

**SEARCHING FOR HERITAGE, BUILDING POLITICS:
ARCHITECTURE, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND IMAGERIES OF
SOCIAL ORDER IN ROMANIA (1947-2007)**

by

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To my mother and the memory of my grandparents.
Vă sãrut mâinile!

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Archives

Arhivele Naționale ale României [National Archives of Romania], Bucharest, (ANR)

Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri [The Archival fond of the Council of Ministers and the Politburo]

Fond CC al PCR- Cancelarie [The Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party]

Arhiva Institutului Național al Monumentelor Istorice, [the Archives of the National Institute for Historical Monuments], (AINMI)

Fond Comisiunea Monumentelor Istorice [Fond of the (interwar) Commission of Historical Monuments], (ACMI/AINMI)

Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale, sucursala Cluj (DJAN) [County Branch of the National Archives]

Fond Bánffy

Open Society Archives, Budapest (OSA).

HU OSA 300 Fond Records of Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute (RFE/RL RI)

HU OSA 300-2 East European Research and Analysis Department

HU OSA 300-60 Romanian Unit

Local Archives, Bonțida Town Hall, Cluj county.

Archival sources are referred in the footnotes as indicated in the parantheses.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Heritage Revival in Contemporary Romania

As recently as 2000, Romania was regarded by western tourists as too dangerous a place to travel to; the situation has drastically changed since 2000. Both statistics and locals have noted a sharp increase in tourism, especially in Transylvania. Some of the travelers have been lured not only by tourism ads, but also by newspapers, travel magazines, pictures, and novels stirring up their imagination. In search for a pristine landscape, with rare flora, forgotten castles, fascinated by riding in carts with horses on rough village roads, those tourists, many of them wealthy middle-class individuals and adventurous backpackers, hope to find in Transylvania a now lost pre-industrial Europe. Travel guides and narratives advertise trips to Transylvania as journeys into the past. As recently as November 2005, a widely known UK daily opened the travel column with the lines: “ Out of the shadows ... rural Transylvania looks at times like 18th-century England.” Under an idyllic photograph, the author continued to describe Transylvania in somewhat nostalgic terms:

It was a scene of almost unimaginable beauty, and one that also seemed curiously familiar; a landscape from the Grimm's fairy tales of one's childhood. "It is exactly what 18th-century England looked like before enclosure," said Ackroyd.¹ And this, most of all, is why you must go to Transylvania: to soothe your soul in vast tracts of idyllic pre-industrial landscape.²

¹ Dr. John Ackroyd is a British botanist and a regular visitor to Transylvania.

² Gavin Bell, "Lost in Transylvania," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2007.

The promise of an encounter with pure nature, together with the simplicity of life in an undisturbed accord with the rhythm of seasons sounds, indeed, extremely enticing not only to foreign travelers, but also to international organizations. The latter not only wish to enjoy such an environment fully, but, more importantly, to preserve it. Such groups have often made their activist debut in an informal manner, i.e., as a group of acquaintances interested in pursuing conservation or restoration projects in less known or accessible areas.

In the early 1990s, among the former socialist countries in the region, Romania was in a particularly disastrous situation. Ceaușescu-run policies of so-called “systematization” had aimed at a drastic spatial reconfiguration, which was to be accomplished through the demolition of many of the buildings evoking modes of being and living *other* than those prescribed by the Communist Party. Right after 1989, notwithstanding the genuine efforts of the few Romanian specialists in conservation left in the country, the heavily centralized political system, combined with the lack of specific legislation on conservation and protection of heritage, led to a further degradation of the sites already affected. Moreover, between 1990 and 1992, most of the Romanian Germans, who could not leave before 1989, emigrated to Germany, leaving behind entire villages, churches and other sites. In an attempt to record the German presence in Transylvania for future generations, the German state commissioned a comprehensive survey of all the former German settlements in Transylvania, done by Romanian specialists under the agreement of the Romanian National Commission and the State Conservation Office.

However, due to the restrictive Romanian legislation at that time, many of the Saxon sites in Transylvania did not count as “heritage” (representing mainly *vernacular* heritage, which was not included then in the national list of official historical sites). As a consequence, those sites, not-yet a heritage from the perspective of the Romanian state and therefore with no government funding invested in their preservation, degraded even further. Meanwhile, private foundations and other bodies from abroad initiated projects of emergency conservation, by taking under their sponsorship some of these sites.

This triggered more international interest in the neglected “heritage” of Transylvania, heritage that was not recognized as such by the Romanian state, which was still the owner (given the blurry situation of property restitution in the postsocialist Romania in the 1990s). By the mid-1990s, organizations such as “Mihai Eminescu” Trust, sponsored by the Prince of Wales, and the German-government sponsored *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeiten* [Society for Technical Cooperation], or GTZ, together with foundations from Germany and others established in Romania, started new projects of conservation of cultural heritage, now expanding from the preservation of the sites to re-launching traditional craft skills and rural tourism. Also, in 1998, the Ministry of Culture obtained a 20-year grant from the World Bank co-financed by the World Monuments Fund for the preservation of several sites (including some of the Saxon villages). More importantly, the grant states that funding will be directed also to “help build public awareness to foster a stronger civic understanding of, and support for, cultural heritage and its important role in the nation's future development.”³ The

³ World Bank News Release number 99/2054/ECA. The document states:
A US\$5.0 million Learning and Innovation loan for Romania to help finance a Cultural Heritage Project was signed [on December 23, 1998] at the World Bank. [...]The project will help Romania develop a new national cultural heritage strategy designed to preserve the country's priority cultural heritage sites

recent development of the Romanian legislation regarding the issue of cultural heritage could represent thus a combined effect of all these previous efforts on the part of numerous foundations, to which the 2004 elections and the EU-enlargement prospects only added impetus. For, even though the Law for the Protection of Historical Monuments was passed in 2001, only since 2004 has a more complex set of regulations grounded institutionally the Institute for the Protection of Historical Monuments, established in 2002 together with the National Commission for Historical Monuments. Also, a Presidential Commission for the protection of national heritage was established in April 2008. The main question is how these regulations affect the social map, what kind of new social and political relations they set onto the social space, and how they are employed politically by different actors.

Among the more or less formally organized groups in the current heritage field in Romania we could distinguish four kinds of actors: 1) heirs of former owners, often aristocratic families who fled Romania during or immediately after the second World War, when communists forcefully and deceitfully took over state power; 2) local architects and experts in art history and building conservation, who have tried to distance themselves from centralized institutions of the post-socialist Romanian state, forming instead smaller, yet more flexible and independent, organizations; 3) the newly formed group of experts who became mediators between the still dysfunctional institutions of the Romanian state, EU bureaucracy, and the private international foundations that offered

and assets. The project will test different approaches to partnerships (public-private; community based; national-international) with the goal of ensuring more sustainable, cost effective approaches to cultural heritage management. This is the first World Bank lending operation co-financed by the World Monuments Fund (WMF).

Source:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTECASUMECSSD/0,,contentMDK:20014164~menuPK:1587207~pagePK:51246584~piPK:51241019~theSitePK:1587162,00.html>. Accessed September 1, 2008.

substantial funding for the heritage sites threatened with destruction; and 4) international specialists in conservation and/or architecture, eager to restore the derelict architectural sites of Transylvania, as well as other foreigners, not necessarily specialists, who, by developing a special relationship to this region, wished to contribute their know-how and sponsorship.

Of course, they have interacted with 5) the state, that is to say, the governmental bodies charged with the protection of the built heritage in Romania, more precisely, the National Institute for the Protection of Historical Monuments. This organization, working under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Culture, takes the final decisions on the architectural and patrimonial value of a specific site. While assisted by the regional offices, it also maps out the entire landscape of the built heritage sites of Romania by establishing a list of national monuments (of over 30,000 in number).⁴ However, this list is seriously questioned by other actors working in the non-governmental sector of the field. More specifically, they criticize the centralist and exclusivist methods of drafting the list (the specialists for the regional offices are nominated only by the Institute), as well as the arbitrariness of the selection criteria in deciding upon the quality of “national heritage” potential of a specific site.⁵

Many actors described in the four categories outlined above have met and collaborated on different projects, thereby forming a network in which everyone knew everyone else, some of them even migrating from one organization to another.⁶

Particularly, those specialists have continuously moved back and forth between

⁴ Presentation by the manager of INMI at the Workshop on Cultural Heritage, The French Institute, Bucharest, 5-6 November, 2007.

⁵ For instance, there are voices pointing out the absence of ethnic Hungarian vernacular architecture.

⁶ Interviews with Irina Prodan and Maria Berza of *Pro-Patrimonio* NGO, Bucharest, November, 2007.

governmental institutions (such as the Romanian Ministry of Culture) and private foundations, depending on the shifting political hierarchies of post-1989 Romania. In the process, the domain of heritage conservation has been (re)constituted as a dynamic field which developed at a speedy pace, especially due to the significant number of foreign partners and their institutional expertise in project drafting and securing financial assistance.

Besides, it appears that the developing rate has been too high. That is, the national list of historical monuments has been criticized by many for being far too long for all the included sites to be seriously taken into account by the governmental bodies. At the same time, there are the private organizations (foundations, charity funds, associations) that try to work through the web of governmental regulations in order to first prove that a site *not* figuring on the national monument list is worth being rehabilitated. Basically, they must persuade the government, and thereby the local authorities in charge (if it is not already private property), to acknowledge the heritage value of a novel site and approve the renovation project. It is only after this recognition is granted that the organization will be entitled to pursue external funding for the initiation of the project. In the meanwhile, the state reaps symbolically all the benefits of the renovation by making claims over the site without having invested anything in the project. However, if the site has become private property, then the organizations have two options: either to buy the property (if it is small) and then restore it in line with all conservation principles; or to engage in a campaign of persuading the owners to pursue a proper, albeit expensive, restoration, instead of replacing it with a modern *reconstruction* which will destroy its heritage value.

As the specialists involved in these organizations put it, they often feel caught between the slow bureaucracy of a seemingly passive postsocialist state and the poverty (or even worse, the peculiar aesthetic preferences) of the site owners. They accuse both the state and the owners of indifference towards and even rejection of the past, paradoxically the country's own past. These organizations are truly dedicated to the cause, many of them working with foreign specialists who put a lot of energy and passion into their projects. When asked by inquisitive journalists and anthropologists, these specialists admit they want to help Romanians recuperate their past, via historical building restoration and the revival of local traditions. They wish to function as mediators between these historical monuments and the people, that is, between a specific past inscribed in and represented by the buildings and the people presently living in their vicinity.

However, by assuming that people of Romania should be helped to remember the past by learning traditional building skills and participating in projects of heritage rehabilitation, such external actors have fully ignored the complex strategies of “heritage (re)making” already initiated and refined by the socialist state. Drawing upon twenty-four months of archival and ethnographic research in three distinct regions of Romania, this dissertation explores how the socialist Romanian state created a regime of “heritage” to ground and endorse a seemingly future-oriented totalizing project of “building socialism.” I show how this multidimensional project of social(ist) homogenization was to be pursued not only discursively, but also via the production of a common spatialized knowledge, which entailed a radical reordering of place, built environment, cultural objects, and even people (moved from one part of the country to another). I then analyze

the earlier forms of assigning political and cultural meaning to things still inform the strategies of some ethnic groups in postsocialist Romania, who simultaneously pursue economic decentralization and a more coherent cultural identity. At a time when property restitution participates in a broader individualization of rights, projects of “heritage revival” capture new meanings and practices of “community” in a EU imagined as “unity in diversity.”

One of the arguments set forth by this dissertation is that the socialist state employed architecture and archaeology as complementary scientific mechanisms that would invest different territories with a unitary political meaning. I suggest that the transformation of post-war fragmented landscapes into socialist modernist cities in the 1950s entailed a reordering not only of urban spaces, but also of their history. The thesis argues that architects and politicians changed their visions of the socialist city according to ideological priorities of distinct political moments, on local and international scales. Whereas modernist architectural forms were meant to symbolize a socialist future, the state officials looked upon urban archaeology as a particular method of scientific inquiry that allowed the socialist state to create its own unitary “heritage,” which legitimated a cohesive body politic and a centralized system.

My research illuminates and compares the ways in which the socialist state attempted to imprint its vision of social order in distinct places, and the multiple forms in which this project of social homogenization was systematically challenged. More specifically, I focus on three sites in different regions of socialist Romania: 1) the country’s capital, Bucharest, which was envisioned to become “the socialist city of the future,” 2) Sibiu, a Transylvanian city established in the 12th century by German colonists

(the Saxons), whose presence in the city remained significant until the last wave of emigration in the early 1990s, and 3) Bonțida, a Transylvanian village currently inhabited by a multi-ethnic population of Romanians, Hungarians, and Roma, and home to one of the most famous Baroque castles in the region. My research in these locales revealed that distinct strategies of social and ethnic differentiation emerged during the 1960s and developed during the 1970s as subtle reactions to the state's centralist regime of heritage. In Transylvania, different ethnic groups initiated intricate processes of memory work under which new *lieux-de-memoire* were being created *intra muros*, within the group, in order to preserve symbolic institutions that were crucial for their identity, but no longer politically allowed. The homogeneous spatialized knowledge that the state wanted to impose was subtly countered by local histories of multiethnic habitation. Those histories informed the ways in which groups were actively creating a situated heritage-as-practice, upon which they continued to draw to reinforce their group identity.⁷ It is these processual forms of heritage-making, continuously adjusting to the shifting cultural policies of the socialist state, that still inform how different local actors in Sibiu and Bonțida understand, relate to, or reject the current projects of heritage revitalization developed in these two sites.

Another contribution of my dissertation is to analyze the emerging forms of heritage-as-recognition that bear on broader shifts in the practices of memory and politics of identity in one marginal location of the “New Europe.” By analyzing heritage as a situated political category, I ask what kinds of contestations over the very meaning of culture, politics, and economics underlie the calls for recognition emerging in a “Europe”

⁷ I import the concept of “heritage-as-practice” from Lisa Breglia’s work on the processes of heritage making and recognition in Mexico.

paradoxically asking for “diversity” and “standardization” simultaneously. I show that while there has been an increasing interest on the behalf of the ethnic minority groups in Transylvania to be given full recognition and political visibility, those claims could be challenged by various factors (such as, Western European actors coming to Sibiu with preconceived notions about the German heritage in Eastern Europe, or hidden local histories of destruction of material goods, as I found to be the case in Bonțida).

Both of the heritage revival projects that I examine here propose an approach to the past as a form of property, which groups are to (re)own and identify with. Those projects of memory-work unquestionably deem remembrance a valuable form of property, which people are encouraged to produce and display. In other words, projects of heritage revival also stand as strategies of (re)creating individual and collective links to a past, which must be remembered and revived via historic buildings and sites. The heritage specialists want to make the locals feel accountable for themselves by feeling accountable for this specific past. However, sometimes, as in the case of Bonțida, those people’s own past might be a past that they want to forget. Instead of being an inheritance—a heritage—it could be a burden. At other times, the past that Sibiu’s small Saxon community wants to remember and re-create to an extent is not palatable to Western European actors, who want to bring in EU monies to transform Sibiu into a cosmopolitan, “young since 1191” type of burg, aiming rather to become attractive to hip European tourists, while ignoring the German-speaking local population.⁸

⁸ “Young since 1191” was one of the slogans used in the advertising campaign “Sibiu 2007,” which began in early 2006. See the touristic guide, “Sibiu/Hermannstadt: Young since 1191,” <http://www.turism.sibiu.ro/pdf/EN.pdf>, accessed January 20, 2010. It alludes to the chronicle dated in 1191, which first mentioned the fortification established by the Saxon colonists in Transylvania, then Villa Hermanni, and later the city of Hermanstadt, in German, or Sibiu, in Romanian. Coordinated by a Bucharest-based advertising agency, the campaign involved an intense mediatization of the city of Sibiu, presented as a place for the young cosmopolitans to meet and enjoy themselves. The banners showing

I suggest that these projects of heritage making in Transylvania must be understood as being formed at the crossroad of diverging discourses about “the past,” informed by international attempts to better monitor the fuzzy domain of “culture,” postcolonial and postsocialist sensibilities engendered by Cold War Politics, as well as regional networks of capital circulation and political alliances, such as the European Union (EU, that seek to legitimate themselves by calling upon imaginaries of a “common heritage.”

Heritage and Patrimony

Many analysts today point out that “heritage” should be approached conceptually as representing a cultural and political *process*, formed through as well as legitimizing distinct political systems, regimes of property, and circuits of capital within an increasingly connected global economy. Anthropologists have argued that the very selection strategy by which “the past” is represented in the present must be approached ethnographically, by examining how “its negotiation [is] taking place within specific historical contexts characterized by particular systems of power and authority that deem only certain forms of heritage credible.”⁹ Why is it that brahmans in a temple in a city in India claim that their version of the past, which employs a set of poems, should be more credible than others?¹⁰ Why do the inhabitants of Rethemnos, a Cretan town, feel

beautiful young couples drinking champagne, playing instruments, or just displaying a Mona Lisa tattooed on a shoulder or a musical score on a woman’s legs, were exhibited all across the main cities in Romania as well as in many locations of Europe. A German colleague expressed his surprise when he described to me the intense mediatization of this campaign in Germany, where the Sibiu 2007 banners seemed to be everywhere, from the underground to the city buses.

⁹ Karen Fog Oung, "The Burden of Heritage: Claiming a Place for a West Indian Culture," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 2 (1999), 370.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, "The Past as Scarce Resource," *Man* 16 (1981).

constrained by the historical preservationists who ask them not to alter the form of their houses, requests that dramatically interfere with local practices of agnatic coresidence?¹¹

Whether the past appears as “a scarce resource” (Appadurai) or “a negotiable good” (Herzfeld), “heritage” appears to function in a similar way to “property,” in that it offers a clearer view of the social webs that are being created among people through “things” and through specific renditions and representations of the past. An analysis of the creation of new property regimes could help us better understand how heritage could represent, to an extent, a form of commodification of memory. As Verdery and others point out, the “reconstitution” of private property in the former Soviet bloc relied on a teleological understanding of history, which treated the socialist period as an accident.¹²

Unlike a legislative framework, an entire social landscape imbued with the forms of social and economic interaction that had emerged after 1945 could not have been changed overnight, or even worse, erased all together. However, many of the experts designing the privatization policies refused to see that. Verdery points out the importance of understanding those radical economic and political changes as part of the creation of new property regimes.¹³ In contrast to more simplistic approaches to privatization, Verdery shows that in fact there are various forms of economic interactions that are connected with each other by a shared understanding of “property” as a conceptual realm, with its boundaries clearly defined. As such, a property regime becomes a formative domain. At the same time, the creation of a new regime of property entails its

¹¹ Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹² Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds., *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield Publishing, 1999), David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹³ Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*.

naturalization, that is, the production of its own normativity through the imposition of new norms, which automatically restructure the relationships among previous economic forms. In this process, the boundaries—the criteria of inclusion and exclusion—are being challenged. Previous forms are being questioned, some are being canceled out as no longer relevant, while other domains become suddenly included in the new property regime.

A similar understanding of the relational character of the creation of “property regimes” could be employed in an ethnographic analysis of processes of “heritage making.” The insistence on the processual nature of “heritage” has been a recurrent theme in the recent literature. Breglia proposes an approach to heritage as practice, as opposed to one focused on heritage-as-artifact, as it represents “an endlessly renewable resource, not some ‘thing’ to be extracted from the contexts of its users or locked away for its own good.”¹⁴ Smith writes about the performative aspect of heritage, which entails a multilayered enterprise of “visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation [...] that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present.”¹⁵

Even though the emergence of the concept of “cultural heritage” should be understood within the multiple geopolitical and economic shifts of the late 19th and 20th centuries, heritage-making, understood as the mechanism of employing one form of the past to justify and consolidate a social or political configuration in a given present, is far from being new. As David C. Harvey points out, the resignification of sites already imbued with historical meaning has been a pivotal political practice since the ancient

¹⁴ Lisa Breglia, *Monumental Ambivalence: The Politics of Heritage* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 14.

¹⁵ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

Romans had aimed to emulate the mythical figures and aesthetic forms of their former rivals, the Greeks.¹⁶ Furthermore, following St Gregory's instruction to "cleanse heathen shrines and use them as churches," the Catholic Church became engaged in a vast operation of "heritage making" by appropriating aesthetic expressions, even in locations of some of the abandoned Greco-Roman sacred sites, and redefining them as "Christian heritage."¹⁷ (This enterprise could also be found in the development of the Eastern tradition of icon painting that relied upon the extremely refined technique and artistic expression of portrait painting that had already been developed as part of the intricate burial rituals in Asia Minor, illustrated by the Fayum portraits.) Given the increasing authority of the Church in medieval Europe, it is then no wonder that both "heritage" and "patrimony" emerged at around the same time (13th and 14th centuries) to designate two complementary entities. "Patrimony" entailed anything derived from one's father (*pater*) or an endowment belonging by ancient right to a church. "Heritage" focused rather on the heir, who received that which was being inherited or acquired from a predecessor, that is, from someone who was positioned within a kin relationship to the inheritor. This kin relationship could have also been a symbolic kinship that was conferred by the adherence to the same religious congregation.

The distinction between "patrimony" and "heritage" might originate in the distinct ways in which the material remains of Antiquity—especially the architectural ones—had been approached in France and England. Choay shows that despite a rising interest in the study of Greco-Roman antiquity among the humanists and artists starting with the 15th

¹⁶ David C. Harvey, "The History of Heritage," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 22.

¹⁷ J. Blair, "Minster Churches in the Landscape," in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, ed. D. Hooke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). Cited by David C. Harvey, "The History of Heritage," 22.

century, it took more than three centuries until a more systematic enterprise of conservation of the architectural remains could be implemented.¹⁸ This is because, Choay argues, up to the late 18th century, throughout Western Europe (with the partial exception of England), those sites represented foremost an object of study rather than of conservation, appearing as a resource of technical knowledge and artistic expression, which could be replicated in novel edifices rather than being historical *unica* that must be preserved as such.¹⁹ The English antiquarians, outraged by the radical iconoclasm that continued even after the success of the Reform, were the first to ask for a royal edict that guaranteed the protection of the medieval monasteries and other “monuments of antiquity” on the argument of their civic and historical dimension.²⁰ Considered valuable not as obsolete religious sites, but rather as lieux-de-memoire that could ground an incipient national sentiment, those sites appeared then as potential producers of a historical imaginary guaranteeing a much sought-after political stability in a pre-Cromwell England torn asunder by internal struggles for power and desires for imperial expansion. According to Choay, this might be one of the first episodes documenting the civic dimension assigned to “monuments of antiquity,” and thereby their transformation into “heritage,” with the purpose of grounding and reifying a sense of belonging to a political community.²¹ Two centuries later, at the end of the 18th century, as a response to the radically interventionist restoration of some gothic cathedrals in England, the society of antiquaries in London succeeded in establishing a fund sustaining a private institutional framework of protection for the historical sites, which later developed into

¹⁸ Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, transl. Lauren M. O’Connell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1992]), 64.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

the currently well-known National Trust.²²

In comparison to England, pre-revolutionary France appears to Choay as “typical” for the attitudes of Western European elites. That is, even though antiquaries and architects decried the degradation, abandonment or demolition of the Greco-Roman antiquities, scarcely any of them showed concern about their protection *in situ*.²³ Choay argues in fact that a framework for “heritage” (*patrimoine*)—in its current understanding of an institutional framework of selecting, arranging, and protecting sites deemed of national importance—appeared only with the Revolution.²⁴ Contrary to a more popular view of the vandalism accompanying those turbulent times, Choay contends that the juridical and institutional framework for the preservation of historical monuments had been in fact initiated by the revolutionary committees, whose decrees anticipated the procedures implemented by the first Commission for Historical Monuments in France, starting in 1837.²⁵

However, in her discussion, Choay moves uncritically from a discussion of the antiquities to an analysis of the formation of the field of “national heritage” in France in the wake of the Revolution. That is, she assumes that the historical sites, as well as the objects that are taken from the clergy and the aristocracy, had remained the same during this transfer, with the important change being the emergence of a more systematic interest in their conservation. However, it is the radical resignification of their property regime (for the immovable sites) and the selection, transfer, hoarding, and rearrangement of the mobile objects in the recently established museum—an epitome of the revolutionary

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 78.

²⁵ Ibid., 97.

ideals—that allowed them to become metonyms of *le patrimoine*. Only by virtue of their new ownership status, as state possessions (patrimony), could these sites and objects be symbolically linked and thereby be transformed into parts and signs of a new body politic. That is, it was the distinct manner in which those material forms were constituted into an assemblage not only owned by, but also making, the nation that offered them a particular political status and value, more so than their distinct materiality. It was this link that made other bonds imaginable and thus possible: that of forming a body politic out of distinct political actors.

This perspective on “patrimony” as appearing through (and endorsing) a radical breach in the way of imagining the political is very important, because it seems to me that a different approach exists in the case of “heritage” in the form that has emerged in England, through the societies of antiquarians and later in the domain of the National Trust. In comparison to the notion of *patrimoine* in France, where this assemblage simultaneously represented (as state possessions) and constituted the state, the sites that ended up being treated as “heritage” in England continue to be separated from the state, being privately owned. As such, they are not institutionally endowed with the potential of creating broader “imagined communities,” but perhaps become more important for endorsing more locally situated representations of history.²⁶

This discussion points out that heritage-making in medieval and early modern Europe was a localized process, very much enmeshed in particular political, economic, and moral frameworks defined by intricate alliances as well as conflicts among various

²⁶ There may be more at play here in the very distinct French and English relationships of state and church that were gradually consolidated over this time period. The deployment of “heritage” and “patrimoine” were distinctions in part bound complexly in the religious-political landscape and in shifting significations of sites linked to religious institutions. I thank Britt Halvorson for this point.

political and religious institutions. This view of heritage challenges the point of view advanced by some legal scholars, who have justified their views in favor of an increased liberalization of the circulation of cultural goods on global markets by appealing to interpretations of historical texts that present heritage-making in medieval and early modern Europe as a continuous process of transaction of cultural goods and representations. In the next section, I analyze the ways in which legal scholars have discussed “heritage” in relation to the field of cultural policymaking, as well as the questions that anthropologists and other social scientist have raised.

Cultural Heritage and Cold War Geopolitics

During the last two decades, there has been a rapidly growing body of scholarly literature proposing distinct approaches to “cultural heritage.” Often, the very choice of using “cultural heritage” or “cultural property” to designate a body of objects, sites, and knowledge that carry cultural value for one community, signals distinct approaches to this subject.

John Merryman, a Stanford law professor, argues for a “cultural internationalism” that would endorse a higher liberalization of the circulation of cultural objects in international markets. He uses a rather simplified portrayal of the international geopolitical and economic relations underpinning the circulation of cultural objects, one in which

the world divides itself into source nations and market nations. In source nations, the supply of desirable cultural property exceeds the internal demand. Nations like Mexico, Egypt, Greece and India are obvious examples. They are rich in cultural artifacts beyond any conceivable local use. In market nations, the demand exceeds the supply. France, Germany, Japan, the Scandinavian nations, Switzerland and

the United States are examples. Demand in the market nation encourages export from source nations. [...] Despite their enthusiasm for other kinds of export trade, most source nations vigorously oppose the export of cultural objects.²⁷

He starts by pointing out the “dissonant sets of values” underlying two pivotal treaties that had been issued on the protection of cultural objects after the Second World War: the 1954 Hague Convention and the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970.²⁸ As he shows, these international agreements had been preceded by a systematic series of efforts to insure the international protection of cultural objects (“monuments and works of art”) in times of war at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. However, as a treaty signed by many of the Western countries in the aftermath of the second world war, the 1954 Hague Convention becomes the main document guaranteeing the protection of cultural property as a “individual international responsibility,” one that set forth a “cosmopolitan notion of general interest in cultural property [...], apart from any national interest.”²⁹ As such, Merryman reads the Convention as a “charter for cultural internationalism,” an endorsement of “the international protection of cultural property,” which signals a shift from a view treating cultural goods as being under the ownership of nation-states to one deeming them universally valuable for mankind.³⁰

He then contrasts the Hague 1954 treaty with the UNESCO convention of 1970, whose purpose was to ensure the protection of the cultural property of the states that signed the treaty and deter the illicit international trade. In fact, Merryman argues, the

²⁷ John Henry Merryman, "Two Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property " *The American Journal of International Law* 80, no. 4 (1986): 832.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 833.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 837 and 841.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 837. Merryman cites the Hague convention, which stated that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.” *Ibid*, 836.

latter is “largely about national retention of cultural property.” As such, it endorses a “cultural nationalist” approach to cultural objects, signaling them as the exclusive possessions of each nation-state that adhered to the convention. Therefore, according to Merryman, we have two paradigms of thinking about cultural property: “one cosmopolitan, the other nationalist; one protective, the other retentive.”³¹ In terms of practices, he describes two antagonistic perspectives on the goods themselves:

[Cultural nationalists engage in] the practice of hoarding cultural objects, a practice that, while not necessarily damaging to the articles retained, serves no discernible domestic purpose other than asserting the right to keep them. [... Those artifacts] are merely warehoused, uncatalogued, uninventoried and unavailable for display. [...] Foreign dealers and collectors would gladly buy them. Cultural nationalism finds no fault with the nation that hoards unused objects in this way. Cultural internationalism, however, urges that objects of that kind be made available abroad by sale, exchange or loan.³²

In short, Merryman notes that while the Hague 1954 treaty aims to “preserve cultural property from damage or destruction,” the main purpose of the 1970 UNESCO document is to support “retention of cultural property by source nations.” Given these circumstances, Merryman is appalled that “cultural nationalism [still?] dominates the field.”³³ This piece sets the tone of 30 years of scholarship with which the author, together with other scholars, have aimed to produce the legalistic argumentative framework concerning the increasing international flexibility of commercial transactions in the art world.³⁴

³¹ Ibid, 846.

³² Ibid, 847.

³³ Ibid, 846.

³⁴ Among his most well-known works, there are John Henry Merryman, "The Nation and the Object," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 3 (1994); "Cultural Property Internationalism," *International Journal of Cultural Property* (2005) 12:11–39., no. 12 (2005), *Thinking About the Elgin Marbles: Critical Essays on Cultural Property, Art and Law* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Kluwer Law International, 2000) and John Henry Merryman and Albert E. Elsen, *Law, Ethics and the Visual Arts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), John Henry Merryman, . In his later pieces, such as “Cultural Property

Merryman's approach has been found wanting by many analysts, including other lawyers, who objected to his interpretation of the language of the two treaties, as well as to his blatantly ignoring the histories of colonialism underlying previous forms of one-sided circulation of cultural goods to sites that are currently the countries standing for the "market nations." Replying to one of his latest pieces, his colleague Lyndel V. Prott challenges the abruptly Eurocentric perspective that Merryman adopts in order to construct a legal and historical argument for the liberalization of cultural property.³⁵ In fact, Prott argues that what Merryman describes as "cultural internationalism" stands rather for "cultural imperialism," since it hides much more complex forms of persuasion, value-attribution, and transaction, sometimes verging on the margin of illicit trade, in which world-famous dealers sometime engage.³⁶ (Prott also observes that the dealers' international associations have not shown any interest in forging relations with UNESCO.) More importantly, Prott notes the exclusively material dimension of the cluster of cultural goods that Merryman includes in the domain of cultural property, as well as the assumption that any of those objects could be potentially transacted as commodities.³⁷ As such, an "internationalist" approach to cultural objects could dilute or erase altogether the sacred value that indigenous communities attribute to some objects

Internationalism," he aimed to historicize further his endorsement of "cultural property internationalism," by grounding in a history of literary texts, which he interprets to endorse the creation of heritage in Europe formed through circulation, appropriation and adaption of different cultural valuables.

³⁵ Lyndel V. Prott, "The International Movement of Cultural Objects " *International Journal of Cultural Property* no. 12 (2005). Prott replies to Merryman's "Cultural Property Internationalism."

³⁶ *Ibid*, 223.

³⁷ As Prott put it,

Merryman prefers to speak of cultural property as "the sorts of things that dealers deal in, collectors collect, and museums acquire and display: principally works of art, antiquities and ethnographic objects" that are "the foci of a social subsystem we can call 'the cultural property world' that is populated by artists, collectors, dealers and auction houses, museums and their professionals, art historians, archaeologists and ethnographers, and source nation cultural officials. (*Ibid*, 228)

produced by community artists if removed from their place of origins in order to be displayed in a museum.³⁸

Even more interesting is Merryman's observation that the US signed the 1970 UNESCO treaty in 1972, but that in fact it took ten years and a great deal of negotiation among dealers, museums, collectors and legislators for the Congress to adopt a legislation that would adhere to UNESCO requirements.³⁹ Merryman does not inquire, however, into the politics of this rather paradoxical gesture as he does not consider the broader economic and political framework in which the 1970 UNESCO document appeared. If we scrutinize the list of the parties that signed the 1970 Convention, we note that many of those countries were included in that "limbo" political zone which represented the main target of both the USA and the USSR at a particular time of Cold War politics (the height of decolonization movements in the former colonies in the global south, the intensification of political struggles and the civil rights movement in the global north, the bloody reiteration of Moscow's decisional power over the satellites in the Eastern bloc, shown by the interventions in 1968 Czechoslovakia, etc). Moreover, the 1970 UNESCO treaty was soon followed by the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of Cultural and Natural World Heritage (which the US signed in 1973, only to withdraw later).⁴⁰ As a UNESCO ambassador admits,

the convention of 1972 established itself fully in the prospect of *development* (my underlining). It is a tool to help poor countries confronted with huge disparities between the amplitude of the means necessary to safeguard their heritage and the lack of financial and technical resources. To that end, the economy of the convention settles on a mechanism of redistribution between the north and the south

³⁸ Ibid, 232.

³⁹ He observes that in the USA, "[t]he Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act was enacted in 1983." Merryman, "Two Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property," 845, note 45.

⁴⁰ Jean Musitelli, "World Heritage, between Universalism and Globalization," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 11, no. 2 (2002), 325.

for which the World Heritage Fund is key.⁴¹

Given the increasingly tense political context of the time, we must think of UNESCO in that period as a stage on which two world rivals met and exchanged diplomatic gallantries in order to scrutinize each other more closely. It also functioned as a medium of translating competing visions of global order into a seemingly universal language of “culture.” In fact, as the ambassador pointed out, the UNESCO agenda at that time was part of broader attempts to import a “modernization model” into the new territories that struggled to achieve their national independence, but still stood undecided at a crossroads of competing ideological paths. Each of the two world powers, as they liked to portray themselves, sought to thrust their political visions into these new territories by portraying them as the most adequate solutions for a postcolonial social organization.

To develop an argument about a shift in the meaning of “heritage” that was forged through the UNESCO regulations after the second half of the 20th century, I draw on Chari and Verdery’s analysis of the broader epistemological shifts and forms of spatialized knowledge that had been endorsed by Cold War representations of space, time, and political order.⁴² They note that the very idea of a third tier within the world economic hierarchy was a product of the Cold War.⁴³ The widely diverse countries that did not directly belong to the capitalist world or to the socialist bloc countries were confined to a unitary category of “Third World,” which was defined as a temporary negation of the other two blocs, as being not yet capitalist or not yet communist. As Chari

⁴¹ Ibid, 326.

⁴² Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009), 7.

⁴³ Ibid, 13.

and Verdery argue,

[The Cold] “War” was quintessentially an organization both of the world and of representations and knowledge about it. [...]The very concept of a Third, Non-aligned World emerged from the Cold War; in the encounter of the superpowers, the “Third World” was constituted as an object of thought and subject of action.⁴⁴

They note that one of the key discursive and practical strategies that the Western world employed in this war was the development paradigm, which aimed to transfer funds and expertise into the global south as a way to encourage them to develop from within.⁴⁵

However, the unilateral plan of development, which was in general concocted in the spacious offices of the major international institutions, corresponded to a naively inaccurate representation of those diverse territories as one culturally uniform global perimeter. The modernization strategies that the international political actors deemed to be equally applicable to any area in this “Third world” were rooted in fact in the reductionist imaginary underlying the Cold War trichotomous partitions of the world.

The application of this grandiose plan, the responses it provoked within the targeted countries, and eventually its failure should be analyzed as being directly articulated to and constrained by the conditions of possibility and political imagination, the hopes and fears engendered by one form of global rivalry, cloned afterwards at different scales.

Therefore, Chari and Verdery argue that “development strategies of newly decolonized states in the second half of the twentieth century must be situated in their efforts to exploit Cold War rivalries between West and East, First and Second worlds.”⁴⁶

Describing it as “one of the most important knowledge effects of the Cold War,” they observe that the modernization theory emerging in western social science offered the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 14 and 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 14-15.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 2.

scientific ground to endorse “the economic advantages of alliances with the West, for which western countries were investing in an ever-larger development apparatus.”⁴⁷

In fact, as many social scientists have shown, the global agenda of development-as-modernization failed not only due to the form of negative definition—a definition by negation—of the “Third World” that Cold War politics engendered. It was the assumption that this uncertain cluster of countries functioned as a ground zero, a cultural *terra nova* on which technologies of modernizing could be easily applied, with rapid results. What the technocrats in the metropolitan offices of the wealthy north fatefully ignored was the immensely complex forms of social stratification, intricate systems of transactions, political in-fighting, and hybrid forms of sociality that have resulted from the interaction of pre-colonial settings with the systems of governance that colonial regimes aimed to impose.⁴⁸ Far from being a *terra nova*, the third world literally was a *terra incognita* almost in an opposite sense from the one used by earlier bearers of modernization projects, the 17th and 18th century European explorers.

As I mentioned earlier, Merryman criticized UNESCO 1970 for guaranteeing the retention of a cluster of culturally valuable objects, which, according to him, should be

⁴⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁸ For a critique of the development model, see for instance James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). In *Expectations of Modernity*, Ferguson examines the rise and fall of the mining industry in the Copperbelt region of Zambia, which has dramatically shifted from being used as an icon of the success of modernization programs in Africa of the 1960s to being now a forgotten place on the global map of capital trajectories and “modern” transformation in the 1960s. He looks at how anthropological work, especially the body of research pursued by the Manchester school team (Max Gluckman and others), through the Rhodes-Livingston Institute, uncritically incorporated a rhetoric of modernity grounded in an evolutionist understanding of social life. By doing so, Ferguson argues, they anticipated and further legitimated the ideological framework of the rapid industrialization promoted as “progress” as the only path to social and economic independence in postcoloniality. Thus, notwithstanding their anti-colonial research agendas, they indirectly contributed to the crises of meaning accompanying the economic crisis of deindustrialization, which started in the early 1980s.

instead put in circulation, which in turn could increase their market value. In Merryman's core argument on the international liberalization of cultural property, we have a view of "culture" that is *made* through circulation: goods that are transacted on the world market, loaned or exchanged, displayed in the grand museums of the "market nations," enjoyed by as many world citizens as possible. He decries then the attempts of the "source nations" to "hoard" objects in sites such as "warehouses," which appear purely illogical from the other point of view of culture as value made through transaction. He appears to be genuinely flabbergasted as to why Mexico, India, Greece, or other "source nations" would not happily pursue the selling of all those objects that they already have "in excess."

Merryman does not take into account a crucial aspect of the role of those objects for the literal making of the nations discussed. Whereas current political and economic circumstances do not allow those countries to forge and maintain a wealthy status quo at a national scale, they need culturally valuable objects in order to create and maintain a "national heritage" that would ground the nation-state in the present. As Herzfeld persuasively describes to be the case in Greece, it is those objects of multiply layered pasts that makes their body politic *hic et nunc*.⁴⁹ If they sold those objects, they would lose any legitimation as states on the contemporary world map. Therefore, the objects have value precisely because they do not travel too much.

⁴⁹ Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Herzfeld analyzes the ways in which literati, politicians, and the wider elites of the newly independent Greece of the late 19th century tried to endorse a continuity between current politics and the Greek antiquity. They successfully extended claims of ancestry based on a shared territory by employing visual representations appearing on antique objects and archeological artifacts as proofs attesting to common racial features and social practices (such as, an image of a shepherd on an antique vase would perfectly match to one Cretan shepherd in contemporary Greece). Herzfeld shows then that iconicity has been employed by nationalist ideologies to create the past as a unitary framework and also connect it to the present, imagined, of course, as unitary, unique and absolute as the past 'was'.

More interesting is how Merryman's accusation of UNESCO's impeding free circulation of these objects might in fact be right on target, but for reasons that he fully ignores. In fact, in some of the countries of the "Second World," that is the socialist satellites on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, cultural property in the form of objects reordered and politically made inalienable turned out to be a pivotal strategy for the new states to acquire their legitimacy. In the first part of the dissertation, I show how in post-1947 socialist Romania the creation of a new regime of heritage legitimated a new body politic and an imagery of social order in full accordance with Cold War representation of space and time. The thesis investigates the formation of this socialist regime of heritage that occurred via a redefinition not only of the value of things, but especially of the ways in which they related to one another. More specifically, I examine how a socialist heritage was created out of wide range of movable and immovable things, via a rearrangement of the relationships among them and thereby their cultural and political meaning.

I show how during the 1950s and early 1960s, the Romanian government entrusted particular professional categories (technocrats, archeologists, and architects) with the task of redefining the political value of things. Those included buildings and objects that had once belonged to various people or groups in interwar Romania and that became confiscated by the state during the nationalization carried out between 1948 and 1952. The political authorities aimed to de-ethnicize and culturally revalue a wide range of material forms by assigning them an exclusively political dimension: to symbolize the inviolable possession of "the people" and thereby materially ground the newly centralized political system. I argue that, by having architects, museum curators, and

archeologists assign new political meanings to materiality, the socialist state in Romania attempted to retrospectively create its own “heritage” that would fit a teleological vision of historical development.

Those revalued objects and sites were added to another pool of objects invested with political meaning: the artifacts collected through a series of archeological digs that were opened across the country as early as 1951. As the common possession of “the people,” belonging to everyone and no one, this heritage endorsed a socialist project of peoplehood, composed of homogeneous individuals in a homogenized territory. Whereas modernist architecture aimed to reshape the social relations in the present and create novel subjectivities via the ways in which people related to and inhabited the built environment, archeological data enabled an imaginary of “the origins” of these people, be they imagined as Slavic during the 1950s or “proto-Romanian” beginning in the 1960s. Archaeology was therefore entrusted with the task of creating a past that would fit the socialist society of the future.

Throughout the 1950s, the archeologists in the socialist bloc were politically compelled to produce data attesting to the ancient pervasiveness of the Slavic culture across the Central and East European region.⁵⁰ Beginning in 1960, however, under the attempts of some of the eastern bloc countries to gain relative autonomy from USSR and open relations with the Western world, a revived interest in the discourse of the nation began to prevail. Accordingly, archeologists shifted their research interests to investigations tracing the origins of the nation in material data. In Romania of the mid 1960s, archeologists and architects alike found themselves once again compelled to

⁵⁰ Florin Curta, "Introduction," in *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

adjust the scope of their research and means of expression to the new political project of inscribing national ideology into the urban landscape. Since Bucharest captured most of the attention of the Politburo, significant resources were invested in the endorsement of a new history of the country's capital. With Bucharest's archeological past becoming as important as its architectural future, a City Museum was officially opened in 1958 as a depository of the city's heritage, and an old palace in the city's center was restored and presented to the public as representing Bucharest's medieval nucleus. Similar archeological projects were pursued in other cities undergoing a socialist remodeling, such as Sztálinvaros (Dunájuváros, after 1961) in Hungary and East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic.⁵¹

A comparative analysis of the production of such socialist teleologies of place in urban sites of the Eastern bloc could shed new light on the visions of development underlying the socialist project. It could probe the political strategies of place-making and history production underlying the transformation of fragmented post-war urban landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe into future-oriented, modernist lived environments. Moreover, by comparing how socialist regimes of heritage were being created in these locales, such research could offer new insights on how international institutions such as UNESCO might have facilitated more hybrid concepts of "heritage," inspired by earlier projects of national consolidation in interwar Europe.

The 1970 Convention was soon followed by the 1972 Convention, which "became the favored interventional tool of UNESCO in 1978, the date of the first inscription on the

⁵¹ On archeological research in East Berlin of the early 1960s, see Simone Hain, "Archäologie und Aneignung. Ideen, Pläne und Stadtfiguration. Aufsätze zur Ostberliner Stadtentwicklung nach 1945," in *Zur Stadtentwicklung und zum Wohnungsbau in Ost-Berlin* (Erkner: Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung, 1999). I owe the information on archeological research pursued during the same period in Dunájuváros (then, Sztálinvaros) to Krisztina Fehérváry (personal communication).

World Heritage List.”⁵² However, if we place this set of arguments and institutional events within the broader geopolitical context of that time, we note some interesting contradictions. If we approach the two UNESCO conventions as a set of interventions endorsing an agenda of heritage-as-development—as one of the UNESCO ambassadors described the 1972 convention and then the World Heritage list that ensued a few years afterwards—we could become less certain than Lyndel Prott (Merryman’s opponent) as to the larger implications of UNESCO’s heritage agenda. More specifically, the same ambassador specified that

[I]imited by its own modest resources, in its wake UNESCO has trained other international institutions, in particular the agencies and the banks that fund the development, which are progressively integrating heritage cooperation into their strategies.⁵³

Included in this cluster there are institutions such as the World Bank, which funded a program to develop historic sites for tourism purposes, the Interamerican Development Bank that sponsored the revitalization of historic areas in Latin America, and the European Union, while an increasing number of private international companies, such as Packard Industries, have recently joined these efforts.

In a sense, then, even if the 1970 Convention guaranteed the right of a state to define its “own” heritage, the establishment of the World Heritage List that immediately followed imposed a unitary regime of value, against which the national heritage of each state that signed the convention was evaluated. This model, which I call heritage-as-development, mirrors projects of development that were simultaneously developed in other sectors in the countries of “Third World.” Consequently, even if in following the 1970 UNESCO treaty those countries presumably could set their own definition of

⁵² Musitelli, "World Heritage, between Universalism and Globalization," 324.

⁵³ Ibid, 326.

“culture,” such a framework proved to be entirely unsustainable. In order to be more visible on the global and political map, those states had to adjust even more to the UNESCO established standards of the evaluation of culture, which started with the World Heritage List. In other words, this list still proposed a regime of value for cultural goods that was grounded in an approach to “heritage” as “historical monuments,” or “historic sites.” However, such an approach to heritage often diminished the range of options that many of the postcolonial countries found available in order to define a postcolonial heritage, given that their historical landscapes had already been radically modified by immersions of European-style architecture and urban planning sponsored by the colonial regimes.⁵⁴ On the contrary, the perspective on heritage that was imposed by UNESCO through the World Heritage List in fact encouraged postcolonial elites to embrace European models of heritage as forms of cultural mimicry, hoping that they would function as both a proof of and a path to broader claims of modernization.⁵⁵

Contradictory Good Intentions: Intangible Heritage, the Intellectual Property Model, and the Risks of Over-Regulating Culture

Increasingly stronger claims for the recognition of cultural forms that transgress material worlds, such as unique forms of technical knowledge and artistic skills, required UNESCO to enlarge the domain of heritage by recognizing those forms as intangible, “fragile and perishable” cultural resources in its 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH). At the same time, the recognition of intangible

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ For a discussion of postcolonial forms of mimicry, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), as well as James Ferguson, “Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the ‘New World Society’” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2002).

heritage created an expansion of the heritage domain beyond the policy-makers' ability to monitor the circulation of those resources. This situation has generated what Michael Brown calls "heritage trouble," that is, "diffuse global anxiety about the movement of information among different cultures."⁵⁶ He notes that the heritage protection policies have tended to follow the Information Society model, which values mostly information understood as (individually owned) creativity to be set in fast circulation. That is, the more forms of cultural knowledge are recognized and promoted as "intangible heritage," the higher is the risk that their new recognition in this era of global information would lead to their losing the importance and meanings within the cultural context where they originated. Brown describes the paradox in the following terms:

One of the ironies of the CSICH is that its language and administrative strategies are patterned on the very Information Society practices they are ostensibly trying to counter. The convention portrays intangible heritage as an objectified resource amenable to modern management techniques. In such a legalistic vision, heritage cannot be protected until it is thoroughly documented.⁵⁷

The intellectual property framework has therefore become a trendy trope, being now held by various national and international forums as a symbolic denominator of one's accountability as well as individuality within global systems of information production and circulation. The intellectual property laws, enforced at an international scale, and the effects of their endorsement have generated debates not only among scholars, but also between policy analysts, lawyers, politicians, and culturally and politically disadvantaged groups. Some of these global actors argue that, in the context in which information has become the new currency of the global economy, copyright laws are "at best, a blunt instrument for managing information exchange in the age of

⁵⁶ Michael F. Brown, "Heritage Trouble: Recent Work on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Property," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12 (2005), 42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

information and digitization.”⁵⁸ Many scholars have pointed out, however, that, instead of “information exchange,” one might want in fact to talk about a unidirectional flow of resources and information from the “have-not” to the “have” nations.⁵⁹ The proponents of a strong international copyright system argue that the copyright reinforcement in developing countries will eventually be beneficial economically and socially, as the local industries and knowledge will be protected from foreign economic and cultural encroachments of western corporations.⁶⁰ However, the critics of copyright argue that such policies will in fact increase the economic gap between developing and developed nations.⁶¹ Thus, they point out the costs of the information production (as research and innovation), as this process assumes a certain level of information already acquired, while they observe the peculiar flow of non-copyrighted resources to the west and their return as western intellectual property to developing countries.⁶²

These economic dynamics are intrinsically linked to changes in cultural patterns. Scholars have pointed out the dangers of uncritically employing the IP model; sometimes, labeling a creative work as “intellectual property” could undermine the very goal and sense of that work. For instance, by looking at the social and cultural role of aboriginal art and discussing its incorporation in the market system, Barron shows how intellectual property law cancels out other potential systems of signification and alternative ontologies. This is because “the integrity of our law depends precisely upon its

⁵⁸ C. Ann Hollifield, Tudor Vlad, and Lee Becker, "The Effects of International Copyright Laws on National Economic Development," in *Copyright and Consequences*, ed. Lee Becker and Tudor Vlad (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003), 169.

⁵⁹ Keith Aoki, "Biocolonialism, Anticommons Property, and Biopiracy in the (Not-So-Brave) New World Order of International Intellectual Property Protection," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 6 (1998): 57.

⁶⁰ Hollifield et al., "The Effects of International Copyright Laws," 195.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 196.

⁶² See, e.g., Aoki, "Biocolonialism, Anticommons Property, and Biopiracy."

ability to banish any trace of theirs: any element of myth in our notions of authorship or ownership, of ritual in the practices through which we live these statuses, or of the sacred in our concept of work.”⁶³ In a similar vein, Coombe shows how the discourse of intellectual property, inserted in the discourse of cultural recognition and used by the Canadian government to grant a “voice” to Native peoples of Canada, operated a divide between these groups and the other Canadians.⁶⁴ As the Native cultural activists insisted that their stories be told exclusively by their own people and not be used by non-Native writers, the “voice” that they were given was already othered and marginalized. Discursively formed by the categories of intellectual property, the policy of “cultural recognition,” by offering a “voice” to the native groups, legitimized it as separate from mainstream “voices.”

In sum, “intellectual property” carries complex political, economic, and moral implications at global and localized scales. Lately, the topic has acquired an increasing significance (and more room on the bookshelves) due to the expansion of the category itself and therefore of its value on global markets of both signs and capital. That is, we observe a globalization (read universalization) of the IP concept, both in geographical space and in sites of representation. Not only ideas, but also plants, body cells, spleens, genes, air, signs, musical notes, voice, body movement, are being patented or labeled with the © mark (copyright).⁶⁵ One could ask then if we witness a strategy of creating a homogenized type of a global social actor, subjected to a cultural and economic order in

⁶³ Anne Barron, "No Other Law? Author-ity, Property and Aboriginal Art," in *Intellectual Property and Ethics*, ed. L. Bently and S. Maniatis (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1998), 86.

⁶⁴ Rosemary Coombe, *Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties* (Durham: Duke University Press., 1998).

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Rosemary Coombe, "Author/Izing the Celebrity: Public Rights, Postmodern Politics, and Unauthorized Genders," in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Peter Jaszi and Martha Woodmansee (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

which everything boils down to being “property.” The implications of the IP discourse therefore transgress the boundaries of the economic realm; IP becomes a sign for specific ideologies of personhood, of societal organization and social relations, and of the dynamics of political and economic models that underlie them.

How could we situate those debates in relation to other political agendas, such as the launching of a concept of a common *European heritage*, lately brought to the fore by both the Council of Europe and the European Commission? Could we think of the European Union as attempting to create a “European heritage” informed by an exclusionary IP model, in a world increasingly divided in distinct areas governed and defined by treaties that control the circulation of cultural resources as well as, sometimes, the very meaning of “culture” (one example being the controversial 2003 UNESCO Convention for Cultural Diversity)? Could we draw a parallel between these contemporary attempts at regimenting “culture” as a means for making political statements in the international arena to earlier partitions operated by Cold War competing visions of global order? In the next section, I analyze the debates triggered by the 2003 UNESCO treaty, to see how those discussions bear on the EU-sponsored enterprise of creating a “European heritage.”

“European Heritage” and Global Politics of Culture

The 2003 Convention on Cultural Diversity (CCD) emerged as a policy instrument that would complement the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (CSICH), adopted in the same year. In fact, as many analysts have pointed out,

these two treaties target different audiences. Whereas CSICH aims to encourage communities that often are not geographically located in the wealthier Euroamerican space (or, if they are, they are socially relegated to the margins of this territory, by being set in a gray area of national belonging and often treated as social “outsiders,” such as the First Nations in Canada), CCD appears to be an artful political statement of European nation-states against the US-dominated global market of cultural industries.⁶⁶ As much as CSICH seemed to cater to the local communities by entitling them with the right of deciding what to include in their own heritage domain, CCD offers an even stronger basis for the (especially European) states to consolidate their sovereignty by providing them with the main role of selectors of cultural expressions and goods.⁶⁷ As anthropologist Alexander Bauer notes,

[th]e 2003 convention requires that states draw up lists enumerating precisely what their important intangible heritage is, and develop management programs for their preservation. Along the way, this often means deciding who can and cannot claim to be cultural practitioners, and which particular variation of a practice will be codified as the “authentic” one. [...] [In fact, the language of the Convention, including terms] such as “cultural contents” and “cultural expressions” [...] seem to open the space for the interests and practices of “traditional,” minority and other intra- and transnational communities, but in practice, these groups are largely cut out of the convention’s framework.⁶⁸

Moreover, Bauer points out that the very attempt, set within an IP model, to identify, regulate and protect “cultural expression,” on the reasoning that it is imbued with much more social signification that transgresses its exclusively market-given value, makes it

⁶⁶ Paul J Nuti, "UNESCO and Cultural Diversity: An Unconventional Approach?," *Anthropology News* 46, no. 9 (2005).

⁶⁷ Richard Kurin, "Regulating Culture," *Anthropology News* 46, no. 9 (2005).

⁶⁸ Alexander A Bauer, "Definitional Anxieties," *Anthropology News* 46, no. 9 (2005).

prone to imitation and commodification on specialized markets of cultural goods.⁶⁹

When the initial draft of the 2003 Convention on Cultural Diversity was expanded and transformed into the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, the changes in the new title did not alter the message of the initial 2003 draft. It noted that while the world cultural industries have become monopolized by five countries, “50 per cent of the world languages are in danger of extinction and that 90 per cent of them are not represented on the Internet.”⁷⁰ We could interpret this as a willingness to approach the field of “cultural expressions” as not defined by boundaries set by nation-states. However, the insistence on languages and the need for their institutional protection appears as a shrewd take on the earlier criticism offered by the US team at the negotiations of the 2003 Convention. Then, the US team opposed France’s claim for “cultural exception” as being part of the field of “cultural diversity” by arguing that instead, “diversity” should be grounded in “notions of freedom of expression and free flow of ideas.”⁷¹ As anthropologist Robert Albro astutely remarks, the two teams spoke past each other, since their arguments were informed by opposed conceptual frameworks. Albro points out that while “freedom of expression” entails an active view of culture as a process (the enunciation and making of “it”), “cultural diversity” presupposes a static set of “it”-s, to be “accounted for and preserved.”⁷² Even though the new text of the 2005 Convention attested that “freedom of thought, expression and information, as well as diversity of the media, enable cultural expressions to flourish

⁶⁹ As Bauer put it, “lurking all the while behind such claims are both national interests discovering the economic opportunities offered by local cultural expressions and the private interests of cultural industries in controlling the expansion of IP rights.”

⁷⁰ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21046&Cr=UNESCO&Cr1=> Accessed on December 27, 2009.

⁷¹ Robert Albro, "Diversity's Fate in Cultural Policymaking," *Anthropology News* 46, no. 4 (2005).

⁷² *Ibid.*

within societies,” it kept reaffirming “the importance of intellectual property rights in sustaining those involved in cultural creativity.”⁷³

More interestingly, the 2005 Convention has become international law only after the European Community, together with 12 other member states, ratified the treaty in December 2006.⁷⁴ Marked by a ceremony held in Brussels that appeared to endorse a political alliance, the signing of the Convention by the European Community was considered to mark “a new pillar of world governance in cultural matters.”⁷⁵ This move on the part of the European Community must be understood within a broader attempt to consolidate Europe as a distinct cultural space and validate the European Union as an increasingly homogeneous actor in world politics.

In May 2007, the European Commission (EC) launched “a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world,” signaling a strong interest in integrating “the cultural dimension and different components of culture in all external and development policies, projects and programmes.”⁷⁶ Two of the crucial objectives of this agenda are “to protect and promote cultural diversity through financial and technical support for, on the one hand, the preservation of and access to cultural heritage and, on the other, the active encouragement and promotion of cultural activities across the world.”⁷⁷ In other words, the European Commission plans to create the institutional and economic mechanisms that

⁷³ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21046&Cr=UNESCO&Cr1=> Accessed on December 27, 2009.

⁷⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/portal/action/diversity/unesco_en.htm Accessed on December 27, 2009.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World, Com (2007) 242 Final, SEC(2007) 570, p. 10. Brussels, 10.5.2007.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

would transform (the loosely defined) field of “culture” into a form of “capital.”⁷⁸

Moreover, it would represent a particular form of capital that would, through a free circulation of “forms of cultural expression,” also create a new European identity.

According to the EC, this identity is crucially understood through the establishment of the past as a preserved “heritage.”

The 2007 EC agenda for culture is informed by an earlier perspective that invokes the rhetoric of an ancient history that is specific to Europe as a symbolic basis for European integration.⁷⁹ It is only now that de Rougemont’s view of “Europe [as] a culture” has been “upgraded” from a loosely defined “spirit of Europe” to an EU-defined and institutionalized “culture,” which, alongside capital and labor standards, strengthens the EU’s role in Europe as a “regulatory order.”⁸⁰ That is, the 2007 “European agenda for culture” promotes an identification with a past (the cultural heritage of Europe) and establishes the continuity between this past (Europe’s heritage) and the present—where culture in Europe, envisioned as “European culture,” is called upon to represent a present beyond one concerned solely with the economic integration of nation-states.

By analyzing *heritage* as a situated political category, I use ethnographic research in two distinct sites in Transylvania in order to explore how the contestations over the very meaning of culture, politics, economics and the relationship among them underlie the framework of the “Unity in Diversity” of the New Europe. How does this novel EU-

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Jan Figel’s declaration that “culture is not a luxury; it is in fact an extremely sound investment. Culture brings money!” Speech by Jan Figel, the EC Commissioner for Education, Training, and Culture. “A Soul for Europe” Conference, Berlin, 17 November 2006. We encounter here an explicit description of “culture” as “capital,” quite different to Bourdieu’s approach to “cultural capital,” which appears as a seemingly inherent individual disposition (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Figel, under a EU-regulative framework, culture could become economic capital in itself.

⁷⁹ Dennis de Rougement, *The Idea of Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

⁸⁰ George Majone, *Regulating Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996). Cited by Gerard Delanty, “Social Theory and European Transformation: Is There a European Society?,” *Sociological Research Online* 3, no. 1 (1998).

endorsed approach to *cultural heritage* as a means to justify transnational political goals (e.g., a democratic and united Europe) meet with the local and regional histories of heritage conservation in postsocialist Romania?

At the Council of Europe workshop “Communicating Cultural Heritage,” held in Sibiu, Romania, in October 2007, participants questioned the relevance of local forms of heritage (traditions, sites, etc.) for a European identity. As they put it, such cultural forms represent heritage precisely because they are localized. It is their function to signify the particularity of a site and a special relationship to the localized past that justifies their quality as heritage. For the 2007 EC agenda, however, it is only through an imagery of mobility that European heritage is to be imagined, created, and naturalized; this heritage emerges as a deterritorialized and translocal process, a point that is endorsed by the relaunched EC Culture Programme 2007-2013, *Crossing Borders - Connecting Cultures*. As the title suggests, a common European heritage cannot be localized, especially because the very concept and ideology of “heritage” originated in the 19th century search for and justification of a “national culture,” as part of the legitimization of nation-states. How could a concept that designates a particular kind of relationship to history and signifies a nation’s particularity within Europe come to represent a transnational European identity? Which cultural forms could stand as “European heritage”? How can we recognize them? Moreover, which actors eventually decide whether those forms are “European” or not?

As I have already pointed out, the earlier attempts of UNESCO to regulate the field of “cultural heritage” were grounded in a model of heritage-as-development, in which the recognition of sites as universal heritage and their inclusion in global regimes

of cultural value were understood to promote a more equitable distribution of resources across the globe (the development model of the 1970s, whose failure became visible during the 1980s). Recently, social scientists have observed an important shift in the meaning and function of heritage. In Michael Rowland's words, "cultural property, defined as heritage, now plays a much larger role in defining the right to exist."⁸¹ To support his point, he draws on Verena Stolcke's argument that "cultural difference is now understood increasingly in terms of the possession of distinct cultural heritage rather than idioms of race and ethnicity."⁸² As such, Rowland notes, Stolcke's observation substantiates earlier arguments advanced by Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser that a politics of recognition has replaced a politics of redistribution, which supported the development model accompanied by the modernization theory as its epistemological framework.⁸³ In other words, we note a shift from heritage-as-development to heritage-as-recognition. Even more so, Rowland points out that in order for recognition to happen, one must set "cultural difference" within a moral-affective framework:

The right to exist asserts instead a claim to a unique identity supported and identified with an objectified notion of culture that may be gained or lost but not exchanged. What this means is that in order for injustice to be recognized, it is necessary not only to deal with the conditions that erode identity but also to arouse feelings of loss and the need of redemption.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Michael Rowland, "Cultural Rights and Wrongs: Uses of the Concept of Property," in *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*, ed. Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphrey (New York: Berg, 2004), 209

⁸² Verena Stolcke, "Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (1995), 5. Cited by Rowland, "Cultural Rights and Wrongs," 209.

⁸³ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review*, no. 212 (1995). Cited by Rowland, "Cultural Rights and Wrongs," 209.

⁸⁴ Rowland, "Cultural Rights and Wrongs," 209.

Rowland's argument adds an important perspective to the earlier discussion of the heritage agenda set forth by UNESCO and the European Community. He points out to the moral undertones of loss and redemption that underlie the 2005 Convention, which advances the idea that in order to be used by groups to sustain claims for political and social recognition, they must first identify and select representations of their difference and freeze them as "endangered cultural heritage."

However, as my ethnographic research in Transylvania shows, sometimes those calls for political recognition are being employed to guard and mask particular politics of redistribution, which transgress national boundaries to create still very localized clusters of economic and cultural capital. For instance, in the town of Sibiu, the project of the rehabilitation of the old center has been promoted as a form of redemption of the Saxons in Transylvania, who had been living in the region for centuries but emigrated to Germany during in the 1980s and especially the 1990s. As I show, the discourse of a Saxon endangered heritage triggered a wealth of international attention, capital, and practical support from private institutions from abroad and even some European states. The project had been, however, relatively ignored (in fact, actively opposed) by the Romanian government at that time (2000-2004), which was pursuing an opposing strategy of cultural marketing very much grounded in an (obsolete) nationalist discourse. The central authorities changed their attitude about the Sibiu project and consequently began rechanneling monies into it, only when they realized that it would directly help Romania's acceptance into the EU.

At the same time, the international capital and expertise targeting the recent heritage-building projects in Romania have been concentrated mostly in locations in

Transylvania, a situation that has expanded even more the already existing economic and social gap between this location and other poorer regions in Romania. I suggest that these internationally and EU-sponsored projects of built heritage rehabilitation have promoted symbolical geographies that resuscitate earlier nostalgic imaginaries of a transnational Central Europe, which is seen in turn as a metonym of a cosmopolitan turn-of-the-century Europe at large. Heritage-making in Transylvania appears then as an example of a subtle and complex strategy in which an EU cultural imaginary is being formed via an economic de-sovereignizing of the member nation-states.

An accompanying process is the confiscation of nostalgia. In the dissertation, I show how in the two cases of Sibiu and Bonțida, we observe how the heritage domain is being formed through a selection of local narratives about the past, combined with preconceived notions about the blurry “communist times,” as well as a standardization of those narratives according to EU-representations of “cultural diversity.” In fact, the endorsement of a powerful symbolic framework for the EU-regulated network of circulation of labor and capital is achieved by having localized, particular forms of “nostalgia” be reinterpreted through nostalgic depictions of Europe as a whole. These case studies stand as political projects to endorse visions of social order by calling upon and producing a representation of the past to legitimize a particular imaginary of the future.

From materiality to peoplehood-making: Imaginaries of social order

This dissertation examines how particular imageries of social order, political values of materiality and visual representations of history were underlying projects of “heritage development” in three temporally and politically distinct locales in Romania.

More specifically, by relying on archival material as well as multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, I analyze three projects: 1) the transformation of a central area of Bucharest into a “historical architectural reservation,” at a time (the 1960s) when the socialist regime aimed to transform Romania’s capital into a “socialist city of the future,” 2) the recent (2005) rehabilitation of the medieval city center of Sibiu/Hermannstadt, which is a *lieu de mémoire* for Transylvania’s Germans, and 3) the current reconstruction of the Bánffy baroque castle in the village of Bonțida, which is now a cultural pilgrimage site for Transylvanian Hungarians.

These sites complement one another in a particularly interesting manner, as each in its own way symbolizes different historical times in the political trajectory of the Romanian modern state. Bucharest, the capital of Romania since the unification of the two principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia, in 1859, symbolizes the center *par excellence* of a modern, politically independent Romania. At the same time, Transylvania is looked upon as “the cultural heritage of Romania”—the region at the heart of Romania’s political identity.⁸⁵ Sibiu, a historically multiethnic site established by German colonists (the Saxons) in the 12th century, represents a Transylvania characterized by a productive (even though economically and socially multi-layered) multiculturalism, which took the form of the German influence on the regional cultural dynamics. The multiethnic village of Bonțida, whose population is divided among Romanians, Hungarians, and Roma, has become representative for the history of Transylvanian Hungarians, especially since the project of the castle’s rehabilitation has been

⁸⁵ Ioan Aurel Pop and Marius Porumb, coord., *Patrimoniul cultural al României. Transilvania* [Romania’s Cultural Heritage. Transylvania], (Cluj-Napoca: Cultural Roman - Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2004).

accompanied by a cultural revival of the literary works of Miklós Bánffy, the castle's owner and an important political and intellectual figure in interwar Transylvania.

I examine how in each of those cases, the transformation of a site into “built heritage”—be that a ruined palace in the center of Bucharest, a city center reminiscent of a medieval German burg, or a castle symbolizing a formerly powerful Hungarian aristocracy—entails an endorsement of particular social imaginaries that produce and essentialize forms of “peoplehood” in conjunction with interrelated forms of political, ethnic, and economic boundaries. Moreover, the production of those groups (that is, the justification of their differences) is spatially marked, with various political actors claiming that the differences emerge from distinct, particular forms of relating to and inhabiting social space and built environment.

In order to become valid, however, those claims must be preceded by strategies through which these actors assign political values to particular material forms, such as medieval houses, Baroque castles, or ruined walls. Only by enlivening them, so to speak, could these groups transform things into politically powerful tools of governance. By being attributed an agentic power to define the spectrum of social relations, these things are then turned around to become political fetishes, which begin to visually represent novel historical narratives. At the same time, these things could also limit the ways in which different people could relate to one another via the things themselves. From this point of view, those things could literally even ground claims aiming to essentialize social or ethnic differences and thereby justify various strategies of exclusion.

In this dissertation, I view the relation between materiality and heritage as processual, shifting according to broader political, economic, and semiotic contexts.

Following Latour's argument that things should always be understood as contingent *assemblies*, I approach "heritage" forms as specific instances of such assembly, in which things capture meaning by the ways in which they are set in relation to other things.⁸⁶ The field of heritage-making could be further explored, I suggest, if we begin to analyze the processes of signification that are engendered by the particular ways in which things are ordered in relation one to another. Such a processual approach to materiality still considers its pivotal importance for heritage-making, but it accounts for instances in which this materiality proves to be porous enough as a means of signification in order to accommodate different narratives.

This approach reveals the shift of perspective from the inhabitants to tourists as a condition for the transformation of Sibiu's old center into an immovable representation of Saxon heritage. It also reveals the ways in which material forms are being re-arranged in Bonțida by two groups (the villagers and the Trust supervising the rehabilitation of Bánffy castle) as diverging forms of heritage-making signal strategies to endorse distinct social hierarchies.

One of the arguments advanced by this dissertation is that projects of heritage-making played a key role in providing a historical substance to the socialist state. The first part of the dissertation illustrates some of the material forms and institutional strategies through which the socialist system derived its legitimacy. I suggest that the regime did that not only from hoarding goods and means of production, as Verdery

⁸⁶ I employ here Bruno Latour's argument that things, far from being mere receptacles of ideas of social order, in fact constrain and construct it, being "in large part the stuff out of which socialness is made." Moreover, he contends that things should always be understood as contingent *assemblies*. Bruno Latour, "When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of 'Science Studies' to the Social Sciences," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (January/March 2000), 114. As Joerges writes about Latour's take on things: "The power of things does not lie in themselves. It lies in their associations; it is the product of the way they are put together and distributed." Bernward Joerges, "Do Politics Have Artefacts?," *Social Studies of Science* 29, no. 3 (1999), 414.

persuasively argued, but also by engendering specific ways in which things were ordered in relation to one another.⁸⁷ In the first part, I reflect on the ways in which the socialist regime endorsed particular assemblies of things that would reflect broader representations of spatialized political order. In the second part, I ask how these earlier forms of assigning political and cultural meaning to things continue to inform the ways in which various groups in contemporary Romania attempt to redefine collective identities at a time when individual property restitution participates in a broader individualization of rights, leaving too little room for the practice of “community.”

Thus, the shift between the two sections represents also a shift between two temporal and political regimes of heritage. Whereas the first part shows how socialist heritage had been formed through processes of centralization and rearrangement of cultural goods as a form of cultural and social homogenization, the second part illustrates how the rhetoric of “heritage-making” informs the attempts to decentralize as a form of political and cultural recognition pursued by different groups in postsocialist Romania. That is, it shows how these goods are being reclaimed by their former owners as being crucial ethnic identity markers and makers. Those cultural goods—be they medieval buildings that had been owned by the Lutheran church in the center of Sibiu or a castle of a former Transylvanian Hungarian aristocrat—become important means for ethnic groups to set forth further claims of cultural recognition not only within national borders, but especially within novel transnational geographies, such as the one endorsed by the EU. Since the EU promotes a cultural agenda of “unity in diversity,” those groups are fully aware that, in order for them to be given a political recognition, they must first matter

⁸⁷ For a discussion of hoarding as a key mechanism of the socialist system, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

culturally. In other words, they must be “different” enough to prove their contribution to “diversity.”

Under these circumstances, an approach to heritage-as-practice is also a form of reflecting on how groups adjust to broader political shifts by trying to redefine themselves in relation to the movement and rearrangement of things. In a highly centralized context, such as the socialist system, the agentive power is taken over by the state. Rearranging things deemed historically valuable becomes a prerogative of power, as well as a means of constituting power. In an increasingly decentralized context, such as post-2007 Romania, social actors aim to be treated as active participants in the processes of signifying materiality by exercising some control on the movement and rearrangement of things. They indicate a desire to participate in heritage-as-practice, instead of being confined to a cultural field in which “heritage” is understood within a grid of semiotically and physically immovable things.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided in two parts. The second, third, and fourth chapters focus on the period between 1947 and 1971 to examine the constitution of a heritage domain for the socialist state. The fifth and the sixth chapters represent two case studies of projects of European heritage development implemented in postsocialist Transylvania since the end of the 1990s. I compare the institutional mechanisms, the usages of historical narratives, and the political allegiances underlying the process of forming two, seemingly opposite, kinds of heritage: 1) that of a socialist state, occurring through a centralization of the immovable and movable valuables and, more importantly, through

the redefinition of the relationships among these things, and 2) the revival of an ethnic heritage in Transylvania, such as Saxon or Hungarian, as part of more complex EU-sponsored project of producing a “European heritage” set under the paradigm of “unity in diversity.”

In the second chapter, I sketch the picture of an institutional landscape in full reform, wherein small, private museums are being dismantled, collections reorganized, and the notions of “patrimony” and “monuments” given new meaning. Here, I explore the fluid and often contradictory directions within which this landscape was being reformatted by various actors across a relatively short period (1948-1952). I also ask to what extent epistemological claims, rationales and representations of history that had been considered too daring during the interwar period came to the fore during the communist regime. Archaeology, for instance, offered such a disciplinary framework.

By moving from a discussion of the institutional reforms to an in-depth case study, in the third chapter I examine the transformation of Bucharest into a socialist city in the 1950s and 1960s. I analyze the specific understanding of history and modernization underlying the transformation of the capital into a socialist city of the future and I argue that this process entailed a reordering not only of urban space, but also of its history.

The fourth chapter explores the making of a heritage site that would fit the historical narrative of the socialist state. More specifically, I analyse the discussions and negotiations among different professional bodies about the archeological digs simultaneously opened in the central area of the city, in particular the site of the Old Princely Court, a location that had been the residence of the princes of Wallachia during the 16th and 17th centuries. The area’s historical importance was resuscitated under the

post-1945 political regime, when the Old Court came to occupy a central point in the network of archeological digs in the city center. The results of the successive excavations—the unearthing of the walls of the court and some rooms of the royal palace—led the state-endorsed archeologists to lay new claims over the site and ask for the official recognition of the area as a “historical reservation.” I argue that, by portraying the excavations as unique tools for the discovery of the past, archaeology as a method of inquiry offered a scientifically grounded mechanism that directly helped the socialist state to carve out a new historical map of the city.

Drawing upon my ethnographic research in Sibiu between 2004 and 2005, in the fifth chapter I analyse the project of reviving Sibiu’s Europeanness and thereby its economic potential through the historical preservation of the city’s old center. Here, I argue that this endeavor of reviving a Saxon heritage in a town that had been mostly deserted by its Saxons residents, who currently form only 1.5% of the population, should be approached as a political project. By investing in the rehabilitation of the historical houses of Sibiu’s historical center, many of which had been confiscated by the socialist state, the German state reinforced its request that the postsocialist Romanian state grant full recognition to the ethnic minorities by restituting their former possessions (especially land and buildings). As such, the rehabilitation of the city’s center illustrates a process of postsocialist decentralization occurring at the pressure of external and internal actors. At the same time, it also represents a form of place-marking as place-making. I argue that the civic beautification of Sibiu’s old center aimed to endorse a new relationship between the houses and their inhabitants, in which tenants would become more aware of their houses’ facades. This shift of perspective would thereby entice them to become more

sensitive to the ethnic dimension of their houses and thereby recognize and value them as Saxon heritage.

Finally, through a historical ethnography of the Bánffy castle in Bonțida, the sixth chapter explores how the local contestations over a project of heritage revival, currently pursued at the castle by an international NGO, stand in fact as a conflict over different temporalities and their differential currency in emerging property regimes. I analyze how the castle's restoration is bolstered by a broader agenda of heritage (re)making, that of producing heritage as a form of political recognition in the present of the Transylvanian Hungarians who played a major role in the cultural and political development of the region before 1945 and who had been ignored or willfully forgotten during the communist period. I contrast this approach with the claims set forth by the local officials, who have appropriated the trope of "heritage" only to use it to reclaim the castle as the most important collective ownership of the village and to reject the validity of the Trust's claims for restitution. These conflicting perspectives on heritage are grounded, I suggest, in diverging understandings of history, but they intersect when they become means for different groups to gain political visibility or pursue individual economic interests.

Part I
The Making of a Socialist Heritage in Romania (1947-1971)

This part of the dissertation focuses on strategies employed by the post-1947 socialist government to collect, rearrange and culturally transform the immovable and movable goods confiscated from various groups and individuals in Romania in the aftermaths of the Second World War. In 1947, with the direct help of the USSR, the Communist Party won the elections in Romania, which marked the beginning of the communist political regime and the country's official inclusion in the Soviet bloc of influence. Between 1947 and 1953, Romania's political, cultural, and social life was fully controlled by the Stalinist USSR through a wide network of Soviet councilors, who monitored and "offered advice" on important political projects developed by the Politburo in Romania.

After Stalin's death in 1953, many people cried, but for many more, life resumed. In Romania, a first wave of political prisoners, who had been sent to prison between 1949 and 1951, were freed and some of them were relatively reintegrated in the system. The political regime led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej needed experts to build socialism, and the new cadres had been found wanting. Although the influence of the Soviet councilors was still strong, the Politburo in Romania tried to distance itself subtly but gradually from the USSR, by becoming increasingly focused on building up technological and economic autonomy. This part of the dissertation shows how Romanian communists tried to create

national heritage within a socialist environment dominated by their struggles to diminish Soviet domination. They did so through a political project of social and spatial homogenization, with Bucharest as its nucleus. The pursuit of a socialist nationalist heritage presupposed a situation in which Bucharest, envisioned to become the socialist capital of the future, would become also the historical center of the country. By focusing on the debates around the remodeling of a central area of Bucharest, the Old Court site, I show how debates about “heritage” and “socialist modernization” must be approached as part of the same project of political resignification of material forms. I suggest that architecture and archaeology were regarded as two distinct technologies of producing social reality, to validate complementary temporal frameworks and historical spans.

My analysis begins in 1947 with an investigation into the making of a national network of socialist museums, homes for the new state’s heritage. It continues with an in-depth reading of the transcripts of the 1953 meeting of the Romanian politburo on the remodeling of Bucharest into “a socialist city of the future.” I then develop a complementary examination of the projects of history-making pursued through the archeological digs opened in the center of Bucharest simultaneously with the architectural enterprise of transforming the city into an epitome of socialist modernity. The analysis ends in 1972, when the Museum of the Old Court in the center of Bucharest was officially opened.

During this time, significant political events occurred: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Party secretary and the state president, died in 1965, and Nicolae Ceaușescu became the new leader. At the beginning of his regime, he appeared to be open to economic and cultural exchanges with Western countries and managed to gain the reputation of being

an open-minded communist leader, when he was the only one among the statesmen of the socialist satellites who openly opposed the USSR's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. However, it soon turned out that Ceaușescu's main interest lay in an increasingly national agenda of a peculiar interpretation. He aimed in fact to construct his own minuscule empire. His "July theses of 1971" marked a turning point in the cultural politics of socialist Romania. Any western influence in cultural developments, including literary and artistic life, was dramatically curtailed. Instead, there was intense pressure for producing a protochronist discourse of the historical continuity of the Romanian people. ("The protochronists" were a group of scholars in Romania of the 1980s who aimed to place the Romanian people at the core of the world's history, by nonsensically arguing that the "proto-Romanians" had played a key role in ancient history or that they even had an ascendancy over all other people.) Archaeology became a means to consolidate this discourse by providing the material proof of such continuity. (This went to an extreme when archeologists were encouraged to prove a historical continuity between Ceaușescu and perhaps the first linguistically articulated leaders by "discovering" near his home village, Scornicești, "evidence" of the earliest Homo sapiens in Europe.⁸⁸)

More changes were to come. Ceaușescu's agenda to fully pay Romania's external debt so that to achieve complete economic autonomy from international political actors marked a process of rapidly decreasing living standards among Romania's citizens. The regime's agenda to achieve economic autonomy at all costs from international actors was

⁸⁸ M. Rady, "Nationalism and nationality in Romania," in P. Latiawski, ed., *Contemporary Nationalism in East Central Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 127-142. Cited in Duncan Light and Daniela Dumbraveanu-Andone, "Heritage and National Identity: Exploring the Relationship in Romania," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 3, no.1, 28-43. Drawing upon Rady, Light and Dumbraveanu-Andone point out that this archeological research, conducted in 1976, illustrated "the increasing identification of Ceaușescu with the historical glories of the Romanian people." Duncan Light and Daniela Dumbraveanu-Andone, "Heritage and National Identity," 33.

combined with a political frenzy of ostensible modernization on a national scale. The discourse of modernization had been part of the socialist state ideology right from the beginning of the regime in 1947, but the early 1980s marked an important shift in the ways the state implemented this agenda. A major project was the (forced) urbanization of Romania's villages, which began being implemented in late 1970s.⁸⁹ Feeding on dreams of grandiose modernization overnight, similar to Stalin's famous "catching up 150 years in 10," and promising a more efficient use of land for agriculture, a part of the systematization plan targeted the villages, which were to be artificially transformed into towns, with villagers living in collective tenement houses.⁹⁰ The Romanian socialist government had presented this plan as a form of social and ethnic redistribution, since the inhabitants of the multiethnic villages of Transylvania would be soon enjoying urban standards of living. This project of radical spatial and social homogenization raised a wave of criticism in Western countries, especially due to a very active Hungarian diaspora who presented this project as an orchestrated form of ethnic destruction. Petitions had been signed worldwide by famous literati and scholars, and the organization "Save Romania's Villages" was immediately formed in 1987. Those efforts complemented the attempts of Romanian professionals and intellectuals to raise awareness about the radical plans of remodeling-as-demolition that were being pursued in urban centers in Romania, with Bucharest being the main focus of this national

⁸⁹ According to Dinu Giurescu, the principles underlying the program of rural systematization were: "[t]he reduction of the built perimeter, the increase of population density as a peremptory condition to raise the standard of living, a rational traffic network and urban facilities." The main goal of the program was to reduce the differences between town and village. However, as Giurescu pointed out, often the living standards in the new houses built in the countryside were higher than those of offered by the five-story tenement constructions built in the 1980s. Dinu Giurescu, *The Razing of Romania's Past* (Washington: World Monuments Fund, 1989), 20-21.

⁹⁰ By 2000, 7,000 of villages (out of a total of 13,000) were planned to be "urbanized." Dinu Giurescu, "Foreword," in *The Razing of Romania's Past*.

reconstruction program.⁹¹ Romanian intellectuals' apprehension about the fate of old Bucharest took the form of numerous petitions sent to Radio Free Europe. However, what they were not willing to admit at that time was that "Ceaușescu's project" of modernization initiated in the late 1970s in fact mirrored earlier fears of backwardness and hopes for modernization that informed the intellectual debates about the capital (and by extension, about Romania), before and during early socialism.⁹²

The discussion outlined in the first part of this dissertation precedes the worst part of Ceaușescu's regime. I discuss some of the arguments about the modernization of Bucharest during the 1950s and 1960s, as they emerge from the Politburo debates about the transformation of "the Party's dear child" into the "socialist city of the future." At the same time, my analysis shows how the post-1971 developments had already been prefigured by a shift from a Western-influenced modernist architectural expression to an increasing interest in an architectural representation of socialism, such as the (never accomplished) project to transform the entire quarter nearing the Old Court Museum into a "reserve of national historical architecture." A closer examination of the political project of heritage-making pursued during early socialism in Romania also shows how earlier debates became employed and exploited later, during Ceaușescu's late years. More specifically, it points out how new and old experts of the past fought for positions of power in the system and gained them by adhering to the protochronist ideology.

⁹¹ In 1988, 29 of the Romanian cities had 85 to 90 of their pre-socialist urban fabric demolished and replaced by apartment buildings. Ibid.

⁹² This is an argument advanced by Maria Raluca Popa in her dissertation. Popa draws on an extensive research, including interviews with architects and planners who took direct part in the planning and building of the new civic center (People's House and Victory of Socialism boulevard). Maria Raluca Popa, "Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest: The Socialist Project in the Context of Romanian Planning for a Capital, a Fast Changing City and an Inherited Urban Space, 1852-1989. An Exercise in Urban Imaginary, Collective Memory and Planning History" Ph.D. diss. (Budapest: Central European University, 2004). A part of this history, to be found in transcripts of Politburo meetings with architects and planners during the 1950s and 1960s that have recently become available, is analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The chapters in Part I rely exclusively on archival documents and articles published in the professional journals of architecture and urban planning of the time. I use correspondence among central governmental bodies to show how professionals and politicians changed their visions of the socialist city according to ideological priorities of distinct political moments, on local and international scales. In contrast to the second part, which employs ethnographic and historical data, the following three chapters draw on a wide range of archival and published sources.

Chapter 2

A STATE OF MATTERS: MUSEUMS, ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE IN FUZZY INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPES (1950-1952)

Introduction

When the socialist state radically shifted property regimes through nationalization and collectivization, all of the material forms deemed valuable became the people's property, being set at a frozen zero time, that is, a continuous and permanent present. Inheritance—one of the major means of assessing property by vertically fixing it within a temporal scale where the past and present were directly linked—was no longer valid as a mechanism of endorsing ownership. In theory, socialism was future-oriented, seeing the past as to be rejected, though in practice Romanian socialism autonomized itself from the USSR by indigenizations involving continuity with the past. The meaning of heritage—as a sign of a past deemed to be representative and still valuable in the present—had to shift as well. That is, the value of the built structures previously regarded as representative of the heritage of the nation (or the region, or the city) had to be reassessed: some passed the test, others did not. The latter then became dispensable from the point of view of their symbolic historical value, being thus reduced to a practical functionality, like other ordinary buildings.

Particular imageries of the past, the present, and especially of a “bright socialist future” underlay the centralized institutional structure of the new regime, which became

well defined after 1952.⁹³ Moreover, I suggest that within this all-encompassing centralized structure, the new leaders initially aimed at carving out discrete fields, separated along disciplinary methods and material forms. They thereby configured “institutions of the past” (such as a well centralized network of local, regional, and national museums, which were also in charge of the archeological sites opened nearby) that were fully separated from the “institutions of the present and of the future,” such as the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions that was asked to transform “chaotic” urban fabric landscapes into strictly planned socialist cities. As I will show in Chapters 2 and 3, those initial visions ended up being challenged by various actors within and across these ideally separated fields. However, in order to fully grasp the strategies later employed by those professionals, we should first understand how this neat separation between “the past” and “the present,” reflected in the establishment of specific institutions, emerged from a fluid and often contradictory background of the immediate postwar years (1947-1951).

Paradoxically, the new leaders of postwar Romania did not always fully and exclusively copy the cultural models imposed by “the center” (that is, Moscow), but also let themselves be inspired by alternative ideas, some of which they allowed to be grafted on new soil. For instance, the emerging interest in archeological sites was not necessarily

⁹³ The nationalization—the process of “transfer” of the industrial and financial estates to the state—was considered officially accomplished in 1952. During that year, there were issued a series of important decrees, such as a new Constitution of the People’s Republic (September), the Resolution for the construction and reconstruction of the cities (November 1952), the official adoption of the Socialist Realist doctrine in arts and architecture (May), and other important decrees. All of them endorsed a Party-state, in which the Party’s General Secretary, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, managed during the very same year to establish himself as the absolute leader of the country. The 1952 Constitution changed only at the end of Dej’s regime (upon his death in 1965), when Nicolae Ceaușescu became the Party’s new Secretary and the leader of socialist Romania. For detailed discussion of those years, see Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final* (București: Humanitas, 2007).

a mere replication of institutional models within the current Soviet system, which had been paying significant heed (and funding) to building a centralized archeological structure. In Romania, local scholars, who had been professionally trained in the late 1930s and 1940s, held an important role in the establishment of archaeology as a pivotal discipline for the state. Many of them had been the disciples of the first professionally trained archeologist in Romania, Vasile Pârvan (1882-1927). By employing his theories and adjusting them to the ideological requirements of the new regime, those researchers established in archaeology a privileged episteme in the production of a history for the socialist state. I suggest that in order to understand how new meanings were imparted to objects and sites and how distinct theories of history coalesced in the socialist state's process of "heritage-making," we must first review the previous debates on the origins and forms of the "nation" emerging at the turn of the 20th century and during the interwar times.

The first part of this chapter outlines the creation of the heritage domain, which accompanied the formation of the Romanian state at the end of 19th century. I briefly discuss the ways in which the new Romanian aristocracy had pursued the creation of a "national heritage" through an emulation of Western imaginaries that highlighted the symbolic importance of a medieval past, which were then adjusted to an eclectic local background. I focus then on the radical breach within this imagery of heritage, a breach that was produced by the archeological research and methods institutionalized by Vasile Pârvan at the turn of the 20th century. I argue that the institutional conflict that emerged between Pârvan and his disciples, on one hand, and the supporters of the interwar Commission for Historical Monuments, on the other, signaled not only an important

paradigm shift in the writing of history in interwar Romania, but also a novel form of imagining and relating to the state. Ironically, some of the institutional strategies and epistemological claims advanced by Pârvan, which appeared too radical in the eyes of his contemporaries, ended up being used later by the socialist government.

The question immediately following was who should be put in charge of this radical remaking of the regime of property, a key mechanism for legitimating a new body politic. This enterprise entailed a double process of reordering: of objects and property regimes and, through them, of social relations. The duality of this process becomes obvious if we analyze the remaking of the institutions and of the personnel set in charge of the museum collections across the country. I will show that the creation of a national network of museums, which would be assigned the pivotal task of displaying a purified vision of the past, became a key political nexus for the new leaders. This happened at the expense of the other sites, such as mansions, historical buildings, or palaces, that had to be reordered and redefined according to a new view of what constituted a “monument.” The process of defining heritage according to certain political narratives was not only about history-making. Since this process fundamentally required people to carry it out, it further created a big problem of political authority for the state because it tested the capacity of the new political apparatus to manage and control the network of “experts,” such as the personnel of the museums and institutes across the country. This production of heritage as orchestration of labor and redefinition of “expertise” theme is a main focus of the second section of the chapter.

Through an analysis of these debates occurring among various institutions between 1948 and 1952, we note that the category of heritage was being redefined at that

political moment along three discrete lines: 1) through shifting the temporal frameworks of the national past and identifying what material forms could signify a redefined national history; 2) by expanding and also creating separate categories of professional expertise concerning heritage and heritage-making; and 3) by stretching out and reshaping the boundaries of the state-endorsed institutional definition of heritage to legitimately encompass archaeological artifacts and other movable forms of heritage as state possessions.

Archaeology, Modernization, and Representations of the Past in Interwar Romania

As the sons of gentry boyars, the French-educated urban elites of mid-19th century Wallachia and Moldavia had pursued the construction of a 19th century Romanian national identity by engaging in various searches for “the essence of the people.” Those quests ranged from literary productions written in a romantic key to more pragmatically-oriented expeditions aiming to collect not only folklore, but also material traces of the past.⁹⁴ As such, the “national heritage” was the result of a dynamic, and contested, combination of a western Romantic penchant for medieval sites along with regional compulsions to identify a “national self” rooted in an Orthodox religious legacy.⁹⁵ By the

⁹⁴ For a more detailed account of the phenomenon of antiquarianism in the early modern Romanian state, see Mircea Angheliniu, *Evoluția gândirii teoretice în arheologia românească. Concepte și modele aplicate în preistorie* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2003), 72-100.

⁹⁵ A recent analysis of the national self-identifications emerging in the Balkans at the end of the 19th century point describes them as “refractions,” that is, as dynamic combinations of multiple projects of modernity, rather than mere passive and exclusive “reflections” of a Western model. See Diana Mishkova, “Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity: A Balkan Perspective,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 2 (2008), 237–56. Those national self-images must be understood, Mishkova argues, as being produced not only through a fascination with a French political and cultural background (such as in the Romanian principalities), but also through cultural models induced by the modernizing reforms of the Ottoman empire, or autochthonous nostalgias for an imperial Byzantine grandeur.

end of the 19th century, those collections of objects (mostly medieval inscriptions and religious objects and sites), as well as major religious sites, came to represent valuable instruments for the new state. Within this context, a widespread interest in “antiquities and archeological sites” among the late 19th century Romanian literati and politicians (partly inspired by “bovaric” longings for French cultural practices) had rapidly led to the establishment of the Commission for Public Monuments in 1874, which included the Museum of Antiquities, already established in 1834.⁹⁶ This development encouraged interest in the material representation and preservation of a national identity, which was now for the first time presented as a scientifically valid and politically legitimate pursuit. The Commission for Historical Monuments and the Archeological Committee under the Museum of Antiquities became the main agents in the process of sketching a taxonomy of heritage for the newly formed Kingdom of Romania. Their purpose was to serve an emerging notion of collective identity inspired by Western projections of the nation-state, in which the main strategy of forming and legitimizing a body politic was to classify sites, buildings, and objects and transform them into national “heritage.”

The first Law on Historical Monuments and the Law on the Antique Monuments and Antiquities, which both appeared in 1892, represented a pivotal moment for the consolidation of state heritage. Closely following the French model of creating a new state by collecting and ordering various material forms as patrimony, the 1892 law on antiquities specified that “all of the objects discovered in the ground, even on private land, belong to the state, with the entrepreneur not being able to appropriate them under

⁹⁶ For a complex discussion of the phenomenon of “geocultural bovarism” in 19th century Romania, see Sorin Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontologies,” *Tr@nsit-Online* (2002).

any circumstances.”⁹⁷ In addition, all churches built prior to 1847 were declared “historical monuments” and set under the state’s protection. Obviously, such stipulations triggered intense debates among various groups as to the “proper” approach the state should take toward “private property.” This attempt at protection and centralization was a strategy of materially creating the state by assigning a “national value” to material forms so that they could no longer be claimed by non-nationals, be they landowners or amateur French or German archeologists. Moreover, this strategy of legitimizing a new state by forming and displaying “it” as material objects must be understood in the context in which the state was seeking to establish its own (“national”) wealth. It did so not only through the requisition of the land of Orthodox monasteries and a process of institution-making and industrialization, but also by securing a tight control over this wealth by means of limiting the development of a large urban middle class and postponing a radical land redistribution to the peasants.⁹⁸

In 1913, the Romanian government passed a new Law on the Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments. The leading archeologist, Vasile Pârvan, then the director of the Museum of Antiquities, publicly criticized this law for offering a privileged position to the Commission at the expense of the Museum. Pârvan noted that the new law guaranteed the Commission a full monopoly over current archeological sites and ongoing archeological research throughout the country. Moreover, he pointed out that the Commission had traditionally favored the preservation of “medieval monuments” at the expense of “the ruins of antiquity and the scientific research about them.” By debunking the Commission’s “exclusive and limited” treatment of late medieval,

⁹⁷ Cezara Mucenic, "Legislația privind monumentele istorice din România 1892-1992," *Revista Monumentelor Istorice* LXI, no. 2 (1992), 14-20.

⁹⁸ The land reform happened only in 1921, after the First World War.

especially Orthodox, churches as the major category of “monuments,” Pârvan challenged the Commission’s privileged position as the sole institutional body entrusted by the state with selecting and promoting specific material forms as “the past of the nation.” With Vasile Pârvan, generally acknowledged as a primary promoter of the discipline of archaeology and the founder of the archeological school of interwar Romania, divergent models of time came to bear on theories of nation formation. The controversy that he and his disciples spurred around the powers attributed to the Commission for Historical Monuments signaled a clash between diverging temporal frameworks of imagining the “national past” and different imaginaries of history that were framed in terms of specific material forms. How were those temporal frameworks grounded in different material forms of representing the past?

Pârvan’s model of history, grounded in an archeological paradigm of ethnogenesis, came to challenge and displace an earlier, Romantic understanding of the nation, one that had been grounded in exclusively linguistic arguments. Pârvan proposed an epistemological framework that was materially grounded and used artifacts to make the origins of the nation more “palpable” and thus imaginable. I suggest that Pârvan aimed at radically redefining the temporal framework of the nation and thereby proposed a novel representation of history through archeological artifacts, which he promoted as forms of heritage more valuable than the medieval churches. He approached the question of ethnogenesis not from a linguistic angle, as had an earlier generation of scholars, but from a new interest in non-linguistic forms of history, a history inscribed in a “new” matter that had been recently unearthed from the ground. Pârvan’s criticism of the workings of the Commission had much at stake—it signaled a counter-project of creating

a new body politic for the Romanian state, one that was no longer defined by a historical imaginary circumscribed by the religious monuments of the late Middle Ages. The debates initiated by Pârvan led to conflicts between the Commission for Historical Monuments and the Museum of Antiquities during the interwar years, conflicts that emerged out of diverging visions of the ‘matters’ of history— what history is and how it should be represented.

The approach to national history advanced by Pârvan and his later project of institutionalizing archaeology as a pivotal discipline for the legitimization of the new post-1918 Romanian state must be understood in the context of his earlier training in ancient history and archaeology at the universities of Jena and Berlin, where he had been exposed to radical shifts in understandings of the ancient world as well as debates about the genesis of modern nations. At the same time that the model of a *Kulturnation*, or the idea that a nation was constituted by a shared cultural legacy, was being rejected, earlier (19th century) endeavors in the study of antiquity as defined by a Greco-Roman paradigm were being challenged by a growing interest in a Germanic past.⁹⁹ By cutting the ties to the Scandinavian antiquarian scholarship from which it had emerged, archaeology in Germany was turning into a political mechanism for defining ethnic groups as “naturally” formed entities that evolved into nations.¹⁰⁰ Pârvan employed these arguments when he tried to “stretch” the temporal framework of the nation by calling upon the heuristic value

⁹⁹ Bernard Mees, "Hitler and *Germanentum*," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004), 255-70.

¹⁰⁰ Such an epistemological climate favored the development of “cultural-historical” paradigm, promoted by German archeologist Gustav Kossina starting in the 1920s. This view promoted the model of ethnies/nation, by approaching assemblages of artifacts as being confined to specific regions, carrying the traits of distinctive ethnic groups (“cultures”) which led later to the formation of understanding of contemporary nations. For a critical discussion of Kossina’s paradigm and its employment in Central and Eastern Europe, see Florin Curta, "Introduction," in *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1-38 and "Some Remarks on Ethnicity in Medieval Archaeology," *Early Medieval Europe* 15, no. 2 (2007), 159-85.

of antiquity in identifying national traits presumed to have emerged much earlier than a medieval past. Therefore, the new paradigms of “indigenous archaeology” that emerged in early 20th century Germany played a pivotal role in Pârvan’s attempt to institutionalize a totalizing archeological project, one that would allow a new regional history to be written from non-linguistic forms of evidence: archeological artifacts.¹⁰¹

Pârvan’s institutional project of promoting archaeology as a key technology for producing and validating the new state cannot be separated from his organicist vision of history. One could ask: how was it possible that a pervasive positivist call for science and method could cohabit with, or even disguise, an institutionalization of the “sciences of the nation,” that is, scientific legitimation of various forms of “national essences”? Historian Sorin Antohi coined the term “ethnic ontology” to describe the process of “endowing the ethnîe/nation with an ontology of its own means,” under which the nation is set within a self-confined verticality and divested of any geopolitical comparison, in which categories are simultaneously indigenized and universalized.¹⁰² In order to understand Pârvan’s approach to the production of historical evidence and knowledge, I suggest we read Antohi’s analysis of the production of “ethnic ontologies” in interwar Romania through Jorg Rusen’s discussion of the double effect of modernization: an inescapable diachronic comparison that creates a permanent need for the re-enchantment of the past. Rusen writes:

Modernization is [...] an internal process of rationalization in dealing with the past. [...] But rationalization is only one side of the coin of modernization. There is always

¹⁰¹ Pârvan wanted to start a project together with other specialists in the Balkans, that would involve a collective enterprise of identification, collection and analysis of the Thraco-Illyric epigraphs across the region of Southeastern Europe. Alexandru Elian, "Introducere," in *Oraşul Bucureşti. Volumul I (1395-1800)*, ed. Alexandru Elian (redactor responsabil), et al. (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1965), 37.

¹⁰² Antohi, "Romania and the Balkans," 2002.

a reaction against it, a re-enchantment in the relationship to the past which at least compensates for the loss of sense and meaning brought about by rational methodologies. So the comparative approach to historiography should always keep in mind both rational disenchantment and a compensatory irrational re-enchantment or new, reformulated (“reformed”) sources and potentials of the sense of meaning of the temporal dimension of human life.¹⁰³

In his attempts to challenge the medieval temporal framework for the material representation of the national past, as promoted by the Commission for Historical Monuments, Pârvan ultimately called upon the scientific validity of archeological evidence to ground a more implacable argument on the formation of “the Romanian nation.” At the same time, he also brought along a different form of re-enchantment with the past, one rooted in a fascination with antiquity that made him extend the temporal framework of the nation, by adopting an (after all, very Romantic) notion of the “rhythm of history.”¹⁰⁴ He did so by offering his own sort of “ethnic onthology,” one based on material objects, that understood the ethnies as fixed to a specific territory. He emerged then as an interesting scholarly figure of the interwar times in Romania, one who attempted to advance a novel configuration of the material representation of the past. Pârvan’s approach to “historical evidence” and his critical take on the Commission

¹⁰³ Jorn Rusen, "Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996), 21.

¹⁰⁴ His understanding of history as “rhythm” is strikingly similar to sociologist Dimitrie Gusti’s understanding of a unique “will” underlying the formation of a nation. Both Pârvan and Gusti, key figures in the formation of the state-endorsed Romanian Social Institute, envisioned total, exhaustive and fully centralized forms of knowledge-production, ranging from archeological knowledge in the form of an archeological map of Romania to the scientific study of the nation by sociological teams. Pârvan aimed at transforming the Museum of Antiquities into the central body for coordinating all of the archeological research in the country. With the help of regional history museums, which were subordinated to the Museum of Antiquities, he hoped to produce a comprehensive “Archeological Map of Romania” while promoting archaeology as a scientifically autonomous discipline and method of inquiry. See Alexandru Zub, *Pe urmele lui Vasile Pârvan [Following the Footsteps of Vasile Pârvan]* (București: Sport Turism, 1983). As such, Pârvan, a founding member of the Romanian Social Institute (formerly the Association for Social Reform), which was established in 1918 to “develop solutions of scientific reorganization of Romanian society,” played a key role in the process of scientifically endorsing post-1918 Greater Romania. For a discussion of Gusti’s project to develop sociology as “science of the nation,” see Emanuela Grama, “Creating ‘the Science of the Nation’: The Romanian Social Institute and the Politics of Modernization in 1930s Romania” (University of Michigan, 2004).

occurred at the conjunction of a series of epistemological developments that echoed wider paradigm shifts while being locally grounded in particular struggles over institutional capital. The methodology proposed by the “Critical School,” established by Nicolae Iorga and other Romanian historians at the turn of the century, was brought under scrutiny by the next generation of historians led by Constantin Giurescu. Pârvan himself occupied a peculiar space within this shift, having inherited the Hegelian vision of total history from Iorga while also promoting a positivist focus on the sources. Giurescu proposed a new perspective on the production of history within an institutionalized framework by promoting a renewed positivist insistence on sources as the exclusive means to write history. This insistence was combined with a programmatic call for a shift from the writing of history within the paradigm of a maestro and his disciples, to the writing of history as a collective project informed by a common methodology.¹⁰⁵

Ironically, Pârvan’s vision of archaeology as a particularly powerful strategy of grounding a body politic came to be recognized by the new socialist state *after* 1947. Pârvan’s dream, never fulfilled during his short lifetime, that of having the Museum of Antiquities transformed into a national Institute of Archaeology, came true only in 1956. Many of Pârvan’s disciples became appointed to key positions within the new scientific apparatus, being entrusted with the task of developing archaeology as a scientific method for endorsing the ideology of the new state. To explain how this happened and why, I must first move backwards a few years, to an apparently minor event in the turbulent postwar period, a moment marking the dissolution of the Commission for Historical

¹⁰⁵ Alexandru Zub, *De la istoria critică la criticism. Istoriografia română sub semnul modernității* (București: Editura enciclopedică, 2000).

Monuments, the institutional rival of the Museum of Antiquities during the interwar years.

Museums and Monuments: Redefining and Rearranging Materiality (1950-1952)

On May 5, 1950, to the dismay of its members and despite their efforts to maintain its validity within the new regime, the Commission for Historical Monuments (henceforth, the Commission), an institution that had held significant political leverage during the interwar period, was officially dismantled. The newly established Committee for Cultural Establishments (henceforth, the Committee), formed after its Soviet equivalent, was to take over the former responsibilities of the Commission under its new Department for Museums and Monuments (*Serviciul Muzeu și Monumente*).¹⁰⁶ Soon thereafter, the Committee asked the directorate of the former Commission to transfer all of its collections and documents (“the archive, memos, and correspondence regarding the monuments”) to them.¹⁰⁷ It took more than one month for the Committee to receive the requested materials, containing an immense volume of material.¹⁰⁸ Understandably, the former members of the now non-existent Commission could not easily let go of such a

¹⁰⁶ The Committee for Cultural Establishment, attached to the Council of Ministers, was founded via Decree 63/March 17, 1950. It was dissolved on November 30, 1953, when it became included, together with other provisory Committees, in the new Ministry of Culture.

¹⁰⁷ The collection of the (interwar) Commission of Historical Monuments, deposited at the Archives of the National Institute for Historical Monuments (*Arhiva Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, henceforth ACMI/AINMI). File 3880, “Organizare, Servicii, Personal, Colaborări, 1945-1950,” 46.

¹⁰⁸ As the director of the former Commission, Victor Brătulescu assessed, the collection was formed of “an archive dating from 1914, the publications, the library, the chromatic and glass negatives, the photographic archive, the collections and the deposit of publications that have been issued since 1908.” File 3880, “Organizare, Servicii, Personal, Colaborări, 1945-1950,” 28-29. Letter to the President (of the Council of Ministers), sent by the Commission on the official document carrying the heading of the Ministry of Arts and Information. Nr. 420, dated May 7, 1948. See also the note about several requests of the committee to have the materials transferred to them.

precious collection, especially since they suspected that a great deal of this material might end up in the garbage can of history, as obsolete scrap paper.¹⁰⁹

Immediately after this request, soon to be endowed with such a notable volume of records and recently invested with the authority of defining the cultural policies of the new state, the Committee sent a general circular to all of the Provisory Regional Assemblies in the country (the temporary bodies preceding the Executive Committees of the People's Councils, to be established in 1951). The Assemblies were asked to pursue a detailed survey of the museums in their regions, with precise directions on how to conduct their investigation.¹¹⁰ The survey entailed also an inventory of the historical monuments, which, "even though they had been owned by exploiters in the past, represent monuments constituting our people's patrimony, and must therefore be preserved in their current state as documents of the past of our Fatherland."¹¹¹

The monitoring of this wide range of cultural artifacts, ranging from museum collections to sites and buildings, should be read as an attempt on the part of the new socialist state to construct anew a body politic for itself. After having acquired a clearer, thorough record of the things and sites that had now to be included in the socialist

¹⁰⁹ As the current archivist of the National Institute for Historical Monuments, Iuliu Șerban, told me, the files of the former Commission of Historical Monuments were saved at the last moment in 1947, when someone telephoned historian Oliver Velescu, a close collaborator of the Commission, to tell him that there were several packages of files with the royal crest on the cover lying in the courtyard. They seemed to have been taken out of the building in 1948, as soon as the Commission was expelled from the house that functioned as its headquarters during most of the interwar years, and due to the lack of room, someone decided to do away with a part of the archive, which seemed to be no longer valuable. Oliver Velescu came and rescued the files and preserved them until the Department for Monuments came to be established in 1953, as part of the State Commission for Architecture and Construction.

¹¹⁰ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814, "Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952," 3-7.

¹¹¹ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814, "Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952," 8. The note sent to the Provisory Committees asked that:

In case [the buildings] are ruined, they must be preserved and cannot be demolished under any circumstances.[...] there had been cases when building materials had been taken out of ruined or not inhabited historical monuments, on the reason that they had belonged to the boyars or nobles in the past, and they are not used today.

heritage, as a key part of the sacred collective property of the people, the state needed proper caretakers for this domain. The inventory of the collections, and historical buildings was soon to be followed by an inventory of people. The latter one, however, proved to be rather difficult.

A few months after the first circular, the Committee sent off a detailed list of local museums, which were to be established or reopened across the country, being included in the local budget of the People's Councils for the subsequent year (1951). At the same time, the Committee requested the Councils to "take measures to fill [the museums] with politically and professionally suitable personnel."¹¹² The local Councils were advised to contact the universities and the principal museums in their region for suggestions on the potential personnel, on the condition that the new employees would be ultimately verified by the cadres of the People's Councils.¹¹³ The demand to fill in the empty slots was soon followed by a decision of the Council of Ministers, which required an immediate inventory of all the historical, ethnographical, and scientific objects of exceptional value, existing at that moment in the museums of RPR.¹¹⁴ The decision was accompanied by detailed instructions on the making of this inventory: after the directors of the museums had put together the lists of the highly valuable objects in their collections, the leaders of the cultural departments of the People's Councils were to verify the thoroughness of the collection and then submit the lists to the Committee.¹¹⁵

¹¹² ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 "Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952," 10. Memo sent to all the People's Councils in the country on December 19, 1950.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 "Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952," 12. Decision nr. 49 of May 21, 1951, issued by the President of the Committee for Cultural Establishments of the RPR, Mihail Roșianu.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

It seems, though, that such an enterprise was not an easy one. The Committee sent several memos noting the discrepancies between how the project was envisioned at the center and the ways in which it was implemented across the country.¹¹⁶ For instance, a circular sent by the Committee to all of the executive committees of the local Councils pointed out the recurrent troubles of the central authorities and forced them to confront the difficult task of identifying politically and intellectually “qualified” personnel for the bureaucracy of the new state:

there had been cases in some counties where unsuitable people had been proposed to occupy positions in museums. They were uneducated, recruited from other types of jobs, and in some cases, were relatives of various local cadres. Our committee, which had been struggling to have the diagram/schema/system of the Museums approved, arguing for the necessity of well-prepared scientific personnel, will approve of no nominee that does not correspond to the standards laid out above.¹¹⁷

Initially, the new personnel for the ever-expanding network of local museums were to be recruited directly by the People’s Councils, after previous consultations with the directors of the museums. The potential candidates were to be politically “checked” by the cadres of the Council, and the lists of the final candidates then submitted to the Committee. However, only a week afterwards, further questions were being raised regarding the decisions reached by some of the local Councils—that is, the central authorities learned that some of the local cadres went far beyond their attributed powers, since “in some regions, the proposals for the new personnel are done without seeking advice from the museums’ directors; hence, incompetent persons are selected, by means

¹¹⁶ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952,” 14-15.

¹¹⁷ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952,” 15.

other than the professional and scientific criteria.”¹¹⁸ Under these circumstances, a second circular was issued to modify the earlier one, by requesting that

the lists of candidates [for the positions in the local museums] be ‘collectively’ drafted by the leader of the Cultural Section of the People’s Council, together with the director of the main regional museum, as well as all the directors of the county museums. Also, in the regions where there are Institutes of Philosophy and History of the RPR Academy, the consultation with the directors of those institutions will be mandatory.¹¹⁹

However, the new directions given by the second circular did not seem to bring any major change in the ways in which the recruitment of the new personnel, as well as the inventorying of the collections, was being carried out on the ground. This must be the reason why the President of the Committee issued yet another decree, which directly aimed at “controlling the nomination of the specialized personnel in the regional or county museums, and the inventorying of the museum collections.”¹²⁰ The new ordinance (the third one within a month) asked that the directors of the regional and county museums no longer “draft and submit the lists of the nominees for the new positions in museums, as well as the list of the museums’ current employees.” Under this new decree, the People’s Councils were no longer invited to actively contribute to the recruitment of the museum personnel, but rather they were offered a secondary role, that of making sure that the lists were drafted and submitted on time.¹²¹ This latter decision points out that as much as the new state wanted to rely on the new people—that is, the political cadres—to carry out the making of the socialist institutions, the leaders were forced to admit that those people lacked not only the scientific expertise, but also a moral commitment to “the people’s goods” and to the state as such.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee și monumente, 1947-1952,” 24-25.

¹²¹ Ibid.

The difficulty for the central socialist authorities to find trustworthy and reliable subjects among the local cadres has been recently documented. Writing about the first stages of the collectivization process, Verdery points out that the newly appointed cadres could get away with a wide range of abuses of power due to the inability of the Party to fully manage such a radical project of redistributing goods while controlling everyone involved (that is, the persuaders and those who were to be persuaded to give in to the new Party-state).¹²² She writes:

Across the entire period, policy oscillated between centralization and decentralization: when Party leaders wanted to control the process, they tried to centralize it, inevitably slowing the pace; when they wanted to increase the pace, they had to decentralize. This, in turn, led to their losing control of their cadres and to local abuses of power, as cadres competed with one another to sign up more villagers.¹²³

As Verdery argues, it was these abuses of power in which the newly appointed cadres engaged at the beginning of the regime. This emerging regime produced and then reinforced a social landscape marked by “careerism, insubordination, network-embeddedness, and clientelism that were the hallmarks of Romanian communist society.”¹²⁴

While collectivization was a broad project, searching for new “experts of the past” to be placed within the new local elites as producers and custodians of the new cultural institutions was a more manageable enterprise. Hence, the multiple circulars that the Committee kept sending to all of the People’s Councils in the country, showing that the central authorities were carefully watching the selection of the would-be local cultural

¹²² Katherine Verdery, "Abusive Cadres in a Voracious Party-State: Romanian Collectivization in the 1950s," *NCEEER Working Paper* (July 2009).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

activists. Indeed, as Verdery notes, the lack of qualified personnel in the immediate postwar years was a widespread phenomenon.¹²⁵ (In the next chapter, I discuss how two years later [1953] the Council of Ministers was still bemoaning the lack of cadres, acknowledging the shortage of specialists needed for the massive project of urban remodeling in Bucharest. The leaders found themselves forced to “welcome” back some of the “old elements” who had been admittedly bourgeois, but also “talented architects.”)¹²⁶ Given the tight control that the Committee maintained over the recruitment of the new personnel for the museums across the country, it becomes evident that these institutions represented key sites for political propaganda. The organization of museums had represented a priority for the state right from the beginning, as a July 1951 official decision states:

In the struggle that the regime of the People’s Democracy is currently carrying on, the museums must stop representing simple deposits of collections; they must turn into genuine instruments of the Party and the government, by directly contributing to the great activities of building socialism, democracy and peace in the People’s Republic of Romania.¹²⁷

The central authorities were therefore interested in establishing a secure network of museums as ideologically stable recipients for what was soon to follow: an equally stable and pervasive narrative of history, to be set within (and produced by) museum collections that had been thoroughly “rearranged and developed according to the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 11-12.

¹²⁶ See Miron Constantinescu’s comment about the talent of Petre Antonescu, architect during the interwar period. In Transcripts of the meetings of the Council of Minister on November 3, 11, and 18, 1952. Cited in “Noiembrie 1952. Consiliul de Miniștri trasează planuri în construcții și Urbanism.” *Magazin Istoric*, 1998, 43. <http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi1998/current2/mi43.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2008.

¹²⁷ ACMI/AINMI, File 1743, 2.

principles of historical materialism.”¹²⁸ Among those newly selected objects, I will argue, archeological artifacts became a particularly important category.

However, before being purged, selected, and rearranged, these objects were to be first identified and collected. Immediately after its establishment, the Committee began this enterprise not only by pursuing a survey of the existent museum collections, but also by collecting “all of the books and museum pieces” that existed in the recently nationalized mansions and villas.¹²⁹ A circular sent by the Committee asked all of the Provisory Regional Assemblies (the temporary bodies preceding the Executive Committees of the People’s Councils) to immediately collect the books and objects left in the expropriated mansions in each region, with the books and furniture being channeled to the local libraries, while the other museum pieces were directed to the regional museums.¹³⁰ Soon afterwards, the Committee decided to invest significant funding into the acquisition of more objects for museums collections. The Executive Committees of the People’s Councils received special subventions aiming at “the reorganization of the regional, city, and county museums; openings of new exhibitions, and the acquisition of museum objects.”¹³¹

Also, the decision signals one more aspect of the making of the heritage of the new state. Whereas the museums seemed to have become a key political institution as the makers of specific representations of the past, the domain of “monuments” was less clearly defined. Indeed, as early as September 1950, immediately after its establishment, the Committee had sent out general directions regarding the protection of buildings

¹²⁸ ACMI/AINMI, File 3880 “Organizare, Servicii, Personal, Colaborări, 1945-1950,” 50. July 4, 1950.

¹²⁹ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952,” 76. The committee for cultural establishments attached to the Council of Ministers, not dated.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952,” 73.

deemed historical monuments. These initial directions sent to all of the Provisory Regional Assemblies, stressed that no renovation should be done to the buildings that were 100 years or older, without prior permission from the central authorities.¹³² A second, more detailed circular was issued a month later, in October 1950, with more detailed instructions. It asked that, “in agreement with the Law for the preservation of historical monuments passed on July 29, 1919, which is still valid, buildings of all kinds, houses, palaces, castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, displaying interesting architectural motifs, which had been built before 1834, are considered historical monuments.”¹³³ Therefore, “they must be preserved in their current state and cannot be demolished under any circumstances.”¹³⁴ More specifically, any form of renovation or remodeling was forbidden, and no “inscription, herald, plate, emblem” was to be taken down, without prior approval of the Committee. The heads of the cultural divisions of the local assemblies were held responsible for the further destruction of such monumental buildings that were no longer inhabited.¹³⁵

However, these directives were not very effective with respect to the country’s actual architectural landscape. Most of the monumental civic architecture in Romania had been erected after the middle of the 19th century, as a direct consequence of the modernization and rapid development following the formation of the Romanian state in 1859. Many of the more imposing buildings in the fledging cities appeared only immediately before or around the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, some of the earlier

¹³² ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952,” 75. The request that no modification be done on nationalized buildings that are 100 years or older appears in circular no. 8046, sent by the Committee for Cultural Establishments to all of the Provisory Assemblies, on September 14, 1950.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952,” 8. Circular 10.230, October 17, 1950, “From the Committee to the Provisory Assemblies.”

castles and mansions in the countryside had also been altered around that time, in order to accommodate the aesthetic preferences and a new life style of an emerging middle class. Therefore, most of the buildings that constituted the urban fabric of the cities up to the war were in fact not within the temporal framework that represented “the past”—“before 1834”—and therefore were not legally protected.

This meant automatically that the list of sites not to be demolished became drastically reduced, by paradoxically calling upon an obsolete law, which the former Commission for Historical Monuments had been preparing to annul. The situation of the nationalized buildings that had been built after 1834, that is, most of them, was therefore extremely precarious. In fact, with their former owners expelled, emigrated, thrown in prison, or in the communist labor force, there were not many left to take care of them. Depending on their location and size, they became sites for the new bureaucracy of the party or headquarters for collective farms, or ended up being abandoned altogether. After the dismantling of the Commission for Historical Monuments, there were few specialists left to travel in the country and monitor the conditions of the sites. With the architects of the former Commission transferred to other institutions and in other positions, the Committee instituted local “Collectives for the historical monuments,” which had to be instituted in each “region, county, and city,” being “attached to the local museums [...] or to the cultural sections of the People’s Councils, if there are no museums.”¹³⁶

¹³⁶ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 “Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952,” 22.

“The tasks of the collectives for historical monuments,” copy, unsigned. These collectives were formed of “comrades, educated workers, peasants, progressist intellectuals, [...] interested in local history and geography,” who were to be chosen by the People’s Councils and confirmed by the central Committee. According to the instructions of the Committee for Cultural Establishments, these collectives had to start their work of identifying the monuments within their region by either consulting “archives, books, and old publications” or pursuing field research to collect those data. The collectives had to identify them and submit suggestions of monuments to be included in the general list of monuments, and reports justifying their choices. The plans and drawings of the selected sites should be carried out with the help of specialists

The collectives were then to start anew a laborious project that had already been carried out for more than half of century by the Commission for Historical Monuments. On the one hand, the Committee really wanted to get hold of the archive and resources of the now dismantled Commission, but on the other, they wanted to assemble their own archive and records *ab initio*, set up by trustworthy comrades, who would establish new hierarchies and monuments lists, by relying on their own understanding of what history was and how should it be represented. Apparently, those collectives had not produced any significant results, since a year afterwards, in October 1951, the Council of Ministers (the most important governmental body, the leader of the state) sent a circular directly to all the Executive committees of the People's Councils asking them to take immediate measures for the monuments' protection. Following a report of the Scientific Commission of Museums and Historical and Artistic Monuments of the Academy that pointed out the critical situation of the monuments and historical sites in the country, the ordinance gave detailed instructions on the buildings and sites that should undergo such protection.¹³⁷ More interestingly, the monuments were separated into four distinct categories: archeological, historical, architectural, and art monuments.¹³⁸

(architects, engineers) of the "regional administrative unit." The collectives were also set in charge of the protection and preservation measures, by recruiting amateurs to study the "old architecture" and put together plans that would be then centralized in order to request governmental funding for restoration projects. Even attached to the regional, city or communal museums, the collectives were envisioned as relatively autonomous units, which had to draft work plans and submit reports directly to the Central Committee.

¹³⁷ ACMI/AINMI, File 3814 "Acte normative muzee si monumente, 1947-1952," 41. Circular nr. 18.938, October 20, 1951. "To all the executive committees of the regional and city popular councils." In line with the previous ordinances, this new decree stressed one more time that no demolition should be carried out without the approval of the Scientific Commission of the Museums attached to the Academy. The letter then suggests the executive committees to "contact the local Collectives for Historical Monuments, where such organizations had been established, or history and literature teachers, intellectuals or amateurs, in order to decide upon which monuments must be protected/preserved.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

This distinction marked a significant shift in the institutional take on “the past.” During the interwar period, the Commission for Historical Monuments had been set in charge of the “protection of the prehistoric, classic, medieval and in general historical sites, as well as of the buildings and objects that appear to be of artistic or historical interest.”¹³⁹ In other words, the Commission was set in charge of every form of materiality deemed to carry “historical value.” Interestingly, right after the organization of the Committee for Cultural Establishments in 1950, the newly appointed director wrote a note concerned with the new criteria of selection, which separated “art monuments” from the “historical” ones, each distributed to distinct institutions (the first to the Committee for Arts, and the latter to the Committee for Cultural Establishments).¹⁴⁰ Pointing out that such a distinction is not valid, as all monuments carry aesthetic and historical value, he suggested that one single institution must be responsible for all of them. A logical argument, his request asked in fact that the former Commission be established under a new form—or, in a more pragmatic interpretation, that the newly established Committee fully acquire the power of decision-making over and consequently the resources to protect all forms of “monument.”¹⁴¹

But the more important part of the note is what the director wrote at the beginning. According to him, “until very recently,” the selection criteria relied upon on a temporal element: that is, the monuments dated before the year 1200 were relegated to the Institute of History and Philosophy of the Romanian Academy, whereas those built afterwards were set under the supervision of the former Minister of Arts (in fact, under the responsibility of the now dismantled Commission for Historical Monuments, active

¹³⁹ Law for the protection and preservation of historical monuments, July 28, 1919.

¹⁴⁰ ACMI/AINMI, File 3880 “Organizare, Servicii, Personal, Colaborări, 1945-1950,” 55.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

until May 1950).¹⁴² I suggest that the director alluded to a *de facto* state of affairs that characterized the workings of the Commission in the period 1919-1950. That is, even if the 1919 Law entrusted the Commission with full responsibility over all forms of “historical monument,” most of the members of the Commission, many of them architects and historians, had manifested a stronger penchant for late medieval, especially Orthodox, churches, which they treated as the major category of “monuments.” This state of affairs had led Pârvan to unsuccessfully fight for the recognition of a separate institution (the Museum of Antiquities, which was included in the Academy after the war, as the Institute of Archaeology), which would become responsible for the current and future archeological sites. What was Pârvan’s main argument? It now appears obvious to us: he argued that “the past” cannot just be represented through material forms placed above ground, such as medieval buildings (most of them, churches), but that it must be also sought underneath the ground, in the older strata preserving much older ruins and artifacts. Beneath the steps of his fellow citizens, he contended, there was lying an entire “new” past, waiting to be unearthed and displayed—an archeological map, that would complement and ground the geographical map of Greater Romania.

It is this “new” past, represented by archeological findings, that greatly appealed to the new leaders, as it offered the promise to meet the ideological premises of building a new world of socialism, as well as grounding this world, literally and symbolically, by providing it with a novel form of heritage. I suggest that archaeology provided a material form of representing the past that appeared the most adequate from a political point of view. Archeological artifacts ended up being amassed, redistributed and displayed through the national network of regional museums of history (city museums) that played

¹⁴² Ibid.

a pivotal role in the creation of a heritage for the socialist state. The local museums offered the perfect framework, set within an aura of scientific and historical accuracy, within which the socialist regime was “glued” to a medieval past represented by artifacts and thereby presented as a predetermined historical stage, perfectly fitting the teleological vision of Marxism as well as its emphasis on materialism. The archeological artifacts unearthed from the ground became thus more important than the built structures of the past times (the latter were to be fully replaced by the new buildings of the socialist urban aesthetics).

In comparison to the interwar period, when “heritage” had been mostly represented by old built structures, the socialist state of the 1950s began to amass archeological artifacts in order to create a different form of heritage. The artifacts represented a different kind of materiality, one that was both “new” and often more mobile (being thus able to be inscribed and displayed as state property). (I develop this argument at length in the fourth chapter.) In addition to the major operations of nationalization and collectivization, this process of agglomerating artifacts stood as another form of channeling resources to the center—the key strategy by which the communist state aimed to consolidate its power.¹⁴³

Archeologists could enjoy significant institutional support as early as 1951, when the Museum of Antiquities, “the national authority of the archeological research during the interwar years,” became included in the newly established Institute of History and Philosophy of the Academy.¹⁴⁴ In 1953, the first network of archeological sites was

¹⁴³ For a discussion of hoarding as a key mechanism of the socialist system, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁴ Mircea Anghelinu, *Evoluția gândirii teoretice în arheologia românească. Concepte și modele aplicate în preistorie* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2003), 178.

opened in the central area of Bucharest, being first set under the supervision of the Institute's researchers.¹⁴⁵ As soon as the Museum of Bucharest was officially opened in 1958, the current and future archeological sites as well as the supervision of the archeological research to be conducted on the area of Bucharest were transferred to the Museum.¹⁴⁶ However, the Institute of Archaeology, as the "most powerful institution" in the field retaining the majority of Pârvan's disciples, remained at the core of a highly centralized system of archeological research, benefiting from institutional and symbolic privileges throughout the socialist period. Under these circumstances, the newly established regional museums, the other two Institutes of Archaeology (in Cluj and Iași, the other two important university centers), as well as the research conducted within the departments of archaeology and history at the universities, could not alter much the position of institutional dominance held by the Institute.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, as I will show in the next chapter, some of those more marginal actors, such as the Museum of Bucharest, at least tried to do so, but without much success.

Above ground: Architecture for a non-historical Future

Bearing this context in mind, I would like to return to the note sent by the Committee for Cultural Establishments in October 1951, which mentioned the separation of "monuments" into four distinct categories. I contend that this separation marked a key

¹⁴⁵ "Șantierul Arheologic București," in *Studii și referate privind istoria României. Din lucrările secțiunii lărgite a secțiunii de științe istorice, filozofice și economico-juridice (21-24 Decembrie 1953)* [*Studies and Reports on the History of Romania. Excerpts of the Extended Session of the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Juridical-Economic Sciences (December 21-24, 1953)*] (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1954), 285-89.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁴⁷ Mircea Anghelinu, *Evoluția gândirii teoretice în arheologia românească*, 178.

shift in the official representation of “the past,” and thereby in the process of history production pursued by the socialist state. In other words, architectural forms of heritage (reclassified in categories of monuments) were severely circumscribed because they could not as easily signify a past that would fit the ideology of the socialist state. An examination of the descriptions of each category points to the artificial boundaries that had been drawn among those four forms of “monument.” The Committee’s director was obviously right to argue that all monuments share an aesthetic and historical dimension.¹⁴⁸ However, the separation was crucial for legitimizing a more complex rearrangement of material forms to fit the new property regime. That is, the “art monuments,” represented by “paintings, sculptures, engravings, fountains, monumental paintings separated from architectural monuments,” could have been more easily moved around, and in most cases placed in the recently established national network of museums. (This is when some of the most valuable ones did not end up as decoration objects in the villas “redistributed” to the newly installed apparatchiks.) Therefore, the state could be immediately endowed with a significant heritage, in the form of the art objects collected from the nationalized houses across the country and distributed to the “instruments of the Party:” the museums. However, the rearrangement and the centralization of the immovable heritage, formed of the nationalized buildings and assemblies (castles, mansions, villas, etc.), proved to be a more difficult task. Hence, the Committee for Cultural Establishments showed limited interest in developing a tight policy of controlling this heritage (in contrast to their diligent involvement in a country wide control of the new museum collections and personnel). Therefore, the archeological

¹⁴⁸ A similar argument is made by Cezara Mucenic, "Legislația privind monumentele istorice din România 1892-1992," 17.

sites, which were automatically considered “historical,” and therefore scientific, were assigned for further research and supervision to the Academy (more specifically, to the Scientific Commission of Museums, Art and Historical Monuments, established in 1951 and formed of members of the Academy).¹⁴⁹

What was left were the architectural sites: some of them could be still considered “historical,” on the condition that they “had been directly linked to important events in our Fatherland’s past.” In other words, they could be used as safe *lieux-de-memoire*, to tell a story that would fit the grand narrative of socialist History. The others, those that were “not connected to significant historical facts,” but were rich in architectural motifs, and “could contribute to the study of architectural evolution,” were included in the category of “architectural monuments.”

As non-historical sites, the latter could therefore be assigned to a separate institution. Consequently, after having been relatively abandoned since the abrogation of the Commission in 1950, the sites and buildings that remained standing during this time and preserved a good part of their architectural value were set under the supervision of the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions. Established in November 1952 as the governmental body in charge of the remodeling of all cities in socialist Romania, this new institution—more exactly, its Department for Monuments—was also responsible for supervising and organizing “the protection and preservation of the historical architectural monuments on the territory of the People’s Republic of Romania.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ The archeological sites included “earth constructions, digs, old roads, remains of old inhabited areas; [...] as well as all the old objects that had been discovered through archeological digs or serendipitously found during the agricultural work.”

¹⁵⁰ Decision of the Council of Ministers, issued on November 13, 1952.

In other words, those sites and buildings were valuable for the history of architecture, but were not deemed valuable for the new historical narrative, which would be produced by the Academy. They did not seem to be as “historically” valuable as other forms of materiality—that is, the archeological sites and artifacts—because the architectural forms were relatively too new to be able to be employed as signs of the past for the new state. They were reminders of “a past” that started with the modernization of Romania under King Carol I, moved into quests for a “National Style” in architecture that emerged at the turn of the century, and then exploded during the interwar period as products of the fervent debates between modernists and preservationists (represented by the members of the Commission for Historical Monuments). This (grossly summarized) “past” was not part of the historical trajectory that the new state wanted to display and especially identify with. Those buildings and assemblies represented rather “a past” that needed to be leveled and camouflaged as much as possible, when it could not be demolished altogether.

At the moment of the establishment of the State Committee for Architecture and Constructions, the political meaning and potential use of those “architectural monuments” was still ambiguous. In fact, confusion was looming large at that time. Only a few months earlier, in June 1952, the Party leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had successfully orchestrated the ousting of three key members of the Politburo.¹⁵¹ This

¹⁵¹ This group was formed of three members of the Politburo (Ana Pauker, Teohari Georgescu, and Vasile Luca, among whom Ana Pauker figured prominently), who shared absolute power with Dej since the war, when the Soviets had facilitated their “implantation” into the Romanian Party émigré center in Moscow. Despite her fanatic loyalty to Stalin, Pauker adamantly opposed the Stalinist line by “deliberately defying the Soviet directives on a number of important fronts—uniquely, during the perilous period of Stalin’s final years.” Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 3. Pauker’s strong and contradictory personality caused significant tensions with Dej’s ambitions within the Party leadership. Dej, with the help and approval of the Soviets (that is, Stalin), managed to oust this group in February 1953, by putting Pauker under house arrest, and throwing Luca and

move, approved by Stalin, strengthened Dej's position in the Party, as well as froze any incipient projects in the larger cultural and artistic sphere that did not strictly follow the Party line.¹⁵²

More changes were to come. Mărginean (2008) nicely captures the shifts occurring in the field of architecture at that time:

Stylistically, the shift from “unduly modernist landscape” to “serene socialist realism” occurred in Romania between 1949 and 1954, causing not just a visual conversion, but as well a redeployment of the social function of the architecture. Comprised in the rhetoric's main tenet “national in form and socialist in content” it was synonymous with the allocation of formative function within a social system. Therefore, architecture came to play a more central place within the society whereas the space had been allocated the main function of mediating between the political authority and the masses.¹⁵³

The discussions over the aesthetic options in the architectural field, far from being merely technical or professional considerations, were thoroughly saturated with the debates and negotiations of the political moment. A growing body of work on Soviet culture and history has been approaching architecture as a particularly relevant domain to analyze the changes in the models of aesthetic representation that accompanied shifts in the internal and external policy of the Soviet state. Vladimir Paperny offers a binary analysis of architecture and arts in Soviet society, in which Culture One expresses the “fluidity” of the Soviet avant-garde in the 1920s and a democratic horizontality in

Georgescu in jail. Even though prior to 1953 Dej justified his move by calling upon Stalin's “interest in the ‘ethnicization’ of East European communist elites,” he later officially exculpated himself by accusing Pauker and Co. of “dogmatism,” describing them as having adopted an inflexible Marxism and thus “be willing to sacrifice the values of the Nation [...to] an outside power.” Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 45, and Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 120.

¹⁵² Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, and Cristian Vasile, eds. *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007.

¹⁵³ Mara Mărginean, “Aesthetic Mechanisms of Stalinization in Romanian Architecture: The Case of Hunedoara, 1947-1954,” (MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2008), 33-34.

architectural vocabulary, while Culture Two represents the freezing absolutism of Stalin's epoch, whose hierarchy and authority came to be architecturally represented by the seven Stalinist skyscrapers.¹⁵⁴ Paperny's view is challenged by Boris Groys, who argues that the tenets of the 1920s avant-garde directly informed Socialist Realism, in that "the production of images in Socialist Realism served above all to depict the utopia of a happy future," in the form of "a new public with new eyes" that the avant-garde artists always imagined as consumers of their art.¹⁵⁵

This utopia was soon to be exported abroad. In Romania of the early 1950s, under the direct "guidance" of the Soviet councilors, architectural expression became a major aesthetic and technological means to represent the future as well as to visually ground a symbolic geography of the soviet bloc. According to Stalin's own tenet, any architectural project in the new satellites of the Soviet Union had to be "national in form and socialist in content." With the Romanian leaders becoming increasingly preoccupied with the application of this principle and the institutionalization of Socialist Realism in the architectural field, it may seem that the last thing they could think about was the preservation of older buildings and sites—the "architectural monuments."

However, to some specialists, those buildings appeared as possible sources of inspiration for autochthonous searches for stylized expressions of "national content." During one of the meetings of the Council of Ministers regarding the launching of the State Commission for Architecture and Constructions, the Soviet counselor Zvedin

¹⁵⁴ Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*, ed. Norman Bryson, Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 (1996)).

¹⁵⁵ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 [1988]), and "Utopian Mass Culture," in *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, ed. Boris Groys and Max Hollein (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003), 22-23.

proposed the establishment of “a body that will focus on the historical monuments and will hold a great responsibility for the architectural development of the cities.” Moreover, he added, “this body will study the monument from the perspective of its architectural value and of its ideological suitability and certainly will inform the Council of Ministers when a no longer valuable monument must be eliminated.” He stressed the importance of Bucharest within this project of architectural development, as the city that “must be the dear child of the Party and the People’s Council.”¹⁵⁶

Councilor Zvedin was asking then for a State Committee that would offer a politically coherent architectural vision by selectively integrating the field of monuments in the project of creating a socialist realist aesthetic. In fact, the Soviet councilor was pushing the Romanian government to reproduce the institutional infrastructure that underlay the Soviet model of construction and urban planning in the postwar years (until Stalin’s death). The establishment of a Committee of Architecture that would also include a special department responsible for the monuments’ political suitability was closely following the Soviet legislation on the protection of the architectural monuments. In the aftermath of the Second World War, an acute sense of loss and destruction triggered a new awareness of the role of monuments in constituting and representing the “national property.” This, combined with Stalin’s “policy of reconciliation with the emblems of national identity,”¹⁵⁷ led to the formulation of detailed instructions on the identification, cataloguing and protection of monuments on the basis of scientific criteria of research and restoration in the form of the law issued in 1948.

¹⁵⁶ Transcripts of the meetings of the Council of Ministers, on November 3, 11, and 18, cited in "Noiembrie 1952. Consiliul de Miniștri trasează planuri în construcții și urbanism." *Magazin Istoric*, 1998, 43. <http://www.itenet.ro/history/archive/mi1998/current2/mi43.html> Accessed September 15, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Jean-Louis Cohen, "Soviet Legal Documents on the Preservation of Monuments," *Future Anterior* V, no. 1 (2008), 63.

More importantly, in contrast to the precarious status that the monuments held during the 1920s and 1930s, which led to numerous demolitions under the revolutionary impetus of constructing a world anew, the 1948 law set the architectural monuments under a stronger scrutiny as well as protection by the state, via the Committee for Architectural Affairs of the Council of Ministers of the USSR.¹⁵⁸ As such, the field of “architectural monuments,” even though still included in the larger domain of “cultural monuments,” was offered a certain degree of autonomy. The text of the law contained a detailed list of what kinds of buildings and monumental complexes (both civic and religious), “complete buildings as well as damaged buildings, ruins, and parts of ancient buildings,” should have been treated as “architectural monuments.”¹⁵⁹ Also, the comprehensive instructions on the maintenance and restoration of those buildings pointed to a renewed interest in including those sites in the post-war enterprise of recovery and modernization, now set under a Cold War competition.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Before 1948, the architectural monuments did not benefit from much institutional protection from the state. Most of the institutional attention had been given to archeological sites right from the establishment of a socialist regime. Dolukhanov points out that [t]he foundation of this system was laid on 18 April 1919, when Lenin signed a decree establishing the Russian Academy for the History of Material Culture (RAIMK) in place of the Imperial Archaeological Commission. The same decree proclaimed all the historical and archaeological monuments on the Russian territory to be state property. [...] From the very beginning the archaeology in the USSR was largely viewed as a device for official communist indoctrination. The study of material remains (hence the name of the archaeological institution) was regarded as an instrument for promoting Marxist dogmas in relation to the socio-economic development of pre-class and early-class societies. [...] [It is for this reason that] for about 70 years the USSR possessed the world's largest network of archaeological research (Trigger 1989). P.M.. Dolukhanov, "Archaeology in the Ex-Ussr: Post-Perestroyka Problems," *Antiquity* 67, no. 254 (1993), 150.

¹⁵⁹ Trans. Richard Anderson, "The USSR's 1948 Instructions for the Identification, Registration, Maintenance, and Restoration of Architectural Monuments under State Protection," *Future Anterior* V, no. 1 (2008). 64-72

¹⁶⁰ Perhaps this diversification of the built landscape, that would include not only socialist modernist projects but also those signs of the past, was a novel strategy for Stalin to “score some points” in the Cold War tight competition between the socialist and capitalist blocs, both involved in a post-war project of quick recovery and modernization. At the same time, it is very likely that the 1948 Soviet law was influenced by a wider concern about the built environment across Europe recovering from the aftermaths of the war. See for instance the discussion on the development of historic preservation in the US as a part of a “national effort to improve university education and to develop new expert skills to match the perceived

The official interest in the historical preservation of architectural monuments had dramatically diminished after Stalin's death in 1953. No longer having the tenets of Socialist Realism as the main guiding schema, the architects in the satellite countries became largely confused and maintained this confusion for a few good years. (In Romania, for instance, this aesthetic confusion was visible up to the late 1950s.¹⁶¹) Khrushchev's rise to power in 1954 led then to a relative political "thaw" that gradually allowed an assimilation of the architectural modernist forms of the postwar Western world into the socialist bloc.¹⁶² This openness was mostly dictated by economic reasoning, as a (moderate) modernist expression seemed to offer the key to economic efficiency and rapid industrialization expected by the socialist leaders.

The shift from socialist realism to modernism was, however, monitored by the Party ideologues, who were wary that a bolder modernist vocabulary would endanger the "socialist architecture" (with the notable exceptions when architects succeeded in "reconciling political loyalty with modernist ideas.")¹⁶³ However, architects in the socialist bloc found ways to work around the "directives" given by the political center, especially in a context of more frequent and vibrant dialogues with their Western colleagues.¹⁶⁴ The architecture emerging in Romania in the early 1960s illustrates this quest for novel means of expression (see, for instance, the radical modernism of the industrial sector, or the administrative shift from kvartal to microraión, indexing a new

superiority of the Soviets." Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Editor's Note," *Future Anterior (Special Issue on the Preservation of Soviet Heritage)* V, no. 1 (2008).III.

¹⁶¹ Radu-Alex Răuță and Hildergarde Heyden, "Shifting Meanings of Modernism: Parallels and Contrasts between Karel Teige and Cezar Lăzărescu," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁶² Carmen Popescu, "Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁶³ Răuță and Heyden "Shifting Meanings of Modernism: Parallels and Contrasts between Karel Teige and Cezar Lăzărescu," 28.

¹⁶⁴ Carmen Popescu, "Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse."

model of imagining collectivity).¹⁶⁵ Moreover, earlier agendas came to underlie these quests. Maxim points out that the architecture of socialism in the 1950s and 1960s came to be heavily influenced by the interwar tenets of the modernist movement (such as, the focus on standardization, technology, and the city as the new unit of production) and earlier attempts to adapt those tenets to the local environment.

The leaders therefore resisted the investment of much funding in the restoration of old built structures, favoring instead two other interventions in the urban landscape: 1) the development of archeological excavations, and simultaneously 2) the remodeling of the urban fabric according to the Master Plan. At the insistence and pressure of a group of specialists, and under the influence of the revival of heritage preservation occurring in the USSR after the war, this shift of interest did not mean a full cancellation of the funds channeled into the restoration and preservation of historical buildings. It entailed, however, a significant reduction of funding for an already radically shortened list of the buildings officially recognized as “historical monuments.”¹⁶⁶

Moreover, in the post-1953 period, when calls for finding “nationalist forms with

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of the relative leeway offered to architects for the projects of industrial architecture in Romania of the 1960s, see Carmen Popescu, “Looking West.” For an analysis of the microraión approached as a technology of crafting a new social form in Bucharest in the 1960s, see Juliana Maxim, “Mass Housing and Collective Experience: On the Notion of Microraión in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s,” *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁶⁶ According to historian Andrei Pippidi, the official list of historical monuments published in 1955 included a drastically reduced number of sites in comparison to the interwar (unofficial) record of monuments. He mentioned, however, that despite the difficult conditions, the architects working for the Direction for Historical Monuments managed to pursue a significant number of preservation and renovation projects all across the country. (Interview with Andrei Pippidi, Bucharest, June 2008.) Architect Eugenia Greceanu, who started working for the Department for Monuments right after graduating from the University of Architecture of Bucharest in 1953, describes this institution as an almost liminal space, where many of the important names of interwar architecture had been exiled to work on “secondary” projects of built preservation. Eugenia Greceanu, “Sovietizarea învățămîntului de arhitectură,” in *Arhitecți în timpul dictaturii—Amintiri [Architects under Dictatorship—Remembrances]*, ed. Viorica Iuga Curea (București: Uniunea Arhitecților din România, 2005), 147. I would take both positions with a grain of salt, especially because both accounts were formulated in the context of post-1990 Romania, and both Greceanu and Pippidi played key roles in the preservationists’ group.

socialist content” shifted to officially encouraged quests for a modernist repertoire, those buildings became relegated to a peripheral zone within the socialist bureaucratic apparatus. However, after 1960, under a systematic policy of distancing from the Soviets and searching for national autonomy, the question of history in architecture becomes once again important. We encounter in that period a forced shift to ‘authenticity’ and ‘national traditions’ in architectural design, already increasingly articulated during the last years of Dej’s regime.¹⁶⁷ Under these new circumstances, the preservation of architectural monuments received more attention and the question of their potential political employment reappeared.¹⁶⁸ Even though most of those sites carried histories that could not easily fit a purified official historical narrative, there were still some of them that could potentially ground a “national past.” However, such sites represented palimpsests of various kinds—an architectural monument could also hide an archeological site, and often both of them could be considered historically important and artistically valuable.

This was the case with the site of the Old Court, which I discuss in detail in the next two chapters. What does the story of the Old Court, its emergence out of “nothing,”

¹⁶⁷ Carmen Popescu, "A Denied Continuity: The Shift of ‘Heritage’ as Ideology in Romanian Socialist Architecture," *Blok*, no. 3 (2004), Augustin Ioan, *Power, Play and National Identity: Politics of Modernization in Central and East-European Architecture. The Romanian File* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1996), Ana Maria Zahariade, "On Silence and Words," in *Ideals in Concrete: Exploring Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Cor Wagenaar, Mieke Dings, and Jannes Linders, picture editor (Amsterdam: Fonds BKVB, 2004).

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, the first national congress on historical monuments, organized in 1963 by the Department for Monuments and the Institute of History of the Academy, where the vicepresident of the State Committee for Construction, Architecture, and Systematization pointed out that “the research of historical monuments must not be a goal, but rather a means for finding more accurate techniques for their preservation.” “Sesiunea de comunicări a Direcției Monumentelor Istorice,” *Arhitectura*, 82, no.3 (1963), 60. During the period 1960-1963, the specialists of the Department conducted complex research in the historical cities in Transylvania, thereby acquiring a solid research portfolio. The local architects later relied heavily on this body of research, produced by the specialists in historical restoration and preservation, in order to fight off the more radical plans of systematization of those cities’ historical centers. For a review of a more systematic approach to historical preservation, see Victor Bilciurescu, “Unele probleme de restaurare a monumentelor istorice,” *Arhitectura*, 80, no.1 (1963), 54-55.

tell us about the larger political shifts occurring at that time in Romania? I suggest that the debates among architects, and then between architects and archeologists over the forms in which the Old Court must be preserved and displayed, should be understood through a dichotomous framework that the socialist leaders aimed to endorse, one separating “the past” from “the future” (with “the present” being only a transitory stage towards the socialist future). That is, architecture and archaeology were regarded as two distinct technologies of producing social reality, to validate an institutional and epistemological framework, within which those domains were assigned complementary temporal frameworks and historical spans. This political vision was to be spatially imprinted—in the case that I analyze, onto Bucharest’s urban surface and underground. However, like any form of totality, it ended up being challenged by various institutional actors, who employed the very categories endorsed by the state only to turn them on their head. In fact, the 1962 conflict around the Old Court, a conflict between architects (employed by the State Committee for Architecture) and archeologists (working either for the Institute of Archaeology, or, very likely, for the Museum of Bucharest), signaled a larger debate. It literally brought to the discussion table of the new leaders (the Council of Ministers) the following question: how could “the past” still dormant underground in the center of Bucharest, in the form of the ruins of the Princely Palace at the Old Court, be unearthed in order to coexist spatially with “the future,” depicted in the form of a totally remodeled city center of a “socialist capital”?

All that followed, with twisting and tweaking, stretching and turning the ground in a central area of Bucharest, with the endless discussions and negotiations among and within the two professional groups (the architects working for different institutions in

Bucharest, carrying distinct visions and interests, and the archeologists, carrying in turn their own interests), signaled a major conundrum for the socialist leaders. The story of the Old Court stands as yet one more proof that their attempt at imprinting their political vision onto the urban space, by clearly separating this space into concentrated sites of the past and widespread spaces of the future, carried at heart the seeds of its failure.

Chapter 3
**CITIES OF THE FUTURE, SITES OF THE PAST: INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS,
IMPENETRABLE PLANS, AND POROUS EXPERTISE IN BUCHAREST (1953-
1971)**

Introduction

For Bucharest's inhabitants, in comparison to other people living behind the Iron Curtain, 1953 meant something more than the year when Stalin died. It also marked the beginning of a radical transformation of the city landscape. This enterprise entailed a double process of unearthing the city's grounds while building its socialist future. In the words of someone directly involved in this process, the director of the Museum of the city,

Starting with that year [1953], the residents of the Capital became the witnesses of an interesting phenomenon, which was also a typical one for the new conditions of our lives. Side by side with so many building sites, constructing the capital city of the future, one could also notice here and there, in the city center or at the periphery, the archeological digs unraveling the past.¹⁶⁹

The plan for building "the socialist city of the future" had begun to be drafted as early as June 1949, but only in November 1952 was a ministerial decision issued to start "the construction and reconstruction of the cities and the organization of architectural

¹⁶⁹ Florian Georgescu, "Introducere [Introduction]," in *Cercetări arheologice în București [Archeological Research in Bucharest]* (Bucharest: S.P. C. Muzeul de Istorie a Oraşului Bucureşti, 1962), 7.

activity.”¹⁷⁰ By setting forth an agenda of bringing radically new urban forms into a city depicted as being like “a spider web of skewed and narrow streets,” a city of which “3/4 of its total surface is currently occupied by hovels,” the political actors of the new regime praised a centralized aesthetics of order that informed the modernist tenets of socialist architecture. The new architectural dogma focused on extending the city vertically via several-story buildings instead of allowing for the city’s horizontal development into suburban areas.¹⁷¹ Dismissing earlier plans of modernization of the city as inherent failures of a capitalist order, those politicians regarded the new vertical city as a novel urban form representing the socialist revolution—that is, a total reordering of space that would accompany and enforce that of social and political forms.

Making Bucharest into a socialist city entailed a reordering not only of urban space, but also of its history. This chapter aims to inquire into the interconnectedness of those two processes, during which a different historical city was being assembled (“discovered”) along with the socialist city of the future. I will examine the process by which the past became defined by particular forms and historical periods. More specifically, I focus on the debates triggered by the archeological findings in one of the central areas of Bucharest: the Old Court area (Curtea Veche, in Romanian)

¹⁷⁰ *Hotărîrea CC al PMR și a Consiliului de Miniștri privind construcția și reconstrucția orașelor și organizarea activității în domeniul arhitecturii și construcției, de la Plenara CC al PMR din noiembrie 1952.* Cited in Ana Maria Zahariade, "New Buildings and Forms [Locuința și Orașul Socialist]," in *Two Books, the Communist Dream & Dacia 1300. Fragments of an Architectural Landscape in Dacia 1300 – My Generation*, ed. Tom Sandquist and Ana Maria Zahariade (Bucharest: Simetria, 2003), 68-79. Published as *Hotărîrea Comitetului Central al P.M.R. și a consiliului de Miniștri al RPR cu privire la planul general de reconstrucție socialistă a orașului București.* Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură Politică, 1952.

¹⁷¹ “Proces verbal al ședinței Prezidiului Consiliului de Miniștri și Biroului Politic al Comitetului Central PMR din 25 Noiembrie 1953.” *Stenogramele ședințelor Prezidiului Consiliului de Miniștri și al Biroului Politic al Comitetului Central al P.M.R. (Partidului Muncitoresc Român) din luna noiembrie, 1953* [Transcripts of the meeting of the Council of Ministers and the Politburo, November 25, 1953] (henceforth, *Transcripts November 1953*). ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 209.

circumscribed by the Old Princely Palace, built at the end of the 17th century and abandoned a century later, and the commercial quarter (also known as Lipscani area) that had been formed around the Palace at the end of the 18th century and developed throughout the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

The chapter is divided into three parts. I begin with a description of the geographical and social changes occurring in this area from the end of the 17th century until the end of the interwar period. In order to understand how the Old Court area gained an (unexpected) importance in the new geography of a socialist Bucharest, at a time when many other historical sites were being ignored or demolished, I need first to examine in detail the urban vision advanced by the new political leaders. The second part focuses therefore on one of the first (1953) Politburo meetings about the urban remodeling of Bucharest into “the socialist city of the future.” Confronted with a lack of specialists, the Politburo agreed to bring back “the old elements,” that is, those specialists who had already gained significant professional experience before 1945, to help with the development of a socialist Master Plan of the city.

Far from being merely robots executing the orders, those specialists gradually started expressing a stronger concern with “the national past.” In the early 1960s, the political atmosphere turned to be relatively more relaxed, and the issue of a “national past” became a serious point of contention within and across professional fields in Bucharest (that is, among architects, as well as between architects and urban archeologists who also worked in the city center). Such concerns took the form of some lively debates on the topic of the Old Court area. In the third part of the chapter, I pay close attention to these disputes by trying to identify the political arguments and claims to

institutional entitlements underlying different visions of the representation of the national past in the site of the Old Court. I note that those debates point to a broader shift in the usages and forms of “heritage”—that is, if during early 1950s, discussions about “the national heritage” had been confined more to the archeological field, “heritage” expanded at the beginning of the 1960s to other domains as well, including architecture. The tense interactions among architects with regards to the transformation of the Old Court and the neighboring quarter into a “historical reservation of architecture” point to a novel interest of the state in the promotion of an architecture with national specificity. Such quests, far from being new, were reminiscent of the turn of the 20th century debates about the creation of an architectural “National Style.” However, as Popescu pointed out, this reminiscence was systematically denied, precisely because the official endorsement of architecture as yet another form of producing a national socialist heritage could not allow for any resemblance with earlier, “bourgeois” representations of “the national past.”

From the Old Court to Lipscani: A journey in time

If we open a map of Bucharest and try to locate the area that underwent a radical reconstruction in the 1980s, resulting in the famously gigantic House of the People and the Victory of Socialism boulevard, we will find that an important part of this area falls into an imaginary triangle. This upside-down triangle is formed by three points on the map, marking three of the oldest sites of the city: the churches Radu Vodă and Mihai Vodă and the Old Princely Court (*Curtea Veche*, in Romanian), a location that had been the residence of the princes of Wallachia between the middle of the 16th and the end

of 17th centuries.¹⁷² If we switch from the map to a bird's eye view of this triangle, we will note a significant difference: while two of the points forming its upper side—both churches—are currently surrounded, almost hidden, by new apartment buildings erected in the 1980s, the third point (the Old Court) is located among much older two-story buildings, distributed unevenly on small tangled streets.¹⁷³ Given the striking difference between those areas, why should we imagine this triangle in the first place? At one moment in recent history, those three sites had been closely connected by being set under the same scientific gaze. It is in these sites that the first archeological digs had been opened in 1953 under the supervision of the Institute of Archaeology (then, the Museum of Antiquities) of the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania.



Figure 1 A bird's eye view over the area circumscribed by the big triangle: Mihai Vodă church, the Central Market (the rectangular construction in the middle), and Radu Vodă. The upper left perimeter of the picture, delimited by red lines, shows the conglomerations of the buildings in

¹⁷² Dumitru Almaş and Panait I. Panait, *Curtea Veche din Bucureşti* (Bucureşti: Editura pentru Turism, 1974).

¹⁷³ The map on which we try to draw the triangle must be a map of a pre-1980 Bucharest, for one of three points—the church Mihai Vodă—had been previously located on the hill. During the building of the new civic center, the church was initially scheduled to be demolished, together with other constructions on the Spirii Hill, to permit the building of the new civic center. At the insistence of specialists and other public pressures, the church was slid (on rails) 300 m down the hill from its initial location. Silvia Colfescu, *Bucureşti. Ghid turistic, istoric, artistic* (Bucureşti: Vremea, 2007), 147.

between Lipscani street and Dâmbovița. Fragment of a larger picture. Unknown author, 1927. source: Google Images, www.mcworld.com.

This chapter will try to answer a rather unusual question: what circumstances made this triangle possible in the first place? At the same time, what made it become the site of such a volatile process, whereby two of the archeological digs that formed its imaginary angles disappeared without trace under the new socialist constructions? More importantly, how was it possible that one of the angles of the triangle—set in the site of the Old Court—endured until the present day, despite the ephemeral nature of the archeological inquiries into the city’s central grounds? The archeological digs temporarily reinstated a fragment of 17th century Bucharest onto the map of the city in 1953. Thus, by exploring the transformations of the design parameters and historical value of one point in the triangle—the Old Court—across twenty years (1953-1978), this chapter will try to inquire into the making and unmaking of various geometries onto the surface of the city as key zones of political debate within and among emerging networks of expertise in socialist Romania. The location holding the remains of the Old Court—the area delimited by the Dâmbovița river to the north and the oldest commercial venue of the city (Lipscani street) at the south—held ambivalent roles in the economy of the city and the imagination of its inhabitants.

Once the main commercial area of the town, at the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, what is currently described as “Bucharest’s historical center” was regarded as a rather peripheral area located south of the “modern” city center.¹⁷⁴ Established by the middle of the 16th century, the Court functioned as the political nucleus of the region until the end of the 17th century, when a fire destroyed the site and

¹⁷⁴ Maria Raluca Popa, "Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest," Ph.D. Diss., Chapter 3, 60.

the Court had to be moved to a different location. After the fire, the terrain was divided and auctioned to the traders and craftsmen who kept moving into the area. This influx of capital and people led to the economic boom of the area, with new inns being opened and commercial venues and shops trading goods brought from as far away as Leipzig (hence the name of the main commercial street, *Lipscani*), Padua or Paris.¹⁷⁵ Starting with the beginning of the 18th century, the area became the main economic location of the city and a place of great social animation. The ruined walls of the Old Court were taken down and the ground leveled to leave room for the new one- or two-story houses built by the prosperous traders. The new buildings accommodated the higher expectations of both the traders and their clientele, by better dividing the commercial space at the ground level from the private area of the trader's family located upstairs.

Inevitably, by being the city's economic nucleus, the area turned into a social magnet, as well, attracting people from all the social and economic strata and thus allowing for various forms of *mélange* and exchange among those actors. The site became renowned not only for the luxurious goods displayed in the shops aligned on *Lipscani* street or the money absorbed by the new banks, but also for the black market and prostitution flourishing on the very same streets. The name *Curtea veche* became associated with this underground world, famously depicted in the novel *The Kings of the Old Court*. Written at the turn of the century and published in the interwar years, this short epic generated enthusiastic responses among the intellectuals of the epoch as well

¹⁷⁵ The name of the street, *Lipscani*, comes from *Lipsca* (Leipzig), where one of the most important fairs in late medieval Europe had been organized three times per year. The traders from Wallachia and Moldavia went to the *Lipsca* fair for supplies twice per year. Their participation had become so significant by the mid 18th century, that when those traders seemed not to be able to travel due to the plague epidemics in the Principalities, the fair organizers did not know whether they should still open the fair. G. Ionescu-Gion, *Istoria Bucureștilor* (București, 1899). 458. In Costin Murgescu, *Mersul ideilor economice la români [the Development of the Economic Ideas among the Romanians]* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987), 139.

as contemporary audiences for its unique style, which captures the atmosphere of a 19th century “Levantine” Bucharest, “where nothing is ever too severe.” The overlapping of two seemingly antagonistic worlds (the “West” and the “Levant”) comes to be represented by the main characters of the book, two boyars well versed in Western manners who want to forget them by immersing themselves in the underground worlds thriving on “those cramped lanes, with houses stuck one to another,” that had been erected on the ruins of the Old Court.¹⁷⁶

The novel’s vivid descriptions of the area as a symbol of fin de siècle decadence help us envision a Lipscani quarter that, at the time of Bucharest’s economic and geographical expansion at the turn of the century and then into the interwar years, thrived as a rich geographical palimpsest of multiple transactions, experiences, and transgressions, a miniature world bordering on the center of the modern city. The ambiguous social atmosphere of the site came also from its proximity to the fair opened by the 18th century at the periphery of the town, on empty terrain lying on the northern side of the Dâmbovița river.¹⁷⁷ The largest market of the city (Halele Centrale, the Central Market henceforth) was later established there, while the site was expanded to form an urban square (later named Union Square [*Piața Unirii*]), which was formed in the 1920s when the Dâmbovița was covered with concrete slabs.¹⁷⁸

During the interwar debates on the city’s development, the Lipscani area and the Central Market came under scrutiny as the seat of corruption, illegal or petty

¹⁷⁶ Mateiu Caragiale, *Craii de Curtea-Veche [the Kings of the Old Court]* (București: Editura Eminescu, 1970[1929]), 23.

¹⁷⁷ The fair moved from the initial location at the *Sf. Gheorghe* church, a site that currently is situated across the Lipscani street, down south, on the shore of Dâmbovița river, when the town expanded. T. Evolceanu, "Concursul pentru sistematizarea Pieței Unirii din București." *Arhitectura* 62, no. 1 (1960), 14.

¹⁷⁸ Popa, “Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest,” 60.

commerce, immorality, and urban chaos—in other words, everything that the urban elites rejected. Some of them asked for a radical restructuring of the area through the removal of the Central Market and the entire realignment of the streets in the Lipscani area.¹⁷⁹ As early as 1930, urbanist Cincinat Sfințescu attempted to find a less radical solution for both sites. He pointed out that the Central Market, like other city markets, represented “tradition,” therefore they need not be “liquidated,” but rather preserved and improved.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the commercial center, which included the Lipscani district, had to be maintained in a more “hygienic form,” that is, be “cleansed” of the small industry producing noise and smoke.¹⁸¹ Sfințescu’s proposals aimed mainly at eradicating the multifarious forms of disorder characterizing the area, which ranged from the inadequate and aesthetically “heteroclyte” shop facades aligned on Lipscani to the unorganized traffic and the amassed goods and people in the Central Market.¹⁸²

None of Sfințescu’s plans—including the first master plan for the entire city, drafted in 1935—ever achieved a material form during the interwar years. However, many of Sfințescu’s ideas directly informed the remodeling of the city pursued by the

¹⁷⁹ Such as Martha Bibescu, a famous writer and socialite of the turn of the century, quoted by Popa, “Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest,” 13, 60, 61, 63. Marta Bibescu, “Sugestiuni pentru înfrumusețarea orașului Bucharest” (Suggestions for the Beautification of the City of Bucharest) in *Bucharest: Secolul XX 5-7* (1997), 183-192. Popa mentions that the text represents “a manuscript from the 1930s, edited and published by architect Șerban Popescu-Criveanu” in *Secolul XX*. Bibescu’s text is quoted, however, by Sfințescu, 1932 [1931], 44-45.

¹⁸⁰ Cincinat Sfințescu. “Estetica Bucureștiului [The Aesthetics of Bucharest]” In *Pentru București; Noi studii urbanistice. Delimitări, zonificare, circulație, estetică [For Bucharest: New Studies of Urban Planning]*, (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice “Bucovina,” 1932[1931]), 150-55, and “Zonificarea urbanistică a municipiului București,” *Pentru București*, 30.

¹⁸¹ As he put it, “the unsanitary industries that produce smoke, dust, or unhealthy waste should be taken out of the city.” Sfințescu “Zonificarea urbanistică a municipiului București,” *Pentru București*, 45-46.

¹⁸² See especially the section “Amenajarea stradei Lipscani, [The remodelling of Lipscani street]” 156-165, in “Estetica Bucureștiului,” *Pentru București*. Sfințescu writes, “such a heteroclyte street poses even higher aesthetical problems,” 163.

socialist regime.¹⁸³



Figure 2 The Central Market during the interwar period. Cincinat Sfințescu, *Pentru București*, 156.

Not surprisingly, the interwar elites' fears and loathing against the city's disorder and chaotic development continued to lie at the core of the master plan, now translated as socialist planning principles. The following section will focus on a close analysis of the debates surrounding the implementation of the master plan of the city of Bucharest and its political implications. I will move then to a discussion of the various urban solutions for Union Square, the square adjacent to the Lipscani/Old Court area, and situate it within the more intricate struggles over political and symbolic capital that came to be inscribed onto the city's territory.

The following section will discuss these two projects (the making the Old Court area into a historical reservation, and the remodeling of Union Square) as parallel processes that could offer us some insights into how the Party leadership and the experts

¹⁸³ Two of the main supervisors of the 1935 plan—Duiuiu Marcu and Cincinat Sfințescu— were invited to be part of the team in charge of drafting the initial version of the Master Plan in 1949. ANR, Fond *CC al PCR*—*Cancelarie* [the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party], File 220/1949, 4. Sfințescu's suggestion that Union Square be reoriented on a south-north direction was implemented in the 1980s. See Popa, "Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest," Chapter IV.

of the new state projected the dialectics of power onto the urban landscape of Bucharest. I start with an analysis of the debates on Union Square's reconstruction, using the particularities of this case to develop an argument about the institutional rearrangements occurring within the wider architectural field in Romania of the early 1960s. I engage then in a detailed reading of a set of letters exchanged between 1962 and 1964 among central institutions on the topic of the preservation of the Old Court area, which some institutional actors deemed to be endangered by the radical remodeling of Union Square. These letters reveal reciprocal accusations among differently positioned institutional actors of ignoring the "national value" of the Old Court or, on the contrary, ludicrously attempting to modify the architectural past that the Old Court represented. Interestingly—and perhaps, not surprisingly—among those actors we also find some of "older elements" that Dej endorsed in 1953, such as architects who had already gained a professional fame during the interwar period. In the last part of the chapter, I situate those debates within the emerging discourse of the (socialist) nation, revived in the mid 1960s and reaching its peak in the 1980s, in order to show that the arguments about architectural form and historical preservation in the case of the Old Court illustrate a more complex enterprise of the socialist state to rewrite a "new" national history into the urban landscape.

Making Bucharest into a Socialist City (1953-1962)

The Master Plan

As early as June 1949, the Council of Ministers of the Romanian People's Republic had already set up a Provisory Committee for the Capital, in charge of outlining "the Master plan of the capital and its surrounding area." *Sistematizare*

(“systematization”) became one of the crucial terms, continually used by politicians and specialists alike, to describe in one word “the standardization and rationalization of both design and building process,” over which the state intended to exert a full monopoly.¹⁸⁴ The operation was already understood as a vast one, as “a prestigious project for the Local Council and as an act of great importance for the current political moment.”¹⁸⁵ The urban remodeling of the city represented the material proof of “the transformation of our Fatherland into a socialist country.”¹⁸⁶

A detailed overview of this remodeling went public in November 1952, when

¹⁸⁴ Juliana Maxim, "The New, the Old, the Modern. Architecture and Its Representation in Socialist Romania, 1955-1965 " (Massachusetts Institute Of Technology 2006).Ph.D. diss. (Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, 2006), 52. Steven Sampson offers a more detailed description of the systematization project:

In the Romanian context, *sistemizare* is more than just a method for the physical transformation of villages and towns. It is, firstly, an *ideal* of how spatial planning should be integrated with economic planning (*planificare*) and socialist development. Second, systematization is a *program* for developing (or in some cases phasing out) each settlement in the country, from hamlet to metropolis. Third, systematization involves an *organizational structure* in which national objectives, regional imbalances and local potentialities are to be harmonized into a centrally administered State policy, codified by law.

Steven Sampson, *National Integration through Socialist Planning: An Anthropological Study of a Romanian New Town* (Boulder: East European Monograph, 1984), 75.

¹⁸⁵ ANR, Fond CC al PCR- *Cancelarie* [the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party], File 220/1949, 4. The Provisory Committee’s main task was “to place order into the city via the development plan of the Capital.” (1949:2) Like other operations, this plan also was meant to endorse the absolute newness that the socialist regime was supposed to represent. This is why the “old plan” (the 1935 Master plan Plan of the city’s systematization, elaborated by a team supervised by urbanist Cincinat Sfințescu) was condemned as having been a “failure,” as was “any plan elaborated under the capitalist regime”(1949: 2-3).

Despite their stated criticism, the Committee asked, though, that the second team, formed of the specialists in charge of drafting the plan, include, among other key architects involved in building socialism, two of the experts who had played a crucial role in the development of the 1935 plan: architect Duiliu Marcu and urbanist Cincinat Sfințescu. The committee advised that instead of being assigned to the Systematization department within the city’s Local Council, the plan be drafted within Bucharest’s Institute of Architectural Design and Constructions (*Institutul de Proiectări și Construcții București*), which was then under the supervision of the Ministry of Constructions. This appeared as the best solution, since most of the specialists appointed to be part of the second team had already been working for the Institute. Moreover, as they stated, “it would not be healthy to mix the collective in charge of the supervision with the collective that elaborates the project.” (1949:3) Those two teams were to be supervised by a third group, the “consultants,” representing in fact the political apparatus ranging from members of the Central Committee of the Party, the State Commission for Planning, and the newly reformatted Academy, a team whose main role was to control and politically endorse the proposals outlined by specialists. The Provisory Committee asked for help from other institutions that would offer resources, as well as seek, acquire and translate the Soviet technical documentation.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

the Council of Ministers issued the Resolution on the Reconstruction of the City of Bucharest.¹⁸⁷ The Resolution set out the main elements to be pursued in most of the systematization plans to follow. It limited the perimeter of the city as well as its population (to a maximum of 1.7 million inhabitants). It also introduced a “novel model of urban development”: the *kvartal*.¹⁸⁸ Imagined as economically self-sufficient residential districts formed of 6-story residential buildings and aligned by 8-story buildings on the main arteries, these new social units were to be replaced by 15-story apartment buildings in the second stage of the project.¹⁸⁹ The 1952 Resolution laid out two long term goals: 1) to smooth out the striking difference between the center and the periphery and 2) to bring order into the city. One of the key words constantly employed to describe the current state of the city was *chaos*. The topic of Bucharest’s chaotic development had already been widely discussed during the interwar debates on modernization which led to the formulation of the 1935 Master Plan. However, this plan was now deemed “a dead piece of work, with no technical and economic foundation.”¹⁹⁰ Consequently, “the city [had] continued to develop anarchically and in conformity with the interests of the dominant class.”¹⁹¹ By denying the previous attempts to shape the urban form according to a western ideal of modernization, the Communist Party

¹⁸⁷ The decision was endorsed by Resolution 2448/November 1952 of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers’ Party of Romania (later the Socialist Party of Romania) and published under the title: *Cu privire la planul general de reconstrucție socialistă al orașului București* (Concerning the general plan for the socialist reconstruction of the city of Bucharest). In Juliana Maxim, “The New, The Old, The Modern,” 41.

¹⁸⁸ See Ana Maria Zahariade, “New Buildings and Forms,” and Juliana Maxim, “The New, The Old, The Modern,” 42-46. Both authors point out that the kvartal as an architectural form should be understood as a continuation of the interwar modernism rather than a break from it.

¹⁸⁹ See also Pompiliu Macovei’s discussion on the second stage of the development of the Master Plan, and Miron Constantinescu’s critical comments that the team working on the Master Plan could not envision erecting 14-15 story buildings too soon. Constantinescu pointed out that “currently [1953] there are neither the technology, nor the technicians and highly skilled labor force that could construct buildings higher than 6-7 stories.” ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 203.

¹⁹⁰ Horia Maicu, “Probleme de sistematizare a capitalei [Problems of urban remodeling of the Capital],” *Arhitectura R.P.R.*, 90/5 (1964), 9.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

appropriated the discourse of “order” to present it as an intrinsic element of the socialist project. Order was to come to the city in multifarious forms—spatially and temporally. Everything that was disordered had to be ordered, disciplined, tamed down.

The decision established a separate institution, the State Commission for Architecture and Construction, in charge of the supervision of the “systematization” of all cities in socialist Romania. Architect Nicolae Bădescu, one of the faithful members of the Communist Party before 1945 and professionally trained under the best interwar architects, was elected the president of the new commission, holding the rank of a minister in the Council.¹⁹² The Institute of Architectural Design and Planning appeared as an immediate product of the 1952 Resolution launching Bucharest’s Master Plan and directly following the establishment of the State Commission for Architecture and Construction (SCAC), in charge of the supervision of the systematization of all cities in socialist Romania. The Resolution also endorsed the creation of the Institute for Urban Planning and Constructions (ISPROR), which was to develop the projects outlined by the State Committee.¹⁹³ Later developed into the Institute of Architectural Design “Project Bucharest,” it came to occupy the center of a network of regional institutes of urban planning and design, established in the main cities in the country, subordinated to SCAC and locally supervised by the Local Councils.

Although the Resolution seemed to offer a thorough set of guidelines for constructing a modern socialist city, its implementation (obviously) proved to be more

¹⁹² Nicolae Bădescu was elected the president of *Comitetului de Stat pentru Arhitectură și Construcții* in December 15, 1952. Eugenia Greceanu talks about Bădescu’s competence and “bright ideas,” but she condemns him for “having bowed before the system,” which explains his quickly rising within the political structures after 1947. Eugenia Greceanu, “Sovietizarea învățământului de arhitectură,” 116 and 124.

¹⁹³ See *Arhitectură și urbanism* 11 (1952): 2-5; *Buletinul Comitetului de Stat pentru Arhitectură și Construcții al Consiliului de Miniștri* 1 (1953): 18-25 and 140-143, cited in Mărginean, “Aesthetic Mechanisms of Stalinization in Romanian Architecture,” 33.

challenging. A year after the resolution had been issued, when the chief architect of the capital, Pompiliu Macovei, was summoned to present the first results of the work on the systematization plan to the Council of Ministers, he had to explain why the plan had not yet been fully drafted. He exculpated himself by pointing out the inextricable link between the city's systematization and the economic national Plan, which was itself being developed.¹⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the significant housing crisis (a deficit of 40-50,000 residential units in Bucharest alone) and the impossibility of the Local Council to fully control the constructions under way in the city emerged as two main conundrums.¹⁹⁵ Macovei admitted that "the People's Council could not maintain an efficient control of the building taking place in Bucharest [since] currently 1500 apartment buildings are being built in unhealthy conditions, which only worsens the actual state of inhabiting."¹⁹⁶

Macovei's proposals stayed within the directions outlined by the 1952 Resolution. At the 1953 meeting, he started by presenting the city's evolution until 1945 as having been "chaotic," "extending outwardly in an uncontrolled manner through small buildings with rural character," which produced a forced extension of the city surface.¹⁹⁷ In these conditions, Macovei suggested that the specialists start their work by demarcating a surface for the city out of the larger area that, for the moment, would

¹⁹⁴ As he put it, the team did not have "a whole array of data and elements, especially those of [an] economic nature, that could clarify the socio-economic profile of the capital and which then [the team] could afterwards translate into definite building projects." He specified that "many of the ministers responsible for key economic sectors could offer [them] no data on the current situation, and more importantly no estimates of the future." The other reason invoked by Macovei was the team's immersion in the organization of the Youth Festival (1953). However, Gheorghiu-Dej reproached him later in the meeting that this was not a good excuse, because had they [i.e., Dej] done the same to the Party [the Politburo], they would have been immediately found culpable. *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 146-147.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 173.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 151.

administratively mark the city limits.¹⁹⁸ According to Macovei, this new area could provide for a population of 3 million, since the new multi-story buildings would be able to accommodate vertically the inhabitants that the older city had incorporated horizontally.¹⁹⁹ The most efficient solution to the housing crisis, suggested Macovei, was to focus first on more peripheral empty areas, whose width could allow for a better organization of building sites while preventing the delay that any prior demolition would entail.²⁰⁰ This approach would not only offer a rhythm of work, “with teams moving from one site to another every 4 months,” but it would also “directly contribute to realizing the socialist character” of the city.²⁰¹ That is, according to Macovei, a rapid change of the city skyline, especially at the periphery, would significantly enhance the city’s general outlook by stressing its new vertical form.

Even though he declared these suggestions to be “only hypotheses, which must be run by specialist[s] in different ministries,” Macovei confidently claimed that his team would be able to come up with a final blueprint of the systematization plan in the first semester of 1954 (that is, within the following six months). The indispensable help, however, had to come not only from the ministers, but also from another source: the specialists who contributed to “the construction of the grand cities of the Soviet Union.”²⁰² More specifically, he proposed that a team of Soviet specialists be invited to Bucharest, so that they could offer recommendations based on a direct assessment of the city landscape, and then take them, together with the [Romanian] team report, and submit both to the Academy of Architecture of the Soviet Union. “Such help,” he emphasized,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 174.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 184.

“had been also offered to the Polish comrades for Warsaw’s reconstruction and for the reconstruction of Berlin.”²⁰³

Macovei’s presentation was met nevertheless with concern by the other participants to the debates, because he did not seem to realize the complexity of the operation and did not carefully assess all the stages that such a project would involve. Architect Bădescu cautioned that before asking for help from anyone else, the team should first come up with several variants of the plan, which the Committee for Architecture could then evaluate and approve before submitting one to the Council of Ministers for the final decision.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the two key political figures at the discussion table—the president of the Council and general secretary of the Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and the president of the State Planning Commission, Miron Constantinescu—were also critical of Macovei, for reasons that I will discuss below.

First of all, Macovei did not see anything problematic in asking for the input of Soviet experts in the development of Bucharest’s Master Plan. In the first years of the socialist regimes in all the satellite countries, to “ask for help” from Moscow—or, rather, welcome Moscow’s “help”—was unquestionable. This process lay at the core of the overall Soviet centralization of decision making and the redistributive system, which was moving experts, outlines and some types of resources vertically, from the center to its satellites.²⁰⁵ However, immediately after Stalin’s death, in June 1953, many of the satellites (that is, the local Party leaders in Eastern Europe) overtly or more subtly sought out strategies for distancing themselves from the center. In many cases, those strategies

²⁰³ Ibid., 183.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 184.

²⁰⁵ For a more complex discussion of this mechanism see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, and Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983).

involved a novel turn to local resources (military, labor, and means of production) and a relative economic autonomy from the USSR. Macovei's proposal to boost the local team's work on the city's master plan with Soviet know-how was no longer palatable to the Romanian leaders. Seeking an increasing, but subtle, autonomy from the Soviets, Dej and his team wanted to cut a crucial segment out of the redistributive socialist system—the segment linking Bucharest to Moscow—and thus obtain a newly re-centralized apparatus, one oriented around national resources and new economic alliances (even with the Western countries).²⁰⁶ In other words, they produced a system that had to expand horizontally in order to compensate for having discarded a now politically unpalatable verticality.²⁰⁷

This shift of the ultimate center of decision from Moscow to Bucharest led the Romanian Party leadership to deal with a situation that they had been aware of from the start: a deficit of both expertise and highly skilled labor.²⁰⁸ This new “awareness” became possible under the relative political relaxation that followed Stalin's death, when the first wave of political prisoners had been released and brought back into the socialist labor force.²⁰⁹ Many of those released in 1954 belonged to the liberal professions in the interwar years, as engineers, architects, lawyers, doctors, etc., and their technical expertise suddenly appeared as a valuable and timely resource for a socialist state struggling to build itself while keeping a relative distance from the USSR. To this

²⁰⁶ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*, 82-83.

²⁰⁷ I employ this geometric metaphor from Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania and What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁰⁸ The members of Politburo had been bemoaning the lack of experts as early as 1951. Katherine Verdery, personal communication.

²⁰⁹ This is a beginning of a very long process, concluded only in the early 1960s. Even in 1964, there were still Soviet councilors running institutions in Romania. In the mid 1950s Dej was far too dependent on Moscow for (him to seek) much autonomy. I owe this point to Katherine Verdery.

relatively small group was added a larger segment of professionals, who had been eliminated or discarded to peripheral jobs in the first years of the communist regime (1947-1954). The pertinence of employing these “old elements” came up during the 1953 Politburo discussions on the Master Plan.

When Macovei restated that the missing economic profile of the city development (the economic planning) prevented the team from completing the preliminary work on the plan, Miron Constantinescu, the president of the State Planning Committee, strongly intervened, challenging the former claims.²¹⁰ Constantinescu set the discussion within a different temporal framework, by pointing out the importance of drafting a plan designed for a 20 year span. Therefore, given the gravity of the task, the preparations would involve a significant amount of time and labor, which “cannot be carried out by medium cadres or even the leaders of the State Planning Commission.”²¹¹ Rather, “several variants of the projects should be examined by a special commission, which included comrades from other institutions, from the Academy of People’s Republic of Romania, from the Academy of Architecture, and the most competent cadres

²¹⁰ At that moment, Miron Constantinescu was “one of the best-educated members of the Rumanian leadership,” having occupied key roles in the Party apparatus. Having joined the Party in 1936, Constantinescu became member of the Politburo and the CC in October 1945. A Radio Free Europe report offers an outline of his political trajectory:

He was managing editor of *Scântea* from 1947 to 1949, Minister of Mining and Petroleum in 1948-1949, and president of the State Planning Commission from 1949 to 1955. He became a full member of the Politburo in October 1951, and remained on it until June 1957. He was a CC secretary from 1952 to 1954. He was elected to the Grand National Assembly in December 1952 and again in February 1957. From 1954 to 1955 he was Vice-Premier, and from 1955 to 1957 First Vice-Premier; in 1956-1957, he was also Minister of Education and Culture. In March 1957, he again became Vice-Premier, but remained in that position only until July, when he was accused [by Dej] of “acting against party unity,” and was reduced to the position of director of the Economic Research Institute (the accusation was repeated in June and August 1958, December 1961, and January 1962).

He became relatively rehabilitated under Ceaușescu, and benefited from a comfortable political position until his death in July 1974. Radio Free Europe Report *Death of Miron Constantinescu*, August 12, 1974. Open Society Archives, 300-8-3, <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/52-2-162.shtml> For a detailed portray of Constantinescu, see also Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

²¹¹ *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 196.

within this branch.”²¹²

Constantinescu asked not only for a shift in the temporal scale of the project, but also for a differently situated regime of expertise. That is, while subtly refraining from commenting in any way on Macovei’s proposal of fully relying on Moscow as the center of operation, Constantinescu endorsed the building of an extensive team out of the best specialists *within* the country. He drew upon the suggestion thrown on the table by other members of the Council, that of forming a special committee that would exclusively focus on the plan by bringing in the best specialists, and suggested that “the good constructors and architects from the past” should be included in this committee.²¹³ He supported the idea of supplementing the Institute of Architectural Design and Constructions with new personnel, especially with the architects currently holding positions where their expertise “could be not fully utilized.”²¹⁴ Moreover, he insisted on having older architects among those new employees. His comments point to a significant shift in the regime’s official attitude towards the pre-1945 specialists:

The employment of older architects has started this year [1953, the year when the first wave of the political prisoners had been released and brought back “into the labor force.”]. [...] [However], there are architects of great talent and experience who are still very little used/exploited by the Institute Project Bucharest. I think that the comrades in the Committee of Architecture must improve their methods of work and

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Constantinescu in *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 218. As another member of the Council, Petre Borilă, put it: “it would not hurt if one or two of those old men were here today at the meeting, especially if they had worked before on these issues [the systematization and urban planning].” *Stenograms 1953*, 205. His comment was endorsed by Petru Groza, who said that “[they] should not fool themselves [by thinking] that such a small team [Macovei’s team] could be responsible for the entire ensemble of constructions and systematization of Bucharest. We must use also those capable elements—the architects with specialization and experience.” *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 209. Chivu Stoica added to those comments, by saying that “the most qualified cadres were not assigned to this project. There are still many cadres who do secondary jobs in different ministries and institutions.” *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 209-210.

²¹⁴ *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 219.

recruitment.²¹⁵ There is a certain sectarianism here, which must be jettisoned. We must engage the highly experienced engineers and architects, but [set them] under the supervision and line of the Party and the government, and not under their old beliefs.²¹⁶

Despite his earlier criticism, in the end Constantinescu sought to absolve the Committee of Architecture, the team supervised by Macovei, of their failure to produce a complete outline of the plan by the meeting date. He pointed out that the team “had faced great difficulties and resistance from all the institutions” when attempting to supplement their ranks with architects and specialists.²¹⁷ “They had tried several times, they had contacted all the ministers and institutions; they had come to the Office of Internal Affairs of the Council of Ministers.”²¹⁸ However, as “the ministers did not have sufficient personnel, their request was left unresolved.”²¹⁹ He suggested that “the Council of Ministers issue an ordinance compelling the ministers to help the Committee of Architecture and the Architecture department of the Local Council with a large number of specialists.”²²⁰

Constantinescu’s comments alluded to a much larger problem, which the new political regime had been struggling with since its formation: the lack of “qualified cadres,” that is, of professionals who could meet both criteria—that of being “politically correct,” faithful and committed Party members, having “healthy social origins,” and being simultaneously highly qualified, especially in scientific and technical domains. The Party leaders became increasingly aware of the difficulty of “growing cadres” while

²¹⁵ In Romanian, “metode de muncă și atragere,” a key term in the socialist newspeak, used to describe the process of “growing cadres” by (sometimes forcefully) persuading them to become faithful to the Party and the communist ideals.

²¹⁶ *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 219.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Transcripts, November 1953*, ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 220.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

engaging in a speedy process of “building socialism.” Under these circumstances, the Council of Ministers was much more willing to accept the recruitment of more experienced architects for Bucharest’s systematization—a crucial project for the Party. However, if this threshold (between the “new” and “old,” marking the “sectarianism” that Constantinescu mentioned) was to be broken, then control had to be reinforced under novel forms. Finding new modalities to increase political control at the very moment of expanding the professional circles appears as the main concern underlying Gheorghiu-Dej’s concluding remarks.

After listening to the commentaries of the other members of the Council, Gheorghiu-Dej gave the final instructions. He insisted that “we need to force the strategy of development of the systematization plan.” “To force,” he elaborated, “does not mean to pursue a study that has no scientific basis, [but, in order] to achieve this, we need to expand the existing framework, to mobilize all the institutions that could contribute to systematic data gathering and preparation of the final form.”²²¹ He expressed serious doubts about the deadline proposed by Macovei, pointing out that a more realistic deadline for the plan’s final draft should be the end of 1954. At the same time, given the importance of the plan, Dej asked that the State Planning Committee be the main supervisor and be responsible for the plan before the Council of Ministers. He insisted on a stronger centralization and a better organized distribution of tasks, under a strict schedule and a detailed set of deadlines.²²² He suggested that the work on the plan be organized as a “military unit” and gave clear orders:

[The work on the Plan must be] controlled by someone from the Government, someone who is more competent, comrade Miron Constantinescu. We need foremost

²²¹ Ibid., 230.

²²² Ibid., 233.

economists. We need to locate the brightest minds in different ministries to establish the economic profile of the city. [...] We need to stop this anarchy. We need [to] establish precise tasks, who should do what, and how to do it. We need to forego bureaucratic methods of work, we need to find operative measures, and work directly, cooperatively, and competitively. We need to search [for specialists] not only in Bucharest, but also in other parts of the country. Bucharest is the heart of the country, workers, constructors, engineers, architects from other regions should be brought in, and older cadres should also be employed.²²³

Thus, even though Dej seemed not to reject the proposal of getting the Soviets involved,²²⁴ he stressed that the main priority is to “grow cadres” and form a team of the best specialists in the country. By the very fact that he appointed Miron Constantinescu as the principal supervisor of the team, Dej endorsed Constantinescu’s preference for a domestic approach to the plan’s development. This approach implied, in fact, an increasing autonomy from the post-Stalin USSR and thus an immediate and exclusive command over the making of the city. We must note that Dej ignored the suggestions made earlier in the meeting by the Soviet councilor Zvedin, who had been assigned by Moscow as a direct and active “voice” and participant in the major decisions made by the Romanian Party leadership after 1947.

Commenting upon Macovei’s presentation, Zvedin criticized Macovei for “not knowing the city well” and proposed a more pragmatic approach to “the city’s reconstruction.” Expressing his concern that the Committee of Architecture did not consider the life of the city, he asked that the “planners become more attached to the ground, to walk on the ground.” He advocated in fact a more hegemonic form of control of the city, which could have been achieved only by “getting to know the city, all of the

²²³ Ibid., 234-235.

²²⁴ As Dej put it, “we need to make cadres, and we could appeal to the Soviet experience. In this matter, it is the only place where we could ask for help.” *Transcripts, November 1953*, ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 236.

streets, all of the paths, all of the corners.” He thus suggested that the Local Council “better grasp this issue of Bucharest’s reconstruction,” in a manner similar to the systematization of Moscow.

In his concluding remarks, however, Dej did not seem to find such a pragmatic knowledge of the city necessary, since he asked for an extension of the team working on Bucharest’s systematization with the best specialists *in the country*. To Dej, what was of crucial importance was that Bucharest’s spatial planning exclusively follow the economic planning (the Plan). As he put it:

[the plan] must be the dictator in Bucharest with regards to any further constructions. The local council has a good heart, a large heart, it is very democratic [so that it allows for uncontrolled constructions to be erected] but this rotten bourgeois liberalism must cease now. No one is allowed to squander the goods of the state, to waste energy for nothing. There should be a controlling body, and everyone should know that they must submit to it. [...] This control must be strengthened, we need a more severe control of the dispositions for construction. We must be very strict with the architects and everyone involved.²²⁵

In fact, in his comments Dej did not mention Zvedin even once. Dej was fully aware of the deep political implications of Bucharest’s systematization in the larger scheme of the new relations with the Soviets. A strong opponent of Khrushchev (who, after a tough fight for power, had become the First Secretary of the Party in the Soviet Union in September 1953) and especially of his agenda of political relaxation, Dej understood that “the only way to defend [his] political hegemony was to ensure the country’s economic independence.”²²⁶ As also becomes transparent from those stenograms, Dej’s leadership was very much influenced by Stalin’s strategy of total control. His “policy amounted to unwavering Stalinism: he favored breakneck

²²⁵ Ibid., 236.

²²⁶ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, 82.

industrialization and waged a merciless collectivization campaign.”²²⁷ At the same time, Dej, a well versed politician, knew that he had to play a double game with Khrushchev, by trying to maintain full control over the country’s management while persuading Khrushchev of unwavering loyalty. We now know that Dej succeeded eventually in winning this game with Khrushchev, since it turned out that, after Khrushchev withdrew the Soviet troops from Romania in June 1958, Dej adopted a strategy that would ensure “a margin of autonomy against any Soviet injunctions for further de-Stalinization.”²²⁸

At the time of the discussion on the systematization blueprint, Dej knew that such autonomy was to be gained through a combination of strategic decisions. It was crucial for the Party to closely monitor every individual or institution directly participating in the drafting of the systematization plan. Otherwise, any extraneous interference (in the form of *unplanned* new buildings or designs) not only would have caused a breach in the targeted urban order, but it would also have hit into the system’s very core: such interventions might have broken the relation of subordination of the city to the economic Plan and thus call into question the totality of the central planning and thereby of the socialist system itself. This was one form of the “anarchy” so much criticized by Dej in his commentaries.

Another type of “anarchy,” which Dej could not yet overtly address, regarded the relations with the post-Stalin Soviet Union. He insisted on having autochthonous specialists, led by Constantinescu, who was entrusted to come up with a version of the Plan that would be then integrated into the urban form. The trick here was the awareness of the totality of this project and the exclusive interdependence of the systematization

²²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²²⁸ Ibid.

blueprint (Plan 1) and the economic planning (Plan 2). The two Plans were forming a rather rigid mechanism, whose lack of flexibility allowed for a particularly powerful manipulation. In other words, who ever controlled the economic planning controlled Bucharest's form, and vice-versa. That is, had the Soviets been invited to "contribute" to the making of the city (in fact, fully supervise the systematization), they would have been automatically given a free hand over the national economic planning. However, as much as he wanted to eschew such forms of "support," Dej had to face the fact that the Soviets had already achieved major economic control over the country.

Aesthetic Reorientations as Political Shifts

According to the 1953 transcripts, the Politburo envisioned the city of Bucharest as an *autochthonous* socialist product, to emerge mostly out of the hands and minds of Romanian architects and urbanists, both "old" and "young" alike. Three-quarters of its buildings were to be demolished, as they did not meet the standards of economic space usage and modern comfort. The socialist Master Plan did not account for the past in any form. On the contrary, as it had been agreed at the meeting, "the preparation [of the blueprint] on [a] scientific basis did not entail a preparation on a historical basis."²²⁹ That is, technology and mass scale industrialization had to facilitate the employment of prefabricated materials in the production of serial residential units, an operation that Dej had already outlined at the end of the meeting:

²²⁹ *Transcripts, November 1953*, p. 220. This comment belonged to Iosif Chișinevschi, "the chief-Inquisitor of the Romanian Stalinism," as Tismăneanu describes him. Chișinevschi would be ousted from the Party by Dej in 1957, together with Miron Constantinescu. If Constantinescu lived enough to be socially and politically rehabilitated by Ceaușescu, Chișinevschi would live his last years at the social periphery. Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej [The Ghost of Gheorghiu-Dej]*, Bucharest, 2008, p.133.

We must gradually move to the industrialization of constructions. We also should know which technology we need and what kind of architecture. [We must know] how much of the built space is for practical use and how much is used for pure embellishment. For there are some who assign 30% for effectively utilized space, and 70% for beauty. We must forego this approach.

With this subtle criticism of the socialist realist approach, Dej anticipated the doctrinal shift in architectural practice that would be announced by Khrushchev a year later. At the Conference of Builders and Architects in December 1954, Khrushchev overtly rejected the costly and gratuitous embellishment of the socialist realist architecture of the Stalin era and endorsed the standardization of construction techniques and materials as a solution for quickly increasing the mass of “more economical and functional housing.”²³⁰ This famous speech marked the official endorsement of a new phase in the architectural practice of the Soviet bloc. More specifically, it allowed—in fact, encouraged—the architects on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain to “critically” engage with the principles of postwar Western modernism in their projects.²³¹ In her discussion of the occurrence and consequences of this shift in the architectural discourse,

²³⁰ Anatole Senkevitch, Jr. offers a summarized description of the shift produced by Khrushchev’s speech. He writes:

The shift from extolling to repudiating the design validity of the Stalinist skyscrapers came in short order with Khrushchev’s denunciation of the decorative excesses in recent Soviet architecture in a speech to the All-Union Conference of Builders and Architects on December 7, 1954. Proclaiming that Soviet building had urgently to adopt industrialized mass construction techniques in order to erect greater numbers of more economical and functional housing, Khrushchev denounced the Moscow skyscrapers for epitomizing the trend of individualized rather than standardized design, with its emphasis on excessive ornamentation and on complex silhouettes with spires incongruously recalling medieval Moscow churches (a resemblance encouraged by Stalin). It was the excessive cost of constructing these elaborate buildings, rather than their artistic content per se, that proved the central focus of Khrushchev’s campaign. Still, his remarks bore unmistakable traces of aesthetic preferences and implications with the suggestion that such an approach revealed “the absence of taste on the part of certain architects” (Nikita S. Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel'stva*, [Moscow, 1955], 20).

In Anatole Senkevitch Jr., “Art, Architecture, and Design: A Commentary,” *Slavic Review* 37, no. 4 (1978), note 11.

²³¹ As happened at the 4th UIA congress in 1955. Popescu, “Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse,” 109.

Carmen Popescu points out the peculiar chronology that these changes took in the Romanian context. She observes that in fact, the first criticism of “Socialist Realism’s excesses” occurred at the second Plenary of the Union of Romanian Architects in July, 1954—something that she describes as a “paradoxical” occurrence, a “precocious reflection,” since it preceded “by four months” the USSR Conference of Builders and Architects at Moscow. Even though the criteria of economy and efficiency had already been addressed in earlier discussions in the journal *Arhitectura RPR*, Popescu notes that the novelty of the debates in the second Plenary was the “enhanced emphasis on this approach [functionality and efficiency instead of gratuitous beautification], presented as the direction to be followed.”²³²

A close reading of the transcripts of the Council of Ministers meeting in November 1953 situates the discussions of the second Plenary of Romanian Architects in a different light. In fact, I suggest that the debates occurring at the Plenary, during which the leading figures in the architectural field of Romania (including Pompiliu Macovei) overtly criticized the socialist realist approach and promoted instead modernist solutions as the “new” norm in socialist architecture, could not have happened had the Party leadership not already endorsed this significant shift in November 1953. A reassessment of the modernist principles appeared in fact as the only solution to the call for efficiency launched by Dej at the closed-door meeting of the Council of Ministers. More importantly, the November 1953 discussions indicate that the Romanian leaders (that is, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej) strongly desired that the development of a Master Plan for Bucharest be pursued by relying as much as possible on autochthonous resources and expertise. Under the guise of (objective) praise for cheaper and more functional

²³² Ibid., 110.

architecture, which would meet the housing crisis more efficiently, Dej's rejection of socialist realist architectural choices signaled a more pervasive change in his political agenda. His precocious push for a more efficient and function-oriented strategy of urban development simultaneously stood as a statement that, despite his stated loyalty to the USSR, he no longer wanted any further stylistic influence or any other form of "guidance" from the Soviets.²³³

The transcripts from the November 1953 meeting help us gauge the extent to which the Party leadership had to walk a fine line between rejecting a total supervision of the plan by the Soviets and responding to the external and internal pressures to speed up

²³³ This reading of Dej's directives, as they were recorded in the 1953 transcripts, challenges an earlier interpretation of Dej's position towards the changes in the architectural field in Romania of early 1950s. In their analysis of the emergence of a "second wave of modernism" in socialist Romania, Răuță and Heyden argue that it was only in 1958 that Dej, in response to Khrushchev's radical move and as an attempt to secure his position as the Party leader, retrospectively claimed his full support for the reforms and the influences they had in architecture. Radu-Alex Răuță and Hildergarde Heyden, "Shifting Meanings of Modernism: Parallels and Contrasts between Karel Teige and Cezar Lăzărescu," *The Journal of Architecture*, 2009 (1): 30. More specifically, as they put it:

[Even though across the entire socialist bloc] almost all the Stalinist leaders were overthrown [,] Romania, however, proved to be an exception in that Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the secretary general of the Romanian Workers' Party, was able to stay in power. His position, threatened by the shock-waves coming from Moscow, was only fully restored in 1958. That is when Dej chose to deliver a programmatic document depicting the new course to be taken by Romanian architects, following the lead of Khrushchev's reforms. In this programmatic document Cezar Lăzărescu's holiday houses [...] were singled out as exemplary, on the basis that the architect had managed to cut costs to almost half of what competing projects were proposing. Referring to several similar projects allowed Dej to argue that the Romanian regime had already been following the course set out by Khrushchev in 1954. This argument supported his claim that destalinisation was already achieved and that his personal leadership was in line with Khrushchev's reformism. The second wave of modernism was thus officially acknowledged.(30)

Two issues must be addressed here. First, Dej secured his position already in 1956, when he (and the Party leadership) played a Janus-like role for the group of Imre Nagy, the reformers of the Hungarian Communist Party who sought refuge in Romania after the 1956 Hungarian revolution had been silenced by the Soviet tanks. Dej in fact proved his political loyalty to the new regime at Moscow by handing Nagy and the others over to the Soviets. At the same time, however, as Tismăneanu and others have already argued, and the 1953 transcripts prove one more time, Dej tried to achieve a relative autonomy from the USSR. In fact, ironically, Dej's affirmation that "destalinization had already been achieved," (31) which Răuță and Heyden read as a retrospective move to please Khrushchev, was in fact accurate. Behind the closed doors of the Council of Ministers, having already gotten rid of the Pauker group, Dej had already been preparing the steps for an indigenous destalinization way ahead of the "big brothers" in Moscow. This quest for autonomy, however, opened a Pandora's box, since the immediate need for experts and highly qualified specialists in urban planning and design brought some of the "older" architects, marginalized until then, back to the drawing board.

the plan's execution. As mentioned earlier, the most pressing matter was Bucharest's significant housing crisis, which was to be solved only by rapidly launching a massive building project of apartment buildings that would meet the dual criteria of functionality and maximal usage of the city space.²³⁴ As such, the closed-door meeting of the Council of Ministers prepared the way for a more overt shift of perspective from a penchant for "pompous, historicist aesthetics" of Socialist Realism to an emphasis on a functional architecture.²³⁵

The documents examined here must be read against a political context that was itself under radical change. From the installation of a socialist government in 1947, the issue of political control appeared as a *sine qua non* for the development of any grand project under socialism. During the period prior to 1953, this control was directly exerted from Moscow with the technical help of different Soviet councilors.²³⁶ Following the triumph of Gheorghiu-Dej over the Pauker group, and especially after Stalin's death, this form of direct and total control of Moscow over Romania's internal affairs shifted to a more mediated one, under which diverse forms of planning and other significant projects were no longer required to be automatically referred to the "Soviet specialists," nor necessarily to be endorsed by the Soviet councilors.²³⁷ This shift of the ultimate center of decision from Moscow to Bucharest occurred simultaneously with—or, perhaps, due to—

²³⁴ Juliana Maxim, "Mass Housing and Collective Experience: On the Notion of Microraiion in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009), 7.

²³⁵ Carmen Popescu, "Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009), 110.

²³⁶ For a detailed analysis of the role of the Soviet councilors in Romania of the 1950s, see *Raportul Final al Comisiei Prezidențiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România*, București, 2006, 121-129.

²³⁷ In June 1952, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej openly accused Ana Pauker, Teohari Georgescu, and Vasile Luca of ideological treason and "cosmopolitanism." The latter were ousted from the Politburo as well from the Romanian Workers' Party. Soon thereafter, Luca and Georgescu were arrested, while Ana Pauker, after a series of show trials, was put under house arrest in April 1953. Luca was accused of high treason, and given the death sentence, changed to life imprisonment. He died in prison in 1963. Georgescu was never put in prison, only politically and socially marginalized. See also note 151, Chapter 2.

a wider interest of the USSR to engage a more systematic economic and cultural exchange with Western Europe after Stalin's death. Moreover, the search for relative political autonomy from the USSR led the regime in Bucharest to start their own form of "Thaw" by allowing specialists—in our case, the architects—to search for innovative and more daring technical solutions. At the same time, under an increasing awareness of the relative lack of highly trained specialists, the regime made another radical shift. It turned to a peculiar group as an alternative pool of highly qualified labor. This pool of expertise was mainly formed of the "disenfranchised" who had been stripped of their possessions, rights, and jobs, and many of whom had been thrown into political prisons during Romania's Stalinization (1947-1953). At the same time, the question of how to keep the socialist project uncontaminated by "the old beliefs" of this category of experts lay at the kernel of the official discussions of that time. As the 1953 transcripts show, the immediate solution was an increasing centralization, which became then enhanced by another form of control: an appeal to the revived discourse of the Nation.²³⁸

The debates emerging within the architectural field at the end of the 1950s must therefore be analyzed from several distinct, but inextricably linked, perspectives. The first one illuminates a quest for the most suitable aesthetic form that could translate the socialist doctrine, as the Party leadership understood it at distinct political moments: the year 1953 represents the very beginning of the "national Stalinism" under Dej, according to Tismăneanu, signaling a gradual transition from Socialist Realism to the adoption of a (moderate) modernist vocabulary in architecture; however, the early 1960s bring about an increasing interest in "local specificity," which architects aimed to

²³⁸ See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, and Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*.

accomplish by adapting vernacular motifs to monumental scales, such as in the case of the civic centers (an approach that resembled earlier projects of the National Style movement emerging at the turn of the 20th century). An increasing concern with an aesthetic representation of the “nation” and the quest for “authenticity” and “specificity” in urban architecture in the early 1960s was accompanied by a state-endorsed interest in the restoration of historical sites.²³⁹ The case of the Old Court brings these two processes together, since it illustrates the tense arguments about historical preservation and diverging views on the practice of restoration among architects.

This perspective on the politics of architecture in early socialist Romania takes a political economic approach, one focused on the struggles over resources within and beyond the architectural field, an aspect that I have already discussed in the first part of the chapter. Such an analysis helps us to better understand the tempestuous disputes among architects, as well as between architects and urbanists, on one hand, and the archeologists working in the city, on the other, disputes triggered by the proposal to declare the Old Court area “a historical reservation.” Moreover, an analysis of these debates on the renovation of the Old Court area cannot be separated from a discussion of the urban remodeling of Union Square, a key area of interest in the economy of the city and thereby of Bucharest’s Master Plan. The prospect of having the Old Court area stand as a “historical reservation” in stark contrast to the radically remodeled Union Square appeared as a timely solution to the Party-endorsed project of transforming Union Square into a pinnacle of socialist modernist architecture.

The following section will discuss these two projects (the making the Old Court area into a historical reservation, and the remodeling of Union Square) as parallel

²³⁹ See my analysis in Chapter 1.

processes that could offer us some insights into how the Party leadership and the experts of the new state projected the dialectics of power onto the urban landscape of Bucharest. I start with an analysis of the debates on Union Square's reconstruction, using the particularities of this case to develop an argument about the institutional rearrangements occurring within the wider architectural field in Romania of the early 1960s. I engage then in a detailed reading of a set of letters exchanged between 1962 and 1964 among central institutions on the topic of the preservation of the Old Court area, which some institutional actors deemed to be endangered by the radical remodeling of Union Square. These letters reveal reciprocal accusations among differently positioned institutional actors of ignoring the "national value" of the Old Court or, on the contrary, ludicrously attempting to modify the architectural past that the Old Court represented. Interestingly—and perhaps, not surprisingly—among those actors we also find some of "older elements" that Dej endorsed in 1953, such as architects who had already gained a professional fame during the interwar period. In the last part of the chapter, I situate those debates within the emerging discourse of the (socialist) nation, revived in the mid 1960s and reaching its peak in the 1980s, in order to show that the arguments about architectural form and historical preservation in the case of the Old Court illustrate a more complex enterprise of the socialist state to rewrite a "new" national history into the urban landscape.

History as Built Contrasts: Competing Temporalities in the Old Court and Union Square

Spaces of the (socialist) future: Union Square as "the site of civic life"

Dej's directives, expressed in the November 1953 meeting of the Politburo, were soon to be extrapolated to the national level (since Bucharest was "the heart of the

country”) and applied accordingly in every town and city. Moreover, an increased centralization was to be accompanied by a policy favoring an economical use of resources and an approach to the city’s remodeling that understood it as an industrialized process. However, from the Resolution for the Improvement of Urban Planning within the Local Councils, issued by the Council of Ministers on November 20, 1959 (henceforth, the 1959 Improvement Resolution), we may surmise that the implementation of the systematization plan at the national level did not work quite as Dej had envisioned.²⁴⁰ In fact, the plan outlined by Dej carried the seeds of failure at its very core, because it aimed to combine elements that contradicted each other. That is, (1) the horizontal enlargement of architectural expertise was automatically constricted by (2) the centralized system of decision making, formed of the bureaucrats of the Party whose main task was to increase (3) the control over and thus the quantity of resources (construction materials, etc).

Verdery helps us better understand the mechanisms of the failure, by identifying at the center of the socialist system an inherent tension between the tendency for accumulating resources at each of the nodes of the redistributive system and the center’s constant interest in accumulating decisional power, that is, distributive rights over these resources.²⁴¹ As she puts it, “what counts most in the competition among social actors within allocative bureaucracies is *inputs to one’s segment*, rather than outputs of production.”²⁴² Therefore, “one finds within the apparatus of management itself an

²⁴⁰ “O importantă hotărîre privind sistematizarea oraşelor [An important decision regarding the systematization of the cities],” *Arhitectura*, 1(62) (1960), 4.

²⁴¹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 72-87.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 80. Verdery cites Stark, “Work, Worth and Justice in a Socialist Mixed Economy,” 1988, 48.

interest in mechanisms that subvert the system's central logic."²⁴³ Verdery uses Câmpeanu to capture the image of this tension: "This potential for revolt nourishes the organic mistrust the supreme entity has of its bureaucracy, which in turn nourishes their historical tendency to transform their separation into conflict."²⁴⁴



Figure 3 The Central market in the 1960s. The smaller building at the right is Manuk's Inn (the front façade). The reconstructed Princely Palace of the Old Court is located behind the inn. Source: romania.ici.ro/images/bucuresti/oldb22.jpg

With this overview in mind, I would like to return to Bucharest's systematization project and examine the changes that the 1959 Improvement Resolution tried to implement. Faced with a long series of dismissals of the systematization plan by the Local Councils across the country, the Politburo decided to endorse a shift in the relationship between the local architects and the regional People's Councils (*Sfaturi Populare*). More specifically, the 1959 Resolution endowed the chief architect of the region (or the capital) with decision making power over the council, whereas the latter was responsible for populating the city's architecture office with well prepared

²⁴³ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 82.

²⁴⁴ Pavel Câmpeanu, *The Genesis of the Stalinist Social Order* (Amok, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1988). 148.

specialists.²⁴⁵ In other words, the role of the architects among other categories of local bureaucrats grew significantly, which allowed them to carve out a special niche of expertise that became indispensable to the Party. This shift generated various forms of tension including those 1) among architects differently placed within this niche, and 2) between this professional category as a whole and others, especially the ones that also needed the ground of the city to establish themselves as a professional group—that is, the archeologists working in central areas of Bucharest.

The contest for proposals launched in 1959 regarding the urban remodeling of Union Square offers us an interesting venue to explore these tensions in more detail. Moreover, the debates surrounding the contest give us a better grasp of the role that Union Square continued to play in the symbolic economy of socialist Bucharest in the 1950s and afterwards. We remember that before 1945 the appearance and the social *mélange* of the Square and the adjacent Lipscani area had already triggered intense

²⁴⁵ A more detailed explanation of the lack of interest shown by the regional People's Councils could be read between the lines in the unsigned account of the 1959 Decision, published in *Arhitectura*.

The People's Councils (*Sfaturile populare*) had underestimated the role that the master plans (*planurile de sistematizare*) played for the development of our cities. [...] Another cause that led to those deficiencies had been the way in which the architecture divisions of the Local Councils (*SAS, Secții de arhitectură și sistematizare*) had been organized and pursued their work. [...] Those divisions had not kept under control the process of construction and reconstruction of the cities. Having been separated from the urban design projects that have been pursued within the regional institutes of urban planning and design [*IRP, Proiect Bucharest Institute* was the equivalent for the capital of those regional institutes, E.G.], kept away from the concrete problems, [those divisions of the local councils] had not been involved in the operative type of work, directly linked to the concrete projects of urban planning and construction and the systems of control over the ways in which the cities' systematization has been pursued. [...]

The 1959 decision stipulates some changes, that aim at the inclusion of those departments (SAS) in the process of urban planning and design. Thus, there will be established the regional departments of systematization, architecture, and urban design (*Direcții de sistematizare, arhitectură și proiectarea construcțiilor*) formed by merging the current architecture divisions and the regional institutes of urban design and offices of systematization and architecture (*Servicii de sistematizare și arhitectură*) for cities. Both institutions are part of the local Councils, which will effectively be responsible for the [implementation] of the systematization projects. Those institutions will be set under the supervisions of the chief architect of the region. The job of the chief architect will thereby carry more leverage, while the issues related to architecture and systematization will be better coordinated within the local councils.

“O importantă hotărîre privind sistematizarea orașelor,” 4.

debates over the site's adequacy to standards of civic habitation. Cincinat Sfințescu, the first professionally trained urban planner working in Bucharest, had come up with a project of reordering the traffic in the area, while maintaining its economic function. Even if his ideas had not been pursued due to a lack of resources and the imminent involvement of the country in the Second World War, they were to be found among the principles of the new master plan for a socialist Bucharest, set up by the November 1952 Resolution. However, Sfințescu's insistence on maintaining the commercial character of the square by preserving the Central Market did not survive in the new master plan. The squares in the center of the city were given great attention in the 1952 master plan, but their role was mainly civic and political.

In his presentation of the Master Plan to the Council of Ministers in November 1953, Macovei stressed the key role that Union Square played in the general urban economy of the city. He suggested that a radical change in the city skyline be achieved by creating a series of taller buildings, which would be placed in key nodal points in the city center. One of those buildings, he proposed, could be an expanded version of the current building of the Municipal Council, located in the square. Macovei envisioned this building as being "elongated and expanded in length," thus marking more strongly "the geometrical center of the city."²⁴⁶ "While Victory Square [another major square of the city] will have a political character, displaying the central political institutions, [Union] Square will become the center of civic life, [marked] by the building of the People's Council and other future establishments."²⁴⁷ In other words, Union Square was regarded as a space containing and giving shape to the social life of the present and, especially, of

²⁴⁶ *Transcripts, November 1953*. ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 180.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

the future. The square would represent a pivotal area in the economy of the city, standing in sharp contrast with the area of the Old Court located in its immediate proximity. That is, the new economic and civic value conferred on Union Square embedded the futuristic quality of the city as a whole within a future-oriented temporal framework, which was further enhanced by an opposite (past-focused) temporality represented by the Old Court. I suggest then that the socialist urban planning in Romania of the 1960s did not reject “the past” entirely, but rather worked it out (or around it) in order to set stronger contrasting sites within the new urban landscape, which would increase the impact of novel socialist urban forms.

Given the importance of Union Square as “the major traffic node in the city center,” its remodeling appeared as a most timely pursuit. Around the same time when the 1959 Decision was issued to dissolve the departments of architecture and constructions of the People’s Councils, the Municipal Council of the city of Bucharest launched a contest for the urban remodeling of Union Square, by sending out a call for proposals that was opened to all the architects included in the Romanian Architects’ Union.²⁴⁸ This was not an ordinary event. In general, many of the projects concerning the remodeling of Bucharest’s central sites were automatically assigned to the mega Institute of Architectural Design and Planning “Project Bucharest.”²⁴⁹ As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, this institution appeared as a later product of the 1952 Resolution which launched Bucharest’s Master Plan and the establishment of the State Commission for Architecture and Construction (SCAC), in charge of the supervision of

²⁴⁸ See the earlier note on the 1959 decision.

²⁴⁹ This Institute emerged out of the initial Institute for Urban Planning and Constructions, which had been established to develop the projects outlined by the State Committee. See my earlier discussion in this chapter.

the systematization of all cities in socialist Romania. Already by the end of the 1950s, “Proiect București” (Project Bucharest, henceforth) became then an indispensable organism for the socialist state, and its authority kept growing within the professional circles of architects and planners, as well as within the bureaucratic structure of the city as a whole. In other words, Project Bucharest kept accumulating not only indispensable resources (well qualified professionals, access to professional know-how [journals, books] from abroad, etc.), but also an exclusivity of those resources and decisional rights over their usage or redistribution. This became more transparent after the 1959 Decision, which granted more rights and decision-making power to the architects working with the People’s Councils across the country. Sometimes, however, Project Bucharest had to admit its own limits.

The contest for Union Square was open to virtually all architects in the country because Project Bucharest could not find an adequate solution for the traffic regulation within the perimeter of the square, a difficulty posed by its peculiar trapezoidal form. Under these circumstances, “the Executive Committee of the Local Council decided to enlarge the sphere of possible solutions by organizing, together with the Architects’ Union, an open competition for proposals on the square’s systematization.”²⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the very short time (the contest/competition was launched on September 10, 1959, with the deadline set for November 10 of the same year), the People’s Council received a record number of proposals, “the highest ever received in a public contest [of architecture] in our country.”²⁵¹ Even more interesting was the fact that many teams submitted more than one project, offering several different proposals. The explanation of

²⁵⁰ T. Evolveanu "Concursul pentru sistematizarea Pieței Unirii din București [The competition for the systematization of Union Square in Bucharest]" *Arhitectura* 62, no. 1 (1960): 14-17.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

this rather peculiar fact was vague, but politically fashionable. The jury inferred that

this massive participation, despite the difficulties posed by the geometry of the square and the short deadline, is attributable to an unhealthy mentality of the candidates. There have been noted [...] different projects made by the same team. This proves that the team in question either manifested doubts about the projects, or relied on luck. In both cases, the quality of the project would suffer.

The “unhealthy mentality,” leading the architects to come up with several projects, could be explained also as a radical strategy—see the record number of projects—to break through the monopoly created by Project Bucharest over the projects pursued in the city center, projects that regularly amassed an extraordinary number of resources (capital, know-how, etc).

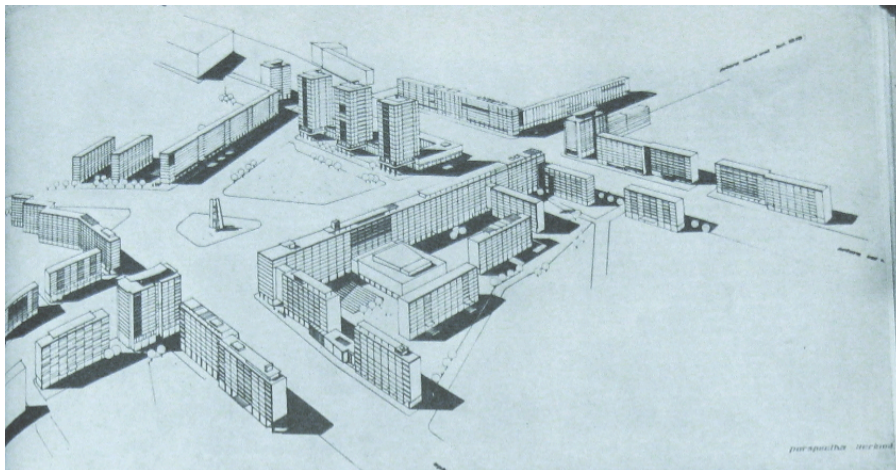


Figure 4 The winning project of the 1959 competition for the remodeling of Union Square. *Arhitectura*, 62, no. 1 (1960): 15.

The mounting tension between Project Bucharest and Romania’s other architects was reflected in the debates that followed the contest, when the members of the Architects’ Union (Bucharest branch) met to discuss the winning project. The project offered a solution for traffic regulation as well as an ordering of the economic activity in the Square. It did so by correcting the trapezoidal form of the square with three apartment buildings, which would be linked at the base via a commercial space that would replace

the old Central Market. The entire square was to be surrounded by new buildings, which would also conceal the older houses in the Lipscani area.

At the meeting, the discussions centered first on the organization of the contest, with some participants criticizing the ambiguous guidelines and some even questioning the decisions of the jury. Then, the architects debated the solutions proposed by the projects thrown into competition. Some of those projects had been rejected for relying on “imported solutions, which would work perhaps in other countries, but could not fit the local conditions.”²⁵² Most of the debates concentrated on the adequacy of the proposals for traffic regulation. Of all the participants, only one architect put forth the issue of the historical monuments that could be affected by the square’s systematization. He pointed out that the historical monuments represented by the Old Court and the 18th century Manuk Inn would not be given enough importance. This comment provoked no further remarks. (However, as I will show later, this topic would be resuscitated in the internal documents circulating during that very year [1963] among central institutions of the architectural field.)

The reconstruction of Union Square was to entail a complete remaking of the area, which was a modified version of the solution chosen in the 1959 contest. More specifically, the square would be circumscribed by new buildings—a grand hotel on the south side, buildings for the institutes of urban planning on the eastern side, a large commercial complex on the north, and at a later date, a new Opera building on the current

²⁵² Gustav Gusti, "Unele probleme privind reconstrucția de tip nou a orașelor noastre în etapa actuală [Some issues regarding the new form of reconstruction of the cities in our country]," *Arhitectura* 63, no. 4 (1963): 2-3, 2.

place of the Brâncovenesc Hospital.²⁵³ The open square would be aesthetically focused on the Union monument, celebrating the making of Greater Romania in 1918.

The new vision of the square allowed then for “the past” to be present only under the condensed form of the Union monument, while other forms (such as the Old Court) were planned to be erased. However, at the time of Maicu’s presentation in 1963, the issue of two other sites—the Old Court and the Manuk Inn—had already been brought back to the discussion table of the Cabinet of the Council of Ministers. This is because the struggle for resources partially emerged as an internal process within the architects’ guild, continuously reinforcing the division between specialists affiliated with Project Bucharest and the others, who aspired to be part of the first category or at least get a share of its exclusive resources.

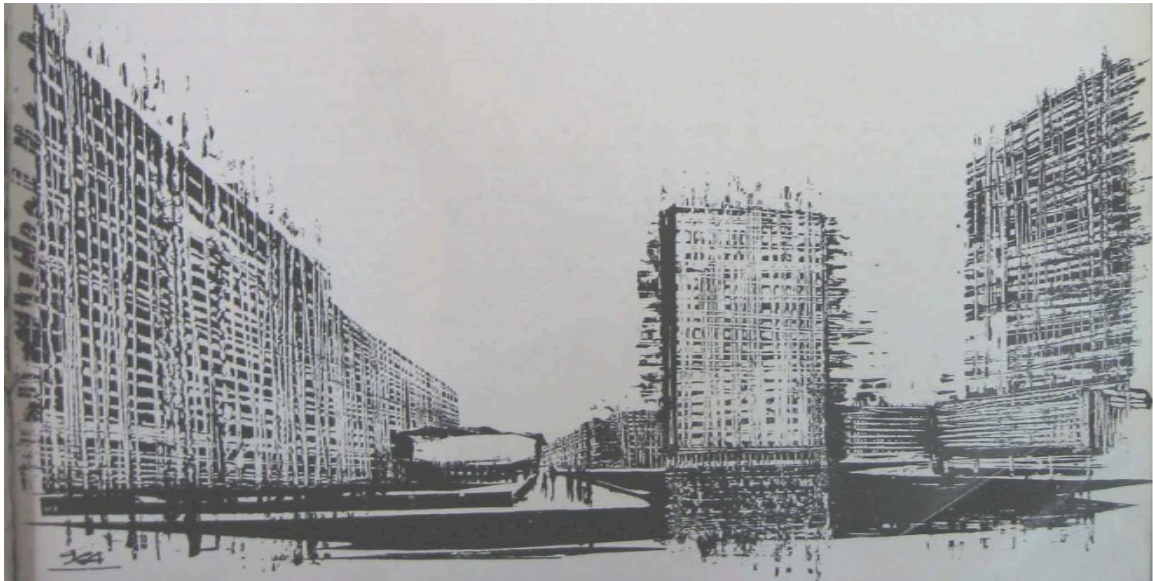


Figure 5 Proposal for the remodeling of Union Square by Horia Maicu. *Arhitectura*, 90, no. 5 (1964): 13.

²⁵³ To a certain extent, this reconstruction had eventually been produced via the making of the Civic Center of Bucharest in the late 1980s. This is an argument advanced by Maria Raluca Popa, "Understanding the Urban Past: The Transformation of Bucharest in the Late Socialist Period," in *Testimonies of the City: Identity, Community and Change in a Contemporary Urban World*, ed. Richard Rodger and Joanna Herbert (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

I discuss this process in detail in the last section of this chapter, where I look at the proposal advanced by architect Constantin Joja to renovate the houses in the Old Court/Lipscani area according to what he deemed to represent a “Romanian urban architecture.” Joja represents a very interesting case, as he was one of the “older elements” who had already gained a professional status through the projects he did or participated in during the interwar times. His take on “renovation” in the Old Court area came under criticism by other architects, especially the ones working in the Department for Historical Monuments, who dismissed Joja’s proposal as being inaccurate and quixotic. While the renovation of the houses in Lipscani came to represent such a point of contention, these disputes in the mid 1960s brought the Old Court back on the map, however, by making it more visible to the central authorities. This incident prevented the pursuit of the initial intentions of some of the architects well placed within the political system, such as chief architect Horia Maicu, who had envisioned the partial demolition of the Old Court area as a *sine qua non* preliminary stage in the expansion and remodeling of Union Square.²⁵⁴

At the same time, the increasing monopoly set by Project Bucharest on the city’s landscape also became contested by other professional categories, especially when the latter also relied on the same ground—or, more exactly, specific areas of this ground—to establish a disciplinary niche for themselves. Only by having established this niche could those groups ask then for institutional recognition—and thus resources—from the center (the redistributive state). Even more so, perhaps those categories aspired to organize a monopoly of their own. In order to understand these professional conflicts better, I turn

²⁵⁴ We also learn from the hand written comments added to the draft, that the response was also sent to architect Horia Maicu, who did not agree with the preservation and restoration of the Manuk Inn. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, 17.

my focus here to the archeologists who since 1953 had been working on the digs opened in the center of Bucharest around the sites of Union Square and the Old Court.

The remodeling of Union Square posed a serious problem to the archeologists working on the Old Court site, which bordered a part of the northern side of the square. At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, during the peak times of Bucharest's urban growth, the economic role of the Lipscani area as the city's major commercial center partially effaced the historical significance of the grounds on which it developed—the Old Court. The area's historical importance was resuscitated under the post-1945 political regime, when the Old Court came to occupy a central point in the network of archeological digs opened in the city center. The results of the successive excavations—the unearthing of the walls of the court and some rooms of the royal palace—led the archeologists to lay new claims over the site.

Why is the Old Court significant to the argument I have laid out thus far? I have attempted to show that both the Old Court and Union Square concentrated not only disputes over growing regimes of expertise but also diverging visions of how the city's planning and architecture should reflect its economic profile. The rest of the chapter focuses then on the following two processes: 1) the disputes across disciplinary boundaries between architects and archeologists over the distinct value and meaning that the Old Court and its adjacent area carried for each profession, and 2) the inner fights among architects differently placed in the institutional network over the remaking of the Old Court into a historical reservation. Although I discuss these processes in chronological order, as they come out of the archival files, I approach them as inextricable ventures, linked by one site (the Old Court) as the point of contention as well

as by diverging views on the representations of the (national) past in this particular area.

Sites of the past: Architects and archeologists in the Old Court area

In October 1963, the chief architect of the capital, Horia Maicu, outlined the Master Plan of the city of Bucharest to the plenary meeting of the national Architects' Union.²⁵⁵ Presented as the "result of the scientific work conducted by circa 350 architects, engineers, economists, technicians from the Local Council, the Project Institute Bucharest, ministers, institutes, and institutions,"²⁵⁶ the 1963 Outline of the systematization scheme directly reflected Dej's instructions given ten years earlier. The blueprint gave detailed explanations on the remaking of the city by mainly invoking economic factors (traffic, electricity, infrastructure, etc). As a whole, the scheme did not differ much from the 1952 Resolution; rather, it was a much more complex project set on a similar goal: "the liquidation of improper constructions," which had to unfold along a time span of several decades. According to Maicu,

In order to maintain the demolitions and the relocation of families under the admissible limit, in the first stages the reconstruction of the city will be mainly conducted on large areas that are partially empty or with run-down buildings. [The process will be less focused on] the central zone, which is to be reconstructed *only after 1980* [my underlining, E.G.]. The reconstruction of the central zone, which currently offers an inhabitable structure, will be done via gradual decommissioning.²⁵⁷

At the same time, the creation of a sequence of public squares and civic centers constituted a focal point of the discussion. The 1952 Master Plan had already emphasized the urgency of creating (or enlarging) public central squares that would both regulate the

²⁵⁵ Horia Maicu quoted in "Plenara Uniunii Arhitecților din R.P.R. [The plenary meeting of the Union of Architects of the People's Republic of Romania]," *Arhitectura*, 85/6 (1963): 54-57.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

central traffic and also confer a sense of order and centralized coherence to the new city in the making. By criticizing the “bourgeois regime” for not having been “able to endow the capital with any architecturally well organized public square,” chief architect Maicu drew in 1963 a direct correlation between this lack of “properly arranged” public squares and the general “chaotic development” of the city. The remodeling of the central major squares stood therefore among the top priorities of the new regime, as they represented crucial urban solutions not only for traffic regulation, but also for engendering novel forms of political subjectivity (since the larger squares constituted the perfect stages for mass demonstrations).

At the time of the discussions held at the Architects’ Union office, the main concerns of the majority of the participants lay elsewhere—that is, with access (or lack thereof) to major projects of the systematization in the city center, which was controlled by Project Bucharest and the Local Council. The remodeling of Bucharest concentrated an extraordinary number of resources and political attention, thus making any form of participation in this project an exclusive and therefore much wanted capital in itself. This competition became even tighter in conditions when the pool of resources was more closely monitored, as happened after the third Party Congress in June 1960, when the leaders decided that “all the conditions must be met so that we could build more, better, faster, cheaper.”²⁵⁸

Almost a year before Horia Maicu’s presentation of the general Master Plan at the Architects’ Union, the president of the State Committee for Architecture and Systematization, architect Nicolae Bădescu, received a copy of a document that was neither dated nor signed. It came with a hand written note attached to it, which read:

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Comrade Bădescu,

We have received this from the Academy of RPR. I think that the staff of the Museum of Bucharest might have had a hand in drafting the document. What do you think?

Dinu V. December 24, 1962

The original letter had been sent to the Central Committee for Culture, directly subordinated to the Council of Ministers, the supreme body of state administration according to the socialist Constitution.²⁵⁹ The text stood as an open accusation against two important institutions within the network of the socialist system of urban planning: 1) the Department for Historical Monuments (*Direcția Monumentelor Istorice*, Department for Monuments henceforth), which was responsible for the monitoring and protection of the sites and buildings considered “historical monuments” within the larger institution of the State Committee for Architecture and Construction (Committee for Architecture, henceforth), and 2) the “Project Bucharest” Institute (Project Bucharest), subordinated to the first institution.

The letter writers incriminate the two institutions for having ignored and thereby critically endangered two major historical sites of Bucharest: the ruins of the Old Court and the adjacent Manuk Inn. More specifically, given its exclusive focus on the radical transformation of the city, Project Bucharest is accused of sheer ignorance of Bucharest’s historical sites, while the Department for Monuments is described as a ghost

²⁵⁹ “Dinu V.” is the signature of Vasile Dinu, at that time (1962) head of unit (*șef de secție*, in Romanian) in the Department of Propaganda and Culture (*Direcția de Propagandă și Cultură*), led by Leonte Răutu, of the Central Committee of Romanian Workers’ Party. Dinu was also professor at the University of Bucharest and the chair of the department of scientific socialism. Vladimir Tismaneanu, personal communication. Vasile Dinu is also mentioned as one of the “adjuncts” of Leonte Răutu. Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, and Cristian Vasile, eds. *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007, 631. Vasile Dinu is also mentioned in the diary of writer Petre Solomon, who noted that Dinu was in 1965 “the new vicepresident of the [Central Committee] for Arts [and Culture of the Council of Ministers].” In “Petre Solomon (1923-1991),” *România Literară*, 2003 (7).

institution, which does not show proper concern for the archeological monuments. Recall that Project Bucharest had overseen the 1959 contest on the redesign of Union Square.

The letter also raises questions about the professionalism and political commitment of two important architects, who also played a key role within the Party central apparatus at the time: the chief architect of Bucharest, Horia Maicu, and the president of Committee for Architecture, architect Nicolae Bădescu (who held the rank of minister. Considering the great political leverage held then by those two political actors, it is perhaps easy to understand why the letter was not signed, but rather sent off as a collective reaction, under the name of the Institute for Archaeology of the Romanian Academy. More interesting is how this document ended up in this particular archive—the official archive of the Department for Monuments, one of the two institutions under accusation.

If we believe Dinu's hunch, then the first question we want to ask is: why would the Museum be so keen on trying to eliminate the Department for Monuments and on inveighing against Project Bucharest? Why would it not appeal to the Institute for Archaeology, instead? Also, why would the note presume the Museum of Bucharest's involvement? I suggest that the letter had something more at stake. A close reading of the letter (and its response) will help us assess its broader implications in the reconfiguration of heritage as a political process. A map of the political and scholarly alliances and contentions at play in the process of heritage-making was being drawn in the background of the letter: one group, formed of the specialists employed by the City Museum of Bucharest, the Institutes of Archaeology, of Art History and of History of the Romanian Academy, was portrayed as attempting to salvage crucial representations of history from

another group, formed of seemingly ignorant professionals (planners and architects) and highly questionable institutions such as the Department for Monuments and Project Bucharest. This section will set the claims and reciprocal accusations advanced by the letters concerning the Old Court within the wider process of remaking disciplinary and professional boundaries in a newly centralized institutional network of the socialist state. In this network in which the resources distributed by the center became scantier, the various professional groups had to fight harder to assign stronger political meanings to their specific research interests if they wanted to obtain further funding.

Given the anonymity of the letter, we cannot assume that the writers were automatically associated with (or employed by) the Museum. However, from an institutional point of view, Dinu was right: at the moment of the letter's writing, all of the archeological sites on the city's territory were included in the jurisdiction of the Museum of History of the City of Bucharest. The Museum had been established in December 1956, at the decision of Bucharest's People's Council, while simultaneously the former Museum of Antiquities (the institution dealing up to that moment with the archeological sites all across the country) had been renamed the Institute of Archaeology, being included in the Academy of the People's Republic.²⁶⁰ The Museum of the City of Bucharest belonged to the newly formed network of regional museums of history opened in the major cities, which were set in charge of drafting and displaying a narrative of regional history that had to fit the new ideological requirements of the state (see my earlier discussion on the formation of those museums in early 1950s, closely supervised from "the center"). Those museums took over the archeological sites of local importance,

²⁶⁰ Panait I. Panait, "Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din Capitală," in *Cercetări arheologice în București* (București: S.P. C. (Sfatul Popular al Capitalei) Muzeul de istorie a orașului București, 1962), 149.

while the Institute of Archaeology was entrusted with the archeological sites deemed to hold “national significance.” As the Old Court had not been included in the latter, someone would have easily deduced that the institution behind the letter was the same one in charge of the site—that is, the City Museum of Bucharest.

The letter appeared under my eyes one winter morning of January 2007, when I was skimming through some thick files in the archives of the National Institute for Historical Monuments in Bucharest.²⁶¹ According to the archivist, those files had been somehow hidden during the reorganization of the archive, so it appeared that I was the first researcher to consult them. As soon as I started reading through the documents, I felt the classic twinge of excitement that anyone has experienced while perusing archives: the file mainly included a significant volume of correspondence among various political institutions on the subject of Bucharest’s Old Princely Court. The anonymous letter was the first document in the file, representing in fact the nucleus of this set of documents, as the subsequent pieces in the file emerged as different forms of response or reaction to the letter. The letter then created the case of the Old Court and transformed it into a political issue. The debates that this issue generated for almost a decade are visually captured by the different scripts on the cover, carrying diverse descriptions of the file’s content.

²⁶¹ When the archivist had brought the two thick files to my desk, he admitted, a bit surprised, that their content represented a discovery for him, as well, because he did not seem to remember having seen those files before. The archive of the Institute for National Monuments itself has a dramatic story, having been on the verge of being destroyed twice in the last fifty years. In Chapter 1, I have already mentioned the first episode, when the archives of the former Commission of Historical Monuments had been rescued at the last moment in 1947 by historian Oliver Velescu, who found the files lying in a courtyard. He preserved them until the Department for Monuments came to be established in 1953, as part of the State Commission for Architecture and Construction. The archive of the interwar Commission was then divided in two: the majority of the files had been sent to the Archives of Bucharest’s City Hall, while a smaller part remained in the archive of Department for Monuments. Then, after the second dismantling of the institution in 1977, the archive was temporarily placed in a basement, until a shelf of files fell and blocked the access door. As the archivist put it, this accident was a blessing in disguise, because the archive could be thereby kept intact until 1990, when it was returned to the recently re-established Commission for Historical Monuments. Between 1990 and 1993, a team of archivists, including Iuliu Șerban, read and classified the entire collection again.

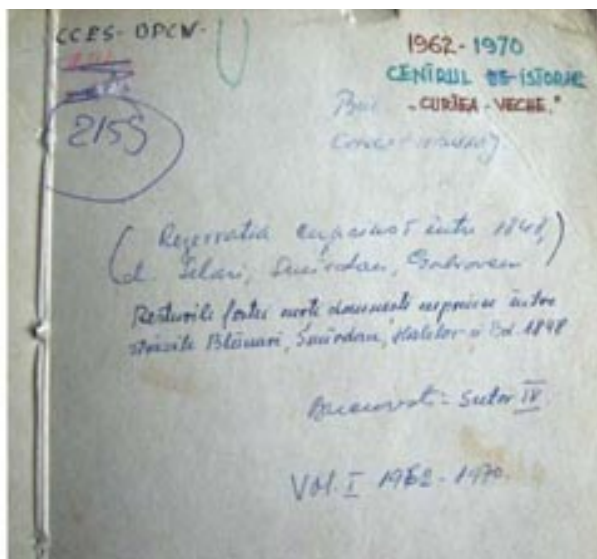


Figure 6 The front cover of the Old Court archival file (1962-1970), AINMI/2159.

1962-1970
 Centrul de istorie/Centrul istoric
 "Curtea Veche"

*(Rezervația cuprinsă între 1848, str. Șelari, Smîrdan, Gabroveni)
 Resturile fostei curți domnești cuprinse între străzile Blănari, Smîrdan,
 Halelor și Bd. 1848.*

1962-1970
 The center of history [transformed into] The historical center
 "The Old Court"
*(The historical reservation delimited by 1848 [boulevard], Șelari, Smîrdan,
 Gabroveni streets)
 The remains of the former princely court, delimited by Blănari, Smîrdan,
 Halelor streets and Boulevard 1848*

It is precisely this uncertainty about the "real" subject of the file that points to the arguments among professional groups on what to do with—or, to make of—this specific area of Bucharest. The file's cover becomes thus a political palimpsest, with the documents therein standing as assessments not of sites and buildings, but of diverging gazes over those sites and their accompanying visions of what is history. Those gazes, searching for the past in specific (often, exclusive) material forms or, on the contrary, ignoring it altogether, create a map of competing claims for expertise and political

recognition. Recall that these debates over historical value were occurring simultaneously with broad and intensive plans for remaking the city of Bucharest according to a modernist architectural vision. Such plans allocated extensive resources to the city's architects, particularly those well placed in the politically powerful Architects' Union.

A close reading of the letter will help us gauge the intensity of this struggle among different professional guilds. The letter opened with a statement:

I. Some monuments of high importance for our country's history can be found in the immediate vicinity of Union Square—the former Flower Market.

They are:

- 1) the ruins of the old princely court of Bucharest, and
- 2) the Manuk Inn [one of the inns established in the area at the end of 16th century].

1). The monuments had been identified and located during the archeological digs carried out at this site by the Institute of Archaeology of Academy of People's Popular Republic, in collaboration with the history Museum of the city of Bucharest. The study had been carried out in order to meet the assignment given [the Museum] by the Party leadership to clarify Bucharest's historical development.

By pointing out the political importance of those sites and their crucial role in fulfilling the Party's interest in a "true" history of Bucharest and its origins, the writers were trying to justify their decision to address the letter directly to the Council of Ministers. The letter then described the situation of the Old Court's ruins, which had been "caught" within, and thus incidentally preserved by, the newer architectural landscape of the area. After the dismantling of the Court at the end of the 18th century, the older walls of the Palace became gradually incorporated into the new buildings erected on the site afterwards. According to the letter, those recently unearthed walls—rather, the ruins thereof—are "representative of the extremely beautiful Romanian architecture of the 16th to 17th centuries, being among the rarest pieces/artifacts of a princely Court still existing

in our country.” In contrast to those archeological monuments—the walls within the buildings—there stood the buildings themselves, described as 19th century architectural products “now shabby [*insalubre*] and scheduled to be torn down as soon as possible, starting in 1963.” This comment on the aesthetic inadequacy of the 19th century buildings had its own past, as it resuscitated earlier (turn of the century and interwar) debates about the import of foreign aesthetics into Romanian architecture (hence, the pre-1945 long obsession with the formulation of a National Style).²⁶² I will return to this issue in the next section of the chapter.

The letter goes then to the core of the matter:

- The team of urban planners at “PROJECT BUCHAREST” had no knowledge about the existence of those highly important monuments and came up with the plan of erecting new apartment buildings on the site.
- Following the interventions made by the team coordinating the archeological digs in Bucharest [...] and the memos sent to the Science Section of the CC of PMR, the Local Council had been advised to pursue the conservation of those monuments within a reservation inside a green area.

A protocol was signed three months ago between the Museum and “PROJECT BUCHAREST” regarding the conservation of the archeological and historical monuments in the area of Flower Market. However, up to this point, the local council of the city has made no decision with regards to the conservation project of the monuments in the Flower Market, despite the imminent demolition works planned for 1963 in the area, more specifically on [the part of the neighborhood facing] Union Square.

We learn thus that the letter came as an immediate reaction to the plans of remodeling Union Square, which I discussed in the previous part of the chapter.

Moreover, it represented only part of a larger enterprise by which the Museum of the city

²⁶² I owe the phrasing in brackets to Juliana Maxim. For a detailed analysis of the emergence of the National Style in Romania, see Carmen Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain. Construire une Nation a travers l'Architecture (1881-1945) [The Romanian National Style. Constructing a nation through architecture]* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004).

intended to claim the Old Court as a particular area and thereby “cut” it out from the city landscape to be reshaped by the Master Plan. Interestingly, the letter writers used two forms of walls—the unearthed ones, that had formed the basis of the Old Court, and those already existing on the ground as the Manuk Inn—to construct a continuous and somewhat complete material representation of the city’s past. These walls were being contrasted with the other walls, those forming the “shabby” 19th century buildings, scheduled to be demolished. At that time—1962—the site comprising the Old Court and the streets radiating towards Lipscani was an area of small shops, restaurants, warehouses, but also the home for 4,800 people, who very likely lived in the “shabby” buildings.²⁶³ In order for the area to be transformed into a historical site, it had first to be divested of the life therein. From an inhabited site, it had to become one put on display.

If the Museum had managed to have both the Old Court and the Manuk Inn accepted as historical sites, they could then become administrators over a museum (the Inn, see below) and an open site (the unearthed Old Court).

The letter moved then to describing the importance of the Manuk Inn:

2). On this wing there is Manuk Inn, a monument of great importance for the country’s history.

Research carried out by the City Museum, by the Academy and the department of the history of architecture (prof. Grigorie Ionescu), has proved that many elements of the initial architecture of the inn have been preserved, including the famous *portic* (with the wood arcades and columns *colonete*)[...]. There is therefore the possibility that the Manuk Inn be preserved and properly put to use for cultural-educational purposes. The Institute of History of the Academy of RPR shares our point of view and supports the suggestions we put forward in this note. Also, many other specialists agree upon the conservation proposal of the Manuk

²⁶³ “Studiu de circulație și parcaje în zona Curtea Veche. Memoriu introductiv [Project for traffic and parking (regulation) in the area of the Old Court. Introduction],” In File *Rezervația cuprinsă între 1848, str. Șelari, Smîrdan, Gabroveni. Resturile fostei curți domnești cuprinse între străzile Blănari, Smîrdan, Halelor și Bd. 1848*. Arhivele Institutului Național al Monumentelor Istorice (henceforth, AINMI), File 2159/1962-1970, 14.

Inn.

3). However, the architects of “PROJECT BUCHAREST” advanced the idea of cutting off the inn with an apartment building, [reasoning that this intervention] would help the systematization plan for Union Market advance faster. They had not, however, inquired into the current state of conservation of the initial architecture of the building, nor considered the possibility of preserving the inn and putting it to use. According to this plan—which had not been discussed by other specialists but exclusively within the teams of architects of Bucharest’s Local Council together with the State Committee for Architecture and Systematization—the quarter/neighborhood of the Flowers Market containing the monuments is divided into two separate projects. [This plan] leaves no room for an open view of the conservation of the monuments mentioned above (1) and (2).

Paragraph three above alludes to the privileged rights seized by the architects working for the Local Council and Project Bucharest, rights that the Museum wanted to challenge. It did so through a shrewd move, which proposed a different mapping of the area, reminiscent of older urban arrangements of the city. That is, the area delimiting the Old Court was integrated with the perimeter defined by the Manuk Inn and by the other older buildings marking the northern side of Union Square. According to the letter writers, the area that had to be preserved was then mapped over the older commercial center of Bucharest, including both Union Square and the Lipscani zone.²⁶⁴

As we will see below, the Museum accused Project Bucharest of ignorance on the topic of local urban history. By doing so, the Museum aimed perhaps to create a dichotomous map of the city, divided between areas of historical importance and others that were deemed empty of history. Should this map have been accepted by the higher political forums, then Project Bucharest’s exclusivity of rights and thus of an architectural gaze over the city would have been challenged by the Museum and its own disciplinary perspective. However, there was one more (important) obstacle: the

²⁶⁴ While I am not presuming the writers to be Museum staff, I intend to place the letter’s arguments in conversation with Museum objectives at the time.

Department for Monuments, the institution that was part of the architectural “guild,” being subordinated to the State Commission for Architecture and also having employed mainly architects, art historians, and some archeologists. If the directorship of the Museum wanted stronger control over part of the city, they had first to eliminate the Department and then redefine what material forms were deemed to encapsulate “the past.” In other words, the Museum had to propose a slightly novel view of what a “monument” could be, under a form that would better fit their disciplinary focus on urban archaeology.

The letter continues then with an accusatory tone:

4). The explanation for this situation is that:

— All the problems related to this specific neighborhood and the existing monuments had been approached only through the interest of building new buildings, with no serious, methodical concern to preserve the monuments, as is done in other socialist countries or other cities of RPR [...see for instance the city of Iași].

— Department for Monuments does not properly care about the monuments of significance for the political and economic history of our fatherland, such sites being preserved due to the intercession of museums or other institutions. [...] The Department for Monuments specialists focus mostly on monuments of *religious* significance [my Italics].

In contrast to other socialist countries, Department for Monuments (with a small working group) hasn't sought the co-involvement of museums in the project of preserving the historical monuments. This represents a great mistake, since the museum network has been developing lately (from around 60 in 1950 to a total of 214 in 1962). As the museums law has not been passed until now, there is no governmental bill that would outline the museums' tasks, and line of development. This leads to a lack of coherent development at the national level. It also impedes the collaboration between museums and monuments [Department for Monuments].

— Returning to the monuments in the Flower Market area, we add that Department for Monuments did not pay attention to the archeological monuments (the ones linked to the old court of Bucharest). As for the Manuk Inn, they wanted to “restore” it under a totally new appearance in order to set their offices there (a project is already submitted to “PROJECT BUCHAREST”). The construction work was to be paid out of the fund reserved for monuments preservation.[...]

Recommendations/Propositions

[...]

3. Given that the demolition works, planned within the systematization of Union market, are scheduled for the beginning of 1963, only now and not later could the solution advanced by “PROJECT BUCHAREST” and [SCAS] on the segmentation of the Inn with a new building be challenged and a decision on the conservation and restoration of this unique historical complex be taken.[...]

— It would have been commonsensical that such problems be solved by the local authorities of Bucharest that could implement the preservation of the described monuments and the establishment of the museum. Such a resolution is not possible however, because, on one hand, comrade H.M., the chief architect of Bucharest had not carefully reviewed the projects designed by his subordinates and advanced them to the Executive Committee of the People’s Council. Therefore, even though he is aware of the situation of the archeological monuments mentioned above, as well as the conservation state of the Manuk inn, he would not change his opinion for obvious reasons. [!] On the other hand, comrade B., the CSCAS president, is not directly responsible for the historical monuments. Every time he was informed of the critical state of those monuments, he did not appreciate their real importance and forwarded the memos to the Department for Monuments, an institution whose profile and attitude we have already discussed above.

In a sense, we could say that our letter writers displayed a high degree of courage—or, depending on one’s point of view, of dangerous naiveté. This is because, even if the letter was not signed, it still represented an official document issued by the Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy. That an institution dared to produce such strong accusations directed to highly placed individuals within the political apparatus of the time (the chief architect of Bucharest, and the president of the State Committee for Architecture and Systematization, who held the rank of minister) could have meant various things. Perhaps, as part of the recently politically cleansed Romanian Academy, the Institute of Archaeology found itself in a strong enough position to claim an exclusive expertise on history-making and preserving. This becomes obvious when the Department for Monuments is accused of focusing only on “monuments of religious

significance,” which, given the antireligious context of the time, implies that the Department for Monuments was a parasite institution concerned only with cultural nonentities.

The writers do not stop here, however. They accuse the Department for Monuments of something that, at that time, especially, was equivalent to a serious crime—that is, they assert that the Department for Monuments has diverted government funds into the renovation (and not restoration) of the Manuk Inn in order to establish their offices there. To misuse the people’s common property in any way was highly punishable in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁶⁵ This is a far more serious accusation than the one directed to Project Bucharest, an institution depicted as being a bunch of inexperienced fellows who would pursue the systematization plan at any cost.²⁶⁶ When pointing out the institutional bodies excluded from the decision-making process in the systematization plan, the letter writers questioned the privileged position that “Project Bucharest” occupied, and asked that a concern for monuments be taken into account by the main actors involved in the remodeling of the city (the City Council and the State Committee for Architecture and Systematization).

Only later in the text, when we read that “the best resolution for this important historical monument [would be] its transformation into a museum,” do we begin to understand that the Institute wanted to take the Manuk Inn out of the authority of the Department for Monuments by including it within the newly burgeoning network of museums, controlled by a different body (the Ministry of Culture). Also, by directly

²⁶⁵ According to the communist law, this was a crime.

²⁶⁶ In fact, this was a depiction shared by other specialists of the time, who viewed the “Project Bucharest” team as exclusively interested in developing modernist projects. Interview with architect Alexandru Beldiman, Bucharest, April 2008.

stating that the Department for Monuments “has not sought the involvement of the museums in the preservation of the historical monuments,” the letter aimed to fully undermine the Department for Monuments as an institution by questioning its ultimate function and adequacy to fulfill the political requirements of the time. Those allegations become more obvious in the conclusion. There, the situation of the monuments in the Flower Market is taken up as being representative of the inadequate approach to monument preservation in general, which so far has not met “the challenges of building socialism in RPR.” (Again, a serious political accusation, since any institution that would hinder the development of socialism could have easily been dismantled.)

The writers propose instead the establishment of a separate commission that would work under the direct supervision of the socialist state’s supreme body: the Council of Ministers.²⁶⁷ This could be read as an attempt to reestablish an equilibrium not only among the institutions involved in monuments preservation, but also among the disciplinary fields. By demanding a new commission formed of experts in the fields of history, art history, and museography, the letter’s writers aimed at challenging the privileged position occupied by Project Bucharest and the Committee for Architecture in relation to the political apparatus (see, for instance, the third point in the letter, where the critical situation of the Flower Market area appears as a direct consequence of the decision solely taken by the Local Council and the Systematization Committee, without any involvement of other specialists.) The writers asked that the approach to monument

²⁶⁷ In socialist Romania, as in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the Grand National Assembly played only a symbolic role, as there was a great difference between the rights offered by the Constitution and the real power of decision making of this institution, which was far from being “grand.” In the Party was concentrated most of the power, and of course, in the Council of Ministers, which also functioned as the real body politic, in comparison to the empty one of the Grand National Assembly. Daniel N. Nelson, “Organs of the State in Romania,” *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 25 (1976), 651-64.

preservation be radically redefined by being taken out from the institutional umbrella of the Committee for Architecture and hence of architecture as a disciplinary field.

The implications of this case permeate the entire letter: the writers request a special commission that would supervise a “unique museum in the country,” an open archeological site/historical reservation that differs from other archeological sites of national importance. As the letter reads, “although previous attempts at preserving archeological sites (such as the Dacian sites in the Orăștie mountains, the Histria site) had been successful, [given those sites’ remoteness] no museums had been organized around the sites that would educate the working people about those sites’ historical evolution.”²⁶⁸ The Old Court situated in the middle of the city would have offered this opportunity, while the Museum would have reaped the benefits of the site’s exposure. In other words, through remaking the Old Court into a reservation, the Museum would have achieved much more visibility among the city’s institutions and thereby potentially acquired more privileges and resources from the center.

Obviously, the letter stirred up a hornet’s nest within the State Committee for Architecture. A month after the letter had reached the State Committee, the vice president of the Committee drafted a strong response, accusing the initial document’s writers of using “false information, insufficiently investigated data,” in order to “discredit” the Department for Monuments.²⁶⁹ The draft document is heavily marked in red by a second reader (presumably, the president of the Committee, architect Bădescu), with comments

²⁶⁸ “Notă privind situația monumentelor de la Piața de Flori din București [Memo regarding the situation of the monuments of the Flower Market in Bucharest].” This is the initial document, officially sent by the Academy. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, 7 (6).

²⁶⁹ “Notă privind situația monumentelor de la Piața de Flori din București (urmare notei Academiei R.P.R.). Memo regarding the situation of the monuments of the Flower Market in Bucharest (response to the note sent by the Academy of RPR)]. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, 13.

suggesting that the letter be “shorter, not polemical, [rather focused] on clearer proposals to solve the problems” [signaled by the initial letter].²⁷⁰

The response turns the accusations around, by pointing out that the archeological sites had never been entrusted to the Department for Monuments. Instead, the Institute of Archaeology and (in the case of the Capital) the Museum of the city have been responsible for “archeological monuments that emerged through excavations or are still buried in the ground.” In turn, the second letter accuses those institutions—and especially the Museum—of passivity, by suggesting that “the Museum does not grasp the necessity of being actively involved and efficient in the scientific research underlying the work of restoration-conservation.” Moreover, the letter states that the State Committee for Architecture had already been aware of the “interesting artifacts preserved at the Old Court” and therefore had asked that a spot be reserved within the Master Plan of the city’s center.²⁷¹ This would have “secured the unearthing and proper display of all the ruins at this site.”²⁷²

The second letter adopts, though, a moderate tone regarding the historical value of the walls unearthed at the site, asking for “further research that could ascertain the scientific and aesthetic value of those ruins and the extent to which this research must stop the imperatives of the area’s systematization.” The State Commission had already

²⁷⁰ Those comments were addressed to “Comrade [Vasile] Bumbăcea,” apparently the one who produced the first draft of the letter responding to the accusations of the first memorandum. At that time (January 1963), Bumbăcea was the vice-chairman of the State Committee for Architecture, Planning, and Construction (*Arhitectura*, 1963 [1], 60). He advanced rapidly within the system, as ten years after, in 1973, he became deputy chairman of the State Committee on Local Economy and Administration (*Gospodăria de Partid*). Open Society Archives, 52-1-70, Report “Personnel Changes at the Subministerial Level in Rumania,” October 23, 1973. He also briefly occupied the position of Deputy Minister of Industrial Building (March 1975–November 1977). Agerpress, Guvernul Manea Mănescu II, <http://documentare.rompres.ro/guverne.php>, accessed on July 27, 2009.

²⁷¹ “Notă privind situația monumentelor de la Piața de Flori din București (urmare notei Academiei R.P.R.). [Memo regarding the situation of the monuments of the Flower Market in Bucharest (response to the note sent by the Academy of RPR)]. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, 14.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 15.

“recommended that the decommission work in the area of the Old Court (the Flower Market) be carried out gradually, under the supervision of specialists (archeologists, art and architectural historians).”²⁷³ Those specialists could then “identify on the spot the valuable elements which could be either displayed in museums or be consolidated and preserved in its original site.” While acknowledging the high value of the Manuk Inn as a historical building, the State Committee points out that any attempts to preserve it must first take into account the systematization plan of this area. It concludes that a proper preservation of the historical monuments within the city could not be pursued without the help and financial support of the People’s Council, help that had not been offered in the past.

The response aimed therefore at restoring a political hierarchy and series of alliances potentially threatened by the first letter. The claims advanced by the latter document, I argue, should be understood through the institutional and epistemological framework that had been endorsed by the state already in early 1950s. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, the domains of architecture and archaeology had been assigned different temporal frameworks and historical spans, in their quality of representing the socialist future (architecture) and the past (archaeology). We should approach the letter exchange also as an attempt on the part of some institutional actors to challenge this binary political vision and redefine how political (and symbolical) capital was mapped out on disciplinary fields. At the same time, the letters themselves were a political *assembly*, as they appeared as a palimpsest of signatures and ink-written comments on the margins, signaling a network of alliances and conflicts paralleling the official system. As political palimpsests, they indicate the serendipity of actions that paralleled what

²⁷³ Ibid., 16.

appeared as—and was intended to be—a perfectly controlled bureaucratic machine of socialist modernity.

The exchange, mediated by the Culture Office of the Council of Ministers as the direct recipient of both letters, did not concern only a strict access to resources. It also aimed at securing and assigning political legitimacy to certain networks and forms of expertise. Far from exclusively mapping areas of expertise delimited by disciplinary boundaries, those struggles occurred both within and across such boundaries. In fact, they point to the porosity of those networks, vying for political recognition while being continuously permeated by the shifts occurring at the political center. More interestingly, as those networks came gradually to be inhabited by the professionals already established in the interwar period, with the Politburo's endorsement, some of the pre-1945 debates percolated in a disguised form into the current quests for an architectural vocabulary that would match both the tight requirements of a centralized economy and the rising political interest in “the nation.”

The following section looks at the debates this time occurring within the architectural field with regards to the renovation of the older houses in the Old Court area. Not surprisingly, most of the arguments advanced in the letters discussed above (1962-1964) are reiterated in the written exchanges between architect Joja, the chief coordinator of the renovation project, whose views were endorsed by other architects as well as by the People's Council of the city of Bucharest, and the Department for Monuments, represented by architects Richard Bordenache and Cezar Miclescu. I use this case in order to illustrate how some architects, with the support of the local politicians, attempted to “modernize” not only the present, but also the past, seemingly enclosed in

the architectural form, by purifying it of any trace deemed to be aesthetically extraneous in a socialist Romania. This enterprise, however, despite a feigned ignorance, reflected earlier quests for the formulation of a National Style. Ironically, as much as the socialist state rejected any kind of associations to a “bourgeois” past and wanted to do away with interwar views on “heritage,” which had been approached as a basis to build an urban architecture for a modern Greater Romania, these debates kept returning in disguised forms.

More importantly, I argue that the institutional conflicts on the walls of the Old Court became so tense because what was at stake did not concern only a project of heritage-making, but also one of peoplehood-unmaking. As I have mentioned earlier, the commercial center neighboring the Old Court had been inhabited throughout the 19th century and during the interwar period by a cluster of people from various social categories, ranging from wealthier shop-owners and small traders to poor bohemian artists, as well as others participating in the socially blurry underground worlds of the black market and prostitution. As much as the new socialist regime wanted to erase this social world of the Lipscani quarter, which represented everything that a socialist citizen should not be (bohemian artist, capitalist entrepreneur, or smart slacker), they never succeeded. But they tried several times. The first instance of their attempts to socially purge the area was represented by the architects’ proposal advanced in 1959 to erase the old houses of Lipscani, including the Old Court site, and erect instead new apartment buildings. However, as this exchange of letter demonstrates, the architects’ initial plan was opposed by another scheme, understood also as transformation, but placed within a different temporal framework. Instead of fully erasing the Old Court’s history through

modernist architecture, the archeologists working at the site used the newly discovered walls of the princely palace to support a historical resignification of the area. By portraying it as the late medieval core of the city, the Old Court would have appeared as a historical site of national importance. In a way, the latter project represented a form of social purging of the groups living around the area in Bucharest of the 1960s by prioritizing the site's historical value over other ways of valuing and inhabiting the space. In other words, the site would have been cleansed of historically non-representative people. As I will show in the next section, Joja's project of transforming the Lipscani area into an architectural reserve by redecorating the facades could be approached also a form of encroaching on the current inhabitants of the area.

Old styles, new politics: Redecorating facades in the Old Court area

Dej's unexpected willingness to follow Miron Constantinescu's advice to bring back the "older elements" of architectural expertise, which I discussed earlier in the chapter, announced the further changes that were about to come in the social and political landscape of post-1954 Romania. It was in the mid 1950s that an increasing number of intellectuals joined the Party, so that they could enter the central institutions and the institutes in the making. "Many of them were 'liberals' whom it would later prove difficult to dislodge."²⁷⁴ Among such "liberals," there was also a number of architects, already well established in the interwar years, who were now suddenly allocated a (sometimes peripheral) role in the central bodies supervising the design of Bucharest's Master Plan.

As a number of recent studies have already pointed out, the aesthetic debates

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 111.

that had occurred in interwar Romania ended up steadily permeating the architectural culture of the early period of socialism (especially the 1954-1967 period).²⁷⁵ As such, the socialist project to articulate a radically novel urban form turned out to be impossible. Under the appearance of novelty, the attempts to create a coherent architectural form of socialism—be it one directly drawing on Socialist Realism or a solution that would meet both criteria of “economic efficiency” and “local (and later, national) specificity” in post-1954 Romania—drew on earlier (even though diverging) quests for representations of “the modern” in interwar Romania.²⁷⁶ It was then that both “National Style,” an architectural movement that focused on a decanted inclusion of local heritage in urban architecture, as well as a moderate modernism, had emerged as answers to autochthonous calls for modernization.²⁷⁷

However, as Popescu has pointed out, such influences were adamantly denied during both stages of “reinventing tradition” in a socialist style — during the short flourishing of Socialist Realism and in the post-1965 emergence of “Lyrical Nationalist” architecture.²⁷⁸ Likewise, as much as it had been repudiated as a “bourgeois” expression during the Stalinization period, modernism came to be resuscitated as the only viable response to the call for efficiency already launched by Dej in November 1953 in the Council of Ministers, and later in the public arena after Khrushchev’s speech. Maxim insightfully argues that “the ‘modern’ under socialism oscillated constantly between the two extremes of the New and the Old, at once promising perpetual renewal and in the act

²⁷⁵ For instance, see Ana Maria Zahariade, “New Buildings and Forms,” Juliana Maxim, *The New, The Old, The Modern*, and Maria Raluca Popa, *Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest*. Carmen Popescu discusses those changes in detail in her “Looking West.”

²⁷⁶ Popescu, “A Denied Continuity: The Shift of ‘Heritage’ as Ideology in Romanian Socialist Architecture,” 11-31.

²⁷⁷ Carmen Popescu, “Looking West,” 114.

²⁷⁸ Carmen Popescu, “A Denied Continuity: the Shift of ‘Heritage’ as Ideology in Romanian Socialist Architecture,” 11-31.

of fulfilling that promise, becoming a mere repetition of a previous self.”²⁷⁹ Obviously, such influence could not have occurred if the Party had not relatively diminished ideological constraints after 1955. As Popescu writes,

when the change of direction was initiated, the effects of censorship became more discreet, being presented as a doctrinal debate, a ‘critical’ reading of Western influence. This represented the second level of a purge by means of indicating the ‘right’ sources and models. The assimilation of Western examples was not condemned anymore: on the contrary, it was considered necessary for the development of the new socialist architecture.

In fact, the moderate modernism of the interwar period, brought back by the “older” architects after 1953, coincided paradoxically with the Party’s support of a “critical adoption” of much more radical forms of modernism emerging in the post-war Western world.²⁸⁰ Through the strategic move of bringing the older architects back into the picture, the Party leadership in fact—perhaps unknowingly—maintained a stronger control over the new aesthetic forms emerging in architecture, as the members of the latter group could temper the younger architects’ desires to pursue more radical solutions offered by the experiments occurring at that time in Western Europe and the USA.²⁸¹ At the same time, since some of those specialists had been at the core of the architectural debates occurring in pre-1945 Romania, they came to challenge and transform to a certain extent the architectural field of early socialism.

As a reaction to the strong impact of Socialism Realism that had frozen any alternate forms of expression, some of the interwar debates resurfaced in the late 1950s and became more acute during the 1960s, during the relative “thaw.” Popescu points out that “several examples of the Romanian architecture designed after 1955 restored the

²⁷⁹ Juliana Maxim, “The New, The Old, The Modern,” 23.

²⁸⁰ Carmen Popescu, ‘Looking West,’ 109.

²⁸¹ Carmen Popescu, ‘Looking West,’ 115-16.

dialogue with the production of ‘National Style’ in the 1930s.”²⁸² Some of those debates were being brought back sometimes by the very actors who had initiated them during the interwar years. Among the architects who joined the state institutions after 1953 were not only those who had been actively engaged in the development of interwar modernism (such as Richard Bordenache, Horia Teodoru, Paul Emil Miclescu). There were also others, much more interested in the “national question,” who had already shown a propensity for identifying a coherent “Romanian style” in their earlier projects (such as Constantin Joja [1908-1991]), and who managed afterwards to find a niche for themselves in a socialist architecture increasingly captured by a hegemonic nationalist discourse.²⁸³ Those distinct perspectives resurfaced later in the debates occurring during the 1960s, when, under the impression of a delusive political relaxation, some of those architects engaged in arguments over what “historical preservation” was and how they should (could) engage in such preservation while constructing the modern socialist city.

One illustration of this process is represented by the heated arguments between Joja and his supporters, on one hand, and the group of architects associated with interwar modernism (such as Bordenache and Miclescu), on the other, with regards to the restoration of the older houses in the Old Court/Lipscani area. This dispute came as a result of the 1962 digs, conducted by the City Museum, when the archeological team discovered some of the original walls of the Old Court’s Princely Palace that had been incorporated in the Manuk Inn. Such “spectacular” findings triggered a chain reaction, as

²⁸² As Popescu writes, “rather, the new regionalism was seen as an emanation of modernist architecture in its attempt to adapt itself to the site.” “A Denied Continuity: the Shift of ‘Heritage’ as Ideology in Romanian Socialist Architecture,” 22.

²⁸³ For two detailed and insightful analyses of the interwar politics of the “Romanian style,” see Augustin Ioan, “Arhitectura interbelică și cheștiunea identității colective [Inter-war architecture and collective identity],” *Echinox Notebooks*, 3 (2002), 80-91, and Carmen Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain. Construire une Nation à travers l’Architecture*.

the anticipated redesign of Union Square, which was to entail possibly the demolition of some of the older buildings in the area, had to be brought to a halt. These “new” old walls of the court became very important not only for the archeologists working in the city, but also as symbolic resources for other actors, as well. The People’s Council of the city immediately designated the area of the Old Court as a “historical reservation,” which was to be renovated within “an urban arrangement in a period style and atmosphere.”²⁸⁴ A special committee, including specialists from the Institute of Art History, the Department for Monuments, the Institute of Architectural Design “Project Bucharest,” the Museum of History of the city of Bucharest, and the Institute of Architecture, was nominated by the City Council to produce a study of urban design of the area.²⁸⁵ Within a few months, this committee, led by architect Constantin Joja, produced a proposal for the planning of the “Old Court” area, which was submitted to the Technical Office of the City Council. The study bears powerfully the mark of Joja’s rhetoric about the uniqueness of “a Romanian urban architecture” and his endeavor to bring this architectural form back to life via the renovation of the Old Court quarter.²⁸⁶

Joja offers a detailed overview of his overall vision for the renovation project:

One certainly could reckon from documents as well as from the buildings existing in Bucharest and other cities in the country, that the Romanian architecture to be found in the civil constructions of the 18th century was characterized by closed or

²⁸⁴ More specifically, the site designated the area “circumscribing the old administrative and commercial center of Bucharest within the perimeter delimited by 1848 [boulevard], Șelari, Smîrdan, Gabroveni streets.” Resolution 2410/24 august 1967, Sfatul Popular al Capitalei. In File 2159, (Rezervația cuprinsă între 1848, str. Șelari, Smîrdan, Gabroveni) Resturile fostei curți domnești cuprinse între străzile Blănari, Smîrdan, Halelor și Bd. 1848. Vol I, 1962-1970, the Archives of the National Institute for Historical Monuments, Bucharest (AINM). (Henceforth, File 2159/1962-170, vol. I, AINM)

²⁸⁵ Studiul detaliului de sistematizare al zonei “Curtea Veche,” [Proposal for the urban planning of the “Old Court” area], AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

²⁸⁶ Joja, who was designated the project manager, signed the study, together with architect N. Nedelescu. “Studiu detaliu de sistematizare, Memoriu general,” not dated, 5 pages, elaborated by the Colectivul de proiectare format din colaboratori pe langa I.A.L Raion Tudor Vladimirescu. The document precedes *Aviz* 2, January 15, 1968 of the Technical Office of the SPOB, approved by the president of the executive committee, Ion Cosma. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

open verandahs.[...]

Generally, the urban Romanian architecture developed in the 18th century along two lines: architecture drawing upon village architecture, on the house with a closed verandah, and courtly architecture. Since we want the Romanian architecture to be displayed in its full value in the area [of the Old Court], the renovation project will center on the adoption of the urban civil constructions of the 18th century.²⁸⁷

The project was immediately and without any reservation approved by the Technical Committee of the People's Council of the city of Bucharest. In fact, this final version of the project proposal, endorsed by the City Council, offered a more detailed description of Joja's intentions. The first stage of the project was to entail the "restoration of the facades of 92 currently degraded buildings...according to the most authentic [architectural style] of the epoch."²⁸⁸ Moreover, some new constructions in the area were to be treated in a similar manner, by being aligned to the height of the existing buildings, and "having their facades treated in the style of the Romanian architecture of the 18th century ([with] opened and closed verandahs)."²⁸⁹ The most interesting element appears at the very end of the document: the author(s) suggest that a preliminary study of other "older" buildings in the city, which presumably display a "Romanian specificity," could be used to identify those elements of "Romanian urban style" to be then "transplanted" into the Old Court area. Those elements could be brought in to enhance the "authenticity" of the renovated facades in the Old Court quarter.²⁹⁰

The aesthetic vision underlying Joja's proposal was not at all new, as it directly dwelt on earlier (interwar) debates that opposed "a genuine Romanian aesthetic

²⁸⁷ Memoriu general, page 2, AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, page 3.

²⁸⁹ Aviz 2, January 15, 1968 of the Technical Office of the SPOB, signed by the president of the executive committee, Ion Cosma, approving Studiu detaliu de sistematizare al zonei Curtea Veche, 5 pages. (The quotation is found on the second page of the document). AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., page 5.

form” to various “foreign influences.” As mentioned earlier, the diverging positions of architects involved in these debates took the form of distinct expressions in interwar architecture: the National Style movement and (a moderate form of) modernism.²⁹¹ There was, however, an irony behind Joja’s claims the Old Court area should be “renovated” according to a neo-Romanian stylistic framework. The architectural style developing at the end of the 18th century, which Joja deemed to be “Romanian civil architecture,” was in fact a product of a historical period (the Phanariot time) that is considered to be *not* representative for the national historical narrative.²⁹²

Joja’s proposal raised eyebrows among some architects, and even caused consternation among others. Architects Richard Bordenache, at that time (1965-71) the director of the Department for Monuments, operating then under the SCAS, and Paul Emil Miculescu, who also worked then for the Department, adamantly opposed Joja’s plan.²⁹³ A long series of letter exchanges started between the Department for Monuments and the People’s Council regarding the renovation of the Old Court area. Following the

²⁹¹ Carmen Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain*.

²⁹² The interwar and then socialist historiography depicts the “Phanariot” period (1711/1716-1821) as a time of economic and cultural decline, set under a strong Ottoman influence. During the “Phanariot epoch,” the Ottoman Empire attempted to strengthen its control over the Romanian principalities by anointing foreigners (especially, well-to-do Greeks from the Fanar quarter of Constantinople) as temporary princes. Despite the later portrayals of those princes as “the evil Phanariots,” who limited the authority of the local boyars and channeled most of the resources across the border, this period also is characterized by a significant development of civil architecture. As Mihai Chioveanu argues, those negative depictions—that he calls, “the myth of ‘the Phanariot evil’”—should be understood within “the antithetical models of Good Romanian and the Evil Phanariot which shape the Romanian historiography after the 18th century.” For a more complex discussion of “the emergence and development of this specific discourse on the Phanariots” see Mihai Chioveanu, “Echoes of the ‘Phanariot Century’”. *Shaping National Identity and Historical Culture in Modern Romania*, *The Romanian Journal for Society and Politics* 2, no. 4 (2004).

The aesthetic choices made by the next generation of the now autochthonized Phanariot families, who came to form the kernel of the budding Romanian aristocracy in the second half of the 19th century, were strongly influenced by the 19th century French school of architecture, favoring a neoclassical, and then the romantic and eclectic styles. Such preferences came to be rebuked by the new generation of Romanian architects, led by Ion Mincu, who dismissed the 19th century architecture for having displayed petty cosmopolitanism and ignorance.

²⁹³ See internal memo sent by Bordenache to Miculescu, with hand-written comments on a typed document, sent by Joja to Bordenache. March 19, 1968. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, 13.

decision of the People’s Council to assign the status of “historical reservation” to the area circumscribed by the Old Court and Lipscani (with Joja as the project manager),²⁹⁴ Bordenache called upon the help of Gustav Gusti, at that moment the vice president of SCAS.



Figure 7 Proposal for the remodeling of Lipscani street. Constantin Joja, *Arhitectura*, 113, no.4 (1968): 18.

Based on an assessment written by Bordenache and Miculescu, in late March 1968 Gusti issued a resolution approving the decision only on the condition that the transformation of the area would observe a set of prerequisites.²⁹⁵ Among those conditions, one directly pertained to the issue of reviving a “National Style” via a transformation of the area buildings:

[It is recommended that the renovation team] will constantly take into account the following criteria of urban planning:

[...] b) the preservation of the urban character of the area at the scale of the old city, [to be achieved] via a harmonious spatial connection/junction to the constructions within the perimeter and without any addition of elements that could not be rigorously controlled from the point of view of the aesthetical-architectural

²⁹⁴ Resolution 2410, August 24, 1967 of the People’s Council of the city of Bucharest (Sfatul popular al orasului București. Comitetul executiv.) AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

²⁹⁵ Letter issued by the State Council for Constructions and Architecture (Consiliul de Stat pentru Construcții, Arhitectură și Sistematizare, CSCAS), addressed to the People’s Council of the City, document 5430/26.03.1968, signed by Gustav Gusti, vicepresident of CSCAS. 5 pages. AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970.

authenticity of the “reconstituted” motifs. It is only on this condition that we agree to the intentions [of the project description] as they were formulated on the second page of the letter [sent by] CPMB-CTS on March 6, [1968], that states: ‘the project will also entail the renovation of those buildings that will require complex façade reconstruction according to a national architectural [style] of the epoch.’²⁹⁶

Only a month later, in April 1968, the diverging views underlying those tense exchanges reached a much larger audience, when a public debate on the reconstruction of the “old historical center of the capital” was organized at the Architects’ House of Bucharest. Joja presented the project by stressing his innovative perspective on the area’s restoration. He mentioned first that

[i]n the past, when they discussed the Romanian architecture, specialists and non-specialists alike had in mind especially the religious architecture and boyar houses. Later on, the village architecture raised interest; however, [it was discussed] in a manner that downplayed its aesthetic dimensions. The urban architecture was never mentioned, [because] it had never been noticed. [...] This urban architecture, which was widespread in the 19th century, ended up being regarded as a [form of] ‘Balkan architecture’ and [therefore] it was never researched, its motifs had never been exploited by any great architect of the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁹⁷

He continued by pointing out the “originality” and “authenticity” of the closed verandahs, “which do not appear anywhere in the Balkans.”²⁹⁸ What was more important about this architectural vocabulary was, in fact, its modernity: “the continuous rhythm of the windows, a genuine curtain of glass that mediates between the interior and the exterior, [represents] exactly the form of modern architecture.”²⁹⁹ Moreover, he stressed, “the Romanian architecture—even the village architecture—is not picturesque, as had been argued, but it is in fact a monumental architecture, whose unity of volume, rhythm, and motifs [...] bring it close to the classical vocabulary.” At the same time, paradoxically, he

²⁹⁶ Ibid., page 4 of the letter.

²⁹⁷ Constantin Joja, “Punerea în valoare a unei vechi arhitecturi urbane românești” in *Discuții: Sistematizarea zonei “Curtea Veche,” București, Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), 17.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 18.

claimed that “the urban Romanian architecture had neither occidental nor oriental influences, [which makes it] exceptionally authentic.”

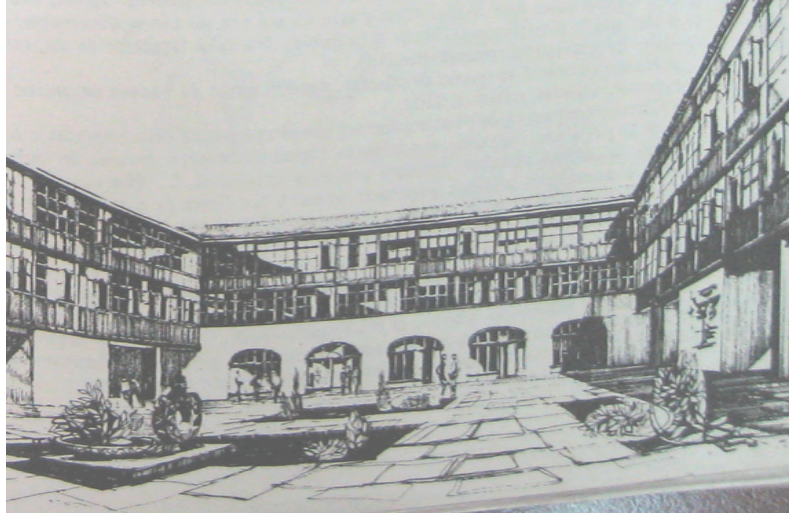


Figure 8 Proposal for the remodeling of an interior courtyard. Constantin Joja. *Arhitectura*, (1968): 23.

It was this claim—that the element of the closed verandah would simultaneously symbolize “tradition,” “authenticity,” and “originality,” on one hand, and “modernity,” and even “monumentality,” on the other—that must have struck some sensitive cords among the technocrats of the moment. Not only did the City Council seem to be persuaded by Joja’s vision of the reconstruction of the Old Court area, but also the architects at the core of the political system—such as Gheorghe Curinschi—appeared to resonate with his claims. By evoking what he called an “innovative approach for restoration,” Curinschi supported Joja’s decision of making the closed verandah into the main element of the renovation project. He argued that the employment of a single element of the 19th century architecture, such as the closed verandah, could offer “a

more modern interpretation of the traditional design.”³⁰⁰ More importantly, he pointed out that “such a perspective would meet both the principles of ...the innovative approach to restoration, as well as the current pursuit of a contemporary Romanian architecture with a distinctive expression.”³⁰¹

Curinschi admitted that such a pursuit was not new, as “the quest for a unique expression characterized the development of the architectural field throughout the modern epoch of Romania’s history.”³⁰² He mentioned that the first attempt took the form of “the so-called ‘neo-Romanian’ movement,” which, despite “some progressive dimensions,” had been historically limited. As such, “it would be highly unlikely that a reiteration of this movement would be possible.”³⁰³ Instead, he suggested, a quest for a contemporary architectural expression should “regard tradition as a source of inspiration rather than a repertoire of elements.”³⁰⁴

Curinschi’s arguments must also be understood as a critical reassessment of radical post-war modernism, arising along with a resuscitated interest in the nationalist discourse. The paradoxical phenomenon of a socialist nationalism emerged in the post-1965 period, to reach its peak in the 1980s.³⁰⁵ In architecture, it took the form of a politically-encouraged quest for a revival of “tradition” and “specificity” that led to the proliferation of “Lyrical Nationalism.”³⁰⁶ Even if this shift generated debates that mirrored the arguments about “modernity and specificity in the 1930s,” their resemblance

³⁰⁰ Gheorghe Curinschi, “Restaurare și inovație,” in *Discuții: Sistematizarea zonei ‘Curtea Veche,’* București, *Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), 9.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*.

³⁰⁶ Carmen Popescu, “A Denied Continuity: the Shift of ‘Heritage’ as Ideology in Romanian Socialist Architecture,” 11-31.

was adamantly denied.³⁰⁷ In fact, as Carmen Popescu argues, “if ‘National Style’ was denied, if not ignored, it happened also due to the influence of the historiography in Western contemporary architecture.” As Curinschi’s speech demonstrated, the architects, especially those occupying central positions in the political system, aimed to display their “progressive” attitude, by calling upon techniques used in the Western world, while “‘National Style’ was explicitly condemned for being demagogical and obsolete.”³⁰⁸

However, in spite of the official take on ‘National Style,’ some voices expressed their appreciation of the movement by calling upon the valuable work of its leaders. These architects retorted to Joja’s statement that, through the transformation of the Old Court into a historical reservation, “an authentic Romanian urban architecture, an architecture proving the Romanian sensibility, would materialize for the first time.”³⁰⁹ Aurel Doicescu rejected the introduction of the closed verandah as the main element of the renovation, considering it rather “an improvisation” without an “architectural value” of the originally opened, well-proportioned verandahs of the old Romanian houses (an allusion to the National Style vocabulary).³¹⁰ As for Joja’s claim that a closed verandah could be treated as a precursor of the modern glass facades, Doicescu found it too “pretentious.” Instead of a “renovation based on imagination,” he suggested that “the buildings in the Old Court quarter be preserved with the forms that they had initially displayed, as much as they are still present: modest, but original.”³¹¹

Doicescu’s argument was further developed by Ion Dumitrescu. The latter

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Constantin Joja, “Punerea în valoare a unei vechi arhitecturi urbane romanesti,” *Discuții: Sistemizarea zonei “Curtea Veche,”* București, *Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), 17.

³¹⁰ Aurel Doicescu, “Arhitectura cu geamlîc: o improvizație minoră,” in *Discuții: Sistemizarea zonei “Curtea Veche,”* București, *Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), 22.

³¹¹ Ibid.

challenged Joja's perspective that the architectural expressions produced at the beginning of the [20th] century would represent "distortions of the authentic urban architecture, as works of exclusively inspired by elements of religious architecture."³¹² In fact, he pointed out, the separation of religious and civil architecture is flawed from the start, given the complex interferences of motifs from these two domains, and their further development in the works emerging at the beginning of the 20th century. To illustrate how those architectural elements represent "a successful adoption of autochthonous architecture," Dumitrescu called upon works of Cristofi Cerchez, inspired by "the baroque forms of the 18th and 19th century," and the "compelling creations" of Grigore Cerchez and Nicolae Ghica-Budești (all of them major names of 'National Style'). In line with Doicescu's arguments, Dumitrescu described the closed verandah as "a decadent derivation" of the originally open verandahs (*pridvor*), initially emerging as intermediary spaces between the exterior and the house interior. Therefore, he argued that "an abuse of facades [redecorated with closed verandahs] would falsify the true character of the architecture of the time."³¹³ Instead, he considered that a focus on "the preservation of the picturesque atmosphere of the ensemble as a whole," with "the employment of the 19th century elements that are still present in the area would offer an adequate solution to the project."³¹⁴

The point of view advanced by Doicescu and Dumitrescu—that of preserving the mix of various historical styles of the buildings in the area—came under a harsh criticism in the exposition offered by architect Nicolae Pruncu, another member of the

³¹² Ion Dumitrescu, "Un alt punct de vedere asupra arhitecturii urbane bucureștene din sec. XIX" in *Discuții: Sistematizarea zonei "Curtea Veche," București, Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), 24.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

committee of the renovation project.³¹⁵ Pruncu gave a detailed overview of the results of the latest archeological digs in the Old Court area, showing that the best solution would be the preservation of the vestiges of the Princely Palace in their initial location.³¹⁶ More specifically, the ruins should be extricated out of the newer constructions, and be displayed within a larger circular area (of 2.5 ha), which would comprise walking paths for tourists. More importantly, the ground level of the area must be lowered to the one existing in the 18th century, a procedure that would greatly affect the urban development of the entire quarter.

While pointing out the complexity of the preservation project, Pruncu insisted that such an operation is a must, given the “exceptional archeological, historical and architectural importance” of the recent discoveries. He rejected the alternative opinions advanced by other specialists (see, for instance, Doicescu and Dumitrescu) of preserving some of the more recent buildings in the site. As Pruncu curtly put it,

Some specialists understand “restoration” by rejecting any clearance of the vestiges of the parasitic constructions. [This translates] in our case, into the refusal to accept the demolition of the constructions [built in] the 19th and 20th centuries, which

³¹⁵ It is also interesting to note the sequence in which those responses had been published, following a complex path of negotiation and criticism in a socialist style. First, Curinschi offers a laudatory endorsement of Joja’s project. Then Joja himself presents the project, stressing its importance along the line of the time—authenticity, originality. His arguments are afterwards questioned by the other two architects (Doicescu and Dumitrescu), whose opinion is, however, dismissed at the end by Pruncu. It is Pruncu who brings the debate full circle by pointing out the importance of the project, and especially the preservation of the Old Court, for the “nation’s history.”

³¹⁶ Nicolae Pruncu, “Aspecte urbanistice ale restaurării Palatului Domnesc,” in *Discuții: Sistematizarea zonei “Curtea Veche,”* București, *Arhitectura*, 4/1968, XVI (113), (113), 25-27. Pruncu offers a detailed picture of the results of the recent archeological digs, as follows: [O]n Soarelui street, no. 10 and 12, there were found the ruins of two travee of the basement of the Princely Palace, while foundations and fragments of pillars of a different part of the basement were found under the foundation of the buildings at number 7-9. [...] On the basis of those vestiges, it is possible to pursue a scientifically rigorous restoration of the basement of the Princely Palace. [...] In addition to the vaults found during the archeological digs, coordinated by professor [Dinu] Rosetti in 1953, there was also found a wall of the main hall of the palace (the throne hall), which is 11 m height in relation to the ground level (*nivel de calcare*) of/in the 18th century, very close to the probable height of the initial cornice of the Palace. [...] [the earlier investigations led to further discovery of the vaults of the eastern corner of the throne hall, of [another] wall of the palace in 30 December street, nr. 29, and the vestiges in 5 Soarelui st. “Aspecte urbanistice ale restaurării Palatului Domnesc,” 26.

mutilated the palace and which throughout all this time have masked valuable evidence. [Those new buildings fooled] many well respected historians, who, within less than one century since the abandonment of the Palace, had located the Princely Palace in the area [known as] *Piața cu Flori* (the Flower Market). How could we seriously advocate the viewpoint that the walls of the pubs whose construction entailed the mutilation of an ancient monument, be displayed together with vestiges of tremendous historical value? Accepting the risks of eventual criticism, our collective stood up to this question by requesting and acquiring the official approval [of the People’s Council] for the demolition of the parasitic constructions that have hidden the genuinely valuable vestiges.³¹⁷

Only when we read Pruncu’s arguments can we begin to understand why Joja’s proposal appeared highly palatable to both the central political apparatus (i.e., the People’s council) and the architects well placed therein. The transformation of the houses in the Old Court quarter into symbols of an equally problematic representation of the vernacular architecture of the 18th century fit perfectly the needs of the post-1965 socialist Romanian state, a state that needed to come up with an imagery of history that would fit the ideological requirements of the present. Joja envisioned the transformation of the Lipscani quarter into an “architectural reservation” that would function as an extension of the Old Court “historical museum.”³¹⁸ Like Pruncu, Joja deemed most of the houses in the quarter area, which had been built between the end of the 18th and the end of the 19th centuries, “shabby and heteroclyte.” Instead, he wanted those houses to be “redone” in order to fit the temporal framework of the newly renovated Old Court, “brought back” to its time—the 18th century. That is, Joja suggested that they be moved one century “back” by being given closed verandahs, an element that would make them representative of “the 18th century urban Romanian architecture.”

Apparently, Joja’s concern with the renovation of the Old Court/Lipscani

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ File 2159/1962-170, vol. I, AINM.

quarter had its own history, dating back to the interwar period.³¹⁹ In 1935, Arșavir Acterian published an article focusing on the new event of ‘the Month of Bucharest,’ in which he mused on this new form of city celebration that aimed to transform Bucharest into a vast theater.³²⁰ The project that Acterian selected as representative for this event was the (temporary) reconstruction of some of the long-vanished buildings in the Old Court quarter.³²¹ Those buildings, considered signs of the “old” Bucharest, were the Colțea water tower (demolished at the beginning of 19th century); the old Sf. Gheorghe church (Biserica Sf. Gheorghe veche); the Antim house, “reconstituted on the basis of documentation from the Brâncoveanu epoch [and] offering a very successful Romanian interpretation of Baroque”; and the house with four bow windows. The author of this project was “young architect Constantin Jojea.”³²² More intriguing are Acterian’s own thoughts on why this project would stand at the core of making Bucharest into a transitory urban spectacle. Acterian writes:

the Month of Bucharest was born mainly out of the need for the sensational. [...] It is an invitation to jamboree.[...] The city officials ask us to celebrate this [new] Capital of 1935—their work of art. To enhance our wonder and admiration, they

³¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of Joja’s earlier involvement in the autochthonist discourse, represented by his participation in the 1940 competition for a Palace of Culture under the programme “Legionnaire Works of Arts,” and his winning project of the competition for the design of Odessa Cathedral in 1942, see Ioan, *Power, Play and National Identity: Politics of Modernization in Central and East-European Architecture. The Romanian File*, 38-40.

³²⁰ Popa offers a succinct description of the meaning and form of this event: King Carol II initiated a new type of popular celebration in the city, called *Luna Bucureștilor* (the Month of Bucharest). For a month, usually in May, the city celebrated its status as a capital of arts and culture. Carol liked to be considered a protector of arts and initiated many cultural projects, some connected to the city. In 1935, the [*Cișmigiu*] park inaugurated by his grandfather, King Carol I in 1906, served as the backdrop for the *Luna Bucureștilor* exhibition and celebrations. In 1936, the exhibition was moved to the north of the city, in a new park landscaped especially for this purpose. Maria Raluca Popa, “Restructuring and Envisioning Bucharest,” Chapter III, 37.

³²¹ Acterian notes that “the Old Quarter [the Old Court quarter, delimited by Lipscani street at north] seems to have been raised overnight by the intelligence and enthusiasm of architects G. Ionescu, N. Popișteanu, and Constantin Jojea.” Arșavir Acterian, “Gânduri în luna Bucureștilor și despre urbanistica românească” [Thoughts about ‘the Month of Bucharest’ and the Romanian urbanism]. In *Ideea Românească*, 1 (2-4), June-August 1935, 133.

³²² Acterian, 133.

reconstituted a part of the past of this city under the form of dioramas representing major monuments, street corners and scenes of the past, and they lay them in front of our eyes side by side: old and present images of Bucharest.³²³

Read retrospectively, we cannot help noticing the irony: even though the Old Court area had already been used by the interwar elites as a site of contrast with a modernized Bucharest, this did not impede the post-1945 leaders from employing a similar strategy. However, in order to make a clean break with this part of the city's history, the latter resorted to the simplest strategy: they plainly ignored the previous roles assigned to the Old Court during the interwar times as part of a "bourgeois" history and denied it altogether. (This strategy represented only the first stage of the metamorphosis of the Old Court into a heritage site for the socialist state. As I argue in the next chapter, the archeological findings in the area offered a pivotal means to produce a "new" Old Court.)

Despite such a background, the 1967 debates present a Joja who did not see—or, at least, did not admit to—any resemblance between his understanding of "Romanian architectural style" and the earlier quests for a 'National Style.' As paradoxical as this unawareness might have appeared to his critics, Joja was right, to an extent. The difference stems from the symbolical orientation of the two projects: whereas National Style represented a quintessential search for the "modern," by conferring a modern interpretation to vernacular architecture,³²⁴ the renovation of the Old Court, according to Joja's interpretation, would have represented a move back into the past. The site's main

³²³ Acterian, 132.

³²⁴ As Carmen Popescu demonstrated, 'National Style' was a fundamentally modern move, trying to emulate in architecture the calls of the time, by simultaneously searching for and attempting to find common expressive grounds for 'authenticity,' 'nation,' and 'modernity.' Carmen Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain. Construire une Nation à travers l'Architecture*.

role would have been that of a *historical reservation*, by standing as a symbol of authentic Romanian urban architecture made even more unique and different from the present and thereby contrasting with the modern socialist city center. The site would have represented not only a point of contrast with the socialist present, as a touristic attraction, but also an extension of a “past” that fit the ideological requirements of the present—a pristine past, rescued out of the debris of the “parasitic” 19th century, and brought back where it belonged—to the late Middle Ages, the historical period that would soon become the source of pride of the Romanian socialist nationalism.

In what ways does this particular debate complicate our understanding of the development of the architectural field in Romania of the 1960s? First of all, it points to the tensions underlying this field, especially at the moment of transition from a modernist expression, with its focus on efficiency, to a more acute call for a national expression and ‘lyrical’ specificity. An awareness of (and perhaps, nostalgia for) earlier engagements with such themes seemed to prevail among some architects, especially those who had been directly involved in those disputes in the 1930s (such as Aurel Doicescu). As much as those specialists were “allowed” to express their appreciation of architectural work produced before the war, their views turned out to be ignored or even ridiculed by the specialists occupying key positions in the system (such as Curinschi or Pruncu). The tone of those debates—and particularly, Pruncu’s suggestion that such discussions on the renovation project of the Old Court should be “reserved only to a few who will be directly involved in the research”³²⁵ reveal the limits of the political openness elusively occurring at that time in Romania. Another telling detail is that the previous debates between Bordernache and Joja—that is, the Department for Monuments and the People’s

³²⁵ Nicolae Pruncu, “Aspecte urbanistice ale restaurării Palatului Domnesc,” 27.

Council—had not even been mentioned in the discussions at the Architects’ House that were eventually published in *Arhitectura* journal, nor by anyone invited to speak on behalf of the Department for Monuments.

The (highly diverging) visions of the adequate renovation of the Old Court site and its neighboring quarter illustrate the intricate searches for a novel representation of the nation in architecture, an expression that would have to be ‘original’ and ‘authentic,’ and all the same time ‘different’ enough to offer an interesting contrasting point to the monumental socialist architecture of the present. Those debates indicate the concerns that the political leaders showed about reinventing not only the social and architectural landscape of the present, but also that of the past. To what extent did they succeed? Between 1967 and 1971, the renovation project and the debates surrounding it continued along with the archeological work at the Old Court site. The restoration of the Princely Palace led to significant changes in the area: the buildings on Soarelui street were eventually demolished and the walking level on the site lowered in order to leave room for the newly unearthed walls of the Palace, which was opened to the public as the “Old Court” Museum on January 27, 1972. Under Joja’s guidance, the restoration of the Manuk Inn began in 1969, and it was reopened as a hotel and restaurant in 1971. As for Joja’s dream of embellishing all the houses on Lipscani and its neighboring streets with sets of closed verandahs, it never materialized.³²⁶

The reconstruction of the old palace and its transformation into a museum did not, however, change the social substance of the Lipscani area, as the alternative projects had envisioned. The plan to fully include the Lipscani area and its people into the economy of

³²⁶ The documents in the file on the Old Court project stop somewhere in the middle of 1971. Only in 1988 are the file and the project reopened, with Nicolae Pruncu designated as the project manager. At that time, the discussions were of a different nature, as they pertained to the radical redesign of the city.

a socialist Bucharest only partially succeeded. In fact, throughout the socialist times, the politically marginalized social worlds of Lipscani thrived. Even if the site of the Old Court, initially a marginal location of the area, was suddenly transformed into Bucharest's historical cradle, some groups living in the neighboring houses never came even close to the state's representation of "socialist peoplehood."

One explanation is a localized one: beginning with the mid-1970s, the project of building a Civic Center for Bucharest captured most of the funding and energy of the officials, technocrats and experts alike. Another explanation stems from the very workings of the socialist centralized economy, under whose shadow the black market flourished. Lipscani was the main area in Bucharest during the 1970s and 1980s where one could find many things that had long ceased to exist in the empty windows of the socialist stores. As much as the state officials initially tried to change the site and its people by opening the Old Court Museum and systematically bringing in delegations of workers and pioneers from all over the country to see the historical walls of Bucharest, networks of illegal commerce continued to prosper on the nearby streets. By the 1980s, the state officials gave up, allowing the provincial visitors who came to the Old Court Museum for their share of national history to acquire, under the knowing eyes of the police, also their share of black-market goods from next door. Nevertheless, the story of Lipscani is an exception. That is, the project of socialist homogenization was distinctly more successful in Bucharest than in other regions of the country.

The systematic immigration of people from all over Romania into Bucharest between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s led not only to a doubling of the capital's population, but also to a significant shift in the social composition of the city. Starting in

the 1950s, the socialist state drafted specific strategies aiming to change the city's composition. It did so by a carefully monitored social mixing, which was achieved by altering the residential and professional profile of the middle-class, while propping up less educated people as new cadres in the system.³²⁷ The very fact that Bucharest became a "closed city" at the end of the 1970s, which stipulated that no one could be employed in the city unless she or he was born there or married to a Bucharest-born person, indicates that the plan of socialist homogenization had succeeded.³²⁸

Conclusion

This chapter showed that Dej's interest in securing his political position in relation to the USSR led to precocious changes in architecture and urban planning in socialist Romania, some of them anticipating the political changes occurring in the USSR starting in 1954. Dej appears to have agreed to the return of the "older elements" only because he perceived them to represent a compact group of well trained specialists, able to offer the best technical solutions and execute what they were told to do. Along with the

³²⁷ Whereas in 1948 the registered population of Bucharest was around 1,025, 000, in 1977, the number of registered people living in Bucharest reached 1,807, 000. Populatia Romaniei. As Liviu Chelcea has shown, nationalization, which entailed the confiscation by the state of entire houses or residential spaces, allowed the formation of a new class of politically privileged residents while desegregating former social hierarchies. One of the strategies employed by the socialist state was to assign common residences to people of different social and professional backgrounds. Liviu Chelcea, "State, Kinship and Urban Transformations during and after Housing Nationalization (Bucharest, Romania 1945-2004)," PhD Dissertation, The Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 2004. For a detailed description of this multilayered process of class remaking, see chapter 2.

³²⁸ The 1977 massive earthquake might have played a role in this decision, but it did not represent the main rationale. The end of the 1970s marked the beginning of the national plan of systematization, which I discussed in the second section of the Introduction. It represented the second, more complex stage of social homogenization, whereby the divides between the urban and rural areas were not to be abolished only by radical changes in the built environment, but also by a controlled mixing of different groups. These strategies targeted two complementary groups: 1) young college graduates who, unless they proved to have "connections," were being assigned jobs in remote locations, often in the countryside, and 2) villagers who could not make ends meet by working in the collective farms and chose to join the "socialist labor force" by moving to industrialized towns). The black humor of this scenario was even admitted by the authorities, when they allowed the national distribution of a comedy on this subject around the time when the new urban regulations were set in force. See the movie *Buletin de București* [Identity card for Bucharest], 1983.

new cadres, those architects were to execute the Party's orders and pursue the rapid development of a socialist Bucharest by "building in concrete and according to highly standardized plans." They also had to learn to read the ambivalent directives offered by the leaders.³²⁹

I suggest that this ambivalence, or "double discourse," stemmed from the encounter between two diverging temporal frameworks, indexing distinct perspectives on the meanings and scales of "history." More specifically, the socialist ideology aimed at redefining not only the meaning of the present, as a time of progress and modernization, but also the form and meaning of the past. Since it could not acknowledge the "bourgeois" time as having represented anything else besides "exploitation," the forms of modernization that had emerged before 1945 were rejected from the start. From the perspective of the socialist leaders and their technocrats, such attempts could not form a solid basis upon which to construct a modern socialist present. This is what Dej meant when he accepted that the "old architects with talent and substantial experience" could be brought back only on the condition that "they follow the Party line, and not their old convictions."³³⁰

The stir caused by Joja's unusual take on the renovation project of the Old Court area shows that the earlier debates of the interwar period informed, though in a disguised form, the tight negotiations around the project. Joja's pre-1945 interest in questions of authenticity and the employment of the vernacular design came to underlie

³²⁹ This ambivalence obviously informed the ways in which the architects related to the changes in their field. Răuță and Heyden note that "between 1954 and 1958 Romanian architecture indeed went through a period of confusion and transition." Radu Alex Răuță and Hildergarde Heyden, "Shifting Meanings of Modernism," 30. Popescu describes this phenomenon as the prevalence of a "double discourse." Carmen Popescu, "Looking West," 114.

³³⁰ *Transcripts, November 1953*, ANR, Fond Cabinetul Consiliului de Miniștri, File 9/1953, 219.

his particular take on the “Romanian civil architecture,” which he wanted to revive in the perimeter of the Old Court area. He presented his interpretation of the “historical renovation” of the area as a unique project, one that was fully detached from earlier interpretations of vernacular architecture (such as the ‘National Style’ movement).

As such, Joja’s project offered a visual representation of “history” in the form of a revived “historical Bucharest” situated in the 18th century, represented by the recently discovered walls of the Princely Palace in the Old Court site. The houses were to be turned into extensions of the palace through their redecoration with a series of closed verandahs, deemed the quintessence of 18th century Romanian civil architecture. The result would have been a “reservation” of the “Romanian civil architectural style”—that is, a coherent narrative on the entire city’s history that would have satisfied all of the criteria of the official discursive field: authenticity, originality, and an exclusively autochthonous modernity, represented by a pristine architectural expression that had “neither occidental, nor oriental influences.”

As I argue in detail in the next chapter, the City Museum was highly interested in Joja’s project, as it only furthered the Museum’s claims to transforming the Old Princely Palace into a historical reservation and, through Joja’s project, extending it to the entire area, up to Lipscani street. The reservation would have then allowed the Museum to lay stronger claims of institutional ownership over a key area of the city. Had Joja’s project been pursued, the houses would have been paired temporally with the Princely Palace, by “traveling” back in time, from the 19th century when most of them had been built, to an imaginary 18th century, architecturally represented by a series of closed verandahs. The entire Old Court/Lipscani area would then have stood as a physical

mark of a late medieval Bucharest, cleansed of any “foreign influences” and ready to appear as an authentic and ideologically safe “old Bucharest.” Even though they mirrored earlier debates of the interwar period, these arguments were presented as “original” because Joja and his team did not want to signal any form of continuity with the “bourgeois” past, which could have endangered their institutional position. I suggest that Joja and his supporters highly favored a presentation of their project as an original venture. This perspective would offer them symbolic authorship and thereby secure them a place within the institutional landscape at a time when the architectural vocabulary had to accommodate a renewed focus on the nation.

As much as those bold statements seemed to please the local officials, including some of the architects well positioned in the central hierarchies, they came to be rejected by some of the “old architects,” now resuscitated and allowed to work for the socialist state. The latter took apart Joja’s project piece by piece as they rejected his choices of architectural design (such as the closed verandahs), his approach to the idea of a “historical renovation,” and the very concept of “Romanian civil architecture” that he incessantly evoked. They also questioned his claims about the project’s uniqueness, by alluding to the foundational work of the National Style representatives. While subtly placing their criticism within the discursive constraints of the given political context, the participants in those debates reiterated some of the themes—such as the relationship between authenticity (tradition) and modernity— that lay at the core of the interwar debates.³³¹

One could say that, for the participants in the debate on the renovation of the

³³¹ This discussion provides a supplementary case to Popescu’s argument. Carmen Popescu, “A Denied Continuity.”

Old Court, the past, which the Party asked them to forget, kept looming in the background, thus making the regimes of expertise that the Party leadership tried to produce gradually more porous than they had initially envisioned. Those leakages in the networks of expertise complicate the picture of an institutional system exclusively working in a centripetal manner, with the “center” unequivocally controlling every possible project. In fact, as the disputes among architects in the case of the Old Court’s renovation demonstrate, diverging temporal frameworks underlying distinct architectural visions could bring significant tension into the process of decision-making at the core of the institutional system. The analysis is further complicated when we attempt to understand the diverging temporal frameworks emerging in the gap between distinct professional visions. The next chapter will examine the tensions occurring between architects and urban archeologists with regards to the Old Court, with an eye to understanding how those groups strove to institutionally “gain” this site by investing specific temporal frameworks as well as material forms with political value.

Chapter 4
GROUNDING SOCIALISM: ARCHITECTURE, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND
CONFLICTING MATERIALITIES IN BUCHAREST’S OLD COURT AREA
(1953-1967)

Introduction

The previous chapter showed how architects and urban planners sought to define an urban heritage for Romania’s capital city. In this chapter I will show how a different set of professionals, archeologists, jumped on the “heritage” bandwagon with a different destination for the capital, based on a historical narrative of Bucharest’s medieval origins. This chapter presents an analysis of the conflict between two professional groups simultaneously rising in the scientific hierarchies of the time—the architects working for the state-sponsored mega-institution of urban planning “Project Bucharest” and the archeologists employed by the City Museum. I examine how the latter attempted to create a privileged professional niche for themselves by advancing claims concerning the superiority of archeological artifacts over the documents produced by a pre-socialist (“bourgeois) historiography.

I argue that, by portraying the excavations as unique tools for the discovery of the past, archaeology as a method of scientific inquiry became also a political strategy that directly helped the socialist state to carve out a new historical map of the city. This map was perfectly laminated onto the teleological view of history advanced by the doctrine of dialectical materialism, which presented the socialist state as a pinnacle of progress. As

such, the re-codification of the past proposed by archaeology enabled the state to retroactively carve its own history into the urban development of the city, a history perfectly fitting the state's current agenda.³³²

I argue that by promoting an imagery of history in the form of artifacts found during the excavations in the center of Bucharest, rather than written documents or even the architectural forms occupying a predominant area of the city since the 19th century, archeologists helped the state perform a multilayered operation. With the help of the new experts of the past, the political leaders could then: 1) “stretch” the past of the city into a pre-feudal time, and thus prove an ethnic continuity of both the settlement and its earlier inhabitants, 2) provide solid evidence for the feudal development of the city, which theoretically laid the basis for the establishment of a socialist order, as I will explain, and 3) dismiss the architectural forms developing in the city across more than a century—from the mid 18th century to the end of the 19th century—by claiming that this historical period was far too open to foreign influences, so that its architecture was not representative of “the national history.” This shift produced in the early 1960s had direct consequences for the radical restructuring of a large area of Bucharest in the mid 1980s (including one neighboring on the Old Court site), when entire quarters formed of “bourgeois” dwellings, built during the 19th century, could be easily erased precisely because they no longer counted as “heritage” to highly-placed professionals (mainly architects) and politicians alike.³³³

At first glance, the scales of the two projects—one by architects, the other by archeologists— could not be matched. While the comprehensive remodelling of the city

³³² I owe this formulation to Oana Mateescu.

³³³ Interview with architect Alexandru Beldiman, Bucharest, April 2008.

entailed a long-term project that relied on massive deployment of labor and expertise, the archeological digs opened in the center of the city were coordinated by a relatively small team of specialists, first supervised by the Institute of Archaeology and after 1958 by the City Museum of Bucharest. Symbolically, however, the two enterprises had similar revolutionary goals: whereas the first group was aiming to give form to a world *de novo*, the latter wanted to “unearth” a correspondingly pristine history, whose uncontested value appeared to be given by the very materiality of the artifacts in the ground. As such, both projects involved peculiarly similar dynamics: they were both concerned with different forms of “stretching,” be that of the city’s skyline or its own past. As many other scholars have already pointed out, the process of “stretching” the “people”—that is, the nation—out into an immemorial past was a crucial strategy via which the Romanian leaders aimed to fix socialism within a national narrative of absolute continuity.³³⁴

Underground searches, hoarded artifacts: Creating a socialist heritage

The fiery debates over the historical value of the Old Court site, especially of the ruins of the original walls that had formed the princely palace, must be understood within a larger context of reconfiguring the value of material forms. This operation of assigning new political meanings to materiality formed the backbone of the process via which the socialist state attempted to retrospectively create its own past that would fit a teleological vision of historical development. Searching for (or rather making anew) a

³³⁴ For an account of this process in socialist Romania, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, Michael Shafir, *Romania - Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), Gail Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). For an analysis of the employment of the paradigm of historical continuity in the post-1989 scholarly production, see Gheorghe Alexandru Niculescu, "Archaeology, Nationalism and the 'History of the Romanians' (2001)," *Dacia* 48-49 (2004-2005).

heritage that would represent this “new” past became then a domain of contention among different groups within and beyond disciplinary boundaries. The creation of new regimes of expertise was proceeding in parallel with the formation of new regimes of value for material forms.³³⁵

I employ Appadurai’s image of “regimes of value” because it captures the relational dimension of the process whereby in Romania of the 1950s specific forms of materiality (such as artifacts found during archeological excavations) could suddenly become more relevant than others (such as 19th century buildings) as potential carriers of the “historical truth.” For Appadurai, a regime of value “is consistent with both very high and very low sharing of standards by the parties to a particular commodity exchange.”³³⁶ By talking about “regimes of value” instead of value in itself, Appadurai attempts to solve the problematic approach of looking at value as an abstract category, outside the specific configuration of the political domain. I would have found his argument more compelling had he approached the whole process of “tournaments of value” not as a unilateral diversion, but as relationally formed at the intersection between subjective interpretations of materiality, grounded *hic et nunc*, and a broader politics of exchange. More specifically, he does not account for tensions or even ruptures occurring within those regimes of value—such as, subjective appropriations and interpretations of

335 Appadurai, together with others (Bourdieu 1977, Miller 1987, Miller 1999), shows the other side of the coin, that is, the ways materiality can form and transform social worlds as much as the social world forms and transforms materiality. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). His piece triggered a whole literature stressing the importance of material culture. Notwithstanding this important point—of materiality as directly acting upon the social—Appadurai still operates within a very clear distinction between what “material” and “social” represent. Therefore, one could see his argument as still confined within a semiotic/material division. Appadurai does not really define what ‘things’ are and therefore his lack of clarity limits his challenging points to a certain extent. Also, he still sees separate regimes of value, which eventually come into contact by exchange, and not ‘value’ as directly formed through or assigned to things. His analysis then does not broaden our understanding of how value is being produced.

³³⁶ Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 15.

materiality that could be informed by former regimes of values, existing in the shadow of current politics of exchange. Moreover, what happens when exchange is not part of the equation, that is, when the circuits for moving things around, a process whereby the regimes of value are constituted in the first place, are being radically reformatted or even politically frozen?

I find Elizabeth Ferry's approach to productively complicate Appadurai's viewpoint. Ferry takes the practices of extraction and circulation of silver in Mexico as a site where the division between inalienability and exchangeability is challenged by the local actors who look at silver—as both commodity and patrimony—as part of a sole category of value. By doing so, Ferry sets up an analytical framework that considers the “coexistence of competing forms of value as a historical process rather than a fixed scheme of incompatible categories.”³³⁷ Ferry draws on Weiner's discussion of inalienable possessions as material representations of “the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners.”³³⁸ She criticizes Weiner's approach, however, for making “the distinction between categories [such as ‘inalienability’ and ‘alienability’] overly rigid.”³³⁹ As she puts it,

[even though] Weiner and others...examine the socially constructed nature of these categories, [they do not consider] the process by which people sort things

³³⁷ Elizabeth Emma Ferry, "Inalienable Commodities: The Production and Circulation of Silver and Patrimony in a Mexican Mining Cooperative," *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (2002), 333.

³³⁸ Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley Los Angeles Oxford: University of California Press, 1992). Anette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). Weiner distinguishes between ‘inalienable’ and ‘alienable’ possessions in order to open up the theoretical framework that classifies all property into ‘movable’ and ‘immovable.’ In doing so, she shifts the focus from ‘portability’ to ‘identity’ by showing how a mobility confined within social boundaries (such as a kinship group) in fact directly reifies the inalienability of a particular form of goods. As Weiner puts it, “what makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time” (1992:33). Therefore, if one gives a particular orientation to the way a form of possession circulates, that property will be exchanged only to be eventually returned, therefore will be kept-while-given (1993:34).

³³⁹ Elizabeth Emma Ferry, "Inalienable Commodities," 335.

into one category or another and obscure the ways in which things may exhibit qualities of inalienability and exchangeability simultaneously.³⁴⁰

Drawing upon Ferry's discussion of "inalienability" and "alienability" as historically situated categories, and especially of the possibility that one "thing" could be placed in both frameworks depending how one sees it, I suggest that, in order to understand the letter exchange, we should view the Old Court as one such thing. More specifically, to architects in charge of the remodeling of Union Square, the Old Court appeared to be "alienable," simple ruins belonging to the same category with the "shabby" houses in the area. To archeologists, however, the same ruins appeared as "artifacts," recently unearthed sources of historical truth and therefore obviously "inalienable."

To an extent, the formation of novel regimes of value involved a paradoxical process of freezing mobile things into collections—be they for display in museums, as "the people's property," or even indeterminately "borrowed" by the Party apparatchiks for their official villas³⁴¹—whereas the more fixed material forms, already imbued with a higher historical value by the old regime—such as old houses, castles, etc.—would be turned into more volatile (alienable) things. That is, different materialities were being assigned different places within these new hierarchies—for instance, the more mobile artifacts unearthed from the ground appeared to be more valuable than the old, ruined built structures of the city, especially when those built structures had been erected in "in-

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Archeologist Eugenia Zaharia writes about the uncertain period 1948-1951, when many art collections and museums had been dismantled and some important objects were "lost" without trace. She also talks about the reorganization of the Royal Palace into the Art Museum, when many objects were "given away" at the request of the new authorities. Eugenia Zaharia, "Colecții și muzee distruse [Destroyed collections and museums]," *Ziarul Financiar (Ziarul de duminică)*, January 16, 2006, <http://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/colectii-si-muzee-distruse-3015923/>. I thank Bogdan Enache for providing me with a copy of the article.

between times,” that is, times considered to be not representative for the development of the nation.³⁴²

So great was this political demand to create hierarchies of historical time—for example, the time of the formation of the first Romanian states became highly important—that sometimes particular material forms (such as the artifacts) were forcefully “squeezed” into the more privileged time slots of history, deemed to be representative for the nation and the new state simultaneously. The Old Court stands as perhaps the extreme case for the willfully inadequate dating and classification of archeological data, which I will discuss at length in the last part of the chapter. First, however, I would like to lay out a more comprehensive argument on the meaning of material forms produced by archeological excavations for the making of the new state.

The archeological artifacts unearthed from the ground became more important than the built structures of past times (the latter were to be fully replaced by the new buildings of the socialist urban aesthetics), for this newly found material met two requirements. First, it was “new,” so it could be directly claimed by the state without an intermediate process of appropriating and redefining the meaning of a form that had been previously owned by a different institution/individual. It thereby allowed the new state to immediately claim its own heritage. Second, often, the artifacts unearthed were mobile, that is, could be transported into the museums, to be better centralized and organized to fit perfectly into the teleological scenario of historical development that the new ideologues espoused. This distinguished them from the immovable ruins.

³⁴² The chronology of those “in-between” times, periods deemed to be “nonrepresentative” for the history of the nation, had obviously been extremely malleable and, to a certain extent, self-contradictory. For instance, see my previous analysis of Joja’s project of renovation (Chapter 2) that aimed to bring back the architectural style of the Phanariot epoch (1711-1821) by presenting it as representative for the “Romanian old urban architecture.”

Obviously, the new institutional landscape and the relations developed between the two professional groups—architects and archeologists—cannot be portrayed only in black and white tones. The architects working for the Direction for Monuments had been involved in significant campaigns of built preservation and renovation all across the country, especially between 1955 and 1970. Rather, the competition between the Department for Monuments and the Institute of Archaeology played a decisive role, as both institutions were competing for the same pool of funds, targeting the historical research and preservation of the past. In other words, both institutions were highly interested in presenting their work—and the material forms they dealt with: built sites vs. artifacts—as being the most important. This competition came across very clearly from the first letter exchange of 1962-1964, which I analyzed in the previous chapter.

However, the process of creating this new heritage was directly competing with the legitimization of the political order through a new spatial form—that is, the transformation of Bucharest into a socialist city. The struggle over the meanings of the Old Court, ranging from representing a historical site of national importance for archeologists to being dismissed as ruins buried underground by Project Bucharest’s architects working on the remodeling of the area, points out the more complex mechanisms of the struggle for resources through diverging disciplinary visions of what the past is and where could it be found. To understand those mechanisms, we must first examine the two operations underway in the middle of the city as interconnected projects. The stretching upward of Bucharest’s skyline starting with the end of the 1950s onward was to be temporarily accompanied by an opposite process, that of digging down into the ground. Focused on offering the most accurate and complete answer to “how old was

Bucharest in fact?” the latter enterprise aimed to produce different forms of evidence—archeological artifacts—that would supplement the scarce written data about the city’s development in its earlier times.

The architects working for Project Bucharest, most of them formed under the auspices of modernist principles, were mostly looking for an urban function and form that would satisfy a changing society of the present, while being very little, or not all, preoccupied with “the past.” The past was not their business. It was, however, the main business of archeologists working for the City Museum of Bucharest who had been offered the unique chance of pursuing extensive research in the middle of the city. Suddenly, the area of the Old Court had to become extremely elastic, so that it could accommodate two kinds of pursuits pertaining to the urban form—one representing the future, another standing for the past. The compromise that the second letter mentioned—that the main façade of the Manuk Inn should be doubled by a modern apartment building, in order to allow a proper systematization of the Unirii Square—stood as a quixotic hybrid, which was rejected by both the modernist architects involved in the remodeling of Union Square and those who wanted to preserve the Inn. Here both parts agreed: the hybrid would not work. What would work then? How elastic did the ground need be in order to accommodate both the demands of the present (to be built) and of the past (to be preserved)? How elastic was the very past of this ground? That is, what forms of “past” were being selected and which ones were rejected or ignored? How would the local and the Party leaders confront this issue? The final section of the chapter will attempt to answer some of those questions.

The initial letter, which landed on architect Bădescu’s desk in early January

1963 provoking much ado among the staff of the State Commission, came as an unexpected factor of variation into a seemingly well planned experiment—the socialist remodeling of a major square of Bucharest. One of the first reports on the results of the excavations proudly announced that the archeological digs that simultaneously opened in three central sites (Radu Vodă, Mihai Vodă, and Curtea Veche) in 1953 marked the initial phase of a “scientific study of the history of the Capital, from the earliest times to these days.”³⁴³ However, the local political apparatus did not envision the digs to remain forever open in central locations in the city.³⁴⁴ Indeed, their first role was to search for possible historical traces that would help elucidate the city’s origins. But their other role, equally important, was to “clean out” the ground in order to close it down for good and thereby allow for Bucharest’s landscape to be molded into a final and total socialist urban product. Such a ground, cleansed of significant material traces of history, was to become the pristine basis for laying out a new urban form representative of the grandiose project of socialist modernization. This development occurred at the intersection of two distinct, but concurrent, processes: 1) a wider reorganization of the disciplinary networks of expertise in alignment with the Party’s rising interest in promoting a “scientific activity,”³⁴⁵ and 2) the archeologists’ rapid awareness of the unique chance brought by

³⁴³“Șantierul Arheologic București,” 287.

³⁴⁴ In the November 1953 meeting on the systematization of the city, Dej and his team did not make any reference to the archeological digs opened in the center.

³⁴⁵ Marxism claimed to create “scientific socialism,” so science held privileged status. The concern with scientific analysis underlies the 1953 report on the projects of the Academy, where the institutes of the Academy are criticized for not having pursued “work of exhaustive synthesis and scientific interpretation, that would have led to valuable historical studies.” As the writer put it, “a rejection of the scientific interpretation of the factual data had been illustrated by [a tendency] to factology, a simple series of facts and data.” P. Constantinescu-Iași, “Raport de activitate pe anul 1953 al secțiunii de științe istorice, filosofice, și economico-juridice a Academiei [Activity Report for the Year 1953],” in *Studii și referate privind istoria României. Din lucrările secțiunii lărgite a secțiunii de științe istorice, filozofice și economico-juridice (21-24 Decembrie 1953) [Studies and Reports on the History of Romania. Excerpts of the Extended Session of the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Juridical-Economic Sciences (December 21-24, 1953)]* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, 1954), 15-16.

the remodeling of the city, a remodeling that relied on the largest ever construction sites opened in the middle of Bucharest. In his report on the first years of activity of the City Museum, the director points out this encounter between the two groups: the archeologists, on one hand, and the architects and planners, on the other.

[T]he activity of salvaging the relics of the past ... appears as more necessary as a large part of Bucharest's territory undergoes continuous changes and redesign, which have been developing with unique amplitude. ... The large construction sites... often lead to the discovery of monuments of material culture. Such situations led the team of specialists of the Museum... to give great concern to the salvaging projects. There have been numerous cases when the Museum's specialists have been contacted by the managers of the construction sites... to come to pursue archeological research on the large socialist construction sites in the city.³⁴⁶

The director did not (could not) talk openly about the tensions between the two groups, even though we learn that the first archeological projects (initiated in 1953) had been pursued under difficult conditions, due to the construction sites in the Capital and the sewage works opened in the city.³⁴⁷ There was then an inherent tension between the two projects, since the archeologists' extended periods of research in one area could have greatly delayed or even precluded any projects of urban remodeling pursued by architects in the same site. Moreover, the first group's pursuits could have endangered the latter's projects altogether, especially if the archeological research led to results that dramatically changed the historical significance of an urban area. In such cases, the architects' plans of radically transforming those places were resisted by archeologists, who claimed new rights over a site suddenly deemed to be historically important. If such claims were bolstered by the state, then the architectural projects could have been indefinitely "frozen."

³⁴⁶ Florian Georgescu, "Introducere [Introduction]," 7.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

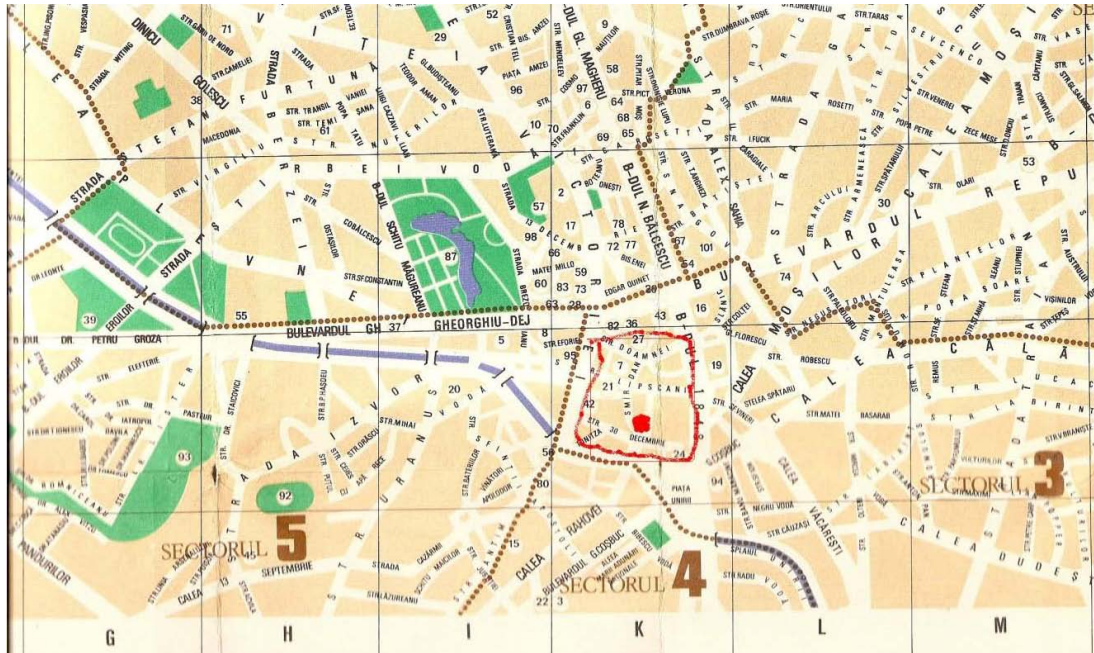


Figure 9 The map of Bucharest in 1979 in Dan Berindei and Sebastian Bonifaciu, *Ghid Turistic, Bucuresti*: Editura Sport-Turism, 1980. Courtesy Craig Turp, www.bucharestlife.net. The red-filled area indicates the site of the Princely Palace, which was opened as the Museum of the Old Court in January 1972. The larger area marked by a red rectangle shows the boundaries of the Lipsanci neighborhood.

The Old Court and the debates over the multiple and diverging meanings of the site offers us a rich venue to reflect on those processes as well as see them unfold in unexpected ways. This is because the Old Court represents a rather special case in the development of archaeology in post-1945 Romania. It is here that the political implications of the archeological inquiries in the city became the most obvious. The argument that will unfold in this section is that in the case of the Old Court, the archeological team of the Museum used (in fact, abused) the privileged position that archaeology had already acquired within the scholarly hierarchies of the new state. That is, in order to create a niche for themselves, the team of archeologists—or rather, the leaders of the Museum—did so by grossly crossing some crucial boundaries: those having to do with the validity of data and methods. Before I move to a deeper analysis of

this case and its consequences, I will first offer an overview of the specific context that made such a story possible in the first place.

In order to advance their claims, the archeologists of the Museum of Bucharest relied on the ampler strategy of the socialist state to use archeological methods and object of inquiry for its own political legitimatization. The uniqueness of archaeology's disciplinary approach to the past stood as the major argument in the first reports published by the teams of archeologists working in the city's center. Those reports presented a flourishing research activity. According to them, following the party directives to "stimulate scientific, literary, and artistic activity," the politically cleansed Academy of the Romanian People's Republic, with "generous funds from the Government and the Party," began pursuing archeological digs as early as 1949.³⁴⁸ Research reports published by the Academy, immediately following the first digs, had the role of popularizing and grounding the new knowledge-in-the-making. These reports aimed to "reflect the contribution of [the collective of the Museum to] the great effort of the Romanian archeologists to document, on the basis of dialectical materialism, the faraway past of our people."³⁴⁹ As the director of the Museum wrote in 1963,

The contribution of archeological research to knowledge about the past of the Capital proved to be considerable. Questions on the historical evolution of the populations living on the territory before the formation of the feudal town

³⁴⁸ "Șantierul arheologic București," 285-87. The archeological digs in the country had started in 1949, but the first excavation in the city of Bucharest began only in 1953. The rumor was that the close friendship between Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej and archeologist Constantin Daicoviciu, whose post-1945 political and professional career itself represents a fascinating case, had a great impact on making the Party leadership channel important funds into archeological research, especially the digs opened in Transylvania. However, Mircea Anghelinu shows that this friendship between Dej and Daicoviciu played only a (perhaps secondary) part in the Party's kindled interest in archaeology. Many interwar archeologists, some of them very much politically incorrect, such as the openly Germanophile Ion Nestor, had never been imprisoned, but rather had a smooth professional career right after 1947. (Personal communication, Professor Florin Curta, March 12, 2009)

³⁴⁹ Emil Condurachi, "Prefață [Preface]," in *Cercetări arheologice în București [Archeological Research in Bucharest]* (Bucharest: S.P. C. Muzeul de Istorie a Orașului București, 1962), 4.

Bucharest, or those on the emergence and development of this town—issues on which the written documentation is absent or insufficient—could often be solved only via archeological investigations.³⁵⁰

Such grandiose claims must be taken, however, with a grain of salt. Even though these reports were being published by the Romanian Academy in relative large editions, they mostly circulated among small circles of specialists.³⁵¹ The groups of archeologists who started working on the digs in Bucharest had been limited to several specialists, helped by some students. This initial group, then working directly for the Romanian Academy, had also started training a new generation of archeologists, who then went to work with the local and regional museums opened in the country.³⁵² The impact of this professional group could not have been compared with that of the planners and architects working for (or hoping to work for) Project Bucharest and other mega-institutions directly connected to the political center. Whereas the latter displayed their plans and visions for the new city in exhibitions widely advertised and open to the public,³⁵³ the archeological excavations were cumbersome for both the planners and

³⁵⁰ Georgescu, "Introducere [Introduction]," 6.

³⁵¹ For example, the print run for *Cercetări arheologice în București [Archeological Research in Bucharest]* (Bucharest: S.P. C. Muzeul de Istorie a Orașului București, 1962) was 1,700 copies.

³⁵² Condurachi, "Prefață [Preface]." Condurachi attempts to offer a rosy picture of the relation between the Institute of Archaeology and the Museum of the city of Bucharest, whose staff "had started their apprenticeship next to the specialists of the Institute of Archaeology. [The Institute] had sought to support the activity of various teams of the regional museums. However, the more those teams gain research experience, the more important a role they should be given in the collective research efforts." Those words hide a more complicated context, which I will discuss later in the chapter, as things got sour as soon as the Museum wanted to quickly obtain a higher visibility among the research institutions of Bucharest, thus endangering the position occupied by the Institute of Archaeology.

³⁵³ The projects in the 1959 competition for the systematization of Union Square had been displayed in an exhibition at the Architect's House, followed then by a "discussion of creation on the systematization solutions," attended by almost 200 specialists. "Discuție de creație asupra proiectelor prezentate la concursul de sistematizare a Pieței Unirii [Debates on the projects accepted to the competition for the systematization of Union Square]," *Arhitectura* 8, no. 1 (62) (1960): 20.

pedestrians (especially those living near the sites).³⁵⁴ In other words, in order to carry out their research and thus establish their own niche among the professional groups vying for recognition and resources from the state, archeologists of the Museum of Bucharest had first to cause a shift of perceptions concerning the ultimate scope of their research. That is, they had to present the excavations in the center as major projects of construction instead of potentially inefficient operations that turned the city upside down and thereby hindered architectural plans.

I suggest that the excavations at the Old Court came to be used as both forms and methods for two intertwined processes: 1) promoting a dialectical materialist view of the history of the city via the material forms excavated out of the ground, which were to replace historiographical accounts produced in the pre-1945 period; and 2) demonstrating the feudal origins of present day Bucharest, a condition that would guarantee not only an ideologically safe socialist development of the city, but also its place within the history of the Nation.

In what follows, I start by analyzing the rising importance of the particular forms of materiality in writing the history of (for) the socialist state. I return to examine the narrative about the medieval history of Bucharest in the last section, where I discuss how the Old Court was transformed from a borderline area in the symbolic geography of the city into a site of “national importance” for the country’s history.

³⁵⁴ As the report on the excavations at the Old Court points out, “one of the greatest difficulties that the research team had to face was the limited space that allowed for archeological research. [...] In most of the cases, we were forced to dig in the very courtyards of the currently inhabited houses.” L. Lăzărescu-Ionescu et al., “Săpăturile arheologice din sectorul Curtea Veche,” in *Studii și referate privind istoria României. Din lucrările secțiunii lărgite a secțiunii de științe istorice, filozofice și economico-juridice (21-24 decembrie 1953)* [*Studies and reports on the history of Romania. Excerpts of the extended session of the department of historical, philosophical and juridical-economic sciences (December 21-24, 1953)*] (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, 1954), 464.

A socialist order of things: Endorsing history as a continuum of rearranged objects

The new imagery of history promoted by the state was circumscribed by a perspective on those artifacts as “imprints,” carrying the exclusive feature of recording the past into their very materiality and thus becoming available to render this past into a pristine, objective version.³⁵⁵ Instead of approaching the material as a “text” into which they could decipher systems of thought, meaning, and social action, archeologists in post-1945 Romania preferred (and were very much encouraged politically) to regard the archeological record as raw matter, free of any political meaning. The new state, in need of a new history, turned then to archaeology to provide it with this supposedly raw material that they could mould into “the past” they wanted. Those claims relied on a premise that the artifacts’ very materiality guaranteed an “objective” interpretation of the past, one that could remain untainted by any biases potentially informing the written sources. The materiality of the artifacts stood as the exclusive way to achieve “objectivity” and therefore grant a radically new historical paradigm the status of “truths.” By putting forward an interpretation of “historical materialism” that assumed that the material is the ultimate proof of truth, the things newly unearthed from the ground literally became “the scientific bases” onto which entire disciplinary realms, such as literature and history, had to be (re)built. The materiality was not, however, freer from ideology than texts. The artifacts’ semiotic porosity could allow for a wider range of

³⁵⁵ For a more detailed discussion of two models in medieval archaeology, one approaching archeological material as a text, in contrast to the other that views artifacts as imprints, see Curta, "Some Remarks on Ethnicity in Medieval Archaeology." Curta draws his argument from John Moreland, *Archaeology and Text* (London: Duckworth, 2001), Linda Patrik, "Is There an Archaeological Record?" 8 (1985), *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 8 (1985).

interpretation than a written document.³⁵⁶ They were therefore more politically malleable, precisely because they were presented as pristine and objective.

Archaeology played then a double role—it not only produced specific representational forms of the past, but it also stood as the discipline that was *par excellence* entitled to confirm or deny the historical validity of earlier documents.³⁵⁷ Obviously, this process of production and reinscription of the past of Bucharest was described through metaphors of “salvage” and “discovery.” For instance, one of the research reports on the first digs opened in 1953 points out that “in addition to tracking down and salvaging some archeological vestiges, the archeological research carried out simultaneously with the construction work aimed to confirm the written sources on the basis of field research.”³⁵⁸ At the same time, archaeology was called upon to reject or verify “imagined legends” regarding the foundation of the city, such as the story that a shepherd, Bucur, was the founder of Bucharest (*București*, in Romanian).³⁵⁹ The

³⁵⁶ By this statement, I do not want to imply that a written document is a static product, delivering the same information when read by different people, in different contexts. On the contrary, texts are themselves very much charged by various contexts (the context of their production is never the same as the context of their interpretation). For a much more eloquent discussion, see Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁵⁷ This argument is obviously not new. It has stood at the core of much larger debates on the relationship between archaeology and history. See Moreland, *Archaeology and Text*, for a succinct and original discussion of this topic.

³⁵⁸ Panait, "Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din capitală," 152.

³⁵⁹ For instance, as a result of one of the first digs opened in the city center (in the Radu Voda church area), the researchers dismissed some of the first (mid 19th century) attempts to popularize historical accounts of Bucharest's origins as “fantasies.” (Those accounts include Gr. Musceleanu, *Calendarul Antic pe 1875* (București, 1875), 75, Alexandru Pelimon, *Bukur, Istoria fundării Bucureștilor* [the History of the Foundation of Bucharest] (București: Tipografia Națională a lui Iosif Romanov et comp., 1858). Both of the documents had mentioned a church that had been initially built of wood by Bucur himself, which then was rebuilt in stone by one of the Romanian princes, Mircea the Old. An archeological study of the site “definitively clarified the origins of the church, [which] had been built in the XVIII century and it is not in any case linked to the city's origins nor with its founder.” I. Ionașcu et al., "Săpăturile arheologice din sectorul Radu Vodă," in *Studii și referate privind istoria României. Din lucrările secțiunii largite a secțiunii de științe istorice, filozofice și economico-juridice (21-24 Decembrie 1953)* [Studies and Reports on the History of Romania. Excerpts of the Extended Session of the Department of Historical, Philosophical and

archeological research within the city should therefore have aimed at “obtaining information on those historical periods on which data are still scarce.”³⁶⁰ Therefore, “as long as the written documentation so far offers few and equivocal data regarding the history of Bucharest in the 14th and 15th centuries, it is necessary that the knowledge on this subject should be acquired via archeological research.”³⁶¹

Another project, pursued in parallel with the archeological investigations in the city, touches directly upon the emerging political role of specific forms of materiality. It involved the identification, research, and publication of a comprehensive collection of medieval inscriptions existing at that moment (the project started in 1951) on the territory of the city of Bucharest.³⁶² This enterprise was presented as the beginning of a grandiose project of identifying, collecting, and organizing the medieval inscriptions across the country’s territory, as well as the research on those that had been destroyed or lost. The chronological scale, which defined the inscriptions as “medieval,” started with “the establishment of the Romanian feudal states [though no date was specified, other sources located this beginning in the 14th century] and ended around 1800.”³⁶³ The selection methodology—of identifying “Romanian medieval inscriptions” and separating these from others of different provenience or usage—reflected a larger political agenda set on finding different forms of Romanianness and distinguishing them from imputed forms of other (especially ethnic) groups.³⁶⁴ Presented as an alternative means of disclosing “data

Juridical-Economic Sciences (December 21-24, 1953) (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, 1954). 458-59.

³⁶⁰ Georgescu, "Introducere [Introduction]," 7.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Elian, "Introducere," 38.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Timothy Kaiser points out that the Romanian archeologists have focused very much on the products of the current ethnic majority. Timothy Kaiser, "Archaeology and Ideology in Southeast Europe," in

of historical interest,” the inscriptions had to carry their “historical value” in a visible form. This meant that the pieces inscribed only with “saints’ names,” without any other date, or those carrying private names of “ordinary” people (in contrast to political figures), could not be included in the collection. Also excluded were those inscriptions on objects that “no matter their origins and historical importance, had not been produced on the territory of the Romanian [medieval] states [i.e., principalities] or had never circulated there in the past” (which meant that they exerted no influence on the culture of the local population at that time).³⁶⁵

Like the archeological excavations carried within Bucharest, the project of the “Romanian medieval inscriptions” should be understood in the context in which feudal history and archaeology became very important disciplinary niches within the socialist state. Even though the inscription project had been initiated in the midst of a heavy sovietization of the Romanian Academy, the unique combination of linguistic and research skills required by the domain of epigraphy determined the selection of a particular team of specialists. As the majority of those researchers had acquired their expertise during the interwar years, with some of them occupying key functions within major institutions (such as the Commission for Historical Monuments), they brought a strong penchant for national history to the project.³⁶⁶ Therefore, during the first phase of research and selection of the inscriptions (1951-1954), in the shadow of a sovietized Academy, the project had already taken a form very much shaped by a nation-centered

Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology, ed. Philip L. Kohl and Clare P. Fawcett (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 103.

³⁶⁵ Elian, "Introducere," 39.

³⁶⁶ One of those specialists was art historian Victor Brătulescu, the last secretary of the interwar Commission for Historical Monuments, dismantled in 1950. After a difficult time for him, following the dismantling of the Commission in 1950, Brătulescu seems to have been able to soon find a decent professional niche. It is likely that he appeared as one of the “old” experts, who was invited to offer his skills and expertise to the enterprise of rewriting history for the socialist state.

model of history, which those experts had promoted in the pre-1945 period.

A unique characteristic of the inscriptions that stood as an additional proof of the data's accuracy was their "fixedness"—as they often had a "private character," they could not offer the wealth of information that one could find in written sources (diplomatic correspondence, narrative sources).³⁶⁷ However,

the accuracy of the details provided [by the inscriptions] is higher. [...] The inscriptions make available data that are in general more certain than of other contemporary sources, from a chronological point of view as well as of the facts and details that they render. In their stereotypical form, with a plain sequence of names and dates, the inscriptions are worded less *ad probantum* than miscellaneous chronicles representing the interests of a group of boyars or a particular deed made via doubtful stories or questionable arguments. [...] As long as the majority of inscriptions describe contemporary facts, within their strict and limited materiality, and are not aimed to be called upon in front of a jury or support any interests of their authors, the veracity of the data they carry cannot be, in general, doubted. [As such, by offering] details on the conditions under which lay, military, but especially religious monuments had been built, [the inscriptions] represent an indispensable source for [documenting] the local history of the cities, towns, and a number of villages in the [medieval] epoch.³⁶⁸

In addition to representing signs imbued with different forms of Romanianness—by being either produced or used by medieval Romanians—the inscriptions via "their strict and limited materiality" encapsulated the promise of rendering "objective" data.³⁶⁹ It was precisely their condition of not being included in the domain of manuscripts—written historical sources—that made them so valuable.³⁷⁰ In a

³⁶⁷ Elian, "Introducere," 13.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ An inscription is defined rather by specifying what it does *not* represent. That is, it is not included in the research domain of epigraphy first of all, everything that is written on papyrus, parchment, paper, and other materials that form the basis of manuscript rolls, as well as the so called diplomatic sources (documents, deeds, correspondence, etc.) that belong to the domains of papyrology and paleography. Also, epigraphy is not concerned with anything that is imprinted, by printing, on any form of material including fabrics. [...] By relying on such exclusions, the field of epigraphy still remains extremely vast. To offer a few examples, we will consider inscriptions anything that is written via procedures such as: engraving, drawing, carving, painting, embroidering or sewing, on an infinite variety of

context where writing (on paper) had become an increasingly dominant form of communication, it was then the higher difficulty of producing **text** via alternative methods—that is, more difficult than writing, such as “carving, sewing, painting, and embroidering”—that made specialists deem the inscriptions potentially more “accurate.”³⁷¹

Since they had to communicate the kernel of one event (for instance, by engraving one name and one date), the epigraphic forms were then invested with the assumption that that kernel was “true” by default and therefore historically relevant.³⁷² It is interesting to note, though, that the specialists applied their own understanding of history, set under chronological parameters, to the selection of the inscriptions. That is, an inscription with no date, or carrying only names, could not be considered “important,” even though the imprinting of those names required as much skill as the carving out of the dates. In other words, the inscriptions represented pivotal historical sources when they could meet both criteria of historical objectivity: that of functioning as chronological markers (through the dates inscribed) and of guaranteeing their validity by the very difficulty of the inscribing process.

The project of analyzing and ordering the medieval inscriptions focused then on three closely interconnected elements that became crucial for the re-writing of history required by the Party leaders: materiality, feudalism, the Romanian nation. In other

materials, ranging from marble, stone, brick, plaster, wood and other construction material, to glass, bone, mother-of-pearl, metal, leather, oil cloth, and fabrics of any kind.

[...] A separation of the proper inscriptions from the literary texts or written notes must be pursued as much as possible, without diminishing the value that the latter sources carry for historical research.

Elian, "Introducere," 12-13.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² I thank Britt Halvorson for pointing out to me that the very assumption that inscriptions would communicate “facts” is a specifically historical one, built on a particular understanding promulgated through print capitalism.

words, the medieval inscriptions were viewed as unique sources of insight into the development of the Romanian nation since its origins: the formation of the first feudal states on the territory lying within the borders of current Romania. In fact, it was not the inscriptions themselves, but the procedure of identifying and selecting them that made the project uniquely suitable for political aims.³⁷³ The selection of the “representative” pieces according to their capacity to function as chronological devices, combined with the data’s accuracy supposedly given by their materiality, represented *in nuce* a more grandiose task that the state entrusted to the specialists (especially historians and archeologists). This task involved the production of a framework of historical continuity, which already had deeper roots in an earlier nationalist agenda (starting in the middle of the 19th century until 1945). This time, however, in order to accommodate a socialist order of things, and also create a niche for the socialist state within this historical framework, the emphasis was placed on the heuristic value of particular forms of materiality.

As I have already suggested, in comparison to the interwar period, when the old built structures had been considered the major form of heritage, the socialist state sought to create its own heritage through a different kind of materiality, one that was both “new” and often more mobile (being thus able to be inscribed and displayed as state property). The archeological artifacts fulfilled this role, which prompted a vast enterprise of excavations across the country that led to an impressive collection of material. Again, what mattered was not only the material per se, but rather the project of amassing and ordering it within a comprehensive (and centralized) schema—the process of setting

³⁷³ See Foucault’s argument that the modern episteme—the mode of knowledge prevalent in modernity—stopped relying on resemblance, but focuses rather on identity and difference. In this case, chronology becomes more important, hence the political importance of history as a discipline. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970).

those material forms within a historical narrative. This project was to unfold in a particularly easy manner, given the dichotomous perspective—that of approaching the artifacts as “imprints” and contrasting them with written sources as ideologically charged “texts”—that informed most of the archeological research pursued in post-1945 Romania, as well as in the entire region. As Timothy Kaiser writes,

another consequence of the nationalist-inspired historical revival in the Balkans has been the adoption of essentially historical methods in archaeology. Chief among these methods is the use of artefact typology as a means of chronology-building and of delimiting cultural boundaries. With their typologies and analyses of artefact style, archeologists have sought to construct a history of the Balkan past in the absence of written records. While a preoccupation with artefact typology is hardly unique to southeast Europe, it does seem that the enterprise is widely regarded as the most serious and important aspect of archaeology. Careers and reputations stand or fall on questions of chronology and typology.³⁷⁴

In fact, this approach allowed archeologists to continue to work within a culture-historical model that favored “long-term historical continuity” over other possible interpretations of the data.³⁷⁵ As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, the new turn to materiality promoted by the state therefore kept being set within a paradigm that had been pervasive in the interwar archaeology only to thrive afterwards in the shadow of dialectical materialism. That is, Pârvan’s search for “the essence of Romanianness” literally underground was further reproduced and developed in communist Romania, especially starting in 1960.³⁷⁶ What the regime promoted as dialectical materialism was a

³⁷⁴ Kaiser, "Archaeology and Ideology in Southeast Europe," 108.

³⁷⁵ Mircea Anghelinu, "Failed Revolution: Marxism and the Romanian Prehistoric Archaeology between 1945 and 1989," *Archaeologia Bulgarica* XI, no. 1 (2007), 6.

³⁷⁶ 1960 marks a clear separation of socialist Romania from the USSR, as it is the year when Dej opens trade with Western Europe (West Germany and France, and later with the US). However, as I have also shown in the previous chapter, Dej’s attempt to distance himself from Moscow had started much earlier, even as early as 1953. Dej’s intentions of reaching an economic and a relative political autonomy became apparent as early as 1953, not only in the form of his determination of opening trade with the West, but also in his disregard of the Soviets’ attempts to get involved in Romania’s internal affairs. See Bruce J.

simplified and more rigid version of Marxism, which Romanian archeologists unfortunately hurried to employ.³⁷⁷ Instead of adopting a dialectical approach to the archeological data, one that would start from an analysis of material to derive a theory of “internal developments of past societies,” the archeologists in post-1945 Romania tended to favor an empiricist agenda.³⁷⁸ That is, the majority directed their studies within a dialectical materialist paradigm, which “assumes that material circumstances actually regulate the adjustment of the superstructural components and may ultimately lead to historical changes.”³⁷⁹ In other words, the more one dug out of the ground, the better a researcher she or he proved to be. This meant an increasing number of new sites being opened, which led to a larger and larger archeological collection that would then be displayed in key locations for political propaganda, such as the regional museums of history.

In addition to the major operations of nationalization and collectivization, this process of agglomerating artifacts stood as another form of channeling resources to the center—the key strategy by which the communist state aimed to consolidate its power.³⁸⁰ Only recently have Romanian scholars approached the topic of the politics of archaeology in post-1945 Romania, remarking on the popularity the discipline benefited

Courtney and Joseph F. Harrington, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American-Romanian Relations, 1940-1990*, East European Monographs (Boulder, Colorado 1991). My earlier discussion of the 1953 memorandum on Bucharest’s systematization points out Dej’s manifest disinterest in having the Soviet architects “visit Bucharest to help with the Master plan.” For a discussion of Dej’s cunning strategy of preserving power, see Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*, and *Fantoma Lui Gheorghiu Dej [the Ghost of Gheorghiu Dej]* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

³⁷⁷ Anghelinu, "Failed Revolution: Marxism and the Romanian Prehistoric Archaeology between 1945 and 1989," 9.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

³⁸⁰ For a discussion of the role and side effects of hoarding in socialist systems, see Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?*

from at that time.³⁸¹ An incisive analysis of that period is offered by Mircea Anghelinu, who writes:

Since it was now [post-1945] assigned a crucial part in the new holistic, all-encompassing, and ideologically vital theory of history, archaeology suddenly gained an unexpected and unprecedented prestige in social and ideological terms. Its new status became evident instantly in such things as [...] the generous institutional support the discipline of archaeology enjoyed.³⁸²

Here I would like to return to my argument on the tense negotiations over the city's space between archeologists working for the Museum and architects of Project Bucharest. I have suggested that the exchange of letters analyzed in the previous chapter should be understood within a (disputable) agreement that archeologists would pursue their research at a speedy pace, by digging out all the material traces of the past and then "close down" the ground so that the architects could start building the socialist city. The Old Court suddenly became a highly problematic case, because, instead of closing it down, the archeologists claimed it as a historical reservation—that is, as a space to be removed from the systematization plan for the city's center. Given the key role that the systematization of the city center was to play for the legitimization of the new leadership, how was it then possible that a bunch of archeologists from the Museum could eventually secure such an exceptional status for a site whose historical value had been relatively ignored? I suggest that an argument about a new history of Bucharest, to be written on the basis of "pristine" artifacts, played a crucial role in sustaining their case. However, this sole claim would not do, as many other archeological sites opened in the city's center

³⁸¹ See, for example, Anghelinu, "Failed Revolution: Marxism and the Romanian Prehistoric Archaeology between 1945 and 1989;" Alexandru Dragoman and Sorin Oanță-Marghitu, "Archaeology in Communist and Post-Communist Romania," *Dacia* 50 (2006), Niculescu, "Archaeology, Nationalism and the 'History of the Romanians' (2001)."

³⁸² Anghelinu, "Failed Revolution: Marxism and the Romanian Prehistoric Archaeology between 1945 and 1989," 8.

also provided important data for the local history. The case needed supplementary grounds—and this was the description (in fact, the making) of the Old Court as a major feudal site for national history. In the next section I will first show why feudalism is so important for the development of a history of contemporary Bucharest. I will then turn to the site itself, to examine how the archeologists of the Museum went about making their own Old Court by creating a smooth and continuous historical framework out of temporally scattered material forms.

Overstrained histories—or why does feudalism matter so much after all?

Up to now, we have gauged by now the circumstances under which, as in many other contexts, archaeology in Romania of the 1950s became a key technology for crafting a new state by extending the politics of the present underneath the ground.³⁸³ Initially, the Party leadership was mainly concerned with the present—that is, implementing the major reforms that would lay the basis of a centralized economy and society: collectivization, nationalization, the economic plan and the systematization of the cities. The Soviet experts who were called upon (or, better put, self-invited) to supervise those reforms relied heavily on the tropes of “science” and “scientific methods,” which had already been well tested in the 1920s and 1930s in the USSR. However, those forms of producing a new social imaginary aimed to generate not only a version of the future,

³⁸³ For an analysis of the making of a new state through archaeology, see Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). For various forms and cases in which archaeology could serve political agendas, see, for example, Philip L. Kohl and Clare P. Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Philip L. Kohl, Mara Kozelsky, and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Selective Remembrances: Archaeology in the Construction, Commemoration, and Consecration of National Pasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Lynn Meskell, *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1998).

but also one of the past. That is, scientific methods had to be used also for assessing a politically proper theory of history for the new state.³⁸⁴ It was a multifaceted process of conquering space and the built environment, as the making of the socialist state presupposed a radical redrafting of the epistemological arrangement between history and archaeology. Archaeology, presented as the ultimate decoder of historical truth, could claim new territory, and this it did right away.

The first digs that were opened in the center of Bucharest in 1953 had explicitly followed the model of the excavations already pursued by the Soviet archeologists in medieval Russian towns.³⁸⁵ One of the first reports on the 1953 excavations points out that their main goal was:

to reveal to the country's large masses what was the true multi-millennarian history of the places we inhabit today. We will thus provide just and objective information, similar to what the Soviet historians and archeologists have been doing for years via their ample archeological investigations in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Novgorod, etc.³⁸⁶

The latter research, set within a model of autochthonous development that ignored patterns of cultural diffusion and migration, aimed to prove the early cultural and

³⁸⁴ See a discussion on the making of a new theory of history in late 1950s Romania, in Michael J. Rura, *Reinterpretation of History as a Method of Furthering Communism in Rumania, a Study in Comparative Historiography* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1961).

³⁸⁵ Bruce Trigger points to Soviet archeologist Leo Klejn, who was the first one to discuss the culture-historical approach advanced by Kossina at the end of 19th century as being part of the larger politics of rewriting history via archaeology. According to Klejn, this approach was not specific for a "German" model of culture, but had been employed by other scholars seeking "the origins of their nations." Trigger writes:

Leo Klejn (1974) has observed that Russian archeologists adopted a German culture-historical approach but used it, as Polish archeologists had done, to counter German myths concerning their own racial and cultural superiority. As with much Soviet archaeology, the general nature of the results was ordained by the government before the research was carried out. After 1945, when Eastern Europe was recognized as a Soviet sphere of influence, an International Congress of Slavic Archaeology was founded to encourage closer relations among Slavic nations. In the Soviet Union, the allocation of substantial resources for researching Slavic ethnogenesis did not result in the significant curtailment of research on other problems. Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Klejn cited by Trigger as Leo S. Klejn, "Kossinna im Abstand von Vierzig Jahren," *Jahresschrift für mitteldeutsche Vorgeschichte* 58 (1974).

³⁸⁶ Ionașcu et al., "Săpăturile arheologice din sectorul Radu Vodă," 410.

economic advancement of the Slavs, and hence, of the Russian people. These studies advanced the view that the Russian ancient settlements emerged simultaneously with, and developed equally along with the towns in, western and central Europe.³⁸⁷

The Russian and then Soviet archeologists had attempted to build the field of medieval (or feudal) archaeology as an institutional framework in order to promote the theory of pan-Slavism.³⁸⁸ By adapting a previous discourse on Slavic (linguistic and ethnic) brotherhood that legitimized the Russian foreign policy of expansion in Europe in the late 19th century, the Soviets sought to resuscitate the myth of Slavic kinship in order to ground a socialist transnationalism with the USSR at its core.³⁸⁹ They gave a new twist to the “Slavic connection” by deeming it a crucial element for proving the ancient pervasiveness of the Slavic culture across the Central and East European region, a perspective informing all of the archeological research pursued in the Soviet bloc during the late 1950s and 1960s.³⁹⁰ Moreover, such a view was called upon to attest to the “superior development” of an early Slavic culture in comparison to those emerging in “the West.” Archaeology and its findings were then to play their part directly in a Cold

³⁸⁷ Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 230.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁸⁹ See Florin Curta’s compelling argument that “Slavic ethnicity is an invention of Byzantine authors, as [...] they began employing names such as Sclavenes and Andes in order to make sense of the process of group identification that was taking place north of the Danube frontier around AD 500.” Abstract in Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region C. 500-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁹⁰ For a review of the making of feudal archaeology as a “Slavic archaeology” in the post-1945 Soviet bloc—that is, an archaeology focused on the Slavic ethnogenesis—see Florin Curta, “Pots, Slavs And ‘Imagined Communities’: Slavic Archaeology and the History of the Early Slavs,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 4, no. 3 (2001) and his “Introduction.” For a discussion of the development of archaeology in socialist Bulgaria, see Douglas W. Bailey, “Bulgarian Archaeology: Ideology, Sociopolitics and the Exotic,” in *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, ed. Lynn Meskell (London: Routledge, 1998). For an exhaustive survey of the different approaches adopted by Romanian historians and archeologists with regards to the “Slavic influence” over the genesis of the population living on the territory of current Romania, see Florin Curta, “The Changing Image of the Early Slavs in the Rumanian Historiography and Archaeological Literature. A Critical Survey,” *Südost-Forschungen* 53 (1994).

War competition, rooted in an early modern political geography of separation between the west and east, and employed anew to justify contemporary distributions of global power.³⁹¹

To have a history of feudalism rewritten on the basis of archeological findings was a crucial political issue all across the Soviet bloc in the 1950s. Searching for feudalism and thoroughly documenting it was a key strategy to justify the existence and necessity of the socialist project, according to a Marxist historical paradigm. As historian Elizabeth Brown points out,

by incorporating ‘the feudal mode of production’ into their design, [Marx and Engels] endowed it with seminal significance. Their followers came to view the feudal stage as a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of socialism, and socialist scholars and activists sought traces of it throughout the world.³⁹²

Apparently then, searching for the feudal origins of the major cities that were to be transformed into the socialist capitals of the new soviet satellites emerged as a key political task for the archeologists working in the eastern bloc. In Romania, the city of Bucharest, as the capital of the country and thereby a would-be pinnacle of socialist

³⁹¹ For a classical study of earlier political imaginaries of a Europe as hierarchically divided between “West” and “East,” see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

³⁹² Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Feudalism," in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. (Accessed on January 17, 2009.). Brown shows that the problematic tendency of confining a variety of political and social forms of organization existing in a Europe of the Middle Ages under one conceptual umbrella of “feudalism” originated in the historical episteme of the 18th century. She points out that British and French writers alike were more interested in

the system, the construct, instead of investigating the various social and political relationships found in medieval Europe. [...] The writers of the eighteenth century, like those of later times, assigned different meanings to the term *féodalité*, or, in English, ‘feodality.’ Some used it to designate a system of government, some to refer to conditions that developed as public power disappeared. By 1800 the construct had been launched and the expression “feudal system” devised; by the mid-nineteenth century the word ‘feudalism’ was in use. [...] Since the middle of the nineteenth century the concepts of feudalism and the feudal system have dominated the study of the medieval past.

Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 4 (1974). In other words, Marx’s major concern with “the feudal mode of production” only reflected a more general interest in “feudalism” across the 19th historiography of the medieval Europe.

urban development, was to play the principal role in this operation. According to the first reports on the excavation carried out in the city's center,

an extremely important issue [was] the expansion of the themes of archeological research. [...] Whereas before August 23, 1944, there had been sporadic archeological research, only within the domain of the primitive and slavery-based social orders, the popular democratic state gives special attention to archeological research on the migratory period and the feudal order, as well as to the forging of a strong collective of specialists in feudal archaeology.³⁹³

Indeed, the first reports presented proof of a strong Slavic influence over the local settlements found in the sites of the Old Court, Radu Vodă, and Mihai Vodă and initially dated as belonging to the 6th century (set within the period of migrations). However, within a relatively short interval, the specialists' interest—and publications—turned from attempts to identify the “Slavic element” and its influence on “the local cultures” to research into the “(proto) Romanian element” within those cultures. That is, starting with the end of 1960s, the principal specialists of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy started publishing extensively on the theme of “proto-Romanian culture.”³⁹⁴ Those studies aimed to assert, now with archeological data such as pottery shape and design, the

³⁹³ "Șantierul Arheologic București," 287.

³⁹⁴ The scholars in 1980s Romania who came to be named “the protochronists,” whose “studies” aimed to place the Romanian people at the core of the world's history, picked up those earlier arguments advanced by historians and especially archeologists in the late 1960s. One of the most famous “protochronists,” Răzvan Theodorescu, has become well known due to his extensive studies of art history as well as a thriving professional career under the socialist regime and especially afterwards, in Romania of the 1990s. In 1974, the year marking the official beginning of protochronism with Edgar Papu's article “Romanian protochronism,” Theodorescu published his doctoral dissertation, focused on proving that “the first superior forms of medieval political, religious, and artistic life” had emerged “only and only” within the territory between “the two extremities of the Romanian Danube.” Theodorescu cites at length well known archeologists starting with 1958 (a year when Dej marked a firm distancing from Moscow). See Ion Nestor, “Contributions archéologiques au problème des proto-roumains. La civilisation de Dridu,” *Dacia* II (1958), Maria Comșa, “Contribuții la cunoașterea culturii străromâne în lumina săpăturilor de la Bucov,” *SCIV* 1 (1959), and “Sur l'origine et l'évolution de la civilisation de la population romane, et ensuite proroumaine, aux Vie-Xe siècles sur le territoire de la Roumanie,” *Dacia* XII (1968). In Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizant, Balcani, Occident, la începuturile culturii medievale românești: Secolele X-XIV* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1974). For a discussion of protochronism, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 167-214.

continuous inhabitation of the territory between “the Carpathians and the Danube” by the same population—the proto-Romanians, living here starting in the ninth century.³⁹⁵ Instead of being “peacefully assimilated” by the Slavic migratory groups, as the 1954 studies published by the same Institute had argued, those local proto-Romanians, due to “their higher number, the stability of their settlements and the superior stage of their material culture and the Roman-Byzantine heritage,” succeeded in asserting “the victory of the Romanic element” over the Slavic influences.³⁹⁶ This move was fully in keeping with Dej’s autonomist policy, discussed in Chapter 2.

In other words, the establishment of feudal archaeology in Romania of the 1960s, far from grounding a history of regional feudalism set under a pan-slavic influence, favored in fact stronger arguments about an earlier emergence of the Romanian nation. We come to understand then why the Old Court offered a great promise to archeologists and local politicians alike of supplying the material evidence to prove the continuity of the Romanian presence in the city from early medieval times until the present day. The next section will examine the arguments and especially the particular material forms that those groups made use of in this enterprise of making the Old Court into *the* heritage site of the city of Bucharest.

Forged encounters: Walls in the ground and misdated artifacts

The research at the Old Court was carried out in three distinctive stages. The first digs had been opened in 1953 and continued through 1954 under the supervision of

³⁹⁵ Theodorescu, *Bizanț , Balcani, Occident, la începuturile culturii medievale românești*, 32.

³⁹⁶ Dinu C. Giurescu, Horia C. Matei, and Nicolae C. et al. Nicolescu, *Istoria României în date* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 26.

archeologist Dinu V. Rosetti, then associated with the Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy. The most accurate archeological research had been conducted at that stage, which led to important data, including especially a part of the walls of the western part of the princely palace, built in the second half of the 16th century. Between 1955 and 1958, no other excavations had been pursued, and the research was limited to the analysis of the artifacts and further attempts to identify ruins of the Old Court still existing at the ground level. With the opening of the new construction sites in the area in 1959-1960, a second stage of archeological research was launched. It consisted only in archeologists closely supervising the excavations occurring at the construction sites, which covered the territory lying to the east of the Old Court site, between the Flower Market and the main boulevard. As the City Museum had already taken over the responsibility of the archeological research carried out within the city's perimeter, the 1959-1960 study was entrusted to archeologists Dinu V. Rosetti (now working for the Museum) and Panait I. Panait.³⁹⁷ The third stage of research was pursued between 1967 and 1971 during a "long excavation campaign" leading to "the discovery of some riverine stone walls," identified as having been part of the first court, established by Prince Vlad the Impaler.³⁹⁸ This long awaited "discovery" had been the main goal of the excavations in the area since their beginning in 1953, as the archeologists eagerly wanted to find a material trace of this court, which had appeared for the first time as "the fortress of

³⁹⁷ After the Local Council of the city of Bucharest had decided on December 10, 1956, to reestablish the Museum of History of the city of Bucharest, the Museum was opened on January 23, 1959, marking the city's 500th anniversary. Panait I. Panait, "Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din capitală," in *Cercetări arheologice în București* (București: S.P. C. [Sfatul Popular al Capitalei] și Muzeul de istorie a orașului București, 1962), 149.

³⁹⁸ Panait I. Panait, "Studiu introductiv [Introduction]," in *Curtea Veche [the Old Court]*, ed. Ioan Negrea (București: Editura Sport-Turism, 1980), 9.

Bucharest” in a 1459 chronicle.³⁹⁹ To my knowledge, there are no published research reports on the 1967-1971 campaign. Before starting a discussion about the more ambivalent political context underlying this absence, I will focus my analysis on the first and second research stages.

The first research report on the results of the excavations, focusing on the “first princely court of Bucharest,” appeared in 1954 as part of the larger study of all the excavations opened in the center of the city.⁴⁰⁰ The major argument underlying the report was that of historical continuity, with the site of the Old Court described as marking a series of earlier settlements developed and continuously inhabited as early as the Neolithic. Moreover, in contrast to other sites dated in the 4th and 5th centuries, discovered at the periphery of Bucharest, “at the Old Court one found much larger and intensively inhabited settlements, [where] a vital life had pulsed.”⁴⁰¹ Some of the pottery is identified in the report as belonging to the 6th century, “which corresponds to the typology of the Slavic pottery,” and is invoked as evidence attesting to the fact that the local population lived according to “the Slavs’ way of living.”⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Lăzărescu-Ionescu et al., “Săpăturile arheologice din sectorul Curtea Veche.”

⁴⁰¹ The urgency of proving the historical importance and continuous habitation of this site comes forth in fragments such as:

the settlement at the Old Court presents therefore the characteristics of a settlement where an indigenous local culture had been developed. As the locals had quasi-permanently been engaged in defense fights, the inventory of the material culture is quite poor.

Ibid., 473.

That is, instead of raising the hypothesis of a more dynamic habitation of the area, comprising more diverse population movements, the argument remains stuck within the continuity paradigm of the culture-historical model. Another sentence is even more amusing: “[t]he fact that we could not track down social differences [in the material culture] at the Old Court does not prove that such differences had not existed.” Ibid., 473.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 537.



Figure 10 The archeological site of the Old Court (1953-1971). "Șantierul arheologic București," Figure 1, 408. I have marked the subsequent archeological sites with different colors: 1) the area delimited by red lines marks the sites opened in 1953, 2) the one in green points to the approximate location of the construction sites carried out in between 1959 and 1961, and 3) the area in brown, in the western part of the Old Court site, marks the later stage of excavations, pursued in the period 1967-1971.

Then, even though the excavations did not reveal any form of material culture between the 6th century and the 14th century, the proof of continuity is found in the fact that “the earliest stage of the feudal period at the Old Court directly overlaps the prefeudal settlement, of which the first is separated by a very thin stratum.[...] The lack of fertile soil (*humus*) could be explained by old leveling work.”⁴⁰³ According to the report, the middle and late feudal period (the 14th to the 16th century) is much more richly documented by pottery, inscriptions, and coins, attesting to the establishment of the

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

Old Court by the second half of the 16th century by the prince Mircea the Shepherd.⁴⁰⁴

The Ottoman pottery dated in the 16th-17th centuries proves the commercial development of the town at that time. The multiple kinds of material culture of the 18th and the 19th centuries found in all the digs (coins, jewelry, mortuary inscriptions, etc.) illustrate the social life of the traders established in the area starting with the end of the 18th century. The excavations had been carried out in multiple points of the site (as shown on the map), leading to a collection of archeological data that made the specialists conclude that “despite the richness of the material found [in these locations], the documentation about the princely court is relatively poor.”⁴⁰⁵ The most important finding, however, was a part of the initial foundation of the princely palace (more precisely, the western corner of the palace, shown below). This foundation, of which only the western corner of the wall had been kept, being enclosed within a house built later on the premises, turned out to be part of a large (32 meter long) vaulted hall.⁴⁰⁶ The kind of construction method and material used for this wall led the specialists to place it within the middle or even early 16th century. The age and the “beauty of the construction and its vaults, and the fact that it is the sole construction left from the old buildings of the Princely court” caused the team working on the site to propose that this room should be classified as a “historical monument and [be] transformed into a museum-lapidarium.”⁴⁰⁷

The aim of this lapidarium was to collect and display some of the inscriptions and other types of artifacts found during the excavations.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 474.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 483

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 487

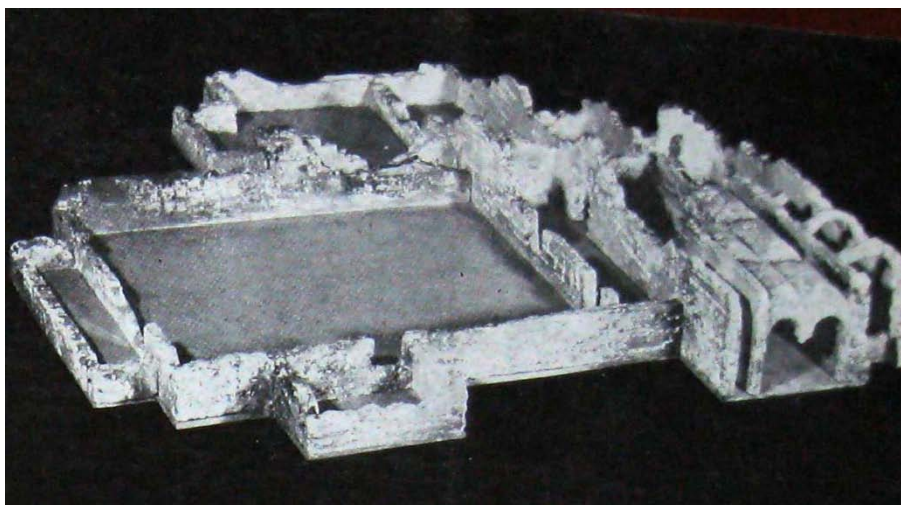


Figure 11 The model of the ruins of the Princely Palace. 1967-1968. *Arhitectura*, 113, no.4 (1968): 27.

Despite its ideological biases—such as the attempt to work within the framework of a continuous habitation of the site, as well as to prove the presence of the “Slavic culture” in the area—the report on the 1953 digs offers very detailed explanations on the methodology employed (including details on the dating of the artifacts via comparison with similar material found at other sites, stratographical drawings, pictures and drawings of pottery and coins, photographs of the stages of excavations). In contrast, the (much shorter) report on the 1959-1960 research in the area neither gives as many details, nor presents a stratographic analysis. More interesting, even, the second document challenges some of the data offered by the 1954 report. For instance, the pottery that archeologist Rosetti had first identified as “Slavic pottery” produced in the 6th century was re-analyzed by the same Rosetti and now placed in the 9th-11th centuries, that is, the beginning of the Middle Ages, when the first feudal states had been formed on the territory of current Romania.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Panait, "Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din Capitală," 143.

This reference is crucial, as it points out not only the political turn away from the “Slavic connection,”⁴⁰⁹ but also the rising importance of the Middle Ages for the new theory of history advanced by the socialist state, aiming to prove a “Romanian” continuous presence from feudalism to socialism. In other words, the second analysis produced an important political shift in constructing the history of Bucharest on the basis of archeological data, by taking what the 1954 report had described as “an intensively inhabited settlement” of the 6th century and moving it up on the scale of history to the 9th-11th century period. The pottery was then used as pivotal evidence that would “prove” that the settlement was a central one for the early feudal history of the city, and that the 16th century Princely Court came later to be established “directly” on this earlier settlement. Having established this key moment in the history of the city—the early medieval period—the report then points out that “the centuries to follow [covering the period between the 12th and 14th centuries] are still very poorly documented.”⁴¹⁰ The question of “what historical process determined the abrupt decline of archeological data [characteristic of] the 12th-14th centuries” remains unanswered.⁴¹¹ However, the possibility that the area ceased to be inhabited within this interval is not even considered. What is certain, the report contends, is that “starting with the first half of the 15th century, there is more frequent habitation on the site that will likely host the walls of the princely Court at the end of this century” [sic! that is, of the 15th century, not of 16th, as had been documented by the earlier report]. The proof of this habitation comes from a set of pottery dated to the 15th century and found in a hut (*bordei*). As this dwelling was found in the immediate proximity of the Old Court site, the report concludes that the

⁴⁰⁹ Note also that in the 1962 text, the 6th century is no longer linked to the “Slavic culture.”

⁴¹⁰ Panait, “Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din Capitală,” 143.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

princely palace had been built on the site previously occupied by some peasant residences.⁴¹² More importantly, the report describes the site under research (see map) as “a chaotic agglomeration of walls and cellars built between the 17th and 20th centuries, [among which] one could find isolated material from the earlier stages of the history of Bucharest.” The main culprit of this destruction of historical proof for “the first phase of the city’s development” is then to be found in the “constructions erected after the auctioning of the Old Court, [which] greatly modified the topographic aspect of the center of the capital.”⁴¹³

To summarize, there are important differences between the two reports in their approach to the research site, methodology, and accuracy of dating. While both reports are characterized by an analytical model set within a theory of historical continuity, their points of interest differ: while the first one identifies the beginning of the site’s habitation in the 4th-6th centuries, in order to prove the Slavic connection, the second document amends this conclusion by setting the key moment four centuries down the road, somewhere between the 9th and the 11th centuries. Also, while both reports acknowledge the lack of archeological data during important stretches of time (ranging from the 5th to the 14th century in the first report, or from the 9th-11th centuries to the 15th century in the second), they start from the premise that the site had nevertheless been continuously inhabited, only that such proof is yet to be discovered through further excavations or, even more definitive, that it had been destroyed during the capitalist stage of the city (end

⁴¹² Ibid., 145.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 147. I remind the reader that the Princely Court, established by the middle of the 16th century, had functioned as the political nucleus of the region until the end of the 17th century, when a fire destroyed the site and the Court had to be moved to a different location. After the fire, the terrain was divided and auctioned to the traders and craftsmen who kept moving into the area. This process led to the formation of the commercial quarter on the premises of the ruined Old Court.

of the 18th century until the beginning of the 19th century). The last point is directly made in the unsigned introduction to the 1954 report.⁴¹⁴ As the writer(s) put it,

the results of the archeological excavations carried out at the Old Court, Mihai Vodă and especially Radu Vodă would have been even more fruitful (successful) [in identifying] the strata of material culture dating from the migrations and early feudal periods, had the bourgeois regime [...] not practiced a systematic policy of destruction of those monuments because of poor funding [resources for preservation.]”

In the previous chapter, as part of my discussion on the renovation of the Old Court in the mid 1960s, I have pointed out that some architects (i.e., Joja and his supporters) grounded their vision of renovation in a temporal framework circumscribed by the 17th and 18th centuries. They asked that the renovation project strive to “bring back” those times as the only one representative for Bucharest’s past. In contrast with this apparently “pure Romanian” history of the city, there stood the period between the end of the 18th century and the turn of the 20th century, depicted as a time engendering “chaotic construction” and “radical changes in the city’s topographic [map],” representing a potentially destructive agent of key moments of the (feudal) history of the city. It is important to note the similarity of those arguments, because, as I will show later in the chapter, they underlie a common vision of the “matters” of history—what it is and how it should be represented. At the moment, I want only to point to this account, especially because it kept being invoked by both reports as a key argument in justifying the lack of archeological material for critical time frames.

That the analysts tried so hard to prove a continuous habitation of the site of the Old Court from the Neolithic up to the present did not go unnoticed. In fact, the specialists of the Institute of Archaeology became extremely critical of the findings of the

⁴¹⁴ “Șantierul arheologic București.”

archeological research (the second stage, 1959-1960, but especially the third, 1967-1971) carried out under the supervision of the City Museum of Bucharest. In what follows, I rely only on one source of information: a series of email exchanges and phone conversations with a Romanian professor of archaeology. Even though he was not a direct participant in or even witness to the process, he had direct access to “the gossip within the archeologists’ guild” regarding the excavations carried out at the Old Court in the 1960s and 1970s. According to this professor, the digs performed at the Old Court and especially the subsequent analysis of the archeological data extracted at the site represent “the ugliest story of the archaeology of Bucharest.” This is because the Museum’s team of archeologists working on the Old Court site had been accused of wrongly dating the artifacts found within the perimeter of the ruined walls of the first court, established by prince Vlad at the middle of the 15th century and unearthed during the 1967-1971 excavations. More specifically, as the professor put it, the Museum’s team assumed that the artifacts were contemporaneous with the walls, and therefore were dated as “having been from the time of Vlad the Impaler,” that is, the 15th century, when in fact they had a more recent provenance. With the auctioning of the land surrounding the Court at the end of the 18th century, the ruins of the Court became abandoned and transformed temporarily into the garbage site of the then increasingly populated commercial area of Lipscani. As such, the artifacts found within the walls of the court could easily have been objects that the later inhabitants of the area lost or disposed of as garbage. Therefore, some of those objects came to represent the material proof of the feudal history of the Old Court, when they in fact belonged to the later history of an abandoned Court.

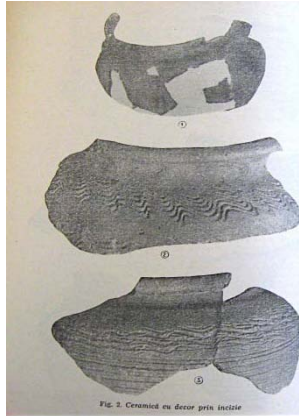


Figure 12 Photograph of pottery in the 1962 report, presented as belonging to the 9th-11th centuries. The same artifacts had been depicted by the 1953 report as “Slavic pottery,” produced in the 6th century. Image 2 in Panait, " Observații arheologice pe șantierele de construcții din Capitală," 142.

As the professor suggested, from the very beginning, the team working at the site “had to prove that the artifacts found there were from the Middle Ages,” so that the City Museum could then justify further requests to the state to fund additional excavations that would document Bucharest’s rich medieval history. This explains why there was no stratigraphical analysis of the research in the 1959-1960 report, which could scientifically ground the dating of the artifacts. Moreover, due to a combination of factors, including the fuss unleashed by the memorandum exchange in 1962-1963 and further pressure from different institutional actors, the City Museum succeeded eventually in securing a rich endowment for further pursuing the research at the Old Court.

The more important question, however, raised a different issue: what combination of factors caused the City Museum to promote the Old Court as the sole representative site for the history of Bucharest? Bucharest had emerged as a polyfocal city, with several sites that developed simultaneously, instead of being characterized by a unique center that would radiate evenly into proximal areas (the model of the Western medieval cities).

Moreover, why had so much pressure been put on displaying the Old Court as *the* oldest site of the city? Other archeological excavations in the city's center had led to the discovery of some early medieval walls as well as a great variety of artifacts identified as belonging to an earlier time (that is, the 6th and 7th centuries). (Interestingly, despite the great importance of those artifacts found in a central area of Bucharest—the Batiștei street, located 3 km west of the Old Court—and of some reports published on the excavations, none of the objects had ever reached the Museum. The professor suggests that the archeologists who worked on the site had colluded with the architects who built the new apartment buildings in the area, both groups being then engaged in this operation of “erasure” of a potential key historical site.)

The making of the Old Court into the “historical center” of the city must be set against the backdrop of a “more profound conflict” already looming due to the institutional niche occupied by archaeology at the time. More exactly, following the second round of archeological studies in the Old Court area and especially after the last excavations, the specialists in Early Middle Ages employed by the Institute of Archaeology started to openly criticize their homologues working for the City Museum for shallow archeological research, accusing them of incompetent excavations (in that area, but not only), inaccurate analysis of the data, and overall destruction of the city's built heritage. A more intriguing aspect of this harsh criticism is that it seems that from the very beginning the Institute looked upon the Museum in a condescending manner, as if they [the Institute] had waited for the Museum to make a mistake, so that they could then eliminate it.⁴¹⁵ According to the professor, these circumstances stemmed, in part,

⁴¹⁵ The archeology professor stressed that the specialists of the Institute were especially condescending towards the medieval archeologists working at the Museum.

from the conflictual relations (“clash of personalities”) between the director of the Institute, Ion Nestor, and the director of the City Museum, Dinu V. Rosetti. At the same time, the Museum and the Institute were competing for a common pool of resources distributed by the state. Moreover, the tension became even more acute as the City Museum managed to secure funding in 1959, while the Institute struggled to obtain more resources for their own research agenda (including the publication of the Archaeological Repertory [Directory] of Romania).⁴¹⁶ The particularly rich endowment of the City Museum with significant state funding could be explained by the high interest invested by the state in the celebration of the city’s 500-year anniversary since the first reference

⁴¹⁶The difficulties faced by the Institute appear in detailed account, written by Alexandru Păunescu. He writes:

The 1949 working plan of the Institute of History and Philosophy included the elaboration of the Archaeological Repertory (Directory) of Romania. This work was aimed at gathering and grouping the information on the archaeological finds in our country grouped territorially according to localities. Thus, a scientific tool has been built up in view of ensuing field research, speciality studies and establishing a base for carrying out the archaeological map of the country. [...] Consequently, the archaeological repertory (directory) has been conceived as a topographic dictionary of the ancient monuments on Romanian territory from the oldest Palaeolithic times until the Romanian Principalities were established. [...]

It was decided that the Repertory should be worked out by a team of qualified researchers, recruited from all over the country, having two working centres, the main one in Bucharest, as part of the section of Ancient History of the Institute, and a regional one, based in Cluj, belonging to the local Institute of History and Philosophy of the Academy. The work was organised according to regions, a criterion entailed by the almost exclusively topographic subject. In principle, the Cluj center tackled the material on Transylvania and Banat, while the Bucharest one that on Wallachia, Little Wallachia, Moldavia and Dobrudja. [...]

Since 1953, due to the need for financial saving and the law of labour, the collaborators have not been paid any more. The work at the Repertory has been done by a few employees of the Section of Ancient History and of the National Museum of Antiquities, as they gave for the Repertory just 20% of their activity. [...]

The effort to deliver for publication the Archaeological Repertory (Directory) at the end of 1953 failed first of all from lack of financial support.[...] Almost six years later the issue of the Repertory was resumed. Thus, the report handed in to the Scientific Council of the Institute by the secretary of the Repertory team.[...] After 11 years, more exactly in 1973, the Scientific Council of the Institute of Archaeology, under the leadership of Professor D. M. Pippidi, took the decision to publish the Archaeological Repertory (Directory). In order to prepare for completion and updating the material for publication it was necessary to regroup the whole material depending on the new territorial-administrative organisation of Romania (1965) according to villages, communes, within the counties in question.

Alexandru Păunescu, “The History of the Archive [of the Archeological Repertory of Romania]”

<http://www.cimec.ro/Arheologie/Digitalarchives/1ARR%20Archive/M.htm>

accessed February 15, 2009.

to the “Bucharest fortress” in a 1459 charter. In fact, the re-opening of the City Museum in January 1959, after it had been closed down in 1940, was to mark this celebration.

However, the subsequent research allocation that the City Local Council generously offered the City Museum specifically for further excavations at the Old Court starting in 1967, even while the Institute could not publish its most important work (the Archeological Repertory) due to a lack of funding, only added fuel to the fire. Under these tense circumstances, the City Museum had to identify a specific niche within the institutional landscape, in which most institutions and disciplinary branches were competing for the state’s whimsical allocation of resources. (Self)-eliminated from the local “guild” of the Early Middle Age specialists, who looked condescendingly upon the Museum’s medieval archeologists, contested by the architects of Project Bucharest for having aimed at institutionally “owning” central areas of the territory of “their” city, the City Museum of Bucharest had to find a means to promote itself as “unique in its own profile,”⁴¹⁷ that is, as indispensable to the state. And a means it found: the recently unearthed walls of the Old Court, which would come to represent “medieval Bucharest.”

The letter that landed on an official desk at the end of 1962 was only the first document of a large correspondence involving all the institutional actors discussed in this paper. The parts reached an agreement in August 1969, when after long debates, the Council of Ministers officially declared the Old Court “a historical reservation.” The site became then a concentrated representation of the city’s past—the place memory of the old Bucharest—being advertised as such by the brochures, guides, and scientific reports published by the Museum of the city. The Museum of the Old Court was officially opened on January 27, 1972, set under the supervision of the City Museum.

⁴¹⁷ Panait, “Studiu introductiv [Introduction],” 20.



Figure 13 The inauguration of the Old Court Museum, January, 1972. Panait I. Panait and Aristide Ștefănescu. *Muzeul Curtea Veche. Palatul Voevodal* (Muzeul de istorie a municipiului București, 1973), fig.52.

Conclusion

The image of a medieval Bucharest, encapsulating a history that the Museum was to promote and protect, became a pivotal currency for the different groups of specialists working on, under, or with the city's territory. I suggest that an increasingly stronger association of this image of a medieval Bucharest on the site of the Old Court played an important role in the tense negotiations over the area between the different factions of archeologists and architects, formed within or even crossing over disciplinary niches. Moreover, the discovery of (a part of) the original walls of the princely palace buried in the ground contributed significantly to the creation and maintenance of this association. The walls, as signs of a political past of a medieval Bucharest, turned to be a more powerful form of artifact than others. Unlike the easy-to-misdate pottery or fleeting coins,

the walls offered, through their immobility, a promise of monumentality that further enticed specialists and larger audiences to envision an old Bucharest that was more similar to popular images of (Western) medieval towns. Those latter images became all the more ubiquitous in architectural journals after the mid 1960s, following the movement on the preservation of historical cities in western Europe against modernist urban planning. This movement advocated a rehabilitation of the “historical district” of a city, a district that architecturally represented a palimpsest of the city’s development around the medieval loci of power (the town hall and the market). This imagery of a unifocal, circularly developing site as the initial core of a future European city was embraced by some architects occupying key positions within the professional hierarchies of Romania of the 1960s. By attempting to fit a multifocal Bucharest into the model of a city with a “historical center,” those architects (such as Joja, Curinschi, and Pruncu, whose arguments I discussed in the previous chapter) turned out to be instrumental for the Museum. (As I have already suggested, under the conditions of an increasing centralization of resources and a rearrangement of the institutional hierarchies in line with the Party’s agenda, this campaign represented a maneuver on the part of the Museum to acquire a more powerful position within this institutional network by advancing stronger claims of ownership over the Old Court site.)

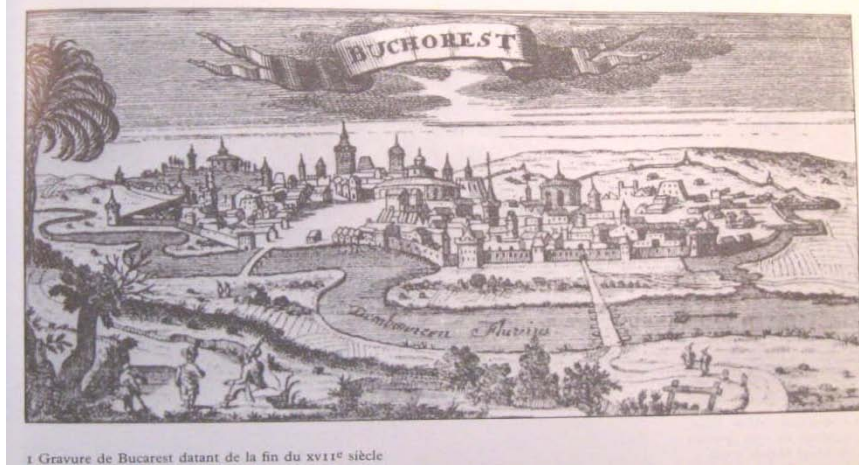


Figure 14 A stamp of Bucharest of the 18th century. This image became very popular in many accounts of Bucharest’s history published in the 1960s and 1970s.

In fact, only now can we fully understand why the Museum openly endorsed the campaign for architectural renovation of the facades in the Lipscani area. Purified of the “foreign elements of 19th century French influence,” and redecorated according to what Joja deemed to be an authentic “Romanian urban architectural style,” those houses could “travel” back in time, like the artifacts found between the walls of the Old Court. Within the “historical reservation” of the Old Court envisioned by Joja and the archeologists of the City Museum, both the (redecorated) houses and the (misdated) artifacts would have shared a materiality remodeled to fit the “right” historical and therefore aesthetic model of the late Middle ages.

The walls of the princely palace, unearthed from the ground, then played a pivotal role in propelling the Museum to advance those claims, by putting forth the Old Court site as *the* historical urban core of a socialist Bucharest, as well as a site that represented the quintessence of Bucharest’s past, and by extrapolation, of the country as a whole. In contrast to other urban centers in the country, Bucharest stood in a metonymical relation

to Romania, an approach that had already emerged by the end of the 19th century, only to be systematically reinforced through the interwar cultural and educational policies.⁴¹⁸



Figure 15 The restored Old Court, 1980. Image reproduced in Ágnes SÁgvári, ed. *The capitals of Europe. A guide to the sources for the history of their architecture and construction.* [*Les capitales de L'Europe. Guide des sources de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*]. München New York London Paris: K G Saur, UNESCO, 1980.

The new regime relied on the historical pervasiveness of this centralist vision when they put to the fore a plan for the country's socialist reconstruction that would start with the reformatting of Bucharest's urban landscape according to the Soviet model of urban planning. Since according to the political leaders of the time, "Bucharest [was] the heart of the country,"⁴¹⁹ the Museum shrewdly exploited this centralist model in order to promote the Old Court as "the hearth of the city"—an image pervading all of the research reports and historical studies about the Old Court that have been published by the Museum.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁴¹⁹ "Proces verbal al ședinței prezidiului Consiliului de Miniștri și Biroului Politic al Comitetului Central PMR din 25 Noiembrie 1953." ANR, Fond Stenograme Consiliul de Miniștri, 9/1953, 235.

⁴²⁰ See, for instance, Panait, "Studiu introductiv [Introduction]," in Panait I. Panait and Aristide Ștefănescu, *Muzeul Curtea Veche. Palatul Voievodal [the Museum of the Old Court. The Kingly Palace]*

Within this narrative of the city's history, the ruins of the princely palace signified Bucharest's political centrality in the late Middle Ages, a time deemed the "moment of maximum development of the [cultural and political] establishments," marking "a new stage in the history of our [Romanian] culture and its place within the southeastern European context."⁴²¹ Only within this context could we come to understand the comparison drawn in the 1962 anonymous memorandum between the Old Court and the two most important archeological sites on Romania's territory—the first century BC Dacian fortresses within the Orăștie Mountains, and the Histria colony on the Black Sea Coast, dated 630 BC. From an archeological site of secondary value and through a cunning strategy of employing the discourse of the Nation together with some manipulation of the archeological data, the Museum could then reposition the Old Court as the historical core of the city. Its recently unearthed walls came to be restored and displayed as invaluable material forms encasing the history of the city as a whole. Moreover, as the memorandum stated, the Old Court site could have potentially been even more important than those other archeological sites. That is, given their remoteness, no museum would have ever been opened in those areas that could teach the "true history of the nation to the working people."⁴²² The Old Court, via its centrality and thereby accessibility, represented the ideal location for such "a museum of national importance."⁴²³

(București1973), and Dumitru Almaș and Panait I. Panait, *Curtea Veche din București* (București: Editura pentru turism, 1974).

⁴²¹ Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident, la începuturile culturii medievale românești*, 11.

⁴²² AINMI, File 2159/1962-1970, Vol I, 6.

⁴²³ Ibid.



Figure 16 Visitors at the Old Court Museum. Photo: V.Stamate, 1975. Postcard 110207.

If the site had not appeared as such from the beginning, then during the 1950s and 1960s some of the specialists of the Museum invested serious energy, imagination, and political lobbying/political clout/political resources into making the Old Court appear increasingly important and “unique” historically. By allegedly setting walls and artifacts within the same historical time—the feudal era of Bucharest—while erasing other (also feudal) walls as non-representative (see, for instance, the Batiștei episode), the specialists of the Museum had simultaneously accomplished two key tasks, each built upon the other. The first was the creation of a smooth uninterrupted historical framework for “their” Old Court portrayed as the feudal core of the socialist city. This description perfectly fit the socialist state’s frenzied interest in feudalism, which came to offer the key to inquiries on the origins of the Nation as well as of the current socialist state. The second operation that the Museum managed to perform was that of uniquely promoting itself, by succeeding in occupying—both metaphorically and literally—the now most central area in the current economy of the city. It did so by means of a pivotal exchange:

it offered the socialist state the perfect “heritage” site in the unearthed walls of the princely court that simultaneously embedded the promise of the new and the old. Hidden underground, the walls had never been owned (or deemed) as “heritage” by former political regimes, so they were pristine, as it were, from a symbolical point of view. At the same time, they stood as a sign of a feudal political history of the city, thereby fitting the favorite historical framework of the socialist state.

Part II

Creating European Heritage at the Margins of Europe: Cultural Recognition as Economic Decentralization in Romania (1999-2007)

The turn of the millennium has been marked by a massive reappraisal of history in many parts of the world, but especially in Southeastern Europe, where the transformation produced by the region's full incorporation into global markets was accompanied by new kinds of dislocation as well as by efforts from various groups to redefine meaningful community. Scholars have sought to understand how the transformations of economic and political systems in the former socialist bloc have helped create new cultural categories and forms of community.⁴²⁴ Such studies have shown that the cultural categories and social logics of postsocialism are in fact embedded in previous economies and forms of sociality, representing "reconfigurations and recombinations" of them.⁴²⁵ As a new space opening up to the global economy and promoting the free movement of capital and people, the postsocialist bloc has witnessed deep changes in narratives of belonging. One such change has involved the reconfiguration of space: land and houses restitution not only produced different geographies, but also transformed people's senses

⁴²⁴ Among the most representative historical-anthropological analyses of the postsocialist context, we can find: Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds., *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 1999); Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Chris Hann, ed., *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2001); Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁴²⁵ David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.

of self and place.⁴²⁶ A discussion of the mechanisms, negotiations and political maneuvering underlying the processes of devaluation and re-evaluation that shaped not only Romania's economy, but the entire field of social relations in the 1990s, is pivotal for an analysis of the processes of heritage (re)making that emerged at that time.

Drawing upon ethnographical and historical research, the second part of this dissertation will discuss in depth the specific processes of heritage making occurring in two locations in Transylvania—Sibiu, a city established in the 12th century by Saxon colonists, who built up its historical urban core, and Bonțida, a multiethnic village in central Transylvania, a region with the largest number of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Starting in 2000, the re-making of the historical center of Sibiu, a lieux-de-mémoire of Transylvania's Saxons, has been financed mostly with private and governmental funding from Germany.⁴²⁷ Only in 2005 did the Romanian government decide to fund part of the renovation. Likewise, one of Transylvania's most famous sites, the Bánffy castle in Bonțida (once known as the "Versailles of Transylvania") has received funding mostly from Hungary, the UK, and the USA—with fewer forms of financial support resources coming from within Romania. By analyzing the multilayered negotiations underlying the processes of heritage making in these two case studies, I show that the idiom of cultural

⁴²⁶ For a complex discussion of the ample transformations of social relations and senses of identity that accompanied the process of land restitution in postsocialist Romania, see Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*. For an analysis of how kinship networks were revived through the restitution claims set on Bucharest's old houses during the 1990s, see Liviu Chelcea, "Ancestors, Domestic Groups, and the Socialist State: Housing Nationalization and Restitution in Romania," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3 (2003): 714–40. Chelcea shows how centrally situated (several decades) "old" houses represented more than pure economic capital. He argues that some of these houses also functioned as mediators of other kinds of social relations, such as the revival of kinship ties among the inheritors. However, even the fate of these houses as potential kin-makers was sealed when the inheritors decided to sell them on the market.

⁴²⁷ The Saxons came to Transylvania during the 12th and 13th centuries, whereas the other German group, the Swabians, arrived much later in the 18th century, at the invitation of the Archiduchess of Austria, Maria Theresa, and settled in the territory that forms now the western region of Romania, Banat.

heritage has played a central part in a more complex mechanism of reconfiguring culture, politics, and meanings of “community” in the postsocialist region.

During the early 1990s, Romania’s economy seemed to have imploded, being on the verge of collapse while still heavily centralized and closely supervised by the old networks of the reformed communists who managed to retain political power after the Romanian revolution in December 1989. Between 1990 and 1996, Romania was characterized by a highly uncertain economic and legal environment, where a series of banks and mutual funds kept announcing their bankruptcy as a means to acquire immediate capital, later invested in million dollar deals, while leaving thousands of people with no means of subsistence. The political regime repeatedly made use of violence in order to end street protests against the former communists’ taking power.⁴²⁸ It was also the reformed communists, who, under the slogan “we don’t sell our country!” played a major role in sealing off the country from potential foreign investors while shrewdly maneuvering a systematic and speedy destruction — or even “disappearance” — of the valuables of the former socialist centralized economy.⁴²⁹ Many quietly observed that the destruction of those valuables was a necessary step for their eventual re-acquisition by those who previously administered them, ranging from managers of regional factories to central figures in the ministries managing large industrial plants. People who had already been involved in external commercial relations with western countries before 1989 also benefited from these swift political negotiations, since they

⁴²⁸ Such were the events of June 1990, when, at the government’s request, miners came to Bucharest to violently put a stop to the protests organized by the opposition, events leading to more than two hundred dead and 5,000 injured. The June events made western countries consider Romania “a failed democracy,” and triggered the first major wave of emigration after 1989, during which more than 100,000 people left Romania to solicit political asylum abroad.

⁴²⁹ A form of “disappearance” is amply discussed in Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, whose title nicely captures the complex maneuvering through which some plots of land that initially appeared on the map, simply vanished when they had to be restituted to their rightful owners.

were among the few who knew “how to do business” in a crowd still learning the market’s basic rules of supply and demand.

In her analysis of the land restitution occurring in Romania in the late 1990s, Verdery points out that this “unmaking of the socialist property regime” was informed by simultaneous strategies of “devaluation and re-evaluation” of the goods and economic and social relations that had formed the centralized socialist systems.⁴³⁰ As she put it,

[t]he central problems for many actors were to discover what was valuable now and how one could get it, what practices were relevant to the valuations newly emerging, and how one could escape from things whose value was now plunging or make such things into assets—what or whom did one have to know and what did one need to have, so as to find value in someone else’s liability.

Romania of the early 1990s represented an extreme example of these sweeping economic transformations. The country’s unstable political context was very much fed by the neocommunist government’s strong reactions to the opposition, on one hand, and, on the other, by their direct interest in projecting an image of a fledgling democracy for the western countries and international organizations so that the latter would grant them financial aid. The socialist-era elites could maintain their political and economic power through the thick networks of obligations and reciprocity forged during the socialist years. But they also strengthened their political alliances through their in-depth knowledge, also acquired and refined in the previous economy, of the assets they had administered as part of the centralized system. Due to this thorough knowledge, they knew better than anyone how to treat these goods (state enterprises, state farms, industrial plants, buildings, estates or land) as jigsaw puzzles that could be arranged and rearranged according to the economic demands of the current context. In other words, I argue, drawing upon Latour’s concept of “assembly of things,” that these groups or individuals

⁴³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, 23.

became the masters of rearranging the relations between people and things by manipulating the ways in which things were ordered in relation to one another.

The former socialist elites, managers, and local officials knew better than others how to forge new economic networks by relying on the social networks already formed in the previous period, through whose nodes they consolidated their political power and thereby continued to preserve for themselves privileged political and economic access to resources. As Verdery and others have amply shown, these managers and local officials had acquired, by virtue of their previous administrative rights, the knowledge of how to separate assets from liabilities, or how to transform assets into liabilities so the transaction would always be to their benefit.⁴³¹

At least, this is what they had been doing extensively during the first cycle of privatization, which took place in the early 1990s in Romania. Starting in 1996, when a newly elected liberal government “opened up” the country to foreign investors, by offering them more advantageous conditions to develop businesses in Romania, the local former-communist managers who had turned into entrepreneurs had to compete with more powerful economic external actors, such as international investors or corporations. However, the former networks of reciprocity and obligations that these managers managed to strengthen during the early 1990s proved to be extremely resilient, and the corruption-ridden economic deals made it very difficult for external investors to pursue business opportunities in the country. Therefore, for the most of the 1990s and even early 2000s, the restructuring of Romania’s economy was rather slow. This was also the case

⁴³¹ In addition to Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, see, for instance, David Stark, “Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism,” in Gernot Grabher and David Stark, eds., *Restructuring Networks in Post-Socialism: Legacies, Linkages, and Localities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35-69, and Elizabeth Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

with the processes of restitution of the movable and immovable valuables (land, buildings, forests or estates) that had been taken away by the socialist state to form a centralized economy.⁴³²

An important segment of restitution claims was formed of the demands set forth by the ethnic groups in Romania, especially by those who had possessed an immense wealth in various forms of private or collective ownership (for instance, land and estates owned by the Lutheran church, to which most of the Saxons of Transylvania confessionally belong, or many of the castles and mansions in Transylvania, formerly owned by Hungarian families of noble descent). The state response to those claims was rather slow. As late as 2006, external institutions, such as the Lutheran Church in Germany and in the USA, converged their own efforts and diplomatic lobby with the Lutheran Church in Romania in order to have the Romanian central officials respond to their claims to receive back the land, estates, and buildings that had been confiscated in 1948 by the socialist regime from the Lutheran church. These claims were grounded in arguments that these goods represented a part of the Saxon community's heritage. The preservation of the Saxon heritage stood at the core of a special project sponsored immediately after 1992 by the reunified Germany, which involved an exhaustive data collection about the vernacular Saxon architecture in Transylvania. The German project devoted special attention to situations where most of these buildings (houses and churches) had been deserted by their Saxon owners who had emigrated to Germany. In Chapter 5, I address these claims for restitution and the forms in which they had been formulated by the Saxons currently residing in Transylvania.

⁴³² Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, 9.

Many of the castles and mansions in Transylvania, which before 1945 had belonged to by Hungarian lesser nobility, have similarly been surrounded by a series of problems concerning their restitution. Despite some attempts at renovation or rehabilitation pursued by state conservation specialists during the 1960s, by the beginning of the 1990s many of these sites were in a deplorable state. Already alerted to this situation, the Hungarian government offered to provide, via its Ministry of National Heritage, generous support for the reconstruction or rehabilitation of the churches, castles, and vernacular architecture that stand as symbols of the Hungarian legacy in Transylvania.⁴³³ However, fewer of the rightful heirs of these buildings' former owners, most of whom who were born and raised abroad, were willing to take up the difficult process of fighting for their ownership rights with the Romanian state and to spend the necessary time and money in court trials that could last for several years. Some of them found this courage only when they were encouraged and actively supported by private foundations or NGOs interested in saving the castles by assigning them heritage value and developing projects of built heritage conservation at the sites. One such case will be discussed in Chapter 6.

This second section of the dissertation moves toward a situated analysis of how heritage projects in the two sites became locations for asserting political leverage in postsocialist Romania using varying views of history as a political currency. Part II has two primary aims: first, it draws directly from the insights and arguments outlined by scholars of postsocialism, who have pointed out the selective continuities in political

⁴³³ The territory known as Transylvania had previously been either part of the Kingdom of Hungary or a semi-autonomous Principality with largely a Hungarian nobility, until the settlement after the first World War incorporated it into Romania. Some Hungarian never accepted this, adding impetus to the idea of preserving a Hungarian legacy in Transylvania.

knowledge and alliances between ‘socialist’ and ‘post-socialist’ periods; and second, it assesses how various political actors on the ground acknowledge, erase, or subvert the centralized socialist system of expertise and institutional recognition surrounding heritage-making discussed in the dissertation’s first half.

My work contributes to the scholarship on postsocialism, which I have already discussed at the beginning — specifically to preexisting work on land and house restitution in Romania. I expand on these insights by looking at how various ethnic “minority” groups have used the notion of heritage-as-restitution – combined with heavy investments of capital from outside Romania’s borders – to leverage political currency in the “new Europe” and simultaneously stake a claim in Romania’s cultural and social landscape.

I argue that the two cases offer different perspectives on the strategies of devaluation and re-evaluation of the former assets of the socialist wealth, in which these castles and buildings had been included. More specifically, I show how the negotiations surrounding the ownership status of these estates (such as the houses in Sibiu’s historical center or the Bánffy castle) are grounded in distinct understandings of history and of the specific historical framework that each group deems to be more valuable than others. I therefore approach these two cases of heritage making (or re-making, depending on what group we ask) as simultaneously representing transformations of regimes of property and the political and economic forms of access to ‘assets’ contained therein. My discussion of the cases draws closely upon Verdery’s advice. She writes:

[...]Empirical analysis must show what the central values are and through which relations and devices their appropriation takes place. Also to be discovered are the characteristic idioms for making claims. [...] Some of these claims find greater acceptance in one property regime than in others. Still another variable is how

claims are adjudicated, such as by using mediators, court trials, uncountered force, or divine sanction.⁴³⁴

Following this analytical framework, I find some important crossroads in the ways claims for restitution of immovable goods, especially those advanced by minority groups, meet claims for constituting cultural heritage as a form of legitimating cultural difference, and therefore cultural diversity, in the European Union. More specifically, in the fifth chapter, I discuss in detail how the political representatives of the Transylvanian Saxons, helped by external actors, set out claims for economic autonomy and decentralization by pushing an agenda of heritage as recognition. This idiom of cultural recognition matches a new turn in the EU cultural policy, in which the search for a common European identity is rooted in cultural diversity. At the same time, these demands for cultural and economic decentralization are fiercely fought by some of the local Romanian officials. They used to have full administrative rights over the state-owned houses, estates and castles that are now being reclaimed as heritage sites, and therefore part of the larger European heritage domain. Some of them, by shrewd maneuvering and by mobilizing local and regional networks of reciprocity and obligations, managed to exploit these sites to their own benefit, during and even after the communist period. The restitution claims advanced by other, mostly external, actors have spoiled the hopes of these local officials, many of whom held positions in the local political apparatus in the socialist times, as well. I show how throughout the 1990s, these local officials holding only administrative rights have engaged in a systematic process of devaluing these sites by leaving them to decay or even gradually destroying them, in the hope of eventually acquiring them for cheap, or, even better, for nothing.

⁴³⁴ Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*, 19.

In sum, the following two chapters show how, in contrast to the cases in Part I, where “heritage” was built in support of political legitimation and a quest for autonomy from the Soviet Union, here the idiom of cultural heritage becomes a means for laying claim to political, economic, and social forms of restitution available in a contemporary “Europeanizing” Romania. I discuss how different actors attempt to negotiate ownership rights over the current two ‘historical sites’ in Transylvania by first invoking an ownership of diverging historical frameworks during which each of these groups had access to these sites. In other words, the heritage making in contemporary Romania reveals processes of devaluation and re-evaluation as a dynamic conflict among hierarchies of historical narratives, where distinct groups engage in producing qualitative differences between such narratives in order to justify economic and cultural difference in the present.

Chapter 5
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION, ETHNIC BELONGING, AND SYMBOLIC
GEOGRAPHIES IN SIBIU/HERMANNSTADT

I don't understand why everyone wants to study the Saxons, now that they are all gone!
A Romanian history professor replying to my description of research interests

Introduction

It all started, the rumor goes, when the deputy Minister of Culture of Luxembourg visited Sibiu for the first time in 1998 and caught the conversation of two elders on the main street. They were speaking a dialect that was so close to the one spoken in Luxembourg that he immediately wanted to know what it was and why was it so similar, and to learn more about the history of Transylvanian Saxons.⁴³⁵ Another account for “how everything began” is that the same Minister of Culture came to Sibiu and met his Romanian homologue, then actor Ion Caramitru, who had already been particularly interested in issues of heritage preservation. They played the piano together, had a pleasant conversation, and decided to organize a project.⁴³⁶

Like all rumors, they partially match the “official” story: that the partnership between the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Sibiu had emerged as a result of the international symposium “Sibiu—European Confluences,” held in Sibiu in May 1998. At the suggestion of the Council of Europe, Romanian Minister of Culture Caramitru invited

⁴³⁵ I got this story from a historian from Luxembourg, whom I met at a conference in March 2006.

⁴³⁶ Discussion with an official from Luxembourg who coordinated the common projects developed between associations in the Duchy of Luxembourg and Sibiu for the program “2007 European cultural capitals: The Duchy of Luxembourg and Sibiu.” The discussion took place in Sibiu in April 2006.

high officials from Germany and Luxembourg to discuss strategies of “salvaging the historical center of Sibiu.”⁴³⁷ The symposium participants convened on several projects. The representatives of the German state decided to sponsor a GTZ office in Sibiu, where a team of German architects would draft and supervise the rehabilitation of the Old Town.⁴³⁸ (GTZ stands for *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeiten*, an institution sponsored by the German Ministry of External Affairs that focuses on projects of development in “non-Western” areas of the world.) The Luxembourg officials decided to sponsor the development of a project between Sibiu and Luxembourg within the larger initiative of “European Cultural Itineraries,” and the restoration of one of the old merchant houses in Sibiu’s Old Town, which was considered emblematic for Sibiu’s history.⁴³⁹

Be they official reports or merely rumors, all those accounts carry the same thing at their kernel: the story of an encounter, echoing a long series of others, going back into the past. All of them, occurring among various ethnic, social, and political groups, have left their traces on the city itself, transforming it into a unique urban palimpsest still waiting to be deciphered. This is what the symposium stood for: an invitation to remember shared histories by identifying their mark on Sibiu’s urban fabric; a call to current political actors in western Europe to rediscover the historical ties to this city (and by extension, to Transylvania as a whole), ties that had been seemingly severed during socialist times. It was clearly an official invitation of the newly reformed Romanian state,

⁴³⁷ Mayor Johannis mentioned that the symposium theme was “Salvage Sibiu’s center.” Interview with Klaus Werner Johannis by Răzvan Brăileanu, “Dezvoltare durabilă la Sibiu,” *“22” Magazine*, July 13, 2007.

⁴³⁸ Hermann Fabini, „Das Schaser-Luxemburg-Haus am Kleinen Ring: Bericht über ein Restaurierungsprojekt in Hermannstadt,” *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumänien (ADZ)*, August 11, 2004, 3.

⁴³⁹ Fabini, “Das Schaser-Luxemburg-Haus am Kleinen Ring.” I discuss the story of this house at length in the second part of the chapter.

under a liberal reformist government, for some of the countries within the EU zone not only to remember but also to draw upon those past ties in order to recreate political alliances in the present. This invitation was taken up and developed by the local elites of Sibiu—especially after the German Forum, the party of the Democratic Forum of Romania’s Germans (the Forum, henceforth), had won the local elections for two consecutive terms (2000-2004 and 2004-2008) and the Forum representative, the Saxon Klaus Johannis, was elected the mayor of Sibiu.⁴⁴⁰

The mayor and his team treated the renovation of the historical town as a key project of their mandate. As the mayor put it, “the historical downtown is an asset of universal value, therefore we must preserve it.” The mayor and other Forum representatives engaged in intensive lobbying for Sibiu by establishing connections with external governmental and private organizations, especially with those in Germany and Luxembourg. Funding started coming in from various sources (the German government through its Development Bank [KfW], the European commission, World Bank, etc.). With this funding and under the supervision of the GTZ office, opened soon after in Sibiu, the project of renovation started. Also, German specialists and architects collaborated with Sibiu’s professionals to apply for UNESCO patrimonial protection for Sibiu’s historical downtown. (The application was not successful). Like Germany, Luxembourg lobbied for Sibiu in Europe as well as funded various projects in Sibiu, including the renovation of the Baroque merchant house in one of Sibiu’s old squares,

⁴⁴⁰ As of 2010, Klaus Johannis is still the mayor of Sibiu, having won his third mandate in 2008. As recently as December 2009, his political star flew even higher in Romanian politics, as he was invited to become the new prime minister, should the alliance formed between the Social Democrat Party and the Liberal Party have won the presidential elections. It did not, and Johannis remained the mayor of Sibiu, “the place where he belonged,” as he declared in a press conference following the December 2009 elections. Interview with Klaus Werner Johannis by Răzvan Brăileanu, “Dezvoltare durabilă la Sibiu,” “22” *Magazine*, July 13, 2007.

currently known as Luxembourg House; moreover, invoking a common historical past as well as a shared linguistic present with the Saxon community of Transylvania, Luxembourg invited Sibiu to apply together to the Council of Ministers of Culture of the European Union in 2004 for the title of European cultural capital in 2007, which they won.

The rehabilitation of Sibiu's "old city" was approached and promoted as one of the major means of legitimizing Sibiu as a European cultural capital. The historical downtown of Sibiu represents an architectural symbol of the Saxons, being one of the first cities to be built by this ethnic group that came to Transylvania in the 12th century. The Saxons had played a major role in the economic and cultural development of the region of Transylvania. If at the beginning of the 20th century the Saxons represented almost 60% of Sibiu's population, most of them had left for West Germany between the late 1960s and the early 1990s, together with other Romanian Germans. Now, the Saxons in Sibiu make up only 1.6% of the inhabitants. However, their presence on the political, cultural, and symbolic map of the city is far greater, as various institutions opened in Sibiu, ranging from tourist offices to the headquarters of the Forum, have systematically tried to highlight the intimate relation between the Saxon community and the city.

Due to his immediate and concrete results, Mayor Johannis and the Forum became, in Romania but especially abroad (i.e., Germany and Luxemburg), an epitome of local initiative and managerial spirit, which proved to be successful with no help from the "state," here translated as Romania's central government. Moreover, the mayor was critical about the passivity of the Romanian government at that time (before the 2004 elections) regarding Sibiu's old city, accusing the ministry of culture making only empty

promises.⁴⁴¹ Indeed, even after Sibiu received the title of European capital of culture for 2007, the funding coming to Sibiu from the Romanian government was scarce. Between 2000 and early 2005, most of the funding came from abroad, which often made the headlines of the local media: “German money for Sibiu!” This deepened the already weak image of “the state,” essentialized as the 2000-2004 central government in Bucharest, which appeared to be physically as well as politically distant from Sibiu and autonomous plans of regional development, in general.

Only in 2005 did the project receive much more visibility at the national level. Within months, the newly elected central government came to grasp the political significance of “Sibiu 2007” for Romania’s image on the European political scene, especially at a time when the state needed the support of as many international actors as possible to lobby for Romania’s acceptance into the European Union in 2007. Sibiu’s reconstruction suddenly became one of the priorities of the Romanian government, and in 2006 all the funds for the renovation of historical monuments at the national level were to be exclusively channeled to Sibiu. If, under the previous government, discussions about the rehabilitation of the historical downtown of Sibiu had been relegated only to the relatively marginal Institute for Historical Monuments, beginning in 2005 the topic came to represent a key investment for national politicians’ public image, as their involvement in the project “Sibiu 2007” stood as a proof of their European civic attitude and openness

⁴⁴¹ Later (June 2007), the mayor revealed that the Romanian Minister of Culture “had forgotten” to forward to the City Hall of Sibiu the official invitation sent by the Minister of Culture of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the Romanian central authorities in Fall 2003. The government of Luxembourg had invited Sibiu to co-apply, together with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, for the title of European capital of culture in 2007. Mayor Johannis mentioned that only in January 2004 did his team find out directly from the Luxembourg officials about this invitation, which they immediately accepted. The candidacy proposal was prepared in two months, and in May 2004, Luxembourg and Sibiu were being offered the title for 2007. Interview with Klaus Werner Johannis by Răzvan Brăileanu, “Dezvoltare durabilă la Sibiu,” “22” *Magazine*, July 13, 2007.

to multicultural values. The Minister of Culture announced: “Sibiu represents Romania. Through culture we will enter Europe!” She became very involved in the project, and remained so even after her resignation several months after her appointment.⁴⁴² The new minister quickly stepped in, by declaring that he would invite the Romanian government to hold one of its meetings in Sibiu, with the members of the European Commission at Bucharest and the mayor of the city of Luxembourg as guests of honor.⁴⁴³ He also mentioned that he would persuade Romania’s prime minister and president to celebrate New Year’s Eve in Sibiu and Romania’s first day as an EU-member state. Notwithstanding their emphatic tone, these declarations pointed out a shift of register in the attitude of the central authorities toward Sibiu. Their proposal to politically mark the urban space of the city by having a government meeting in Sibiu represented a form of symbolical recognition of the sudden centrality of the city on Romania’s political map. (The proposed governmental meeting, however, never took place.) By approaching Sibiu as no longer a self-contained, middle-range city in Transylvania but rather a meeting point for “European confluences,” the Romanian central officials aimed to spur a snowball-like process of political and symbolic resignification of the site, one that would trigger further investment in the region and in the country as a whole.

In order for potential foreign investors to “put their faith in Sibiu” and start business in the region, they could not be lured in only with vague promises of economic

⁴⁴² In August 2007, Mona Muscă resigned from her ministerial position after the press had publicized documents proving her former collaboration with the Secret Police before 1989. She maintained, however, her position in the Romanian Parliament and continued to actively support “Sibiu 2007,” being appointed the president of the International Support Committee for Sibiu. “Mona Musca lasă locul lui Iorgulescu,” *Rondul de Sibiu*, Supliment “Sibiu 2007- Capitala Culturală Europeană,” Teodora Gheorghiu and Elida-Ioana Cremene, September 9, 2005, p.2-3.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

stability in a country located at that time outside of the EU “safety zone.”⁴⁴⁴ Those investors were more likely to assume the risk of opening joint-ventures in the region only if they were provided with more persuasive arguments. Such arguments, I contend, would come from revisiting a *longue durée* history of ties and exchanges between Sibiu and other regions in Europe, which could be invoked in order to bolster the confidence of current EU-located entrepreneurs.

On one side, this process entailed a renewal of those ties via transnational projects, which focused on the inclusion of Sibiu in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg’s (eventually successful) application for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2007. But those ties in the making would still have been far too loose had they been expected to emerge exclusively out of “remembered” shared histories. Such nostalgic arguments would just not do for the potential foreign investors, who were oriented very much to the present, and especially the future. To be persuaded, they needed a stronger, stable, and more immediate ground. The city of Sibiu became this very ground. The rehabilitation of the old center of Sibiu was approached as the main strategy of ordering the urban space by giving it a form that would signify thriving development, a vibrant urban culture, and cosmopolitan and hip forms of circulation of people, goods, and services—exactly what the EU expected from its new candidate members.

At the same time, a promise of contemporary development had to be set within an inviting and persuasive historical narrative. All those forms of potentiality needed a history, and this history was to be represented by the (rehabilitated) buildings of the old center. It was the *historical* city—the houses with their roofs with “eyes,” the hidden

⁴⁴⁴ “Foreign investors place faith in Sibiu,” by Eamonn Houston, October 19, 2004, *Bucharest Business Week Online*.

courtyards behind the imposing wooden gates, the labyrinthine quality of the old center, with the sinuous streets and the corridors between houses, the bridges, the bastions and the walls—that created an urban atmosphere fascinating to tourists, potential investors, and ethnographers alike. It was this uniqueness of the medieval center among other cities in Transylvania that led the Council of Europe to seek long-term strategies for the preservation of Sibiu’s center as a “European cultural heritage.”⁴⁴⁵ The 1998 symposium was the first event out of a series of projects involving different groups of political actors that focused on the rehabilitation of Sibiu’s historical center as a vital priority in the region. The city emerging out of those projects appeared as an interesting oxymoron, thriving on contrasts, since the city’s potential development relied on a rebirth of the city’s very past.⁴⁴⁶

I will examine the complex process of remaking Sibiu into a European city-site as an archaeology of memory: a “deciphering” of European signs from the city’s material ground (buildings, shapes, local institutions). As yet another attempt at deciphering, my analysis will ironically reveal the limits of this metaphor by discussing the multiple illusions, nostalgias, and expectations underlying a history of Sibiu as it was being set under revision. At the first glance, this process—the salvaging of Sibiu and its transformation into a meeting point of European confluences—was envisioned as a restoration of the “forgotten” Europeanness of Sibiu. In fact, as I will show, it represented a form of *making*, a process of construction very much grounded in multiple

⁴⁴⁵ Sighișoara was another fortified town, with a smaller population. Sighișoara’s fortified old center had already been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1998.

⁴⁴⁶ The preservation of “the image of the old city” was the number one priority in the project “Romania – Europe—a common heritage—Sibiu 2000,” launched by the Ministry of Culture and Cults of Romania, with “financial support of several states- Germany, Luxembourg, France, Belgium and Italy.” For a short presentation of the project see http://www.eukn.org/romania/themes/Urban_Policy/Urban_environment/-Romania—Europe—a-common-heritage—Sibiu-2000_3118.html (Accessed on September 28, 2009.)

contemporary agendas and political concerns, and informed by histories much more convoluted and tense than the beautified image of a pan-European “unity in diversity” promoted by the Council of Europe.

The enterprise of making Sibiu a European cultural site has proved to be a challenging one, as various actors involved in the project have engaged in significant struggles over representations of “culture” and “Europe.” Underlying these struggles we find competing claims for the legitimization of various “pasts” and “presents” as “history.” In contrast to the Romanian central officials’ declarations, other claims, advanced by local or international actors, questioned political geographies set under spatial projections of the “nation-state” and proposed instead transnational forms of mapping history onto space. The latter claims put forth symbolic geographies set within earlier political imaginaries of a medieval or a turn-of-the century imperial Central Europe that challenged centralist projects of the nation-state, grounded on an assumed territory-based commonality. Not surprisingly, such arguments for a subtle, but gradual distancing from the institutional framework of the nation-state have resonated in the recent years with the attempts of the European Union to validate itself institutionally by intensively promoting an all-encompassing and primordial “European culture,” thriving beyond and often despite national borders.

The project of reviving Sibiu’s Europeanness and thereby economic potential through the historical preservation of the city’s old center revealed many political fantasies on which different groups fed. This chapter will focus first on how various actors searched for “heritage” in Sibiu as well as the arguments they deployed to justify their quests and methods of identification. I will also analyze the strategies whereby,

under the GTZ's enthusiastic supervision, houses of Sibiu's old center have been simultaneously transformed into representations of Saxon heritage for international tourists and into means of civic education for their residents, whereas some of the Saxons currently living in Sibiu have not wholeheartedly shared this enthusiasm. The second part of this chapter will zoom out from the project of rehabilitation to analyze on the broader institutional strategies and diverging political agendas at play in this process. I will discuss how the changes occurring within Romania's structures of power, triggered by the election of a liberal government in 1997, met other interests of political actors in the EU. More specifically, those interests included Luxembourg's project of consolidating a national identity and its position among other European countries, Germany's concern with the historical and current position of the German minorities in the Eastern bloc, as well as the interest of EU organizations, such as the Council of Europe, in creating new frameworks for producing novel forms of identifications of various states and regions with a shared "European culture and identity."

The Development Model and the Making of Contemporary Germany: *GTZ* in Sibiu and Abroad

I began my fieldwork in Sibiu before I knew that its houses would become central research subjects for my dissertation. In Fall 2005, I spent my first two months in Sibiu wandering the streets for hours and paying attention to how the city, especially the old city, was inhabited. I compared my perspective with what I had seen two years before, during my previous visit in summer 2003. Within two years, the city had become much more colorful and enlivened, with a vivid urban culture percolating through all the pores

of the historical city center. Small restaurants and jazz clubs opened in some of the old houses' cellars, sandwiches were made and sold on the spot by a resident-turned-entrepreneur through his kitchen window conveniently opening to one of the central squares, while Italians moved to Sibiu to become restaurant owners and sell the best pizza, hot chocolate and ice cream in the region. Meanwhile, the houses of the old center changed as well: some of their old window frames were being replaced by plastic ones, deemed to be more efficient in blocking noise, heat, or cold, as well as "modern," standing as the most visible sign of any elevation of the residents' social status. An even greater sign of such upgrades were the mansards arranged under some of the houses' roofs, which some of the house owners managed to create before the city hall forbade any radical transformations of the rooftops and the roof windows in the old center.⁴⁴⁷ Poorer residents, who did not have the means to change their window frames, would still paint them in vivid colors and sometimes even stick to the glass colorful advertisements they would find in their mailboxes, generously distributed by various companies vying for market visibility. The windows of the houses in the old center not only displayed the outside world to the house residents, but also offered clues about the residents' economic status and aesthetic preferences to the outside viewers.

To a smaller extent, if someone paid close attention, other elements of the houses could also offer more insight about the lives and means of the residents: entrances with shabby, or, on the contrary, reconstructed and even new metal gates; roofs with old and often missing tiles, contrasting to others, on which (too) brightly red new tiles replaced

⁴⁴⁷ This method of expanding the occupancy extended also to the socialist apartment buildings, whose residents would contract with construction companies to erect an extra floor of apartments on top of the buildings, which they would then rent or sell. During the year I lived in Sibiu, many a 4-level apartment building underwent such alterations.

the old ones; interior courtyards showing large hollows in the ground, with the skeleton of a run down car deposited in a corner, strikingly different from others, nicely paved with cobblestones.



Figure 17 The “eyes” of the houses in the Little Square, Sibiu, April 2007.

In fall 2005, the houses of the old center of Sibiu were a wide combination of colors and elements: dark wooden window frames, adjacent to bright white plastic ones; windows with Maggi ads stuck in a corner, next to some displaying embroidered, expensive curtains; mailboxes of multiple sizes and colors spread on the entrance walls; house facades painted in bright turquoise, with a strip of fake marble added on the lower side, abutting on ones dully covered by grey tones. The 1,200 historical buildings were then the mirrors of their residents’ lives, approximately 20,000 people sharing the 90ha territory of Sibiu’s old town, which was for the first time mentioned in an 1191 chronicle as Villa Hermanni (Hermann’s town, hence the city’s German name, Hermannstadt).⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁸ The real number of the current (temporary and permanent) inhabitants of the historical center represented a controversial topic while I was in Sibiu in 2005. The GTZ officially estimated the number to be around 14,000, but they were aware that besides these “official” residents, there were many others who lived there, even though they did not declare their residence. Other officials thought that the real number was much higher, reaching in fact 25,000 people. Already in 2003, one of the local newspapers wrote: “The aim of the City Hall is to downsize the number of the historical center’s inhabitants from 25,000 to 10,000 exactly [as it was] during the Middle Ages.” “Centrul istoric va pierde 15.000 de locuitori [The historical center will lose 15,000 residents],” *Rondul*, July 7, 2003. In the absence of more specific data, I offer the figure of 20,000 as a very approximate estimate.

The necessity of focusing on the entire historical center as a historical assembly became evident during the first official discussions initiated in 1998 by Romanian officials, aiming to find strategies for the site's preservation. The specialists admitted that the previous interventions had focused on specific buildings, while a project of rehabilitation of the entire site had never been envisioned due to the exorbitant costs as well as the complex management of a plan for the residents' temporary relocation.

In 1999, GTZ (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeiten*, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation) began a pilot research project, during which the rehabilitation needs of the site had been assessed, and plans began to be drafted. The GTZ team concluded that “the gradual degradation of the original building material, the high population density, and the precarious living conditions were the most evident symptoms of a massive deterioration of the historical center.”⁴⁴⁹ They set as the main objectives of their project the improvement of the living conditions within the historical center, the historical preservation of the buildings and the transformation of the site into an economic resource for local development through the promotion of cultural tourism. The historical preservation of the city's old center was approached as a strategy of *renewal* of the city's economy. More important, the project was also promoted as a strategy of raising awareness and developing civic engagement among the city's residents, especially those living in the buildings on the site, by encouraging them to understand their houses' historical value, seek professional assistance for their potential redecoration plans, and understand and promote the preservation program.

⁴⁴⁹ Cristina Muntoiu and Michael Engel, “Sibiu Historic Centre Rehabilitation Project: An overview of activities during the period 09/2000 - 04/2007” (Sibiu / Hermannstadt: the Joint Romanian German Project “Rehabilitation of the Historic Centre of Sibiu/Hermannstadt,” April 2007).

One of the immediate effects of the rehabilitation program has been a relative gentrification of the old city center. In fact, I will discuss at length in the second section of this chapter, the gentrification was not only helped out by the local agendas of heritage promotion, but also has legitimized the very quality of a site transformed into heritage: the buildings had become signs of a romantic(ized) past, of the times when the “civilized Saxons” inhabited the city center. Automatically, the current owners should be like their buildings. However, a significant percent of the population currently occupying the old center of Sibiu is formed of old and/or relatively poor people.⁴⁵⁰ They represent the former tenants brought in by the socialist urban policies. Even though they managed to buy their apartments from the socialist state, they have been recently sued by the families of the former house owners. The latter had either been the Saxons who emigrated to Germany during the 1980s and were forced to give their nice houses to the state in order to obtain a passport, or had been rich “bourgeois” old families, whom the socialist state sent to prison or expelled to poorer regions of Romania. Therefore, the investment in the buildings’ renovation has been kept to a minimum due to the uncertain ownership.

In September 2000, upon the opening of the GTZ office in Sibiu, the project was officially launched. It mainly entailed free consultancy offered by rehabilitation specialists to the owners and tenants living in the historic center, and it funded limited interventions on some buildings.⁴⁵¹ The full restoration of the buildings was never an

⁴⁵⁰ In January 2005, the chief architects of the city, Szabolcs Guttman, offered the following statistics on the social fabric of Sibiu’s historical center: “we have 1000 buildings in the center, of which 20 % are rehabilitated. Another 20% are individually owned, and 40% are collectively owned. The most difficult cases are the mixed ones, in which both private owners and the state partially own the building. These represent 28% of the buildings, where the houses are either occupied by people who are too poor to buy their residence, or their final ownership is still legally uncertain, as the former owners sued the socialist state and asked for the buildings’ restitution. Interview with Szabolcs Guttman by Iulia Nagy, “Nu putem tăia panglica în Piața Mare în 2005,” *Tribuna*, January 17, 2005, page 17.

⁴⁵¹ Cristina Muntoiu and Michael Engel, “Sibiu Historic Centre Rehabilitation Project.”

objective, and the GTZ team proposed an alternative, step-by-step model, which would distribute the funds to a wider range of buildings to solve their most severe and urgent structural problems.⁴⁵² In 2004, upon receiving more funds from the German Development Bank KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau) through the program of financial cooperation between Germany and Romania, the GTZ team expanded their range of projects. In addition to the rehabilitation work on the houses, the other projects included: training sessions for specialists (architects, craftsmen, civil engineers, etc) as well as non-specialists, such as the residents of the historical center who would apply the preservation techniques in their own homes; institutional support offered to Sibiu’s City Hall for drafting the Rehabilitation Charter and other urban management long-term plans; and various public campaigns aiming to offer more information about “an integrated and careful rehabilitation of the historical center.”⁴⁵³



Figure 18 The larger banner reads “*Trecutul Sibiului devine Viitor*” [Sibiu’s Past becomes Sibiu’s Future]. November, 2005.

⁴⁵² Ibid, 11.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 12.

As I will discuss in the second part of the chapter, the GTZ campaigns represented strategies of educating the residents on how to look at and inhabit their city in a novel way. These strategies conflicted, however, with other forms of habitation, and especially with local understandings of “place” and “history.”

To better analyze the rationale underlying the GTZ projects in Sibiu, I will first situate them within their broader institutional context. GTZ is a large organization working under the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of the German state. Established in 1975, it has initiated and supervised projects in more than 60 countries, projects promoting “decentralization and local governance, poverty alleviation, the development of urban services and an environment-friendly urbanization, and the cooperation between the public and the private sectors.”⁴⁵⁴ Since its beginning, GTZ developed only five projects directly focused on the rehabilitation of urban heritage, a very small number within the total projects that GTZ has coordinated. The organization continues to support three projects of urban rehabilitation in historical cities, of which two had been included on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Alep in Syria, which started in 1993, and Shibam / Wadi Hadhramawt in Yémen, which began in 1997).⁴⁵⁵ The third one has been Sibiu, which was launched in 2000. Within GTZ policy as a whole, this particular kind of project—the rehabilitation of historical cities—appears then to be an exception.

As a GTZ specialist, Ursula Eigel has pointed out that, as much as such projects are very well developed and sponsored in Germany, the German state is not in general

⁴⁵⁴ Ursula Eigel, “Le patrimoine culturel dans les projets urbains de la GTZ,” in *Partenariats pour les villes du patrimoine mondial. La culture comme vecteur de développement urbain durable*. Proceedings of the workshop “Héritage partagé, responsabilité commune,” held during November 11-12 in Urbino, Pesaro – Italie. Centre du patrimoine mondial de l’UNESCO, Paris, 2004, 75-77.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, 75.

interested in funding projects of cultural heritage preservation outside Germany. Such projects are considered to be too costly, requiring significant funding, while their main focus on the historical buildings' preservation does not directly support the German state's international development policy.⁴⁵⁶ According to Eigel, the German state views the investment in cultural heritage to be "a luxury, which only the rich countries could afford to offer themselves," a perspective in general shared by the countries where German-sponsored development projects are being initiated.⁴⁵⁷ Since the protection of cultural heritage is not considered an area of development for GTZ, all of the GTZ enterprises of urban rehabilitation had emerged "within fortuitous circumstances and following individual initiatives."⁴⁵⁸ In her comparative analysis of three such projects, (AleP, Shibam, and Bhaktapur in Népal, whose supervision GTZ transferred to the Nepalese state in the early 1980s), Eigel noted a series of similarities. First, all three sites had already been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, and the local authorities in all of the three locations had as their main goal to revitalize or preserve the sites so that they remained on the UNESCO List. Second, starting from the historical preservation of the sites, they aimed to develop a broader plan of urban management of their cities. In AleP and Shibam, one of the project aims was the rehabilitation of private historical buildings. Another goal was to spur and sustain the participation of the city's residents in the rehabilitation and conservation projects.⁴⁵⁹

The notable difference between the earlier GTZ-sponsored projects of urban rehabilitation, which Eigel compared in her study, and Sibiu was that the latter had never

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 76.

been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. In 2000, when GTZ opened its office in the city to begin the rehabilitation of Sibiu's historical center, the local team had, among its plans, a proposal for the inclusion of Sibiu in the World Heritage List. UNESCO experts visited Sibiu in 2004, but the proposal was not granted. In this respect, Sibiu's case within the GTZ broader development agenda was unique. The touristic potential of the city was obviously persuasive enough, but it could not have matched that of a World Heritage site, which would attract many more tourists every year. Why did the German state agree to fund such an expensive project of rehabilitation of a *potential* UNESCO site?

The answer is not to be found in the rationale of the German state's agenda for international development. As everyone in Sibiu knows, the rehabilitation of the city's old center, which was promoted as a strategy of local development, has been in fact a more complex political project of 1) memory preservation of Transylvania's Saxons and 2) a move from political recognition to economic redistribution for those Saxons who stayed in Transylvania. More specifically, the preservation of the old center's houses, built and inhabited by Transylvania's Saxons for centuries, aimed to preserve the memory of these people, now that most of Sibiu's Saxons had left for Germany at different moments in the 20th century. The houses stood for the people now gone. As such, the old center of the city was to be transformed into an authentic heritage site, a museum of an almost extinguished people.⁴⁶⁰

The GTZ project also signaled a policy shift in the German state's approach to the ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe and Russia. After Germany's reunification in 1992, the political inclusion of those of German descent from East Europe into contemporary

⁴⁶⁰ I owe this idea to Gillian Feeley-Harnik.

Germany was no longer an institutional option. The German state moved then from an inclusive model of political recognition to that of economic redistribution, by sponsoring projects of local development and democratization in the countries of the former socialist bloc which once had a significant German population.

Tertium non datur? Transylvania's Saxons in socialist Romania⁴⁶¹

Frau Henrietta Ackerman, a Saxon lady who had lived in Sibiu all her life and had been involved in many social activities told me at one moment that the three most important things for the Saxons were their language, their school, and their church.⁴⁶² At the same time, however, she complained about children from mixed marriages who speak “an awful German” and about the fact that most of the children at the Brukenthal high school were in fact Romanians, with fewer and fewer Saxon teachers to speak a “clean” German and even fewer younger people coming to the church on a regular basis. Underlying many conversations with most of the middle aged and older Saxons that I met in Sibiu, such complaints index fears of losing a sense of belonging to a community defined along linguistic and religious boundaries. At the same time, such comments also point to a particular understanding of the Saxon ethnic community, one rooted in an 18th

⁴⁶¹ By choosing this subtitle—*tertium non datur* (there is no third option)—I would like to point not only to the debates that emerged after the Second World War, but also to the ways in which they became part of the very process of defining a Saxon ethnic belonging after the war. I employ this title from the chapter “Bleiben oder Gehen—tertium non datur? Eine empirische Studie zum Auswanderungskonflikt unter den Siebenbürger Sachsen nach dem 2. Weltkrieg” in Georg Weber, Armin Nassehi, Renate Weber-Schlenther, Oliver Sill, Georg Kneer, Gerd Nollman, and Irmhild Saake, *Emigration Der Siebenbürger Sachsen: Studien zu Ost-West-Wanderungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003).

⁴⁶² She was the wife of an important member of the Forum, professor at the Theological Lutheran seminary, but also someone who would be more associated with the “traditional” Saxon ladies, did not go to Teusch Haus, did not really mingle with the “local” intellectuals, would be attending the church and *Frauenkränzchen*, and be a stay-at-home mom and housewife.

century Herderian political imaginary promoting linguistic and religious purity as key markers of ethnic difference.⁴⁶³

Those fears were far from new. For Transylvanian Saxons, they took different forms throughout the 20th century, especially after 1918, when the new Romanian state, whose territory significantly increased with the annexation of Bukovina, Transylvania, and Bessarabia, pursued an intense program of cultural homogenization in order to build up a strong ‘national body’ of Greater Romania. As historian Irina Livezeanu has demonstrated, the identification of the regional elites with the new Romanian state did not happen smoothly; on the contrary, it involved profound social and cultural crises, and these directly affected the ways in which the concept of “Greater Romania” was cross-regionally constituted, and regionally negotiated and legitimized. Livezeanu points out that a major problem that the post-1918 Romanian state had to confront was the lack of a significant Romanian urban middle-class in the newly annexed territories. The state saw as a mandatory condition of nation-building the formation of a Romanian urban middle class. This middle class would directly contribute to economic development as well as follow and implement the concept of the nation that the state promoted.

However, the Romanians who had succeeded to enter the circle of professional urbanites were very few in comparison to the non-Romanian groups.⁴⁶⁴ Before 1918, in the annexed provinces, Romanians had largely constituted the lower-class rural population. Therefore, Livezeanu argues, the state engaged in a systematic program of Romanization through education and cultural policies in an attempt to replace the urban

⁴⁶³ I am aware that Sibiu’s Saxon “community” does not represent a homogeneous group. However, due to its size—very small, forming 1.6 % of the population of Sibiu—as well as the disproportionately high percentage of rapidly ageing members, I will treat it as a unitary social unit.

⁴⁶⁴ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 298.

non-Romanian elites with the newly formed, Romanian ones.⁴⁶⁵ The central authorities' agenda of erasing regional differences was met, however, with strong criticism by the local elites of the newly annexed territories. Of course, the non-Romanian elites had obvious reasons to protest such an intense agenda of Romanization. Moreover, the local professionals of Romanian origins, as few as they were, did not like the state's pervasive nationalist agenda. Therefore, they rejected the model of nation that the state proposed and asked to be given political legitimacy to make the unification and Romanization happen in the ways they envisioned it.⁴⁶⁶

In the case of the Transylvanian Saxons, the increasing centralization orchestrated by the Bucharest-based politicians determined a parallel increase in the centralization of decision-making processes within the Saxons' political and social organizations (such as the local *Nachbarschaften*, local corporative forms of reciprocal help and cooperation, and the political structures, such as the Saxon People's Party [*Sächsische Volkspartei*]).⁴⁶⁷ Confronted with a relative political and economic marginalization in a new state that pushed for an ethnicity-based form of modernization, which aimed to create a Romanian

⁴⁶⁵ Livezeanu shows that the first step was to educate the Romanian rural class and invite them to become an ally of the state, by moving to town, joining the bureaucracy and thus playing a more active and visible role in building the nation. Therefore, the state pursued an intense program of monitoring and centralizing the country's educational infrastructure: Romanian became the only language of the education system, while the languages of the minority groups were banned; a national curriculum was implemented; the number of non-Romanians who would graduate high-school was strictly monitored, etc. The universities were to become major sites for the creation of a national elite. Thus, with the tacit approval of the state, the universities became highly politicized sites. An immediate consequence was the development of nationalist, extreme-right new elites. At the same time, the state also initiated a series of reforms, such as the emancipation of Jews, the redistribution of the great estates to the landless peasants, and the establishment of universal male suffrage.

⁴⁶⁶ Sometimes the rejection took the form of more intense political activism on the part of the minority groups as well as regional Romanian elites, as happened with Transylvanian Hungarians and Romanians who coined the concept of "Transylvanism." By claiming that the Transylvanians, no matter their ethnic background (Romanians, Hungarian, German, etc.), were much more alike, by the virtue of their common territory, than the inhabitants from other regions, be they of the same ethnic descent, this group pointed out Transylvania's particular multiculturalism in order to justify a relative political autonomy in the region.

⁴⁶⁷ Peter Haslinger. Review of Harald Roth, *Politische Strukturen und Strömungen bei den Siebenbürger Sachsen 1919-1933*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. April, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4041>. Accessed on January 15, 2010.

middle-class in all of the regions of Greater Romania, the Saxon leaders reacted by promoting paternalistic ruling methods and asking for a high degree of social and political conformity in the interest of the ethnic group as a whole.⁴⁶⁸ This kind of conformism imposed through localized social structures, such as the *Nachbarschaften*, as well as through a rhetoric of political unity, enabled the Saxon leaders to promote a politically and socially homogeneous image of the Saxon group. They used this image of unassailable harmony among the Saxons in order to forge alliances with the Romanian politicians at the center as well as maintain or even develop business relations with non-Saxon entrepreneurs.⁴⁶⁹ However, by the early 1930s, as a reaction to these forms of pressure from above, a rising interest in modernization and democratization understood as a stronger individualism among the new generation allowed the National Socialist ideology to percolate into the political agenda of the Saxon group.⁴⁷⁰ Under these circumstances, the ideological tensions among the leaders of the Saxon group and the eventual capturing of the political leadership of *Verband der Deutschen in Grossrumänien* (Association of Germans in Greater Romania) by Nazi-oriented politicians, led to an increasingly fractured sense of ethnic belonging among Transylvanian Saxons during the late interwar period.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ For more details on one of the most important Saxon leaders in interwar Transylvania, Hans Otto-Roth, and his wide breadth of economic and political connections with the Romanian state officials, see Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea sașilor transilvăneni, 1918-1944* (Sibiu: Hora, 2001).

⁴⁷⁰ In fact, the interest in the Nazi ideology among the Saxon youth preceded and provoked the shift in the "Volksprogramm," the common program to which the members of the Saxon group were expected to adhere. What in 1932 had already started as a cooperative movement promoting the rhetoric of *Selbsthilfe* (self-aid) as a strategy for modernization, by mid 1933 developed into an organization openly supporting the Nazis and pursuing the destabilization of the earlier structures of the Saxon community. Peter Haslinger. Review of Harald Roth, *Politische Strukturen und Strömungen bei den Siebenbürger Sachsen 1919-1933*.

Whereas before 1918 the Saxons had formed one of Transylvania's largest groups, during the interwar period this number began to decrease. This was a direct effect of the radical population movement, orchestrated by the Nazi regime aiming to rearrange all of the people living in Europe at that time according to the racial grid of the Third Reich. In 1930, the number Germans in Romania was approximately 745,000, which included the Saxons in Transylvania, the Schwaben (Swabians) in the Banat region, and the ethnic Germans in Dobruja and Bessarabia regions.⁴⁷¹ In 1940, invoking the *Heim ins Reich* policy by which Nazi Germany aimed to consolidate as well as "purify" its body politic, Hitler ordered the Romanian government (with which it was allied in the war effort until 1944) to send the Germans of Dobruja and Bessarabia (approximately 200,000 people) to the territory included then in the Third Reich. Before 1944, the adult ethnic Germans in Romania were obliged to enroll in the German army, which meant that at the end of the war they were considered German citizens and sent back to Germany together with all of the POWs. By 1948 there were 348,000 ethnic Germans in Romania. In comparison to other countries of the Soviet bloc (such as, Czechoslovakia and Poland), the ethnic Germans in Romania were not relocated to Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. This meant that the largest community of ethnic Germans in the region was to be found in Romania after the war.⁴⁷² After the war, the status of the ethnic

⁴⁷¹ More precise, the number was 745, 421. Hans Hartl, "Die Lage der Deutschen in Rumänien," in *Sudosteuroopa Mitteilungen* nr. 4 1981, 21 Jahrgang, 33-48, 35. OSA Box 1100 Germans. Hartl draws upon the national census of December 29, 1930, published by Sabin Manuilă, București, Bd. II. This number included 633, 488 ethnic Germans who lived within the Carpathian region (Transylvania, Banat, and Maramureș), and the others, located in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Dobruja, and Wallachia (Bucharest).

⁴⁷² In September 1944, the German ethnic communities in Northern Transylvania accompanied the German troops in their withdrawal. However, the Red Army sent back to Romania a significant number of these people, who were placed in labor camps upon their return. Notwithstanding an initial intention of the German state to evacuate the ethnic Germans from Romania with the Romanian government's agreement, this transfer was never pursued. Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final*, 542-543.

Germans worsened, as they had been accused of collaboration with the Nazi regime. Due to those accusations, between 1945 and 1948 they lost their political rights, such as the right to vote, and their land and other possessions (houses, etc) were confiscated by the socialist state. Under Stalin's order, in January 1945 all of the "able-bodied" Germans then residing in Transylvania were deported to Siberia for forced labor, to return only by the end of 1940s.⁴⁷³

The political pressure put by the socialist regime on the ethnic Germans decreased somewhat in the mid 1960s, as some of those Germans returning from the USSR were given back their houses or a plot to build new ones and "invited" to join collective farms (although technically they were not supposed to be allowed in).⁴⁷⁴ The Romanian authorities allowed the reopening of German schools and the reissuing of German language newspapers.⁴⁷⁵ At the same time, from the increasing pressure of Transylvanian German groups who had already arrived in Germany during and after the war, the Federal Republic of Germany started increasing their official requests for the Romanian state to allow the reunification of families. The Association of the Transylvanian Saxons (*die Landsmannschaft der Siebenbürger Sachsen*), the foundation established in 1949, was instrumental in persuading the government of West Germany to begin negotiations with the socialist Romanian state that eventually resulted in the 1978 agreement guaranteeing

⁴⁷³ More specifically, men between 17 and 45 and women between 18 and 35. Meanwhile, a part of the Catholic German-speaking Swabians of the Banat were deported to the southern part of Romania. While 10% of those deported died in the labor camps, the majority (75%) returned to Romania, while a smaller group went instead to Germany and Austria (20%) or remained in the USSR (7%). Ibid., 531-533.

⁴⁷⁴ They were not supposed to be in collective farms (GACs), but some GAC presidents let them in anyway. I thank Katherine Verdery for this clarification.

⁴⁷⁵ RFE report "Romania's German Minority," Romania SR/5, April 18, 1986, signed M.S. [Michael Shafir?]. OSA, Fond Dan Ionescu 205 60 5, Box 50 Ethnic Minorities: Germans 86-95/Ethnic Minorities 1986-1989.

the yearly emigration of ethnic Germans.⁴⁷⁶ The Association also attempted to maintain a political awareness of the culture and history of Transylvania's Germans in post-war Germany. It established a museum, a daily newspaper, a research institute with its own journal, with an accent on the *Volkundlandeskunde*, an interest in an approach to cultural studies emerging from the *Volk* philosophy of the German understanding of nation. The foundation promoted a representation of the history of the Saxons in Transylvania as a group completely coherent and independent—a point of view that was accurate as far as it referred to pre-1918 Transylvania, and a cohesive Saxon group, almost ignoring any forms of difference in terms of social status and residence (urban or rural). In a way, the rationale of the foundation was to provide the Transylvanian Saxons in post-war Germany a subtle form of refuge in a different temporal framework, that of the turn of the 20th century Transylvania, in which the Saxon group was firmly rooted in unquestionable social and economic institutions undergirded by an unquestionable *Weltanschauung*. Almost as if the war had not happened, the foundation remained caught in an idyllic image of a homogeneous Saxon group, thereby replicating, to a certain extent, the strategies of the Saxon politicians in post-1918 Greater Romania. This institutional strategy—that of reconstructing an imaginary pre-war Transylvania in post-war

⁴⁷⁶ For a discussion of the political role played by the Association and the conflict emerging out of the diverging points of view of Saxons' emigration to Germany, see Georg Weber et al., eds., *Emigration der Siebenbürger Sachsen: Studien zu Ost-West-Wanderungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, 517. Starting from the question that preoccupied every Saxon in Transylvania immediately after the war—should they leave for Germany or stay in their home country?—the authors discuss the ways in which this question was approached by the two main organizations established by the Transylvanian Saxons in post-war Germany: the Help Committee (*das Hilfkomitee*) and the Association. The Committee, which had been established in 1946, and set under the supervision of the Lutheran church and the Red Cross, focused more on the integration of the recent émigrés into the Lutheran church in Federal Germany. In other words, the Committee understood their main role to be that of a voice on the behalf of the Lutheran church in Romania. In contrast, the Association claimed to be representing the political voice of the Transylvanian Saxons in Germany.

Germany—had long-term consequences for the kind of relations developed between the Saxons who emigrated and those (very few) who decided to remain in Transylvania.

Following the implementation of the 1978 law for the reunification of families, the foundation acquired even more political leverage among the Transylvanian immigrants in Federal Germany. Even though the term did not mention where this reunification should take place (in Romania or West Germany), it was assumed that the official language disguised a request that the relatives of those already in Germany be allowed to emigrate as well.⁴⁷⁷ Since the Romanian government had become increasingly interested in reestablishing economic relations with Western Europe, those official pressures led to some results. Following Romania's agreement to resume diplomatic relations with West Germany in 1967, a secret agreement between the two states was signed in January 1978 after long negotiations, with the Romanian state grossly exploiting the situation by beginning to "export" its ethnic Germans in exchange for hard currency.⁴⁷⁸ According to a 1986 report of Radio Free Europe (RFE), starting in the mid-1970s the ethnic minorities of Romania, including the Transylvanian Saxons and the Catholic Swabians of the Banat, increasingly felt the communist state's pressure to forge "one single Romanian socialist nation."⁴⁷⁹

In post-1947 Sibiu, the major institutions of the Saxon group had already undergone significant changes. These institutions, immovable representations of the Saxon heritage, such as banks, the Lutheran church, or exclusively Saxon schools, which

⁴⁷⁷ Hannelore Baier, personal communication.

⁴⁷⁸ The agreement provided for 11,000 ethnic Germans with relatives in Germany to emigrate on the condition that West Germany pay about 5,000 DM per person. RFE report "Romania's German Minority," Romania SR/5, April 18, 1986, OSA.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. The report also mentions that "the Romanian Communist Party has proclaimed 'national homogenization' as the ultimate goal for the Romanian socialist people."

played a pivotal role for Transylvania's Saxons to maintain an ethnic belonging as well as a privileged social status, had been ripped apart by the socialist state. They were either closed down, such as the banks, drastically impoverished, such as the Lutheran church (whose possessions had been nationalized), or significantly altered, as an ever increasing number of Romanian children were entering the German-language schools. Under these new political circumstances, the Saxons developed alternate cultural practices as forms of retaining a Saxon cultural identity when national state policies began to encroach on the Saxon institutions. However, these new, more mobile forms of ethnicity-making and legitimating were also more up for grabs. As I develop later in this section, the "new" cultural practices of Sibiu's Saxons began to be mirrored by non-Saxons, especially by the well-to-do Romanians, as a form of proving and marking a high status within the local social hierarchies.⁴⁸⁰

Already by the early 1980s, the increasing number of ethnic Germans who were leaving Romania offered the government the perfect alibi to drastically curtail state support for German cultural life. In such conditions, key institutions of the German-speaking ethnic group were altered or disappeared altogether. Also, with the departure of many Lutheran pastors, the communities formed around the local churches, especially in

⁴⁸⁰ More interesting is that this phenomenon occurred despite a notable change in the ethnic distribution of the local population, in which the number of Romanians almost tripled after 1945 (from approximately 37,000 in 1948 to around 120,000 in 1977), while the number of Germans and Hungarians remained within the same range (25,000 and 5,000, respectively). *Populația României, 1977*. This major increase of the Romanian group indicates that Sibiu was one of the cities officially open on the national map of population redistribution, which meant that people from other regions could come to work in the city. In other words, Sibiu was not a closed city as Bucharest became by the 1980s.

However, a significant shift in the local social composition already became evident by the early 1980s. A graphical depiction of this social shift was offered to me by a Romanian historian, who would travel yearly to Sibiu to attend the jazz festival. As he put it, by 1980 he noted a key difference on the streets of Sibiu: *gogoșa* (an O-shaped doughnut, sold in general on Bucharest's commercial streets and in the eastern part of Romania) replaced *langoșa* (a cheese-filled and better tasting doughnut of Hungarian cuisine, very popular in Transylvania). What he meant was that this culinary change signaled a change in the locals' food preferences, which further indexed the strong influences on the local taste brought along by the newcomers to Sibiu during the 1970s and the 1980s.

villages with a Saxon population, were slowly dissolving.⁴⁸¹ Many of the German-language secondary schools in cities with a high ethnic German population were closed down or obliged to open classes for Romanian-speaking pupils.⁴⁸² While the departments of German studies in the universities were being “frozen,” with no students admitted starting in 1985, it also became increasingly difficult for West Germany to send teachers to temporarily work in these schools, as the Romanian government would no longer allow “foreigners” to teach future Romanian citizens.⁴⁸³

As much as we must approach the RFE documents critically, this gloomy view of the vanishing of German ethnic groups in Romania is shared by other sources, as well.

⁴⁸¹ At one moment, as a measure to reduce the numbers of ethnic Germans emigrating to Germany, the German Federal Republic had to pass a decree that should they decide to emigrate, the Lutheran pastors coming from abroad were no longer allowed to serve the church in Germany.

⁴⁸² *Deutsche Tagespost/Katolische Zeitung für Deutschland*, „Die deutschen Schulen in Rumänien müssen schießen,“ [The German-language schools in Romania must be closed down], February 26, 1986. [Having been written before the German orthography reform of 1996, the article uses the older German orthography.] OSA, Box 187, File 1100 Ethnic Minorities: German 1986, page F-540. Drawing upon a report published by *Sieberbürgische Zeitung*, the article mentions that the central institutions in Bucharest started systematically closing down the schools of the Romanian Germans in Transylvania and Banat. The writers pointed out that, beginning with the [1985-1986] academic year, the last four German-only high schools would also enroll Romanian pupils. As the latter spoke only Romanian, the national language [die Landessprache], this situation automatically led to the Romanian German pupils learning and speaking only Romanian, as well. Pupils of ethnic German descent no longer had the possibility of taking their high-school entrance exams in the German language, a right that had been previously granted to the German and Hungarian minority groups. Also, the newspaper mentioned, the situation of the German-speaking teachers was just as dramatic, as the only high school preparing future teachers for German-language school was to be closed down as soon as the most recent cohort graduated in 1988. In parallel, the number of students pursuing a degree in German studies at the University was “drastically reduced.” The newspaper concluded that from then on, German would be treated in the national schools’ curricula only as another foreign language.

⁴⁸³ RFE report “Romania’s German Minority,” Romania SR/5, April 18, 1986, OSA. See also *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Rumänien bedrängt die Deutschen,“ [Romania presses the Germans], January 30, 1987, in Box 187, File Ethnic minorities: Germans/1987, page F-505. The article points to the constant intensification of the nationalist discourse and practices in Romania, which led to an increasing conflict with the neighboring countries. West Germany became directly affected via the impact these attempts toward national homogenization had on the ethnic Germans living in Romania at that time. As the article points out, at the disposition of the central authorities in Romania, “out of ten lecturer positions opened to foreigners to come to teach in Romania, four were cut.” Two of these positions were to be allocated to German lecturers, one in Timisoara, the cultural center of the Banat Schwaben, and the other in Bucharest. Lecturers from West Germany were allowed to apply only to two locations: Klausenburg (Cluj, in Romanian, the largest university center and city of Transylvania, situated in the region with the largest Hungarian minority) and Jassy, the largest city in the region of Moldavia. In comparison to Timisoara and Bucharest, very few ethnic Germans lived in or nearby Klausenburg (Cluj) and Jassy.

For instance, starting from her ethnographic observations in a multiethnic village in Transylvania in the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, Verdery noted that “for Romania’s German community overall, ethnic identity has become far less central to life, far less publicly visible, and far more individualized than was once true,”⁴⁸⁴ a phenomenon that she described as the “unmaking” of German ethnicity in Romania. In comparison to the RFE report, Verdery argued that the 1980s governmental policies directed at ethnic groups in Romania were not the main cause of the shift from a strong sense of ethnic belonging to a more individualized self-identification for ethnic Germans—in other words, a shift from “what they were” to “what they are *not*.” According to Verdery, it was rather a combination of historical factors, such as the dwindling importance of the former institutions that consolidated the German ethnic group in Transylvania, and contemporary changes in the international political context, especially the post-1978 possibility of emigration to West Germany, that led to “the declining salience of ethnicity” among Germans in Romania.⁴⁸⁵

At the same time, the ethnic Germans were employing strategies that were fully consistent with former social practices and collective attitudes that this group especially had relied upon in the past. It was only at this time, as Verdery shows, that such strategies took a rather strange twist, as their application undermined the very social network through which German ethnicity had previously been built. More specifically, the history of the Germans of Transylvania overlaps with a history of a series of economic

⁴⁸⁴ Katherine Verdery, “The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania’s Germans,” *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 1 (1985), 63.

⁴⁸⁵ Verdery, “The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity,” 64. The historical and institutional factors maintaining a clearly defined German ethnic group included: the Lutheran church, the particular economic niches occupied by the Germans, the professional associations (*die Vereinen*) closed to non-Germans, the banks and credit systems also favoring a German clientele, and the specific forms of socialization especially in the rural areas, such as *die Nachbarschaften* (neighbor-oriented groups), *die Jugend* (the youth group), etc.

privileges, economic behavior and rules, and specific access to *intra muros* know-how and resources that had enabled them to thrive as a social and ethnic group without lobbying much for direct political power. These means of ethnic identity formation, centered on a model interlinking religion and economic attitudes, led to a (self)-understanding of Germanness as primarily based in being economically successful and politically mobile.⁴⁸⁶

In socialist Romania, however, the pursuit of economic institutional independence became out of the question, while the policies of social homogenization led to an increase in social and geographical flexibility and interethnic marriages. Under those specific circumstances, the German ethnic group chose to resort to a form of political passivity, combined with an investment in professional training that would facilitate a better integration upon their emigration to Germany.⁴⁸⁷ Verdery contends, however, that “emigration promote[d] the ultimate individualization of German ethnicity,” as it focused exclusively on individual enterprise, with one family or a person always competing with others for a passport and an exit visa.⁴⁸⁸ This point is crucial for a more subtle understanding of the emergence of novel social practices in Transylvania in the late socialist period (the late 1970s and the 1980s). As I will show, “the individualization of German ethnicity” played a pivotal role in the development of specific social practices in Sibiu at the conjunction of 1) situated histories of multiethnic habitation in Transylvania, especially of the relations between the Germans and the Romanians, and 2) the centralist state project to create a form of socialist personhood through various means of cultural and social homogenization.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 74-75.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 75.

My conversations with older Saxons and Romanians in Sibiu about the social atmosphere of the city during the 1980s conveyed a similar picture to one described by Verdery.⁴⁸⁹ As most of the Saxons were becoming focused on emigration, they began living in the future (in Germany) more than in the present (Romania). As one of my Saxon interviewees mentioned, starting in the 1980s when her friends, all of them Saxons, would meet at soirees or dinners, the only topic of discussions was “have you received your passport?”

As many of the ethnic Germans were witnessing the disappearance of the ties and institutions that used to bind them into a cohesive ethnic group, they gradually stopped associating their sentiment of ethnic belonging with Transylvania, as earlier generations did (“we have been in Transylvania for 800 years,” etc.). While no longer interested in

⁴⁸⁹ During my volunteering at the “Carl Wolff” home between October and December 2005, I helped with various chores in the “home” section, where most of the elderly do not require complex medical assistance. During most of the afternoons of these three months, I was bringing food to the bed-ridden patients, sorting the medicine for each patient, while I also tried to engage in a dialogue with some of the patients there. I could thus learn from them aspects about everyday life in Sibiu and especially within the Saxon community in the 1970s and 1980s, the deportation of Romania’s Germans to the USSR, local forms of building up communities within the Saxon group, and their family’s life story.

Opened in 2000 by the Lutheran Church in Romania, with funds and know-how from the Lutheran church in Germany, this institution had been initially designed as “a home away from home” for the elderly Saxons who were living alone in the villages that no longer had a numerous Saxon population and could no longer care for themselves, thereby “staining the image of the [Lutheran] Church.” As the number of the older Saxons requiring assistance has gradually diminished, the “Carl Wolff” home has recently begun to accept elderly from other ethnic groups and confessions, such as Hungarian and Romanians. Besides the professionally trained medical personnel, the home relies also on volunteers from abroad, most of them young people from Germany or Austria who come to Transylvania as part of the social work program to experience something new before embarking on studies at the university level, or who prefer doing social work instead of military service. The home stands then as a particular meeting point of two groups that often have nothing in common except the language (and, rarely, an acknowledged sharing of the Lutheran faith). Even then, the linguistic commonality is relative, since the elderly could use their “language” (the Saxon dialect, *Sächsich*) only among themselves, as most of the personnel and the young volunteers do not speak it.

I also noticed that, to a certain extent, volunteers’ input has replaced the work of the community’s youth and adults lost through the emigration of most of Romanian Germans between 1980 and 1990. This is why it represents, together with other sources of help (such as funding and expertise), a mechanism of strengthening the relationship between the German state and Romania’s dwindling Saxon community. At the same time, I suggest that volunteer work is also looked upon as a marker of an ethnic identity, more specifically of Saxon-German identity. Many informants told me that volunteering is not a “Romanian custom,” “there are no Romanian volunteers.” This remark appeared in a different form in other cases of the circles of Saxon women—*Frauenarbeit Kränzchen*.

maintaining a strong identification with the Saxon group and a concept of ethnic-belonging rooted in territory (Transylvania), most of the ethnic Germans and especially those in urban areas who had been educated at German-language high schools and therefore were fluent in Hochdeutsch and less interested in speaking Saxon became more interested in cultivating their *German* ethnic identity. This offered them a privileged status: that of being able to leave a gloomy Romania in order to enter Germany as citizens fully entitled to benefits from a wealthy welfare state, meanwhile receiving parcels of Lindt chocolate, Burda glossy magazines, and other goods that the non-Germans, especially many of the Romanians without “connections,” could only fantasize about. To an extent, the ethnic sentiment (of being Saxons) ceased to be associated with—and reinforced by—immovable material forms, ranging from *houses*, which would have been left behind, given to the socialist state in exchange for a passport, to *place* as a political, ethnicized territory. The Saxon houses in Transylvania, be they in the villages or in the cities, no longer functioned as a sign of ethnic belonging for the would-be German citizens. It was in Germany that the Transylvanian Saxons wanted to get actively engaged in crafting a stronger ethnic self, one that would match the criteria set by the German state and would also allow them to become socially and culturally more accepted.

Consequently, German ethnicity was being remade through other, more mobile, cultural forms. Even if the majority of the young and middle-aged ethnic Germans were focusing only on emigration as their life project, some of them kept and cultivated the social ties within the local ethnic network. According to some elderly Saxons with whom I talked, in Sibiu in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s there existed alternative

cultural nuclei where the German culture and language were preserved—such as, in the choir of the Lutheran church; among Saxon women, who were much sought after by well-to-do Romanian parents wanting to raise their children bilingual; and especially in small groups resembling the model of German private or professional small associations (*Vereinen*), which focused on the collective pursuit of different hobbies ranging from knitting to amateur botanical research and mountain trekking. Some of these associations remained in place also after the regime change; others disappeared.⁴⁹⁰

However, the boundaries of those groups, which had emerged as exclusively Saxon assemblies, were becoming more fluid as their initial members started leaving for Germany. Frau Drucker, who had been trekking the mountains around Sibiu every weekend for more than forty years—she was 92 when I met her and still had a vibrant and witty personality—told me that the Saxon members of the mountain trekking group “The Friends of the Mountains” were not initially willing to accept Romanians into the

⁴⁹⁰ Almost every week during several months in Fall 2005 and Winter 2006, I went to one of those circles to (try to) knit, together with some of the Saxon ladies in Sibiu, most of whom have been attending this group activity on and off for almost twenty years. I was lucky enough to be brought in by one of the women holding a high status among Sibiu’s Saxons, thus having the members of the group “forced” to allow me to temporarily join them. Obviously, I had to meet the mandatory condition of exclusively using German during my presence there, which was seized upon by some of the group members as an opportunity for endless attempts to correct my pronunciation, and ask all of the possible questions about my origins, my research, my haircut, and my life, in general. I say “lucky” because these women keep their circles very tight—no outsider is allowed, especially a Romanian (I attended one such episode during which a Romanian woman dropped in, uninvited, to mention [in Romanian] that she heard of this circle, that she loves to knit, and asked whether she could join them. This intrusive visitor provoked an immediate rebuke on the part of the most vocal woman, the group’s charismatic leader, who immediately said in German to the other women that she does not want any foreigner to come to the group. This rebuke was then translated into Romanian in a more diplomatic form by another lady, who told the visitor that they do not want other new members, that the room is small and there is no space for others.) While I was attending the work circle, at the suggestion of one of the group’s leaders I went to visit a similar women’s circle, this time organized by a Romanian woman with closed links with the Saxon community. It was in fact a women’s get-together, hosted by this Romanian lady every week over tea and coffee. She also sometimes attempted larger events, by inviting a woman guest speaker to give a topic-focused presentation. When I told my Saxon women friends that I had visited this circle, they commented that “these Romanians meet just to talk and drink coffee, whereas we meet to work and then talk.” To me, going every Thursday to the Kränzchen was a great opportunity to meet some wonderful, witty and sharp-tongued Saxon ladies, to learn a lot about the various tensions among different social factions and actors in Sibiu’s Saxon community within a relatively short interval, as well as to succeed in making one (!) glove in three months and finally learn how to pronounce “München.”

group to replace their long term colleagues who had already emigrated to Germany. Some of those Saxon “friends of the mountains” insisted on speaking German as a form of separation, even when Romanians were present, until they had to give in, realizing that they would be left alone—even literally, on the mountains—had they continued to hold onto this linguistic boundary.

Here, I would like to return to Verdery’s observation on the “individualization of German ethnicity.” It is this “individualization,” I suggest, that allowed for a very interesting phenomenon of class distinction as ethnicity-substitution to emerge in Sibiu, and very likely, in other urban sites in Transylvania whose history was deeply enmeshed with that of the Saxons. More specifically, by relying on my observations in Sibiu and especially my conversations with Saxons and Romanians about the city during the 1980s, I would argue that the non-Germans, especially the Romanians who constituted the majority in the city, seized this shift from a collectivity-determined German ethnicity to an increasingly individualized form of ethnic identity in order to build a higher symbolic position for themselves within the local hierarchies of the city. That is, well-to-do Romanians began to mirror cultural and social practices of their Saxon co-urbanites as a situated form of social mobility. What emerged as forms of heritage-as-practice that would guarantee a form of ethnic and social belonging for Sibiu’s Saxons during the 1980s began to be mirrored by local well-to-do Romanians as a part of a symbolic competition within the local social structures of the city.

This phenomenon was not new, but it took on novel connotations in the context of the impending emigration of a distinct group that created and defined the social and cultural structures of the city for most of its existence. The Saxons’ imminent departure

was to leave empty crucial positions within the social hierarchy of the city, which many of the locals (mostly Romanians) hurried to occupy. In order to prove that they were worthy for these positions, the new elites had to meet first the central authorities' criteria of political fitness (that of having a "clean" past, without any "bourgeois" background) and Party faithfulness. However, even if they passed the first test, whereby the bureaucracy of the socialist state would acknowledge their belonging to the cluster of the "Romanian socialist citizens," the would-be elites of Sibiu would have yet to face another scrutiny, this time a symbolical and localized one. They would have to show that they fit the cultural and social criteria of the city, which were still heavily marked by the Saxons' local institutions and cultural requirements. Hence, many of well-to-do Romanians in Sibiu would join clubs, pursue hobbies, trek the mountains around Sibiu along with their Saxon co-urbanites, or/and offer their children private music lessons and hire them Saxon nannies. Some of them moved into the houses gradually deserted by the Saxons leaving for Germany.

Due to the cultural homogenization endorsed by the Romanian socialist state, it seems that ethnicity was no longer a social institution adequate to the workings of Romania's social system in the 1980s. The social grid of socialist Romania underlying the making of a "socialist personhood" appeared to be rather dichotomous, separating people with "connections," which were in general the people within the political system and ranking high in the Party, from "the rest," those without "connections" and relatively marginal. Even though this grid was supposedly situated within a post-class, post-ethnic form of socialist personhood, in fact, in Ceaușescu's Romania where the doctrine of nationalist socialism was thriving, a new class was emerging through various adjustments

to social and cultural practices that sometimes even contrasted with the regime's political ideology. The case of appropriation of Saxon ethnicity-markers by the well-situated Romanians in Sibiu is illustrative of the deep contradictions underlying the political project of building socialism in Romania (and beyond). Sibiu's case shows how the centralizing project of creating a "socialist personhood" of the ethnically diverse groups of Romania was countered by more convoluted social practices, which emerged as adaptations to the political context of socialist Romania in the 1980s, but were also very much informed by former social configurations, economic hierarchies, and situated systems of value connected to deeper histories of multiethnic cohabitation.

Performing Ethnicity, Dreaming of Germany: The Saxons in post-1992 Period

These situated social practices of the 1980s have strongly informed the political and social developments in contemporary Sibiu. More specifically, I suggest that the GTZ project was contested by a part of the local elites who directly benefited from the Saxons' increasing absence during the 1980s and early 1990s. In Sibiu in 1989 there were around 7,000 people who declared themselves to be Lutheran (which, more often than not, signaled their Saxon ethnicity). In 1992/1993 (the first census after 1989) there were fewer than 3,000.⁴⁹¹ As Erwin Ackerman, one of the founders of the German Democratic Forum, remembers, in December 1989 he publicly pleaded with Sibiu's Saxons to choose Transylvania over Germany. In the balcony of one of the central buildings in the Great Square, which once hosted the local organization of the then recently dismantled communist Party, he remembered calling out: "Do not leave! Do not leave! Do not

⁴⁹¹ "Emigration der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Zahlen: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion," in Georg Weber, et al., *Emigration Der Siebenbürger Sachsen*, 487.

leave!’ To no avail. Most of them left within a year.” As Herr Ackerman explained to me, for so long many of them had been building all of their life plans on the expectation of emigration. Some of them had had their visa requests denied several times, for different reasons (including that of not procuring enough deutschmarks for various bribes). When the borders suddenly opened in 1990, they had already been living “on hold,” propelled to leave as soon as that became possible. They could no longer imagine that they might stay, so they left, afraid that the borders might close again.

Herr Ackerman forgot to mention one important element. The ethnic Germans (or those who could emigrate under this category) who left right after the regime change (between the beginning of 1990 and the end of 1992) benefited from the same privileges that had been offered to everyone who had entered Germany before 1989 under the title of *Aussiedler* (“out-settlers”), a status designating persons of German descent who had remained outside the borders of West Germany after 1945 and were considered entitled to “repatriation” and to a wealth of different forms of support from the German state.⁴⁹² By immigrating under the title of *Aussiedler* (“out-settlers”), these persons were immediately offered German citizenship as well as “various integration assistance packages, paid as if the expellees had been born and had worked in the Federal Republic, including the payment of pensions, unemployment and welfare.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² For a discussion of the political connotations of the term *Aussiedler*, see Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, “Second-Class Citizens? Restricted Freedom of Movement for Spätaussiedler Is Constitutional,” *German Law Journal* 5, no. 7 (2004), Rogers Brubaker, “Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing in the “New Europe”” *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (1998), Rogers Brubaker and Jaeeun Kim, “Transborder Nationhood and the Politics of Belonging in Germany and Korea,” (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2009), work in progress, <http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/research/identity%20articles/Brubaker%20Transborder%20Nationhood>. (Accessed on August 18, 2009.)

⁴⁹³ For an analysis of the law on granting asylum to expellees, *Bundesvertriebenengesetz*, see Koppenfels, “Second-Class Citizens? Restricted Freedom of Movement for Spätaussiedler Is Constitutional.” For a discussion of the changes of status, from “expellees” to “*Aussiedleren*,” which occurred in 1953, see

In contrast to the common model of migration as a strategy of identity-preservation, Brubaker argues that in the case of the ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and Russia emigrating to Germany in the 1980s and early 1990s, the incentive of migration generated a process of identity-remaking. As he put it:

Not only was German ethnicity as a “lived reality” not decisive in motivating migrants, but the highly prized opportunity to migrate—as a citizen!—to the fabled “new world” of Western Europe generated strong incentives to cultivate, retrieve, reinvigorate, invent, or otherwise acquire the requisite official ethnicity.⁴⁹⁴

Indeed, this incentive was so powerful that even those who would not otherwise identify with the Saxon group in Sibiu sought stronger ties with a remote history of belonging to the German ethnic group, in order to facilitate their departure to Germany. Take for instance the case of a family whose surname, Baier, indexed them as ethnic Germans. The family spoke Romanian at home and had been formed through an interethnic marriage between a Romanian woman born in Sibiu and a Swabian whose family had been deported from the Banat to the southern part of Romania in the late 1950s. The woman’s husband understood German but could not speak very well, while she spoke and understood none. Being a couple of intellectuals who were well anchored in the local social networks of Sibiu, however, they were able to offer their three children the best education, including their having a Saxon baby-sitter and a Saxon piano teacher; due to the children’s own industriousness and intelligence, they graduated from the German-language local gymnasium in Sibiu. Upon graduation, in the early 1990s, one of the children decided to pursue his university studies in Germany. In order to benefit from

Klekowski von Koppenfels, ““Second-Class Citizens?” and Brubaker and Kim, "Transborder Nationhood and the Politics of Belonging in Germany and Korea."

⁴⁹⁴ Brubaker, "Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing in the ‘New Europe,’" 1052.

the incentives offered to the immigrating ethnic Germans, he had to create a case for himself, by collecting family documents and testimonies from his father that helped him successfully prove his identity as an ethnic German. At the same time, I suggest, he would never identify himself as a Saxon or Swabian, but rather as a Romanian-born German citizen keeping his ties with his family residing in Sibiu.⁴⁹⁵

This case illustrates how forms of ethnic sentiment and belonging could “skip” a generation and become lost, or on the contrary, resuscitated according to the new values attached to belonging to one ethnic group under specific political circumstances. It also points to the situated means to remake one’s ethnic identity that would suit those political circumstances, in this case the emigration requirements. That is, the know-how and resources in crafting or retrieving such an identity—an emigration industry, as it were—developed especially in those urban settings that had had a larger number of ethnic Germans and consequently had been experiencing more significant shifts in the interethnic distribution of the local population. Therefore, I suggest that besides the strong expectation to leave, built up over the years, that Herr Ackerman talked about, the development of this “emigration industry” particularly in those sites with sizable German populations such as Sibiu further enticed those who wanted to leave the country and could prove that they belonged to the German ethnic group. These networks of “emigration expertise” might also have eased the process of departure even after the borders were opened with the political regime change in December 1989.

⁴⁹⁵ While he did not say this directly, I suggest this is the case due to his consistent distancing from any forms of his potentially being associated to any of those groups. He consistently used jokes and irony when discussing any form of Saxonness, ranging from their accents, dialect, and even remarks about the “Saxon stinginess.”

The case of the non-Saxon Sibian turned into a German citizen also offers an interesting example of the ways in which the social status was acquired mainly through an education pursued according to an ethnically-defined canon (German high-school, private tutoring, etc), which, as I mentioned earlier, some of the children of well-to-do Romanians benefited from as early as the 1980s as they occupied the places formerly occupied by the Saxons' children. Moreover, it proves how in some cases, this social status was used by well educated Romanian nationals to put forth ethnic claims of recognition so that they would be considered of German ethnic descent. This situation could offer a possible, and very unexpected answer, to the *tertium non datur* question—that is, the fact that there was no third option for the Transylvanian Saxons who could either leave for Germany or stay in Transylvania. A bold assertion would be that the emigrated Saxons remained in Sibiu in the forms of Saxonness set forth by the Romanians. They also remained symbolically imprinted on Sibiu's urban fabric, in the form of the historical center that recently became a means of attracting capital into the city.

Currently, this presence has begun to matter again, as it was used by various factions within Romania, ranging from local Saxon politicians in Sibiu to central officials of the Romanian state. More importantly, Sibiu's Saxons have also been approached as a form of cultural capital by a series of external political actors. The German state stands out within this group, and its powerful involvement in Sibiu through the GTZ project signals multiple political shifts. First, it illustrates the policy shift of the German state towards the ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe and in Russia as it emerged after 1992. Confronted with a potential doubling of the national population in no time, Germany

rapidly shifted from an immigration-focused model, which promoted an all-inclusive idea of “repatriation” for all of the ethnic Germans fleeing the world behind the Iron Curtain, to a more pragmatic paradigm of democratization as local development. In other words, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the newly reunified German state replaced a now obsolete rhetoric of “human rights” with that of “local development, democratization, and infrastructure building” in the former socialist bloc.

Even though, before 1989, the German Federal Republic state appeared to have exclusively relied on the ethnic national model, which allowed the new settlers to be considered German by the virtue of their ethnic, and not territorial, belonging, Brubaker and Kim point out to the broader geopolitical contexts underlying the immigration policy of the German state in post-war Europe. They argue that the ways in which the German state created or shifted its political categories of subjects, by delimiting “outsiders” from “insiders,” were directly informed by Cold War dichotomous political geographies and claims for ethnic belonging in a Europe cut in half by the Berlin Wall. They write:

Within a Cold War frame, the embrace of *Aussiedler*, like that of *Übersiedler* (resettlers from the GDR), was used to highlight the opposition between openness and closure, freedom and oppression. The sufferings of transborder Germans—the expulsions themselves, of course, but now, in an ironic reversal, the restrictions on exit and the lack of institutional support for the preservation of German culture—were recoded in universalistic language as human rights violations.⁴⁹⁶

Due to the difficulties that they faced in leaving their countries of origin and the yearly “quotas” imposed by the socialist states, the immigrants who entered Germany before the mid 1980s (about 35,000 annually) could be more easily accommodated within the welfare system. After 1992, however, the situation changed. The “exodus” caused by the opening of the borders that brought almost 2 million ethnic Germans to Germany

⁴⁹⁶ Brubaker and Kim, “Transborder Nationhood and the Politics of Belonging in Germany and Korea,” 26.

within an interval of two years intensified public debates on the meaning and utility of this process of “repatriation.” Already coping with the rising costs of reunification and an increasingly unstable labor market, Germany no longer showed a strong interest in fully welcoming the *Aussiedleren*, but rather aimed to support the countries with a large population of ethnic Germans (hoping that their significant funding channeled into “local development” would also have a direct impact on the German group, as well). In Romania, for instance, the funding sent from Germany reached an important sum in 2000.⁴⁹⁷

The GTZ project developed in Sibiu between 2000 and 2006 represented such a political project. It illustrated the shift from political recognition-as-inclusion to economic redistribution that the German state adopted towards the presence and history of the ethnic Germans in the countries that once belonged to the former socialist bloc. At the same time, it also represented a form of place-marking as place-making, since, by investing in the rehabilitation of the historical houses of Sibiu’s historical center, many of which had been confiscated by the socialist state from the Lutheran church during nationalization, the German state made a visible political statement. It marked Germany’s clear insistence that the postsocialist Romanian state grant full recognition to the ethnic minorities by restituting their former possessions (especially land and buildings). As such, it illustrated a process of postsocialist decentralization occurring at the simultaneous pressure of external and internal actors, who converged in their attempts to

⁴⁹⁷ Between 1990 and 2002, the German state offered the Romanian state a non-reimbursable credit of more than 128 million euro, given the “privileged relationship” between the two states guaranteed by the agreement of technical cooperation signed between the two countries in 1994. The agreement guaranteed the non-reimbursable sum of 7.66 million euro given by Germany in 2001, which were given for the rehabilitation of historical towns, mainly the city of Sibiu. In 2002, the non-reimbursable sum was 6 million euro. Declaration of the minister secretary of state Andrei Popescu in the meeting of the Senate, the Romanian Parliament, December 15, 2003.

push for the restitution of the cultural and economic capital that once was used by the socialist state to make its own body politic.

This form of decentralization as a rearrangement of cultural capital was justified through claims for cultural recognition and heritage-(re)making of Transylvanian Saxons, claims set forth by both the German state and the local Saxon leaders in Sibiu.

Simultaneously, then, the project of Saxon heritage-remaking in Sibiu represented a form of forging closer transnational relations and endorsing some new symbolical geographies in the context of the EU-expansion. As such, the project spoke directly to the ways in which the EU is a continuously shifting network of influence and negotiation among its most powerful member states, which are highly interested in creating and sponsoring differently shaped transnational symbolic geographies with the new members states in order to have a stronger political leverage within the EU-system of decision-making and economic cooperation.

Beautifying a City, Becoming a Citizen (*ein Burger*): The GTZ Campaigns in Sibiu

Since its inception, the rehabilitation project had been a major discussion topic for Sibians as well as for political actors abroad. This was because it brought to the fore other key debates, such as: local ethnic politics and interethnic relations; the relation among the state, the individual, and public space; the politics of urban aesthetics; ideas of “past” and “present”; the political production of “history”; the relation between “history” and “memory” and their link to “space”; etc. Thus, the public and closed-doors debates among various local and national institutions over the arrangement of Sibiu’s urban space implicitly became debates over the social and ethnic geography of the city. These debates were reflected by various visions as to how the historical downtown should be rebuilt

(which of course triggered further debates). As one of the coordinators of the renovation project pointed out to me, commenting on the project's title—"Sibiu's Past Becomes Its Future"—one of the questions underlying these debates is "how far into the past do we want to go?" I would like to complicate his point by further asking: on which of these "pasts" should and/or did one focus in the attempt to transform this city for "the future"? What other "futures" were being silenced and excluded? Also, in what ways were ideas of state authority contrasted with ideas of local autonomy and initiative, which were further mapped onto ethnic histories and ethnically reconfigured spaces of belonging?

I begin by describing the campaigns that GTZ coordinated between 2004 and 2007, whereby they aimed to instill a sense of "civic consciousness" in Sibiu's urbanites, and especially in the residents of the historical center. I then analyze these campaigns by looking at how they were envisioned as complementary strategies to support a particular understanding of "urbanity" as a form of living in and identifying with a city. I bring a complementary perspective, that of a Saxon professor living in Sibiu at the time of my fieldwork, to bear on my analysis of the GTZ project of heritage-making as local development. By putting in dialogue these two perspectives, I try to show how the rehabilitation of the city center stands as a more complex political project of memory preservation of Transylvania's Saxons and a shift from political recognition to economic redistribution for the Saxons currently living in Transylvania.

Beginning in 2004, various campaigns funded and coordinated by GTZ, together with the mayor's office, were initiated in the city. GTZ distributed flyers that explained in detail what a proper renovation of an old building entails, starting from the complex process of obtaining the construction approval to the materials that were to be used for

the aesthetic aspects of the building renovation. No changes in the structure of the buildings were allowed, and the materials and the technologies that were to be used should as much as possible be keeping the “natural, organic” character of the downtown’s old buildings. By presenting the old houses as historical monuments, they asked that no alterations be done to the structure of houses, while all the materials and technologies used should be as close to the “traditional” techniques as possible (for instance, one must use wood window frames, wrought iron and not plastic frames). The publicity around the methods of rehabilitation and preservation of the historical center was structured according to the main elements of a building. It was a fragmentary campaign, in that these instructions were published extensively in the local mass media, which week after week focused on one building element (the windows, the gates, the interior courtyards, the house facades, etc). With photos and examples, clearly marked: “Like this!” or “Not like that!” (in Romanian, *Așa Da*, *Așa Nu*, which, funny enough, were linguistic remainders of the former communist times, when any situation that could not fit the socialist social model, ranging from lazy workers or a plan that was not fulfilled to women wearing far too short skirts on the street was marked “Așa Nu!!” [Not like that!]).⁴⁹⁸

The roofs and their traditional shingles made the first page of the local newspapers one week. The GTZ team asked that, as “the tourists were impressed by those roofs,” the original shingles be preserved or at least replaced by similarly colored tiles and the old chimneys left in their original place, even if they were no longer functional. The roofs represented a serious problem for GTZ, as I later found out, since some of the

⁴⁹⁸ My mother told me that during the 1970s, when the very short skirts were in fashion, some of the “too daring” young women would be picked up on the street and brought to the police as a form of punishment for showing too much of their legs.

main buildings in the old center, centrally located, had been renovated with funds from the Romanian government. The funds were given to a different construction company, which fully replaced the old shingles with new ones of a strikingly red nuance, visibly contrasting with the roofs repaired under GTZ supervision. One of the architects working for GTZ pointed out these bright roofs to me, as an example of the stupidity and carelessness of the Romanian officials. He said that it would have been much cheaper and more appropriate for their historical preservation had the original roofs been mended selectively, by leaving the good original shingles in place and replacing only the broken ones.



Figure 19 Sibiu's Large Square in July 2006. One could distinguish the renovated roofs by their bright red-orange color.

The facades were also a major element of the campaigns. It was clearly stated that the houses' facades be renovated according to their original colors and building materials, which must be reconstituted after old photographs or drawings. Other flyers displayed photographs with a variety of mailboxes of different size and color carelessly spread on

the interior entrance wall of some of the houses, right after the gate, and contrasted them with others, of similar format, carefully arranged one in line with another. (I will let the reader guess which of the two situations would have received the label: “Like this!”) The courtyards offered another set of contrasts: photos displaying old cars or bicycles thrown in a corner of the yard were opposed to others, showing courtyards nicely arranged with trees and a table for guests. One of the GTZ architects, talking about the courtyards of the houses, stressed that “[they] are historical proofs as much as any other element of an historical house. The courtyard needs to be a common space and be felt as a common space. It needs to be treated as an extension of the house.” Many inhabitants of the old houses treated the courtyard as a warehouse, she said, where they stored all the things they wanted to get rid of later. As she put it, “This is a question of mentality.” The residents of the historical center were also invited to attend workshops during which German specialists would show them how to restore and repaint an old door or window frame, as a cheaper and more adequate alternative to the replacement with new ones, which was no longer allowed.

A major campaign was dedicated to the windows of the historical houses, more specifically to the window frames. Under the title “No plastic in the historical center!” the GTZ team asked the residents to cease changing the original wooden frames and replacing them with plastic, “modern” frames. They suggested that the wooden frames must be renovated, or, in case this was no longer possible, replaced with new wooden frames. In order to raise awareness about the potential destructive effects of the plastic window frames on the historical look of the houses, the campaign involved groups of high-school students who would be sent to talk to the residents of the historical center,

and distribute flyers with more information. Between February and March 2006, the students were asked to distribute this information in each mailbox of the 1,200 houses in the center, as well as tell to whoever would have liked to listen to them, that the plastic windows could hamper the potential inclusion of Sibiu's old center in the UNESCO World Heritage List. As a newspaper documenting the campaign put it, "the City Hall, the Architects' Union, and the GTZ declared war on the use of plastic in the historical center!"⁴⁹⁹

Among other programs linked to the renovation of the old town GTZ also sponsored yearly competitions and prizes for the best renovated houses, prizes that went to the owners of the house, not to the architects. Of course, many of them were well-to-do people, who were able to afford a thorough renovation with "traditional" materials, such as wood, bricks, and wrought iron, materials more expensive than the ones currently used in construction. These competitions were extensively discussed in the local media, the winners were interviewed, and the history of their houses presented in detail.

In short, a major focus of the GTZ complex project was the preservation of a specific aesthetic of the historical houses. However, their rehabilitation concept also produced a major shift: from complex forms of habitation and sociality, the houses were reduced to a list of elements that were mostly visible from outside (roofs, windows, facades, doors, chimneys, etc). Moreover, the monitoring of these elements according to a dichotomous evaluation, by separating the properly preserved ones (*Așa Da!*) from those inadequate from an aesthetic point of view (*Așa Nu!*), created a strange hierarchy among the houses within the city, as if they were divided between representations of proper social subjects and that of inadequate ones. If we continue this parallel, from this

⁴⁹⁹ "Campanie: Nu tâmplărie PVC în centrul istoric!" February 3-March 20, 2006. www.gtz.ro

point of view, the competition for the most beautifully renovated houses would appear as a kind of beauty pageant. In fact, as I will discuss below, the rehabilitation project increasingly appeared to be a form of social beautification rather than a project of built heritage preservation.



Figure 20 A GTZ flyer illustrating some of the faades that were too “brightly” painted. “Sibiu Historic Centre Rehabilitation Project,” 14.

GTZ also funded the publication and distribution of the “Municipal Action Program 2001-2004,” the official guide of Sibiu’s City Hall, which outlined its vision of the city’s future: “the inhabitants need to identify themselves with their city” and “they are invited to actively participate in the city’s development.”⁵⁰⁰ As for the “historical city”, which had its own chapter, the guide stressed that

the unitary character of the old city need[ed] be maintained, while also being given a new life force. Commerce, crafts, tourism and culture [would] help the old city develop new urban functions ... The residence in the old city [was to be] maintained while the living conditions need[ed] to be gradually improved especially by downsizing the population density.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰ Ghidul de dezvoltare a municipiului Sibiu, Honterus Verlag, Sibiu/Hermannstadt 2004, 19.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 31-32.

In other words, the objective was to reconstruct a city that was not necessarily for the people living there, which were too many anyway, but one for visitors, tourists, and those who would be able to afford maintaining and living in one of the old houses.

More importantly, however, was a complementary focus of the GTZ team, which was then to represent the entire project before an international audience: the public space.

As an international GTZ report wrote:

Sibiu (German: Hermannstadt) in Romania has added a key element to the mosaic of its urban development strategy. The authorities and inhabitants now know that to make the old town really worth living in, it will not be enough to just restore the fabric of residential buildings. Public space is on the agenda, along with road traffic.⁵⁰²

Indeed, the GTZ project also entailed a social and political project of changing ideologies about the public space, as it was accompanied by a specific vision of reconstructing the downtown as a novel social space. Not only were buildings redone and squares rearranged; the physical marking of the space became also a project of transforming its inhabitants as well. The local officials characterized the renovation of the downtown as also a collective social project. Thus, by using tropes invoking both historical specificity and a cultural universalism—such as the rhetoric of heritage—the local officials asked Sibiu’s urbanites to start identifying with their city, very often (too often) essentialized to the historical downtown. The renovation of the major squares in the old center was treated as a priority goal. In 2004, the World Bank offered 1 million euros for the restoration of one of the major squares in the historical center, which hosts a wide range of restaurants (the Little Square). The project for the renovation of the Main Square triggered intense debates among the local specialists, some of whom accused the

⁵⁰² Designing Tomorrow’s Cities: Focus – Fascination – Future. Abridged Version of the GTZ Annual Report 2004, 5.

mayor of spending a fortune on a project that did not match any preservation criteria for a medieval square and that would fully spoil its historical character.⁵⁰³ Despite these accusations, the mayor promoted the project, justifying it as a gift to the Sibians. He said that the Main Square “must become alive and be transformed into a place that represents Sibians.” As the mayor put it, Sibians needed to think of the Large Square as their living room, where they could invite guests as well as feel at home.

In a nutshell, the GTZ project had two main goals: 1) that of making Sibiu’s urbanites, and especially the residents of the historical center, more aware of the *exterior* of their houses, and 2) that of enhancing the social value of the public space, especially that in the historical center, through a thorough refurbishment of the major squares. In the next section, I will discuss the social and symbolic implications of GTZ’s vision of rehabilitation.

Shift of Perspective: Sibiu’s Historical Center as an Assembly of Houses

During my time in Sibiu, I came to realize that, while I enjoyed knowing those houses through the various and colorful lives they had at the present, the heritage specialists wanted to set them in a coherent urban aesthetics. This aesthetic urban form that the GTZ experts wanted to apply to Sibiu’s old center was not necessarily the one that the houses’ inhabitants wanted to create. What the latter displayed in their homes was an aesthetic of heterogeneity that they employed as a sign of ownership of their domestic space. The residents’ aesthetic choices were therefore generated by a local combination of functional needs of habitation and desires of modernization and

⁵⁰³ Hermann Fabini, „ In der Denkmalpflege ist weniger mehr,“ *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumanien* (ADZ), January 13, 2005, 5.

“normalcy” in a postsocialist world beguiled by the promises of readily accessible modernity in the form of IKEA or Praktiker goods.⁵⁰⁴ As Fehervary has argued, relying on her research in a town in Hungary formerly considered the epitome of socialist urbanism, an expectation of “normalcy” understood as postsocialist prosperity and forms of subjectivity increasingly defined through the dictum “freedom of expression” have not emerged only under the influence of capitalist consumerism. Instead, they appeared as even stronger responses to the state-endorsed forms of homogenization as social equalization that had been produced by the urban and social design promoted by socialist adoption of Modernist tenets.⁵⁰⁵ This argument could be easily applied to postsocialist Romania, where especially starting in the late 1970s until the end of Ceaușescu’s regime, consumption, as a “hidden object of desire,” had been highly regulated by the socialist state as a form of political control. As reactions to earlier attempts of the socialist state to increase its subjects’ submission by reducing their consumption options, post-1989 consumption practices in Romania, as well as across the former socialist bloc, have become pivotal means for redefining not only urban spaces and aesthetics, but also social relations and understandings of ‘person’ and ‘community.’⁵⁰⁶

To return to the houses of Sibiu’s old center, I suggest that they stood as perfect examples of this postsocialist search for a better, “normal” life that Fehervary witnessed

⁵⁰⁴ Praktiker is a German chain selling construction and do-it-self construction kits. One opened in Sibiu in the early 2000s.

⁵⁰⁵ Krisztina Fehervary, "In Search of the Normal: Material Culture and Middle-Class Fashioning in a Hungarian Steel Town, 1950-1997," PhD Thesis (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).

⁵⁰⁶ At the same time, consumption represented a main site for people to negotiate with the state or even deny its legitimacy altogether. Another point of view recently advanced by scholars writing about postsocialist consumption is that what seems to be a ‘return to innocence’ in the form of stubbornly nostalgic consumption of local goods represents actually new configurations of needs and desires forged by or against transforming global economies. That is, those economic practices are cultural forms, which are actively employed by people as main symbolical sites that index major transformations of morals, identities, and meanings. See, for example, Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

in a Hungarian town, which, in contrast to Sibiu, could be perceived as an instance of the “non-heritage,” or “anti-heritage,” represented by socialist modernist urban design.⁵⁰⁷

The highly unordered variety of aesthetic preferences, manifested by the ways in which the residents have chosen to make the house interiors into their “homes,” inevitably permeated the way the house facades came to be seen by passers-by. It was precisely this lively but aesthetically destabilizing lack of order that the GTZ project rejected, trying to tame it down and create instead an appearance of urban continuity and order. More importantly, this desired urban aesthetic reflected an attempt to restore a sense of historical continuity in a multiethnic city that went through significant upheavals throughout the 20th century.

The GTZ project to transform those houses into unitary objects for tourists to admire aimed, to an extent, to give the impression that the number of tenants in the house remained the same as at the turn of the century. At that time, most of the houses of the old center were inhabited by the Saxons, then the majority in Hermannstadt, a city of the Austro-Hungarian empire until 1918. Not only did the tenants change after 1945, when most of the houses were confiscated by the socialist state from their individual owners as well as from the Lutheran church that had many of the central houses in its patrimony, but the number of tenants had also fluctuated. The grand apartments occupying the entire floor of the house were partitioned so that they could accommodate up to four families or

⁵⁰⁷ An awareness of the importance of the 20th century *modern* heritage, represented by industrial complexes as well as by socialist apartment buildings has already emerged as an important argument in the recent heritage debates. In the former German Democrat Republic, there are projects of conservation of socialist apartment buildings. For a historical and ethnographic discussion of the preservation of industrial heritage in contemporary Romania, see Liviu Chelcea, *Bucureștiul industrial: Memorie, industrializare, și regenerare urbană* (Iași: Polirom, 2008).

even more. The rooms right under the large roofs, designed as storage units, were transformed into living places, as well.

At the same time, as much as the new political regime attempted to infiltrate its vision of social order into these houses by dividing them into much smaller housing units, doubling or tripling the number of tenants and sometimes redistributing the bigger apartments to local cadres of the new political hierarchies, those houses stood nevertheless as signs of Saxonness, still representing a vision of the world of those who built them several centuries ago. Their compact appearance, with high windows, tall and seemingly impenetrable gates, and wide, heavy roofs, marked a clear division between the private and the public realms. Even though occupied by an increasing number of non-Germans as their former inhabitants began leaving for Germany starting in the 1960s, to an extent they were still perceived as representations of the Transylvanian Germans.⁵⁰⁸

To discuss how the GTZ project attempted to enhance this semiotic potential, by transforming the houses themselves into proxies of the absentees (most of Sibiu's Saxons who had left for Germany between the 1960s and the 1990s), I employ Keane's view of things as potential means of representation. Keane points out that objects have their porous strata potentially prone to signification, but there is a kernel that is left unchanged, unsignifiable. Keane analyzes representations "both as entities with their own, particular, formal properties and as kinds of practice, distinct and yet inseparable from the full range of people and everyday activities."⁵⁰⁹ While "[i]t works at the unstable boundary at which the 'material' and 'symbolical' meet, reinforcing or undermining one another," however,

⁵⁰⁸ After some of them had been stripped of their Romanian citizenship, accused of collaboration with the Nazi regime, and deported to labor camps in the USSR between 1945 and 1950.

⁵⁰⁹ Webb Keane, *Signs of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8.

“a medium of representation is not only something that stands ‘between’ those things that it mediates, it is also a ‘thing’ in its own right.”⁵¹⁰ Keane argues that

objects are *not* open to any arbitrarily imposed set of meanings [...] [T]heir very materiality makes a difference both in the sources of their meanings and in their destinations[...]. In asking what, and in what way, objects “represent”, we must also look at their production, the transformation they undergo, the vicissitudes to which they are prone, and the alternative trajectories against which representational practice seeks to confine them.⁵¹¹

Even though he maintains that the meanings of objects should be understood through the “shifting physical, economic, and semiotic contexts” to which they are subjected, he does not explain how the semiotic contexts themselves initially emerge. Latour adds a new perspective to Keane’s discussion, as he argues that things capture meaning by the ways in which they are set in relation to other things.⁵¹²

This leads us to think that the rehabilitation of the old center and its description as a project of heritage-(re)making is grounded in a perspective on the houses of the old center different from that of the residents themselves. We might compare our view of Sibiu’s houses to the strategies that GTZ employed, including the program of urban aesthetic education that they publicized across the town starting in January 2006. GTZ aimed to revive the potential of the houses in Sibiu’s old center to represent in miniature a *Saxon* Transylvania. They did so by redefining the ways in which the houses were situated in relation to each other and then in relation to the public space of the city. Whereas I was paying close attention to the various ways in which those places were

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, 9.

⁵¹² Bruno Latour, "When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of ‘Science Studies’ to the Social Sciences," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (January/March 2000): 107–23.

inhabited, the GTZ architects were approaching them from the perspective of the tourists who would eventually come to the city to wander on the streets and look at the historical center as an *assembly* of houses.

I suggest that the GTZ program aimed to produce a new semiotic arrangement that would endorse a new relationship between the houses and their inhabitants. This new relationship would emerge out of a new angle that GTZ proposed from which to contemplate the houses and give them meaning. More specifically, I argue, GTZ wanted to produce a perspective shift—from focusing on the inside, on the house as their home, the tenants were asked to look instead at their homes as secondary parts of the house, as the background of the houses' facades, to be admired by tourists. By aiming to show the city to onlookers, temporary flaneurs on Sibiu's streets, the GTZ transformed the latter into the main active subjects of the city. The GTZ did so by shifting the ways the houses were looked at, by aiming to transform them from individual, (too) aesthetically diverse, individual "homes" into unitary, packaged heritage objects.

This shift of perspective, which GTZ aimed to endorse through the multifarious campaigns and programs developed in the historical center, did not happen in a vacuum of signification. On the contrary, as I will show in the subsequent section, the GTZ's vision of "heritage-making" was informed, to a certain extent, by local ideas of ethnic difference cherished especially within the local Saxon community, and the ways in which some of the Saxon leaders understood these ethnic differences to be codified by distinct forms of habitation. In the following section, I briefly discuss the contemporary Saxon community of Sibiu, relying on my ethnographic observations. I move then to discuss the perspective on social practices of habitation and ethnic distinctions, as it was offered to

me by one of the leaders of Sibiu's Saxon group. I then compare these statements with the vision of heritage-building that was endorsed by GTZ.

Carrying History on Their Shoulders: Houses and Saxon Self-narration in Contemporary Sibiu

Despite the fact that the Saxon group represents a relatively small segment (1.6%) within the city's entire population, the city has preserved its role as the center of Transylvania's German group. This historically grounded role has been currently imprinted within the city's landscape by the centrally placed sites of the two key institutions grounding the Saxon group in Transylvania: the Lutheran church, with its General Consistory and Lutheran theological seminary, and the Democratic Forum of the Germans in Romania, located right across from the seminary, within one of the buildings the state recently retroceded to the Lutheran church. Having won the local elections three times in a row (2000, 2004, 2008), the Forum represents much more than a political party—in fact, it seeks to stand as a *forum*. Along with the Lutheran church, the Forum lies at the kernel of the Saxon community, as to a certain extent they both influence and guide the social practices and small projects of the Saxon group in Sibiu.

Both the church and the Forum have been very active in sponsoring frequent series of cultural and social events, which are held in two main locations: in the main conference room of the building hosting the Forum, in the famous Hall of Mirrors, and on the premises of the "Friedrich Teusch" Center for Cultural Dialogue, which hosts the archives of the Lutheran church in Transylvania. Besides being a research center and having more recently become a museum of the history of the Lutheran church in

Transylvania, the “Teusch Haus,” as it is known in Sibiu, has functioned as a cultural and social site of the Saxon community there, organizing scholarly lectures, presentations of books and documentaries, temporary exhibitions on themes related to German culture (*Landeskunde*), as well as talks given by politicians especially from German-speaking countries, sometimes set in the form of an open dialogue with Sibiu’s officials. (The presentations and other events target a German-speaking audience, since most of them are held in German).

If we are to return to Frau Ackerman’s statement that the Saxon community is grounded in three things—the church, the school, and the language—we would note that, to an extent, her description could still be applied to Sibiu’s current Saxon group. For all that it appears as a much rehearsed cliché, grounded in a 19th century political imaginary of “the people” (*das Volk*), the statement’s peculiar veracity derives from the particular characteristics of the Saxon group in the present, that is, a group whose older segment is disproportionately high, and hence, given its small size, it has become much more homogeneous than before along the lines of age and political orientation. Under these circumstances, the church comes to substitute for many an institution that would have offered a richer cultural and social landscape. (Such institutions have developed in the last decade, sponsored mostly by funding and programs from abroad, but they are not much frequented by the members of Sibiu’s Saxon group.) Moreover, the Forum also has a tight relationship with the Lutheran church, with some of the local political leaders occupying prominent positions within the church as well.

As much as this perceived homogeneity could appear politically enticing, as it may allow for a simpler, unilateral electoral agenda targeting only the specific needs of

the group, it also can be exploited for opposite purposes. That is, a culturally homogeneous group, formed especially of older subjects, invites questions about its political representativeness. Allegations of the group's exploiting transnational agendas and resources by virtue of "politically correct" entitlements and claims for minority rights, or even more subtle, and thus more difficult to reject, forms of mockery come from more cosmopolitan subjects, such as German ex-pats, volunteers, or young tourists who, confronted with the cultural and linguistic forms of Sibiu's Saxon group, reject them as being "conservative," that is, as traditional or just plain "boring."

The irony is that many of those Saxons, especially the older ones, identify themselves as being *Germans* living in Transylvania. A Saxon historian pointed out to me the persistence with which some of the Saxons maintain or even recreate ethnic boundaries by constantly choosing specific cultural and linguistic forms over others:

As for those who live here [who never emigrated], or those who lived here in the past century, the 20th century, but also many of those currently living here, they watch only German television programs, now that it is possible, read only newspapers and magazine received from Germany, they know everything that happens in Germany, but they are not so interested in what is going on in Romania. For the majority of them, this identification with Romania has never happened.

During my time in Sibiu, I was able to observe some instances of this complex process of cultural bovarism, in which many of Sibiu's Saxons engage by symbolically living in-between a Germany constantly imagined and approximated via visits to relatives, media channels, and other material forms, and a Transylvania where they have been feeling increasingly marginal as political actors.⁵¹³ Indeed, the Forum, the Teusch

⁵¹³ By cultural bovarism I understand the tendency of a group or an individual (in general, relatively marginal) to imagine themselves as belonging to a much larger or more powerful cultural landscape. I draw

Haus, or Evangelische Akademie (a German foundation for interconfessional and cultural exchange), constantly organized events, presentations, talks, and round tables. These meetings focused on topics such as Romania's integration into the EU (this was in Fall 2005), religions in Europe, talks on Luxembourg and immigration to Transylvania, linguistic connections between the Luxembourg and Saxon dialects, celebratory exhibits of the Grimm brothers, economic cooperation and European regionalism. Often I heard some comments among the participants trying to adequately convey the requisite cultural knowledge and interest in broader contemporary issues on European agendas that characterize those events, and by extension, their (mostly Saxon) audience. (The implicit comparison was with the parochial approach to those topics displayed by the events organized by some [Romanian] governmental or local institutions in Sibiu, such as the "Astra" museum and the local library, the local Department for Culture and Patrimony, and even the Orthodox church. Those comments carried their truth, as well as pointing to broader negotiations of the meanings of culture and history and competing projects of memory-work unraveling on the surface of the city.)

Indeed, most of the members that ordinarily form the audience of such events belong to the elites of the local Saxon group, such as professors, teachers, historians, artists, journalists, and bookish students. Despite a strong penchant for cultural bovarism, manifested through direct comments or more subtly, through aesthetic and cultural choices, the members of the Saxon group in Sibiu, I suggest, have also been actively engaged in a constant process of translating, literally and symbolically, between cultural and linguistic realms. For instance, other events, such as the talk given by a Romanian,

on Sorin Antohi's discussion of cultural bovarism in his "Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontologies" *Tr@nsit-Online* (2002).

Bucharest-based journalist Cristian Pârvulescu, a well known voice among those intellectuals supporting the (then) political opposition under a regime formed mostly of neo-communists, or the talk given (in German) by a German historian, Georg Herbstritt, on the launching of his book on the collaboration between the East German Stasi and the Securitate, had a fully packed house and stirred a lot of talk within the Saxon circles in town.⁵¹⁴

Among Sibiu's Saxons, Professor Bonhoeffer is famous. He is one of the founders of the German Forum, a Saxon theology professor who has been a leading figure in Sibiu's Saxon community since his decision to leave West Germany in 1985 and return to Transylvania, in order to "show solidarity with the 300,000 Germans living [there]."⁵¹⁵ Professor Bonhoeffer, as I will call him henceforth, was a Saxon who left Transylvania during the war to become a Wehrmacht soldier, ended up in Germany as a war prisoner, then pursued his education and had a successful career in West Germany, only to decide to return to Transylvania at the moment when most of the Saxons wanted to emigrate (by the mid 1980s). In contrast with them, Professor Bonhoeffer came back to Transylvania with a sense of mission exactly when the situation worsened for most of Romania's citizens, including the ethnic Germans. His bravery and determination made him a reference figure for Transylvania's Saxon group.

He and his wife kindly invited me to join them for breakfast one morning in October 2005. When I told them that I wanted to better understand how interethnic relations, especially those between Saxons and Romanian, had developed after December

⁵¹⁴ Georg Herbstritt and Stejărel Olaru, *Stasi și Securitatea* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005).

⁵¹⁵ "Das Leben in Rumänien erleichtern: Westdeutscher Theologe nach Siebenbürgen," *Deutsche Tagespost Katholische Zeitung für Deutschland*, February 20, 1985. OSA box 120 Romania/Minorities—Ethnic Germans.

1989 in Transylvania, he began by telling me that “the world of the Saxons and the world of Romanians has always moved in parallel, never intertwining.” At this point, his wife interjected that the Saxons had suffered greatly when the Romanian socialist state confiscated their houses. It is for this reason, Professor Bonhoeffer added, that the past is different for Saxons than for Romanians. He offered the following explanation:

The Saxons carry their past on their shoulders in a different way than Romanians: whereas Romanians live as part of their generation or of their parents, the Saxons live in a longer history, they think of the history that they carry on their shoulders. When the Saxons come to ask for their houses to be restituted, they think of their forefathers. They would say, “it is our house because it is the house of my forefather.” This is why it was unbearable for the Saxons to find out, upon their return from the labor camps in the USSR, that their houses and belongings had been taken away, and when they asked for them to be returned, they began receiving anonymous letters, written by Romanians, that read: “What land do you want now? when you came here [to Transylvania], you had none!”

This statement is thought-provoking for several reasons. It offers an “encapsulated story,” that is, a well-rehearsed narrative, that provides an origin story—“we have been here for 850 years” and an additional dimension of accountability, that “Saxons carry their history on their shoulders.” That is, Professor Bonhoeffer intimates that it is not only an awareness of spatial continuity, but also an active engagement with maintaining this sentiment of continuity at the core of one’s sense of ethnic belonging that defines what a Saxon should be. In a way, this description of one’s identity being constructed through keeping history on one’s shoulders entails a concept of the person seen as a sum of what Strathern calls “dividuals” (or “partible persons”), in which various people participate in creating one social self.⁵¹⁶ In comparison to Strathern’s dividual, who is relationally

⁵¹⁶ Marilyn Strathern coined the term “dividual” in her discussion of the nature of personhood in a gift economy. She argued that due to the permanent and close relationships these people develop among each other as part of the larger system of obligations, in which the division between economic and social becomes very blurry, they could not be understood as autonomous individuals but rather as ‘dividuals,’

formed especially in the present through complex social and economic relations with others, we encounter a different form of “dividual” in Professor Bonhoeffer’s account, in which a Saxon could be a Saxon only if he or she is willing to acknowledge the self as part of the past, of understanding himself as more a carrier of a larger history than a maker of one’s own.

The glue that makes possible this self-identification with someone who precedes one by 850 years, however, must take a form that is more prone to objectification than a sentiment or a political discourse; that is, we encounter an objectification of history as a burden-like thing, which needs to take a material form that can ideally stay the same across generations, something that offers the promise of sameness—that one is (through) his or her ancestors—because it embeds it. The promise of “sameness” that would be embedded in a house or a piece of land and would extend then to an understanding of “history,” as a thing to be carried along, relies then on a particular cultural imaginary and on specific understandings of materiality and material form.

The process is therefore dialectical: one is Saxon not only because he inherited the house, but also because he honored and took care of it as such, as a container of his ancestors’ lives, imprinted onto the forms in which the house had been inhabited, and which therefore could mould the current owners’ lives, as well. The conditions of possibility for them to be Saxons are offered via specific material forms—such as a house or a piece of land—presuming that the current inhabitants honor the past as it is inscribed in the house. The statement “It is our house because it is the house of our forefathers” signals an understanding of a house as being both static and dynamic, standing as the

living in and constituting the social network. Marilyn Strathern, "Subject or Object: Women and the Circulation of Valuables in Highlands in New Guinea," in *Women and Property, Women as Property*, ed. Renne Hirschon (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

proof and promise of sameness while being invested with a certain form of agency—that of shaping the lives of the individuals living therein and transforming them into “Saxons.”

By extension, “the house” could come to represent a fortified town, a church, or even a city. Professor Bonhoeffer’s account resonates with an explanation that I received from a Saxon art historian, who had studied Transylvania’s fortified churches at length. According to her, a very strong sense of ownership had been formed during the Middle Ages, when “one had to heavily rely on community in order to survive.” As she put it,

Especially the Saxons who, at the moment when they had decided to leave [their homeland in northwestern Europe] for a place that they did not know, were aware that there was no way back. Hence the royal edict [that brought them] had to be so fabulous, so as to persuade them to leave everything behind and come here, to a place where *hic sunt leones*. Since they knew they could not go back, they developed an extremely strong connection to the land and belongings they acquired here [in Transylvania]. They knew that if they fled in front of the Tatars, others would come to occupy their land. Hence, the fortified towns.

She concluded by describing the Saxons’ relationship to their place in absolute terms: “without your place, you were dead!”

With this strong statement in mind, I return to my conversation with Professor Bonhoeffer to suggest that his account offers not only an interpretation of the story of origins (“we have been here for 850 years”). By pointing to the lack of identity that results from the absence of ownership—what land do you want? when you came here, you had none!—it also stands as an allegory of a potential project of ethnic destruction through the redistribution of material forms that were imbued with cultural meaning. Professor Bonhoeffer’s explanation echoed the argument of the art historian in that the Saxons’ houses stood as both metonyms and metaphors of ethnic belonging, as active

elements in representing an imaginary of ethnic kinship developed through a particular understanding of “property.” In that sense, this account also illustrates the anthropological approach to “property” understood not as a relation between people and things, but rather as one between people through things.

Noteworthy in Professor Bonhoeffer’s account is that it sets the narrative of historical continuity of the Saxons in Transylvania within a moral framework, a framework of accountability for one’s past. As such, he implicitly (but perhaps unwillingly) points to an idea of Saxonness that needs to be assumed and permanently *produced* through one’s willing adoption of the narrative of continuity. To be part of the Saxon group implies an act of labor: one must carry one’s history on one’s shoulders in order to be recognized as a Saxon. Another implication of the professor’s account is the relationship he draws between a labored place—such as, the cultivated land or the house—and the making and reification of the Saxon identity.

Even more interesting is the way he chooses to ground his argument. That is, he draws upon a contrast between “the Saxons” and “the Romanians,” with the latter understood as “living only within their own generation,” implying that they live in a present as it is, without strong ties to the past. Professor Bonhoeffer aimed to strengthen the contrast by bringing in an image offered by Lucian Blaga, an interwar Romanian philosopher from Transylvania who aimed to produce a theory of culture grounded in an understanding of space: “A [Romanian] shepherd traveling with his herd through a Saxon village encounters the fortified church: they are two worlds that live in the same place, but [inhabit] different spaces.” By stating that they live in “parallel worlds,” Professor Bonhoeffer alludes to two distinct forms of identifying with an ethnic group, set within

different temporal coordinates. More interesting are the elements that he selected to exemplify the distinction—a shepherd, who would stand for Transylvania’s Romanians, and the fortified church, that would symbolize the Saxon group; that is, the very symbol of transhumance set in contrast to a symbol of stability and endurance. Moreover, he offers a depiction of the Romanians as newcomers to Transylvania, whose historical and ethnic roots are more perishable than those of other groups. He extrapolated the contrast when I inquired upon his opinion about the discussions triggered at the time (October 2005) around the urban arrangement of Sibiu’s Large Square. He answered bluntly:

the Romanians never had a sense of urbanity. They want the park back, the park that used to be in the square.⁵¹⁷ They cannot bear the open space, to be able to see the square. [From their point of view, the square] should not be seen. They don’t even want to see the others or even themselves.

How could I approach these statements, offered by a senior professor, someone carrying significant prestige and holding an important political role among Sibiu’s Saxons? If his previous comparison drew upon a theory of history as formative of a sense of Saxon ethnic belonging (while the absence of a historical awareness would characterize a form of Romanianness), in the last statement Professor Bonhoeffer offers a different strategy of ethnic formation and differentiation: the presence or absence of an urban sense, of being able (or not) to identify oneself as part of a larger social group; to be able and willing to look at others, sustain their gaze upon you, and thereby incorporate them into your own identity formation. Moreover, this ability (or lack thereof) is captured and inscribed by a specific relation to space: according to Professor Bonhoeffer, Sibiu’s Saxons approach the Main Square not only as a material representation of their own

⁵¹⁷ Between 1948 and 1984 the Main Square was transformed into a small park, with a flower garden and a round lawn.

history that was established, together with the entire Old Town, by the first Saxon colonists who arrived in Transylvania, but also as a proof of their urbanity, their ability and willingness to relate socially to others—to “see” them.

Indeed, someone could argue that such statements are far too essentialist and elide a more grounded analysis of the specifics of the political disputes going on at the local and governmental level. Another analyst would raise a question about the peculiar position that Professor Bonhoeffer has occupied since his move to Sibiu more than twenty years ago, in 1985. Even though he has retired, he remains very active socially and intellectually. He is often invited to give the opening speech at various meetings, such as one held by the World Monuments Fund in Sibiu in September 2005, or to be the discussant for scholarly papers or panels hosted by the Teusch Haus. As such, his viewpoint weighs heavily within the local Saxon community and still permeates, at least on the surface, the current political atmosphere of the German Forum. Given his pivotal political and symbolical position within the local hierarchy of the city as well as the broader Saxon group in Transylvania, I suggest that his statements should be approached as being representative for many of Sibiu’s Saxons, especially given the higher degree of homogeneity of this group, a double effect of the group size and the age of its members.

It is here that I would like to return to the vision of social order underlying GTZ’s project of rehabilitating the historical center. I suggest that there is a very interesting concordance between the Professor’s statements and the main goals of the GTZ team. That is, Professor Bonhoeffer’s description of the houses as dialectical receptacles and makers of Saxon ethnic identity conveyed an understanding of habitation as an ethnically marked social practice. As I have already pointed out, for the professor, the houses that

had been formerly owned by the Saxons before most of them emigrated to Germany used to function as pivotal means for their owners to produce a sentiment of ethnic belonging. Only by being properly inhabited by their residents would the houses help the Saxons “carry their history of their shoulders” by making them continuously adjust to and reproduce the ways in which their forefathers had also inhabited the same house.

If the houses offered a material ground to reinforce the narrative of historical continuity for each family, at the same time, they also functioned as connectors between the residents and the larger social group in the present. According to this vision, the houses stood as nodes between distinct temporal frameworks as well as points making and defining a form of public space *intra muros*, within the Saxon community. By being set within a clearly defined spatial network, which would mirror a social configuration of economic and moral obligations, the Saxon houses would create a community simultaneously defined and linked by the public space and a narrative of historical continuity. As such, the houses were not only receptacles and makers of an ethnic sentiment among their current residents, but also instruments through which the community could assess whether these residents fit the criteria of ethnic belonging by observing how they inhabit their houses. This dual quality of the houses—as mediators of history and parts of an assembly through which the community was continuously making itself through proper forms of habitation—would make the Saxon group into a self-reliant, functioning social network. This interpretation of Professor Bonhoeffer’s statements echoes an understanding of the Saxon community as a confined, fully self-reliant corporation of perfect social order and unassailable harmony, which was the view that the leaders of the Saxon group promoted during the 1920s. (Given the Professor’s

life trajectory and his youth in Transylvania during the 1920s and 1930s, it is no wonder that his statements closely match earlier self-representations of the Saxon group.)

People in Houses, Houses as People: Minority Politics, Diverging Property Regimes, and Imaginaries of a Saxon Peoplehood

More interesting is that Professor Bonhoeffer's conceptualization of the relationship among houses, public space, and Saxon ethnicity parallels the GTZ's vision of rehabilitation as being mainly a social project. However, despite these parallels, divergent understandings of "heritage" and especially its function underlie the two statements. As I have already pointed out, the GTZ project entailed a shift of perspective: it asked the residents of the historical center to look at their houses in a novel way. More specifically, it required them to translate themselves from the inside to the outside of the house, and thereby to become, to an extent, tourists in their own town. This shift of perspective became a new condition for proving one's civic status, that is, one's desire to be considered a proper citizen, a resident of the city, not only of his or her own apartment. This shift of perspective was pursued through two main strategies: 1) by making the inhabitants more aware of the aesthetic importance of the external elements of their houses (roofs, facades, window frames, entrance gates, etc.), as well as of these elements' *social* value, and 2) by inviting them to forge new links among themselves, the interior of their homes, and the public space, which should be treated as an extension as their own living room, as the mayor suggested.

This new understanding of urban aesthetics was set, however, within a framework of social and civic responsibility, as the flyers advertised the key message that local high school students involved in the "No Plastic" campaign were also instructed to stress: that

the plastic window frames would directly endanger not only the urban quality of the city, but also the city's very symbolical value in the eyes of UNESCO representatives.⁵¹⁸ In other words, the residents were told to think first of UNESCO, and then of their own civic status, before pursuing any replacement of their window frames.

Therefore, both perspectives—the one set forth by Professor Bonhoeffer and the one promoted by GTZ—present the houses as civic vectors par excellence, as instruments for the residents to signify or reject a form of social belonging. However, whereas for Professor Bonhoeffer the houses represented a means to inscribe social belonging onto place through the categorical and exclusive reinforcement of a primordial *ethnic* belonging, for GTZ the houses appeared as vehicles to transform their residents into proper “citizens” (in the German sense of the word, *die Bürger*). Therefore, the GTZ project aimed to persuade the current residents of Sibiu's historical center to take on the social behavior of the former residents of this center: the Saxons. Moreover, by compelling the contemporary residents of Sibiu's downtown to decorate their houses according to their original look, by relying on old photos or drawings, the GTZ team seemed to be engaged (unwillingly, perhaps) in a kind of project of social engineering as well, in which the residents would become citizens in the shadow of the houses' former Saxon owners.

This is the point where the potential parallel between Professor Bonhoeffer's view and GTZ's vision ends. For GTZ, the project of rehabilitation is a social project because it envisions local development as emerging from a change of social practices. Moreover, this change of social practices is promoted through the reinforcement of local symbolical

⁵¹⁸ As the flyer read, “the plastic window frames hamper the chance of having our historical center included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, while they also negatively affect our image as European Cultural Capital in 2007.” Flyer 16, www.gtz.ro

hierarchies rooted in ethnic differences between the Romanians and the Saxons. The GTZ project therefore encourages the current residents of the historical center (mostly Romanians) to undertake new social roles by appearing as good imitators of forms of urbanity understood as ethnic markers. In other words, the residents are compelled to become as “Saxon” as possible in order to satisfy the sophisticated aesthetic desires of cultural tourists as well as to actively contribute to the making of their city into a “European capital.” Simultaneously, the houses themselves are transformed into substitutes of their former Saxon owners. By attempting to make “Sibiu’s past into its future,” as the title of the whole GTZ project runs, the rehabilitation of the historical houses becomes a social project as well, that of transforming Sibiu’s historical center into a museum of the disappeared people: the Saxons who left Transylvania.

This form of rehabilitation as memorialization is, however, categorically rejected by the Saxons who are still living in Transylvania and who aim not only to be treated as alive social subjects but also to be given full recognition as political actors on the contemporary map of Europe. Professor Bonhoeffer’s statements indicate a double criticism of the GTZ perspective. First, by pointing out the claims for the houses’ restitution set forth by the Saxons on the premise of historical continuity—“it is our house because it is the house of our forefathers”—the Professor makes a statement about ownership as being ethnically marked. That is, he indicates that ownership has value as long as it is preserved within the ethnic group, the Saxon community. By adding then that “the Romanians never had a sense of urbanity,” the Professor emphasizes a class distinction as being frozen within a grid of ethnic difference, which can never be transcended. In other words, he expresses his skepticism about GTZ’s aim to teach the

current Romanian residents to become Saxon-like, and therefore more “European,” by changing their ways of relating to the historical houses of Sibiu’s center. From his point of view, the moral value of the house transcends the economic market value of some shabby houses in need of complex and costly reparation. Even more so, the current run-down condition of some of the houses in the historical center stands as the most visible proof that the current owners did not care about these houses as the Saxons would have done, precisely because the houses carried no moral or historical value to the current residents. Consequently, these residents do not deserve these houses because they are not and cannot ever become *Saxon*.

As such, the Professor’s strong statement must be understood as a deeper conviction that the conflicts over the houses are in fact conflicts among different kinds of peoplehood, in this case, represented by the Romanians and the Saxons. According to him, the multifarious differences between these peoplehoods stem from a wide span of smaller contrasts, ranging from the different ways of inhabiting a private place (the house) which are seen as being biologically inscribed, to that of inhabiting a wider social space (the Main Square), to even an ability to “see”—that is, comprehend—the difference itself by knowing how to observe and accommodate the others in an open space. The Professor’s statement directly questioned a project that promoted an EU-endorsed vision of creating a “common European heritage,” while attempting to make it happen at the margins of Europe. As I will show, his view was grounded in a specific situation in which the Saxon group found itself after the massive emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania in the early 1990s.

The Professor's comments must be situated within the broader context of the minority politics of the postsocialist Romanian state. At the time of my conversation with Professor Bonhoeffer (October 2005), there had been an immense external and internal pressure on the Romanian government to expedite the restitution of the buildings that had been in the possession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Romania, to which the majority of Transylvania's Saxons belong. A law granting the restitution of all buildings that belonged to ethnic communities, and were confiscated between 1940 and 1989 had been passed in 2004.⁵¹⁹ In 2005, the newly-elected Romanian government passed another law, which amended the 2004 legislation and broadened the scope of the restitution process, by stipulating that farm and forest land and other real estate be returned to ethnic communities as well as religious groups.⁵²⁰ Notwithstanding these amendments, which aimed to simplify and expedite the restitution process, many buildings continued to remain in the property of the state. This situation made the bishop of the Lutheran Church in Romania, which serves the German-speaking community, invite the bishop of the Lutheran Church in America and the president of the Lutheran World Federation for an official visit to Romania.⁵²¹ One of the major goals of this visit was for the American bishop to exert more pressure on the Romanian government to facilitate the return to the Lutheran church of immovable goods that had been confiscated by the socialist state. Moreover, this situation did not even address the countless cases in which the Saxons who emigrated before 1989 had to "sell" for a symbolic sum or even give their houses in

⁵¹⁹ Wolfgang Wittstock, "Sechsmonatige Antragsfrist: Zum Gesetz über die Rückgabe von Immobilien an Gemeinschaften der nationalen Minderheiten," ADZ, May 28, 2004. <http://adz.ro/archiv/index.htm>, Accessed December 20, 2009.

⁵²⁰ IRF Report, U.S. Policy & Issues - United States Diplomatic Mission in Romania . Romania: 2007 International Religious Freedom. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. http://www.usembassy.ro/US_Policy/2007_IRF_En.html. Accessed on December 20, 2009.

⁵²¹ ELCA Presiding Bishop, LWF President Visits Romanian Government Officials, News Service, November 3, 2006 <http://www.elca.org/news>, Accessed on December 20, 2009.

exchange for a passport. Many of those Saxons could not ask for the restitution of their former possessions in Romania after 1989 because they were not willing to apply for Romanian citizenship.⁵²²

As a leader of the Saxon group in Sibiu, directly involved in the political life of the German Forum and in the internal debates of the Lutheran Church council, Professor Bonhoeffer was fully aware of the complex factors at play in the GTZ's project of resignifying the meaning of the houses. The Professor's statements were pointing out that the houses of the historical center were part of a larger cluster of immovable material forms that represented the heritage of the German Lutherans in Romania, which meant mostly the Saxons. He also wanted to show that as much as the GTZ hoped to redefine Sibiu by conferring it a "Saxon" medieval look, this project was shallow, because it did not directly help the Saxons currently living in Sibiu. According to the Professor, the remaking of the Saxon community was to happen only when the houses of the historical center, together with other immovable possessions, would be restituted to the Lutheran Church and therefore became again material forms of ethnicity-making. From his perspective, the GTZ vision of rehabilitation as beautification of the city was categorically not a project of heritage-making.

I suggest that Professor Bonhoeffer's comments must be understood as a very shrewd maneuver whereby he calls upon an idealized world of the Saxon community, one reminiscent of the ways in which the Saxon group promoted itself during the interwar period and thereby maintained an economic autonomy which allowed it to thrive even

⁵²² Between 1999 and 2004, approximately 1,500 German citizens settled their domicile in Romania. *Romania Statistical Yearbook 2005*, Romanian National Institute of Statistics, Bucharest. Even though the statistic does not distinguish between German citizens and former Transylvanian Saxons, currently German-citizens, it is highly likely that a great number of these resettlers are Saxons who returned to live in Transylvania due to the increasing living costs in Germany.

when its political importance had diminished. The Professor employed almost the same tactics as his forebears, the Saxon politicians in Greater Romania, in order to justify claims of political recognition that the Saxon community set forth in the present, in a Romania about to join the EU. (At the time of the interview, Romania was not yet a member state. It joined the EU in 2007.) Therefore, he aimed to make a point, which echoed the general discourse of the Forum: that the Saxons of Transylvania have not disappeared, despite their very small number, and that they want to be given the political attention that they deserve. Professor Bonhoeffer was also making a subtle criticism regarding the German state, by alluding to the fact that economic support for local development, in the form of the beautification of the city's center, did not replace the political support that the ethnic Germans expected from the German state. (As I mentioned earlier, this political support had existed, but it was withdrawn when Germany adopted the policy of local development after 1992.)

In his comments, the Professor was addressing the most pressing problem of the Saxons currently living in Transylvania: that such a small community does not have enough political leverage to pressure the state for the restitutions of an immense wealth, which used to belong to a thriving Saxon community before the war. (Despite the politics of centralization orchestrated by the interwar governments, this community was able to fully preserve its economic autonomy.) Therefore, the strong contrasts that Professor Bonhoeffer drew between the Saxons and the Romanians must be set within the current circumstances of Romania's national politics, where the ethnic Germans have been treated more as pawns to signal a multiculturalism on the surface than as actors occupying a powerful position on the national political scene. That is, those statements

signal Professor Bonhoeffer's deep frustration with the uncertain situation of the ethnic Germans in Romania, an uncertainty that was especially high at the moment of our discussion (2005), in a Romania not yet an EU member and more than ten years after Germany's radical shift of policy concerning the emigration of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe.

In fact, those frustrations echoed earlier ones, which had been poignantly formulated by the honorary president of the German Forum as early as April 2001. At that time, the Forum was facing the radical institutional rearrangement of government ministries following the December 2000 elections, which had been won by a government formed mostly of the former communists, regrouped under the umbrella of the Social Democratic Party in Romania (PSD). One direct result of the elections was the dismantling of the Department of National Minorities and its transformation into an office for interethnic relations attached to the Ministry of Information. This change raised serious questions as to whether the councilors for minorities, formerly working in the Department of National Minorities, would still be able to hold on to their position in the new government. Confronted with such changes, the Forum's honorary president officially closed the 2001 general meeting by saying:

The long-standing tendency is that those circumstances that open up special possibilities for us as German communities in Romania (namely, possibilities to fully involve and develop ourselves for the good of all) are being developed without us and pass us by, because neither Bucharest nor Berlin think that we have a truly catalytic potential. Some see us as a house plant that can be shown to certain visitors, while others regard us as objects to be looked after, to which they were once obligated to care for, and thus still feel obligated.⁵²³

⁵²³ The honorary president of the German Forum, Paul Phillipi, quoted in *Deutsche Minderheit in Rumänien: „Zimmerpflanze oder Betreuungs-Objekt,”* by Martin Ohnweiler, April 15, 2001, *Siebenbürgische Zeitung Online*.

This statement pointed to a profound sentiment among the ethnic Germans of being left “in-between,” currently recognized as a fully fledged political community neither by the Romanian government nor by the German one.

Even though some of the Saxons currently living in Transylvania, such as Professor Bonhoeffer, continue to use an idyllic image of the Saxon community by selling it to those who seek it in order to acquire resources and other forms of support for the present needs of the local communities, Romania’s ethnic Germans want to be approached as *modern* political actors fully anchored in the present. Even more so, their leaders portray themselves as being more progressive than other political and economic actors in Romania, a viewpoint permeating most of the speeches of the Forum’s leaders—such as, for instance, the declaration of the honorary president of the Forum, Paul Philippi, that the Forum understands itself as a catalyst within Romania’s political field, or Mayor Klaus Johannis’ statement that one should make use of the advantages of being a small community (that is, more flexible and adaptable to various changes).⁵²⁴ Another example is the analogy to the realm of technology employed by the Forum’s vice president, Hans Klein, who, prior to Romania’s accession into the EU, affirmed that the ethnic Germans represent “the locomotive” that would bring Romania into Europe.⁵²⁵ Therefore, the current leaders of the German ethnic group in Romania engage in a peculiar process of seeking and maintaining a political profile that must satisfy two very different sets of needs and standards. More specifically, those leaders must adjust their political program in order to meet the interests and values of an aging and increasingly

⁵²⁴ Philippi and Johannis quoted in “Zusammenarbeit und EU-Integration: ‘Einblicke und Ausblicke’ zum 15-Jahre-Jubiläum des DFDR” by Hannelore Baier, May 11, 2004, *ADZ*. In original, “die Vorteile zu nutzen, die das Klein-Sein mit sich bringt” (K. Johannis).

⁵²⁵ Open discussion about economic regions in Europe, organized by the Teusch Haus, November 2005. See also the previously mentioned interview with mayor Klaus Johannis.

smaller community, whose values are perceived as more traditional, while maintaining an optimistic and future-oriented agenda persuasive enough to acquire further economical and political support from governmental actors from Romania and abroad.

A strategy of maintaining a relatively consistent image among these highly diverging factors has been for the political leaders to portray themselves as morally virtuous/“better” kinds of people: hard-working, carriers of a long history on their shoulders, catalysts that would transform an entire city, and locomotives that bring about progress and development, having acquired these special skills by belonging to the Saxon ethnic group. In other words, the Saxon leaders aimed to produce for themselves an image of a people of a different kind, which, notwithstanding the community’s dwindling size, is worth much more value to what they promote as being ethnically innate qualities of industriousness, honor, and morality. These are claims that are not made straightforwardly, but they undergird the claims for political recognition that the Saxon leaders continue to set forth. Those claims are crucial for the Saxon group to retain not only a cultural identity in Transylvania, but also to recuperate many of the former belongings of the Lutheran Church from the Romanian state. In order for them to recreate their heritage, therefore, the Saxons of Transylvania must be as visible as possible on the European and international political scene.

This is why the GTZ project of development as rehabilitation was welcomed, but with reservations by some of Sibiu’s Saxons. The project of rehabilitation as memorialization of Sibiu’s Saxon past appeared as a form of support that in fact accentuates something they wanted to avoid: having themselves portrayed as one-dimensional, via a transformation of Sibiu into a token of a Germanic past outside the

political borders of Germany. The German state was very much encouraging development, but a development seen only via the historically preserved urban landscape that would further investment and tourism.⁵²⁶

As a German scholar visiting Sibiu said to me, those actors (the “Europeans”) wanted to make Sibiu into a genuinely German historical town, something that they no longer have in post war Germany.⁵²⁷ This remark underscores that the GTZ project aimed to give Sibiu’s historical center an atmosphere of Saxon authenticity, whose main role was to transform the city into a representation of *European* culture. However, as I have already shown, GTZ’s approach to the remaking of Sibiu’s center into an epitome of Saxon heritage did not follow the classic steps of an enterprise of historical preservation. Instead, they chose to teach the current residents how they could transform their own houses to become more aesthetically like those of a German town. In other words, they tried to offer to the residents themselves the guidelines for the city’s transformation into a European site. Also, as I have already mentioned, GTZ invited the residents to change the ways in which they related to their houses and to the city, in general. In short, GTZ aimed to teach Sibiu’s residents to become European citizens and prove their newly acquired Europeanness through the ways in which they respected the historical value of their houses, by changing their habitation practices and aesthetic preferences as well as developing a new relation to public space.

I suggested earlier that this project was a subtle invitation to the Romanians forming the majority of Sibiu’s urbanites to become more “Saxon,” by adopting social

⁵²⁶ For a discussion of historical preservation and its role in creating a historical narrative of a unitary German past, see Rudy Koshar, *Germany’s Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁵²⁷ Fieldwork notes, November 2005.

practices of urban habitation that had been associated with Saxon ideas of citizenry and urbanity. In other words, the Saxon past that GTZ aimed to revive in Sibiu through the beautification of historical houses was made into the form of a *European* past which the current residents in Sibiu, mostly Romanians, were invited to embrace by becoming Europeans themselves. Obviously, as Professor Bonhoeffer clearly stated, this approach strongly collided with the perspective of Sibiu's Saxons that "Saxonnness" cannot be something that can just be taught. On the contrary, it must be cultivated and transmitted through generations, distinct kinship and economic associations, as well as inheritance systems, as he pointed out. In fact, the major problem of the GTZ approach to heritage-as-practice—as something that could be learned—hit a chord among the Saxons precisely because it could annul claims for inheritance that they had set forth. That is, GTZ's heritage-as-practice philosophy, which aimed to make Sibiu's Romanians more "Saxon" and thereby more "European," contradicted Transylvanian Saxons' interest in promoting a form of heritage-as-cultural-recognition. This framework would not only underscore the distinct, non-processual quality of Saxon heritage and set forth a claim for cultural and political recognition of the Saxon ethnic group in contemporary Romania, but it would also directly ground the group's request for the restitution of the immovable goods that used to belong to the ethnic group before the Second World War. Therefore, in a way, the GTZ project, if understood as a project of local development sponsored by the German state, which would illustrate Germany's 1992 policy shift from political recognition to economic distribution, in fact endangered more complicated processes of local economic redistribution, including the restitution claims advanced by the Saxon group.

Villa Hermanni: Place-making in Sibiu and Luxembourg's Search for a European Identity

The GTZ project and the vision of heritage-as-development that it tried to promote must also be set in comparison to another project of rehabilitation: that of the Baroque Schaser house in Sibiu, whose full refurbishment was sponsored by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In fact, the comparison was made by GTZ itself in one of its first reports. There, the restoration of the Luxembourg house—called there, the Red House, due to its new color—was used as a complementary illustration to the vision of rehabilitation promoted by GTZ. That is, the report explained that there were two ways to go about the rehabilitation of Sibiu's historical center: 1) by identifying the most important and perhaps most historically valuable buildings and pursuing a thorough and adequate renovation of them (an approach illustrated by the Luxembourg House) and 2) of distributing the funding among smaller interventions on a larger number of buildings, a perspective on rehabilitation underlying the project coordinated by GTZ.⁵²⁸

Whereas GTZ claimed that these two approaches to historical preservation represent “two faces of one target,” that is, “they do not contradict, but rather complete each other,” many other specialists, including local architects in Sibiu as well as Bucharest-located specialists from the National Institute for Historical Monuments, were very critical of GTZ's approach. As the former director of the Institute put it, “historical preservation is a complex process,” which GTZ did not take into account.⁵²⁹ “They were not concerned with the major problems of the buildings, and nothing was done on the infrastructure of the historical houses.” Instead, they focused only on “roofs, facades, and

⁵²⁸ “2 moduri de abordare - 1 scop: Reabilitarea centrului istoric, Sibiu / Hermannstadt,” Flyer 3, www.gtz.ro

⁵²⁹ Interview, April 20, 2008, Bucharest.

some courtyards.” In fact, she said, “from the start, GTZ did not set a major task for itself.” She pointed out that the GTZ team had two goals: 1) to make the residents aware of the value of their houses and encourage them to become active in the houses’ preservation, and 2) to demonstrate how the buildings could be better preserved in the future. Consequently, from her point of view, GTZ’s enterprise was not a legitimate project of historical preservation.



Figure 21 A 2007 stamp of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg showing the renovated Luxembourg house in Sibiu. www.pt.lu/portal/Philatelie/stamps/pid/2609. Photo: Menn Bodson, Bridel.

In comparison, the Luxembourg Haus project was commended by specialists in Sibiu as well as in the central institutes in Bucharest for being an exemplary accomplishment of historical preservation. The consolidation and restoration carried out between 1999 and 2003 revealed that a gothic house had been initially attached to the wall circumscribing the Huet square, which meant that it had been built on the first precincts of the fortification *Villa Hermani*, Hermannstadt. Standing in the cradle of the city, the house thus represents then the history of the town *in nuce*. During the 17th century, the house was expanded and redecorated, acquiring a Central European Baroque style. The restoration was financed by the Ministry of Culture, Sites and Monuments

service of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Currently owned by the Lutheran church, the house hosts a pub downstairs and a cultural center at the first level, with a guest house on the second and third levels. On March 30, 2004, the Luxembourg house was officially opened in the presence of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Luxembourg. On that occasion, the Lutheran pastor of Sibiu declared to the royal family: “We are like brothers,” with the Duke replying that he “no longer feels a guest in Sibiu.”⁵³⁰

I suggest that the refurbishment of Luxembourg Haus should be approached as a project of place-making that had different goals than the GTZ project of rehabilitation. First, by deciding to sponsor the renovation of a pivotal house for the history of the city, the Luxembourg government aimed to reaffirm and literally ground a historical connection to Sibiu, which verged on the border between myth and history. That is, by promoting this renovation, Luxembourg wished to reinforce the story that the first colonists who established Sibiu in 1191 were originally coming from the territory that is now included in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The renovation of the house represented only one form through which Luxembourg wanted to reestablish this historical link.⁵³¹ Another project that Luxembourg partially funded was also the research

⁵³⁰ The invocation of those “kinship”-like ties framed many speeches of the local Saxon leaders before and during the project “Sibiu 2007.” (However, note the difference between the invocation of an imagery of an agnate kinship link, which was used by the Lutheran reverend, and the description used by the then Ministry of Culture, Razvan Theodorescu, who made a comment about the official engagement between Sibiu and Luxembourg, set therefore within a metaphor of an affinal [not consanguine] kinship connection.)

⁵³¹ According to a Luxembourg official, who participated in the organization of the common projects Luxembourg-Sibiu under the title “European cultural capitals” in 2007, “the German Forum [was] more up front about this myth [that the Saxons who established the town of Sibiu migrated from the region of today’s Luxembourg].” She mentioned to me that the Forum had even tried to apply for a project under “Sibiu 2007” that would focus on the historical ties between Sibiu and Luxembourg and the early migration to Transylvania. The project was rejected, because it did not offer any specific data and historical sources attesting this migration. Conversation in Sibiu, April 2006.

Notwithstanding these remarks, the connection to Sibiu played an important role in allowing Luxembourg and the Greater Region “to project itself beyond its borders,” as Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg put it. This was a diplomatic way of pointing out that,

and completion of the dictionary of the Saxon dialect, which was claimed to be linguistically close to Luxembourgeois, the local language currently spoken in Luxembourg, which is a form of German with a strong admixture of French.

These two smaller projects preceded the much more important one that Luxembourg began in 2004—that of inviting Sibiu to apply together for and share the title of European Cultural Capital in 2007. The application was successful, and a complex collaboration between Sibiu and the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg ensued in order to prepare Sibiu to meet the standards of a European Cultural Capital by 2007. In fact, the success of the dual application for the title persuaded more external institutions, including the World Bank and the German state, this time directly through its KfW Development Bank, to further fund the GTZ rehabilitation project, which thereby could be extended for another two years (2004-2006).

In Romania, and especially in Sibiu, Luxembourg's generous sponsorship and invitation was greatly welcomed. Many of the local leaders also approached it as an unexpected and fully gratuitous gesture, which gave them even more reason to strengthen

through this link with Sibiu, Luxembourg could directly contribute to the expansion of an European cultural domain, grounding a "a common European identity." The connection between Sibiu and Luxembourg is amply described in the Final Report of the 2007 European Cultural Capital program:

The exceptional bond between Luxembourg and Sibiu allowed them to overcome the 1400km distance between the two cities, which puts into perspective one of the major missions of the European Capitals of Culture [ECOC], namely to engage with lesser-known regions of Europe. Sibiu – or Hermannstadt in German – initiated an extensive programme of renovation of the old city for the ECOC. Sibiu and Luxembourg have maintained a privileged relationship since the 12th century, when 'Saxons' from Luxembourg and the surrounding region emigrated to Transylvania, in what is now Romania. It was through a linguistic comparison of Luxembourgeois and Saxon (a dialect close to *francique mosellan*) that this link was rediscovered during the 19th century. Beyond these historic links and 'mythical', close relations, Sibiu and Luxembourg now cooperate closely. 2007 was therefore a unique partnership between two cultural capitals, based on intercultural work at a distance between politicians, institutions, associations, schools and artists. This led to 46 common projects in different artistic and cultural fields, many of which are precursors of encounters and sustained cooperation after 2007.

"Luxembourg and Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007: Final Report," June 2008, 7. Published under the framework of "Luxembourg and Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007", under the High Patronage of Their Royal Highness The Grand Duke and The Grand Duchess.

the diplomatic and cultural ties with public and private institutions in Luxembourg. Moreover, I would suggest, in comparison to a more convoluted relation to the German state and consequently a more ambivalent attitude towards the GTZ project of rehabilitation, which I already discussed, this relationship with Luxembourg seemed to be almost free of any political embroilment. The invitation to be in the center of attention in Europe for a year, as European cultural capital, an invitation especially granted at a moment when the inclusion of Romania in the EU was still uncertain (2004), offered Sibiu, and especially Sibiu's Saxon community and its political leaders, a crucial means through which to negotiate political representation in the present. By extending the invitation to Sibiu as a way to reinforce historical connections between the two sites, Luxembourg reinstated the Saxons of Sibiu on the map of contemporary Europe. In other words, instead of using them as representations of the past, and moreover a past that could be imitated by non-Saxons in Sibiu, as the GTZ project might have (unwittingly, perhaps) pursued through its approach to "heritage-as-practice," Luxembourg, through the gesture to serve together as representations of European culture for a year, offered Sibiu's Saxons a chance for political and cultural visibility undreamt of before. Under these new circumstances, the Saxons of Sibiu were no longer appearing as "house plants" for the Romanian government to use as tokens of multicultural policies, but were, instead, given full recognition.

What some political actors in the central offices of the Romanian government may not have known at that time was that Luxembourg itself had begun in 2002 a more complex political enterprise of "preparing the country's future" by having its National Research Fund launch a program entitled "Living tomorrow in Luxembourg" (*Vivre*

demain au Luxembourg, henceforth VIVRE).⁵³² As one of the participants in the program, Sonja Kmec, explained, the first target of this program was

to find a solution to the question of the definition of a collective identity, which rallies for instance around the monarchy, the constitution or a shared ethic, while being at the same time open to the future.⁵³³

In her conference paper, Kmec discusses one of the research projects that was funded through VIVRE, a three year collective project on the role of lieux-de-memoire in the formation of collective identities. According to her, this project was developed in order to offer insights into the “interplay between memory and history” and the impact of this relationship upon the formation of national lieux-de-memoire in Luxembourg. The project was funded also because it met stringent political concerns of the Luxembourg state. As she put it,

This is considered "a vital question for our country," which is said to have been confronted with profound economic, cultural, educational and identity changes in the last thirty years and which is expected to face even more profound changes in the future due to globalisation, the European integration process and inner European migrations towards Luxembourg. Not just the population's living standards, but its cultural identity is considered to be at stake, caught in a "dilemma" between the "national" — considered to be "irreplaceable" — the regional (bigger region) and the global.

One of the requirements of the VIVRE program was that the results of the projects funded be readily available not only to other researchers, but also to economic and political actors, as well as the larger public.⁵³⁴ This particular research project was

⁵³² Sonja Kmec, University of Luxembourg, "Lieux de mémoire" and the (de)construction of "identities." Paper given at the Sixth European Social Science History Conference, 22-25 March 2006, Amsterdam, in the panel J-1: "Lieux de mémoire" in Europe: National Receptions and Appropriations of a Historiographical Concept.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

published as a nicely illustrated, bilingual album displaying a variety of lieux-de-memoire in Luxembourg.⁵³⁵

Even though Kmec does not mention Sibiu in her paper, I suggest that this project and its broader political rationale are crucial for a better understanding of the recent cultural and political alliances that Luxembourg has developed with the city of Sibiu since 1999. In fact, the sponsorship of the refurbishment of the house now named after the country signaled a project of creating a lieu-de-memoire outside the national borders of the Luxembourg state. Moreover, the sharing of the title of European cultural capital with Sibiu was in itself a clear gesture of endorsing novel transnational symbolical geographies of contemporary political significance. Therefore, Luxembourg's invitation, as much as it could have been one of gratuitous generosity, also offered an important political compensation. That is, by calling upon historical ties, and a form of shared "heritage," Luxembourg, a minuscule state, after all, aimed to secure political visibility not only for Sibiu and its Saxon community, but also for itself on the grander European political stage.

In conclusion, the GTZ project of rehabilitation and the renovation of the Luxemburg haus could be approached as projects of heritage-making with clear political goals. They represent metaphorically as well as bring new insight into the symbolic geographies that are simultaneously created by and negotiated among various EU members, in an attempt to secure more political leverage within this transnational union.

⁵³⁵ Sonja Kmec, Benoît Majerus, Michel Margue and Pit Péporté, eds., *Lieux de mémoire au Luxembourg. Usages du passé et construction nationale / Erinnerungsorte in Luxemburg, Umgang mit der Vergangenheit und Konstruktion der Nation*, (Luxembourg 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that heritage-making in contemporary Sibiu is a multilayered process, which must be situated historically and geopolitically. First, I offered a historical discussion of the social and political transformations of the Saxon community in Transylvania during socialist times. I suggested that the centralist project of social and ethnic homogenization was turned on its head in a very interesting way in Sibiu during the 1970s and 1980s, as many Romanians started mirroring cultural forms of Saxonness in order to pursue and signify a higher social status within the local hierarchy of the city. This example offers an illustration of forms of heritage-as-practice that various groups relied upon to counter the socialist state's attempts to erase ethnic and cultural differences on a national scale.

At the same time, if heritage-as-practice was something that Saxons in Sibiu relied upon, in the absence of stronger institutions that the socialist state had encroached upon, heritage-as-practice in contemporary Sibiu is no longer viewed as salutary by the dwindling community of Saxons. I showed that the GTZ project of rehabilitation of the city's historical center, as much as it contained the implicit promise of offering Transylvania's Saxons political visibility and agency before the central government, raised further questions about the political viability of the Saxon community. I suggested that the approach to heritage-as-practice that GTZ proposed, by inviting the residents of Sibiu, most of them Romanians, to become more "European" by adopting social practices of habitation formerly associated with the Saxon group, ended by questioning the very core of Saxon ethnic identity. In short, the project pointed out that ethnic belonging could also be a form of learning and thereby detached it from processes of intergenerational

inheritance. This radical perspective not only raised questions of the ethnic distinctions that the Saxons in Sibiu continue to hold onto as a way of (very successfully, in fact) retaining political visibility. It simultaneously added a new nuance to the debates about Saxon heritage, which directly bear on the claims set forth by the Saxon group in Transylvania for restitution of the vast range of economic resources, including buildings and land, that used to belong to the Lutheran church and that the socialist state confiscated.

The intense debates around the projects of heritage-making, mainly represented by the rehabilitation of the historical center, which preceded the official transformation of the city into a European cultural capital in 2007, also illustrate an interesting adaptation of earlier interests in heritage as development that emerged in the 1980s, which I discussed at length in the Introduction. If, at that moment, a perspective on heritage as development was supported by UNESCO as an attempt to even out the huge economic discrepancies between the wealthy north and the poor global south, in the case of Sibiu we observe a similar relationship between Germany and ethnic Germans still living in eastern Europe. The perspective on heritage as development that was promoted by GTZ in Sibiu signaled the shift of policy from that of political inclusion for ethnic Germans, by inviting them to emigrate to Germany, to that of helping build a framework in which these groups could develop in the countries of their birth. However, as I showed, this approach to heritage as development sometimes conflicts with local approaches to heritage as cultural and political recognition, a recognition sought at national and especially international scales. In the case of Transylvania's Saxons, this perspective on

heritage becomes crucial for them to justify the restitution of a vast wealth to a currently dwindling community (60,000 people).

Under these circumstances, Luxembourg's invitation to Sibiu to co-participate in the competition for European Cultural Capital in 2007, appeared as a salutary complementary mechanism of bringing the Saxons of Sibiu back onto the map of Europe. I suggest that this invitation also must be understood not only as a local endorsement of "common European heritage" in the contemporary EU, but also as attempts to create specific clusters of transnational cultural identities in the present that are consolidated through claims to a "common heritage" and shared historical narratives.

Chapter 6

CONFLICTING HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS AND BUILT HERITAGE REVIVAL AT BÁNFFY CASTLE

Introduction

The previous chapter revealed the multiple and diverging political interests underlying the project of making the historical center of Sibiu into a representation of “European (Saxon) heritage.” As I pointed out, many of these conflicts stemmed from different understandings of what heritage is and what it is good for. Some of the specialists in historical preservation from the central institutions in Bucharest were very critical of the approach to the city center’s rehabilitation pursued by the GTZ team. While the first group viewed historical preservation as an end in itself, the latter offered a more pragmatic orientation to projects of heritage-making as being mainly a form of local development. The GTZ project was quintessentially a social project of transforming the relationship between Sibiu’s urbanites and their lived environment by asking them to see their city differently, especially the houses of the historical center. This shift of perspective was not promoted only through an exclusively aesthetic argument, but rather as a form of producing and reinforcing the civic participation of Sibiu’s residents as well as encouraging them to prove their own social value, by showing themselves worthy to be living in the now European Sibiu.

This chapter offers a relatively similar story, which is, however, differently mapped on local histories of interethnic relations, class formation, economic

development, and regional symbolical competition. I propose an analysis of an ongoing project of heritage revitalization—the reconstruction of the Bánffy castle in the village of Bonțida, Cluj county—as a site for examining diverging processes of heritage-making as opposite systems of resignification of material forms. More specifically, I show how the creation of a “European heritage” in the contemporary village of Bonțida has involved multiple negotiations and conflicts among not only various local and external actors, but also distinct and even diverging historiographies, historical frameworks and regimes of property. Those temporal frameworks are: 1) pre-war times, when the castle was owned by the Bánffy family, imagined by foreign specialists in building conservation as a turn-of-the-century idyllic and multicultural Transylvania, 2) the socialist period, when the castle had been seized by the socialist state to be used by the new local leaders for various more or less legal purposes, until it was abandoned in the early 1970s, and 3) the postsocialist context, in which an NGO, Ardeal Trust, relying on mostly external funding, has tried to symbolically and physically revive the castle, by widely promoting it as a European heritage site while also trying to persuade the villagers to participate in this radical resignification. The estate was formerly owned by a Transylvanian Hungarian aristocratic family in a village in which the majority is currently Romanian (approximately 70%). The local Hungarians as well as the Roma each represent 15% of the population.⁵³⁶

Historians and art historians have considered the Bánffy castle one of the most important architectural assemblages of Transylvania. The castle’s overwhelming luxury has prompted visitors to regard it as the “Versailles of Transylvania.” After 1945, when

⁵³⁶ Data from the archives of Bonțida’s Town Hall, collected as part of the national research for the 2000 Referendum.

communists seized power, the castle, together with numerous other private estates of pre-communist Romania, was confiscated by the new state. During the socialist period, it fulfilled various roles, ranging from a storage site for machinery parks, to a mushroom plant and a beer bottling plant, until it was abandoned in the mid 1970s. Since 1998, the NGO *Ardeal Trust* (the Trust, henceforth), with initial support from the Hungarian and Romanian governments, as well as grants from the EU and other private foundations, has initiated the reconstruction of the Bánffy castle as an international site of teaching traditional crafts.⁵³⁷

To better understand the negotiations over what “heritage” represents and to whom it should belong I place the material and symbolical transformations of the castle within the broader changes occurring in the village throughout the 20th century. More specifically, I investigate how the villagers related to, valued, or rejected the castle at different political moments, which were mapped onto the wider political projects of social and economic reevaluation of the relationship between people and things. I argue that the castle became a pivotal means for the post-1945 socialist leaders in the village to built up and ground a new capital by appropriating the castle as their own belonging. Such a maneuver was far from being singular, as it was just one of the multiple instances starting up a more complex process of post-1945 new class formation through the collection and reevaluation of the assets that used to belong to the groups holding social and political power in the interwar period. This was the major strategy through which the socialist regime in Romania acquired political legitimacy. Bontida represented just a tiny

⁵³⁷ I changed the NGO’s name for reasons of confidentiality. *Ardeal* is the Romanian name for Transylvania, being borrowed from the Hungarian *Erdély*, which means “beyond the forest.”

part of the larger project of centralizing economic and symbolic goods, which, as I have shown in the second chapter, was set up by the socialist state as early as 1947.

At the same time, a close examination of the dismantling of the Bánffy castle in Bonțida and its piecemeal transfer into the village in the form of bricks, statues, some pieces of furniture, roof tiles, window frames, pieces of wood ceiling, and other things, reveals that this transfer was not exclusively dictated by “the center,” but in fact was pursued by the locals who found themselves in power positions in the post-1947 political apparatus. As early as 1947, the Commission for Historical Monuments, alerted by the recently established Union of the Hungarians in Romania, tried to stop the looting and willful destruction of many of the castles and mansions in Transylvania, which mostly had been expropriated from well-to-do Transylvanian Hungarians. However, due to the impending dismantling of the Commission in a time of radical political transition, with the new communist government pursuing a Stalinization closely supervised by the USSR, the project of preservation of the Hungarian architectural sites in Transylvania was abandoned. Late, at the end of the 1960s, the newly re-established Department for Historical Monuments aimed to pursue a larger project of historical preservation of some important castles and mansions in Transylvania, including the former Bánffy castle. There is archival evidence, which was supported by the conversations I had with historians and art historians in Cluj, that the local party leaders in Bonțida actively opposed the central institutions’ attempt to renovate the castle. The conclusions I draw from the archival data go against the prevalent argument, set forth by many of the foreign specialists pursuing rehabilitation projects mostly in Transylvania after 1990, that the socialist Romanian state had never invested in built-heritage preservation. Instead of

acknowledging some of the earlier efforts of the Romanian specialists to pursue state-sponsored projects of built-heritage rehabilitation through the national Department of Historical Monuments, at the beginning of the 1990s foreign specialists claimed that it was they who brought forth know-how and resources to revive the lost built heritage of Transylvania.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze Ardeal Trust's stated intentions to "train and re-train" the local craftsmen in traditional building skills, which the NGO assumed to have been neglected and mostly forgotten in post-socialist Romania. I suggest that such a process of reinventing "craftsmanship" could be understood as a particular form of re-learning history via teaching traditional crafts. This operation carries a new valuation of a specific past, embedded in historical buildings. However, during this very process, another chunk of time is de-historicized and thus taken out of the past. This is the communist period, which is rendered an ahistorical time; in other words, a *no-time*. For the past that those specialists reclaim and would like to "revive" stopped in 1945, and they aim now to link it directly to the post-1990 era. The process of learning or re-learning particular traditional skills illustrates how structures of knowledge are radically rearranged and redefined, whereas other forms of knowledge are deemed obsolete and inadequate. By critically examining this process of teaching and (re)learning skills involving different actors (British and Romanian craftsmen, EU experts, international specialist, governmental actors, etc), I aim to understand if such an operation also becomes a way of rearranging historical and contemporary reality. In other words, in what ways do global arrangements of hierarchies of knowledge and skills call upon the very concepts of "history" and "heritage," strategically placed within a romantic imagery

of “traditional sites” (or regions)? I investigate the paradox underlying the current regime of heritage promoted by the NGO, in which tradition, in the form of traditional building techniques, becomes resignified as a path to development and democratic modernization.

I move then to discuss another program developed by the Trust that was intended to complement the traditional building skills teaching program. More specifically, beginning in 2002, the Trust launched the yearly Bonțida Cultural Fair as a strategy to promote the site by opening it to the public, including the villagers. According to one of the Trust managers, this project has been approached as a means to “bring the village community back into the castle.” However, this invitation was not necessarily welcomed by the people in the village, some of whom consider this event as a kind of circus combined with a temporary flea market. I discuss the divergent meanings of materiality, emerging from the distinct temporal frameworks in which the Trust and the villagers situate themselves and their actions.

In the last part of the chapter, I pay attention to the different usages of history and the diverging meanings of heritage employed by the Trust and the local authorities. The case of the Bánffy castle becomes yet another example of the multilayered process whereby a form of socialist heritage (the heritage of the new socialist state, a regime without a history in the political context of Romania) was formed out of a rearrangement not only of things, but especially of the relationships among them. From a coherent and compact private estate, under the approving silence of the local officials, the castle and the park nearby had been disassembled into separate parts, to be then spread into the very fabric of the village or even appropriated by these local officials to pursue individual political goals. It is this rearrangement of things underlying a rearranged history that is

used as a basis by the current local officials to ground a claim over the castle based on their conviction that it represents the village's heritage. I suggest that these officials had taken up the discourse of heritage, which had been brought to Bonțida by the Trust, only to turn it on its head. They did so in order to justify their continuous claims over the castle, which used to be under their supervision as part of the socialist state's public domain.

By drawing upon previous analyses of conflictual forms of heritage, I propose that these officials' take on heritage is grounded in an approach to heritage as proximity, in which they rely on an understanding of recent history as a continuous process, without a clear cut between the socialist period and the postsocialist 1990s.⁵³⁸ I counterpose this approach to the position taken by the Trust, set within an approach to heritage as recognition, as one instance in which a group, in order to sustain claims for political and social recognition, must first identify and select representations of their difference and freeze them as "endangered cultural heritage." In this case, the Trust sees the restitution of the castle to its original owners, the Bánffy family, as a political act that would acknowledge the rights and history of the Transylvanian Hungarian former nobility. An analysis of the conflicting claims over the Bánffy castle offers an interesting angle on the strategies employed by various groups in contemporary Romania to gain political visibility by employing the trope of "cultural heritage" while drastically redefining it to their own benefit.

⁵³⁸ I owe Britt Halvorson the expression "heritage as proximity." I think it captures best how the village officials called upon their former administrative rights over the castle and the geographical location of the castle in the middle of the village, and then combined them with the current discourse of "heritage" promoted by the Trust, in order to lay their own ownership claims over the castle.

We encounter here an important shift from the political and economic environment that I discussed in Part I. In socialist Romania, local authorities functioned as proxies of the central institutions and thereby owned a monopoly over the distribution of resources as well as the “politically correct” representations of “heritage” and “history.” However, as much as they tried after the 1990s to hold onto their privileges that they had acquired in the previous economy, these local actors have found themselves in a much more vulnerable position. In a postsocialist context in which the centralized redistributive system no longer functions and consequently the field of cultural politicking is much more fragmented, they have shifted from their previous role of distributors of resources to being just another set of consumers, always set in competition with others. Therefore, the struggles over the historical meanings and the cultural and economic value of the Bánffy castle render a vivid picture of the broader reconfigurations occurring within the postsocialist social and economic landscape.

The Bánffy Castle and the Village of Bonțida: Historical Ties and Social Tensions

The Bánffy family, one of the mightiest aristocratic lines of Transylvania, owned the castle without interruption between 1347 and 1944. Continuously modified, expanded, and reconstructed by different generations of successors, the site was shaped not only by the family’s resources, but also by its high aspirations within the political hierarchy of the Hapsburg Empire. An imposing palimpsest of architectural styles (baroque, renaissance, neo-classicism), the castle faithfully reflects the larger historical, political, and aesthetical shifts during 18th and 19th century Europe.⁵³⁹ The image it

⁵³⁹ András Kovács, "Castelul din Bonțida. Etape de construcție în stilul Renașterii," *Ars Transsilvaniae* V (1995).

acquired by the middle of the 18th century, via an embellishment with human-size statues, a French-style park, and marble staples, mirrored the tastes of the imperial aristocracy dominated by Viennese baroque architecture. Its last owner, count Bánffy Miklós, was a key figure in the literary and political world of turn-of-the-century Transylvania, when the province was still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. After 1926, he directly contributed to the cultural and political revival of the Transylvanian Hungarian community, which felt deprived of much of their political and cultural power following Transylvania's incorporation into Romania after the First World War.



Figure 22 The northern wing of the castle, modified at the end of 1930s. Courtesy of József Bálint. (Photo included in the album “Castelul Banffy, com. Bontida, jud. Cluj,” by Constantin Rusu, 1968.)

A significant dimension of the project of rehabilitation of the castle, initiated by the Trust in 1999, has involved the revival of the estate as a cultural site, together with the memory of its last owner. Calling upon an idyllic image of a multicultural turn-of-the-century Transylvania, the Trust claims that they aim to bring the castle back to life, into

the hearth of the community, and thereby to restore a historically deep link between the castle and the village, which was destroyed under the communist regime.

In this section, I do not aim to offer a simple history of the castle, but rather use the castle as a starting point from which to unearth the multiple histories of the social and political landscape in which the castle is embedded. I argue that the changes within the local economy of the castle index a shifting social fabric and diverging ethnic allegiances. By drawing upon archival material and secondary sources as well as some villagers' remembrances about the castle before and after the Second World War, I analyze the castle's non-static meanings as a part of the dynamic social fabric in the region and town. I show that the castle has been differently incorporated into villagers' understandings of the locale, while the interethnic tense and deep history taking shape in the background of the castle conflicts with the neatly packaged historical narrative promoted through the NGO's version of the castle as the village's heritage.

Up until the middle of the 19th century, the commune of Bonțida (Bonchida in Hungarian) was strictly dependent on the Bánffy domain. As some of the Bánffy owners held significant political positions at the Viennese imperial court, they had the power and wealth to orchestrate some influx of labor into Bonțida that would directly contribute to the development of the Bánffy domain, and indirectly of Bonțida itself.⁵⁴⁰ In 1750, people

⁵⁴⁰ The privileged political and social status that the Bánffy line had among Transylvania's nobility had a direct influence on Bonțida's position on the administrative map of the region. Beginning with the mid 18th century until mid 19th century, Bonțida represented an administrative center within the historic *comitatus* (county) of Doboka in the Austro-Hungarian empire. The site lost its centrality due to the administrative changes that followed the 1848 revolution. In an attempt to strengthen the endangered power of the Hapsburg empire, the imperial court implemented from 1849 on various strategies that would make the counties more dependent on the administrative court offices. In 1854, the counties' organization changed, and Bonțida was incorporated into the larger district of Kolozsvár (Cluj). Aurel Loșonți, *Trecut și prezent despre Bonțida: Studiu Monografic [Past and Present About Bonțida: Monography]* (Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea Tehnica, 2001), 47.

of different ethnic backgrounds were brought to work as serfs on the land.⁵⁴¹ The establishment of a dual Monarchy (Austro-Hungarian) in 1867 marked also, from an economical standpoint, the rise of a relatively independent Hungary, whose size allowed sufficient flexibility on the speedier global markets, while also profiting from the protection ensured by the empire's mercantilism and unity.⁵⁴² The industrial take-off additionally determined a more systematic influx to the urban centers, which affected Bonțida as well.

By the end of the 19th century up until the Second World War, younger people started to leave Bonțida in search of jobs.⁵⁴³ Many of them, especially those without land, knew they could not make ends meet if they remained in the village. To climb up the social ladder, they were forced to leave behind the feudal system of the village and dash into the booming urban markets in search of a better destiny. As an old peasant woman told me, “if you had worked for the *grof* [derived from the German *Graf*, nobleman], you could not build even a tiny house (*căsuță*), because the *grof* did not pay well at all. But, if you went to town [for work], you could [manage to gain money and built yourself a house].”⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴¹ Those people brought into Bonchida as new serfs for the Bánffy lands further diversified the ethnic background of the locals, as a significant part of the new population was Armenian. (This fact led to the establishment of the local Catholic community). The development is also shown by statistics. In 1721, there were 76 households in Bonchida, of which 22 Hungarian and 54 Romanian, including 6 nobiliary households, 30 of serfs, 12 temporary laborers (free peasants paid by day), and 28 other. In 1785, there was a population of 1290 people, organized in 242 households, out of which 147 did not own land. Loșonți, *Trecut și prezent despre Bonțida*, 175.

⁵⁴² Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic, and Ethnic Change*, 340.

⁵⁴³ Compare population in 1900 to 1930. The 1900 census recorded 2, 223 people, of which 1,139 Romanians, 999 Hungarians, 71 Germans, and 14 belonging to other ethnic groups (Jews, Armenians, Gypsy). Loșonți, *Trecut și prezent despre Bonțida*, 176.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Ms. Floarea, who worked for seven years in a hotel in Bucharest, together with her husband. They regularly sent their savings back home, to her parents, in order to build a new house. The parents build a house according to the instructions send by Ms. Floarea, who wanted a porch with columns, exactly like the columns of the hotel where she had worked. After Romania joined the Allies' forces in

Especially after the 1918 unification of Transylvania with Romania, the Romanians of Bonțida (but also some Hungarians) looking for better jobs could easily travel to the “old kingdom” (the “old,” pre-1918 Romania). In interwar Romania, most of them started working in hotels and middle-class households. Many of my interlocutors admitted that Transylvanians were in high demand for such positions because they were viewed as “clean and responsible.” Many people left, leaving their children behind with the grandparents, to work in Bucharest for extended periods (sometimes up to ten years). Others emigrated as far as the United States.⁵⁴⁵ The money they regularly sent home represented an important capital for the development of local households. This is the time when small old cottages were demolished for the sake of new, larger and grander houses, some embellished with obviously modern elements the new owners encountered in the cities during their *Wanderschaft* (i.e. a journey in search for jobs). For instance, some of the houses built between 1920 and 1940 in Bonțida contain architectural traits of the sites where Bonțideans had worked. The current owners pointed out such elements to me, stating that their parents “wanted columns resembling [hotel] *Modern*.”⁵⁴⁶

Whereas before 1920 most of the strongly built houses in Bonțida had been part of the Bánffy family property, between 1920 and 1940 the continuous influx of capital brought about a relative economic development in the commune as a whole.⁵⁴⁷ Lots of new houses were built at this time in Bonțida, which radically changed the overall appearance of the village. However, these changes did not occur in a historical vacuum.

1944, she returned to Bonțida following the Romanian troops that entered Transylvania upon the country's shift to the Allied side. (Between 1940 and 1944, following the Vienna Award, the northern half of Transylvania was part of Hungary.)

⁵⁴⁵ Loșonți, *Trecut și prezent despre Bonțida*, 49.

⁵⁴⁶ A luxurious Bucharest hotel, where many Bonțidans worked in the interwar years.

⁵⁴⁷ I found those accounts confirmed by Loșonți, 106.

On the contrary, the radical remapping of this part of the world due to Transylvania's unification with Romania after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy brought about novel ethnic geographies that reflected the strong tendencies of *Romanization* carried out by the Romanian state. If in 1920, Bonțida had, among other groups, 1,316 Romanians and 950 Hungarians, ten years later, in 1930, the Romanian population had kept its size (1310 people), while the Hungarians had diminished by ¼ (768 people).⁵⁴⁸ This ethnic redistribution mirrored the new social and economic hierarchies.⁵⁴⁹

Consequently, after 1918, because of important land reforms and labor migration, and especially on the ground of political and thereby ethnic reconfigurations, the Bánffy domain ceased to be the main provider for the Bonțideans. More than half of the land formerly owned by the Bánffy family was distributed in line with the 1921 land reform to those who fought during the war, while more land was being bought with the money coming from outside.⁵⁵⁰ This was why workers from mountain villages were temporarily hired for the summer on the count's land (*moșie*), while quite a few Bonțideans worked their own new land. The personnel of the castle was recruited from the Hungarian-speaking people of Bonțida or the neighboring villages; often their entire family was hired on a yearly contract. Peasant agriculture was a great resource for the newly born

⁵⁴⁸ Even if many villagers worked outside Bonțida, they were declared as residents and registered as such by the census statistics.

⁵⁴⁹ For instance, many of the houses owned by Hungarians before 1918 (hence, the street's old name, *ulița ungiurească*, the Hungarian alley/pathway), were progressively acquired by Romanians due to the influx of capital sent by the relatives working in the cities.

⁵⁵⁰ In 1912, the Bánffy domain had covered 4,862 ha, which represented 67.2% of the total land of Bonțida commune (including the neighboring village *Vălaszút/Răscruci*), whereas the peasants had owned 1,253 ha, representing 23.7% ha. In 1928, the Bánffy land covered only 1,253 (17.3% of the land surrounding Bonțida), while the peasants now had 5,239 ha (72.4% of the total land). Source: Petru Spânuț, *Herghelia Națională Bonțida [the Bonțida National Studfarm]* (București: Ministry of Agriculture and Domains, The Veterinary and Sanitary General Office, 1928), 12.

Romanian state. Peasants received a strong impetus from the state to become more qualified in agriculture and develop a more capitalist approach to production. The latter consequently shifted from a subsistence economy to competition and high production.⁵⁵¹



Figure 23 The western wing of the Bánffy castle, 1936. Unknown author. Courtesy of József Bálint. (Photo included in the album “Castelul Banffi, com. Bontida, jud. Cluj,” by Constantin Rusu, 1968.)

Moreover, after 1918, a new site began to gain more interest for Bonțida at the regional and national level: the Bonțida national stud farm (*Herghelia Națională Bonțida*). Opened in 1907 by the Hungarian state as a military stud farm, it became the property of the Romanian state upon the 1918 unification. Besides the common goal of breeding horses, it seems that additional subtle political tensions underlay the farm’s competition with the Bánffy castle. In a sense, the stud farm was a certain type of proxy for the (Romanian) state closely watching the Transylvanian (Hungarian) nobility. As such, the farm might have also contributed to the widening of the gap between the village

⁵⁵¹ This was part of a larger social project of transforming the relationship between the individual and state in interwar Romania. See Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

and the castle by setting as its mission “to erase the lack of education and to teach skills in the field of agriculture and animal raising in these villages.”⁵⁵²

Indeed, starting in 1935, the farm administrator, the agronomist Silviu Pop, also one of the most affluent men in Bonțida, offered regular summer courses on agriculture and other related fields, in an attempt to improve the peasants’ education and skills.⁵⁵³

While the local peasants were encouraged to attend such classes, count Bánffy György(1843-1929) searched for solutions to become more independent from the type of production that would need a constant and significant labor force.⁵⁵⁴ The castle was therefore to be regarded as private property, whose boundaries were not to be transgressed. At the same time, its influence over the commune’s internal affairs remained high, as the local administrators and politicians were still old allies of Bánffy.

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The pre-1918 class divide between “the Bánffy castle” and “Bonțida,” which almost naturally fit the picture of the imperial economic order of late feudalism, was congruent with the ethnic social divisions promoted by imperial politics. After 1918, once the ethnic policies changed dramatically, by virtue of which fact Romanians felt entitled

⁵⁵² Spânul, *Herghelia Națională Bonțida* [the Bonțida National Studfarm], 16.

⁵⁵³ “Din activitatea Camerei de agricultură a județului Cluj,” *Patria* (Romanian daily), Cluj, August 20, 1933, page 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Besides raising thorough-bred horses (horses were his grand passion), he replaced a stone mill with a (quicker, and therefore, more profitable) electric one, thus adding new revenues to those acquired from the orchard, the pig farm, and the winery. DJAN Cluj, Fond Bánffy, File 1537, page 150 (130). Nemes Gyula’s memoirs (“A tékozló fiú és zék régi emlékem” [A wandering son and my memoirs]). I thank Lorand Sallai for his translation.

⁵⁵⁵ With their economic and especially political status already consolidated, some Romanians in Bonțida tried to undermine the Bánffy family’s influence on the commune’s organization. A 1935 regional daily mentioned the plan of key figures of Bonțida’s Romanians (forming *obșteea sătenilor*) to organize new local elections. Their goal was to allow the members of the (newly elected) communal council to fire those who had been close collaborators of the Bánffy family, especially the president of the current local council, who was a good friend of the Bánffys. However, they failed, and the president was not changed. *Patria*, 1935, 20 January, p.4. The connection between the president, Onos Sándor/Alexandru and the Bánffy family is also confirmed by Nemes Gyula’s account.

to act as the majority in before the Hungarian “minority,”⁵⁵⁶ the divide suddenly became highly questionable. The former aristocrats of the empire were now politically equal to all Bonțida’s other inhabitants under the umbrella of the young Romanian state. In such circumstances, notwithstanding the close contacts between some of the Bonțida elites and the Bánffy family, the castle’s importance within the local symbolic economy started to decrease. From being the “natural” center of the commune, the castle appeared as private property, relatively disconnected from the locals’ social world.⁵⁵⁷

The intense and systematic political centralism practiced by the post-1918 Romanian government aimed at significantly tearing apart the social and political fabric of the substantial group of Transylvanian Hungarians. Under these conditions, any kind of nostalgic resistance, dreaming of the pre-1918 Hungary, seemed, politically speaking, an immature utopian gesture. Instead, increasingly more Hungarian elites felt that they must first come to terms with the new political configuration that turned them from first-class into second-class political subjects, and subsequently initiate an active and systematic identity movement that would preserve the awareness of Transylvanian Hungarianness.⁵⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the deep frictions among them, these elites pursued strategies which were purportedly the best way to maintain an ethnic identity of Transylvanian Hungarians as a whole.

⁵⁵⁶ I am using the political terms of that time.

⁵⁵⁷ Compare this context to an earlier relationship developed between the villagers and the castle’s owners, illustrated by a scene in Bánffy Miklós’s *Transylvanian Trilogy*, in which villagers come to the count as to their father, for advice. This description complements remarks received from some of my interlocutors in Bonțida, who told me that the count often would be the godfather for the children of the people working at the castle.

⁵⁵⁸ Lucian Nastașă, "Maghiarii din România și etica minoritară. Repere istorice, 1920-1940 [the Magyars of Romania and the Minority Ethics. Historical Milestones, 1920-1940]," in *Maghiarii din România (1920-1940)*, ed. Lucian Nastașă and Levente Sálát (Cluj: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2003).

One such strategy proposed a holistic approach to post-1918 Transylvania, in that the region was promoted as a politically and culturally unique social space, wherein the boundaries between the *intra muros* ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, and others) were in fact more dialectical. In fact, the interethnic boundaries were more blurry than the boundaries separating Transylvania from the other regions. In other words, the Transylvanians, no matter their ethnic background, were much more alike than the inhabitants from other regions, be they of the same ethnic descent. This view undergirded “Transylvaniam,” a current which invoked Transylvania’s particular multiculturalism to justify a relative political autonomy in the region. This seemed to be “a logical solution of creating a regional parity, with no ‘minority’ and ‘majority,’” but rather with “Transylvanians” only.⁵⁵⁹

Bánffy Miklós, the castle’s last owner after his father’s death in 1929, was one of the strongest promoters of Transylvaniam, by initiating and coordinating a group of Hungarian intellectuals and artists, “Erdélyi Helikon,” which edited its own journal between 1928 and 1944. Moreover, Bánffy tried to give rise to a solid cultural network of young artists and writers of interethnic orientation, who promoted Transylvaniam as a multicultural interethnic awareness of a “common destiny.”⁵⁶⁰ It seems that

it is mostly thanks to him — given the circumstances — that Transylvanian-Hungarian literature and cultural life between the two world wars started flourishing. He supported young writers and financially supported talented students, established a Transylvanian Fine Arts Circle, [and set up] connections with Transylvanian-Romanian and German authors.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁶¹ Györgyi Kusztos, "A Model of Unifying Innovation and Reproduction — Bánffy Miklós and ‘Transylvaniam’," *TRANS. Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* 16 (2005). Available online: http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/09_5/kusztos16.htm

As the president of the Hungarian Community (the representative organization that replaced the Hungarian Party after 1938),⁵⁶² Bánffy Miklós was among those Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals who tried to persuade the Budapest-based government to tame the repressive policies towards the Romanian minority after 1940, when Northern Transylvania was incorporated into Hungary under the 1940 second Vienna treaty.⁵⁶³ When presenting the activities of Transylvania's former Hungarian Commission in front of the Hungarian Parliament, he pointed out the "freedom" and the political recognition the Transylvanian Hungarians had been previously given by the Romanian government, thereby calling for a similar attitude towards Transylvania's Romanians, who found themselves inhabitants of Hungarian territories almost overnight.⁵⁶⁴ Bánffy had the merit to be among the Transylvanian Hungarian politicians who attempted to reduce the escalation of violence as well as the repressive measures taken by Horthy's regime against the non-Hungarian groups in Transylvania.

More importantly, between 1934 and 1944, he published a 1,400 page novel—*Erdélyi Történet*, translated as *The Writing on the Wall: A Transylvanian Trilogy*.⁵⁶⁵ Partly autobiographic, the trilogy depicts a pre-1918 Hungarian nobility, completely unaware of the radical political upheavals emerging all around them. They were

⁵⁶² After March 31, 1938, King Carol II banned all the political parties in Romania in order to endorse his dictatorship. Bánffy Miklós was elected as the president of the Hungarian People's Community, which was to supervise all of the social, economic, and cultural activities of the Hungarian community in Romania.

⁵⁶³ Under the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, signed at the end of the first world war, Hungary was forced to cede Transylvania and the Banat to Romania. The ill feelings and resentments of the Hungarians over this great loss played a significant part in Hitler's pressuring Romania in 1940 (when both Romania and Hungary were Germany's allies) to return the northern half of Transylvania to Hungary. (This besides other territories given to the USSR and Bulgaria.) In 1940, under the Vienna second award, Romania lost a third of its former territories. Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947*, (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1994), 450.

⁵⁶⁴ Tribuna Ardealului, "Discursul Contelui N. Bánffy" [Count Bánffy's speech], by Artur Anderco. December 25, 1940.

⁵⁶⁵ The title alludes to the biblical scene from the Old Testament book of Daniel, where "the hand of God writes in letters of fire upon the wall of the King's palace: MENE- the Lord hath counted thy kingdom....But no one could see the writing because they were drunken with wine and wrath with another." Motto, *Transylvanian Trilogy*.

portrayed as lacking any kind of historical and political consciousness, seeking instead pleasure and beauty in a multitude of forms. The novel also includes beautiful pages describing the castle and the park on the Bánffy domain in Bonțida, which appears under the name of “Denestornya” in the book. Bánffy wrote with wit and humor, and a certain irony about the group he himself belonged to. At the same time, the book is traversed by a strong awareness of Transylvanian identity that could not be justified by an imperial understanding of an all-encompassing concept of Hungarianness. While abandoned in the early times of communist Hungary, due to its “reactionary” topic as well as its author’s aristocratic origins, the book was “rediscovered” by a Hungarian literary critic, István Nemeskürty, who wrote a review of the trilogy in 1980.⁵⁶⁶ Also, between 1999 and 2001 an English translation came out in London, thereby definitely exposing Bánffy Miklós and his world to a much wider audience.⁵⁶⁷

It is in fact this book that has made Bonțida and the Bánffy castle known outside its regional and local boundaries, as it stirred the interest of English-speaking nostalgic romantics. Thus, the castle came to embody both the fascinating, still unknown, Transylvania, and the dying aristocracy of *fin-de-siècle* Central Europe. As such, the publication of the English translation immensely helped the Trust’s project of rehabilitation, insofar as it stimulated on a much larger scale nostalgic imageries of the

⁵⁶⁶ Foreword by Patrick Thursfield. István Nemeskürty deemed *The Transylvanian Trilogy* especially “important because of its historical authenticity and ‘document-style description of the era’.” (Nemeskürty in Kurtosz, 2006).

⁵⁶⁷ The translation was supported by the Hungarian Ministry for Cultural Heritage via a translation grant offered by the Hungarian Book Foundation, which sponsored the translation and editing costs of the last two volumes. Source: http://www.hungarianbookfoundation.hu/subventioned_books/7?year=1999, Accessed June 20, 2008. The translators—among whom was Bánffy Miklós’ own daughter, Katalin Jelen-Bánffy—were awarded the Weidenfeld Translation Prize, while the first volume (*They Were Counted*) figured on the Books of the Year lists, and even on the UNESCO list of “representative works of European heritage.”

lost, yet still fascinating world of imperial Central Europe, and especially drew attention to its endangered heritage in the form of abandoned castles and manors.⁵⁶⁸

In sum, my discussion of the relationship between the castle and the village prior to 1945 points out several things. First, far from being directly economically dependent on the castle, the villagers in fact were more flexible and preferred to search for better paid work in the expanding urban settings after 1918 and even abroad. Such independence was also encouraged by the law of agrarian reform in 1921, when people in the village who took part in the First World War were given plots of land. During the interwar years, after the return of Bánffy Miklós from Budapest in 1926, the castle independently developed into a place of cultural gatherings of the literati of Transylvania and other artists and writers from Hungary. In that sense, it could be looked upon as a heritage site for the Transylvanian Hungarian elite of the interwar period. Second, the severing of economic ties combined with the new political configuration infused with an even greater tension the relationship between the castle and the villagers. The ambiguity of this relationship (of hostile and even envious admiration) came up during my conversations with older Bonțidans.⁵⁶⁹ One of the most common lines in these conversations was that the gates were closed and that only a few privileged people could

⁵⁶⁸ As the castle's guest book records, quite a few English-speaking visitors had "already fancied this beautiful place by reading Bánffy Miklós's *They Were Counted* trilogy." And the same visitors admit, "it is wonderful to see it coming back to life." This resurrection imagery permeates most of the notes written by the foreign guests. Another visitor puts it even more convincingly: "After ...reading about it in the novel 'They were counted,' I finally made it to Bonțida. What a grand chateau it was in the past! I truly believe the phoenix will rise again from the ashes. And I shall return that day." A note written by the UK IHBC chair reinforces the Phoenix metaphor by saying "a historic place waking up from a deep sleep, and skills are born again!" Most of the notes are in English, with a few written in French and German, in addition to the higher number of comments made especially in Hungarian, but also Romanian. From what I gathered during my stay in Bonțida, Bánffy's trilogy (especially the English edition) and the Trust's project of strategic renovation actively complement one another. If one was not aware of it until a visit to the castle, one would surely find out about Bánffy's book and very likely buy it. Conversely, upon reading the trilogy, one would be even more enticed to travel to Transylvania to see "the real castle."

⁵⁶⁹ I borrow the term of "hostile admiration" from Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic and Ethnic Change*.

get inside. Very few among them expressed nostalgia about the castle. Such wistfulness was usually characteristic of those who were more familiar with the castle and even lived on its premises (as, for instance, the daughter of the last forester). For many people, however, these times represented the harsh period of growing up without their parents who either became temporary migrants, or, if they stayed, were toiling on their land day in and day out.

Somehow, to the villagers of Bonțida, the castle and its architectural beauty remained visually muted, while the park was a “dream,” as if an invisible boundary had been drawn around the castle, making it disappear from people’s social horizon. This sentiment of inaccessibility of the Bánffy domain, including the castle and the immense park, remained a kernel of the local sense of place the villagers developed of their own Bonțida. Thus, contrary to the manager’s arguments on its centrality in the village’s economy, the castle had simultaneously been within and outside the village long before 1945.

The radical change of borders in 1940 triggered ample moves of population, as well as violent reactions of the groups on both sides of the new borders. The members of each ethnic group were trying to protect themselves by fleeing to safer zones (if they could, Hungarians from the Old Kingdom and southern Transylvania fled to the north, while Romanians fled to the south). There was a wave of purges on both sides of the new border: out of accumulated frustrations, Hungarians felt entitled to “punish” the Romanians for the early political and social treatment they had received from the Romanian state, while furious Romanians on the other side of the border wanted to take revenge for losing “their” Transylvania, by attacking some of their Hungarian neighbors

who were left behind in the south.⁵⁷⁰ Older Romanians in Bonțida still vividly remembered what “they went through when the Hungarians came.” According to those interviewees, Romanian children were forced to learn Hungarian in school, as they were not allowed to speak Romanian or display any form of allegiance to the Romanian state.⁵⁷¹

In 1944, after the Romanian state switched sides to join the Allied forces, Bonțida and the neighboring villages again became a dangerous zone. Also, as soon as Cluj county was conquered by the Romanian army, a new wave of ethnic purging started especially in this region as a reaction to the earlier acts of violence pursued by some of the Hungarians towards their Romanian neighbors. The latter wave of violence was a politically-endorsed retaliation of some of the Romanians towards their Hungarian neighbors.⁵⁷² Some older Hungarians from Bonțida told me that when they heard the Soviet and Romanian armies were coming closer, they went to hide in the forest and stayed there for days. During this time, some of the Romanians from Bonțida came home by following the Romanian army—as an old lady remembered, “I followed them [the army] closely [in order to protect herself], carrying my infant along, until we reached home (Bonțida).”

⁵⁷⁰ Gál Mária, Gajdos Balogh Attila, Imreh Ferenc, eds., *Cartea Albă despre atrocitățile anti-maghiare din toamna anului 1944* [The White Book of the Anti-Hungarian Atrocities of Fall 1944], (Cluj: UDMR, 1995). Translated from the Hungarian original, “*Fehér könyv az 1944 oszi magyarellenes atrocitásokról*” (Kolozsvar: RMD Sz, 1995).

⁵⁷¹ Learning Hungarian proved to be good cultural capital later on, as some of those children, now adults, were able to make use of their Hungarian language skills when they would travel to communist Hungary, in search of better jobs.

⁵⁷² In the neighboring village, Răscruți/ Válaszút, there were reports that “gendarmes confiscated the properties of farmers, beat up men and took the majority of them to unknown destinations.[...] The most characteristic element of all these dastardly events was that these bullying persons were assisted by the former prominent local members of the ill-famed Iron Guard.”

At the end of the war, the Bánffy castle also suffered greatly. The German army had established a camp hospital in Bonțida, in the castle, which they set on fire when they withdrew north, before the Soviets and the Romanians conquered the commune on October 12, 1944.⁵⁷³ The fire destroyed one central body of the castle, but then the local people came in and destroyed even more—they stole the furniture and the wine bottles in the cellars, they destroyed the 26,000-volume library as well as the Bánffy family's archive, by throwing them into the nearby river or setting them on fire.⁵⁷⁴ Many people, Romanian, Gypsy, and even Hungarians, participated in this act of destruction. There was no one to stop them; one of the few people who would have taken care of the castle, the reformed priest, fled Bonțida to avoid capture by the Soviets and Romanians.⁵⁷⁵ However, during my fieldwork there were very few people in the village who acknowledged that the locals had been directly involved in the destruction of the castle and its extremely rare valuables. A formerly silent class warfare, which had been developing underground during the interwar times as the village had increasingly become economically independent from the castle, had burst into the open as soon as a fuzzy social landscape ridden with uncertainty and the absence of any norms emerged at the end of the war in the summer of 1944. The complex feelings of rancor that some of the locals had accumulated towards the Bánffy family underlay their violence towards the

⁵⁷³ There are various stories here contradicting each other: according to what the Trust's staff now tell the visitors, the Germans set the castle on fire in revenge against Bánffy, who on behalf of the Hungarian government had secret talks with Romanian politicians, such as Iuliu Maniu. He came to Bucharest to persuade the Romanian government to reach an agreement with Hungary. It was a failed attempt. However, other versions contradict this story, because, they say, the Germans always put fire on the sites they transformed into hospitals, because they did not want the whole equipment to fall into the enemy's hands.

⁵⁷⁴ Dávid Gyula *A Bonchidai Bánffy kastély* [The Bánffy Castle of Bonțida] (Kolozsvár: Polis Kiadó, 2001), 212, citing Csatári Dániel, *Forgószélben* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1969).

⁵⁷⁵ Interviews in Bonțida, confirmed by the article in *Plugarii*.

castle, in which the destruction of the archives and the immense library meant a deliberate erasure of the family's history as well as their high cultural and social status.

It was then that a radical fragmentation of the castle's material goods took place, as the locals who took part in the castle's assault after the departure of the German troops brought to their homes as much as they wanted. As a Hungarian woman remembered, her own grandmother had scolded her grandfather, who returned from the castle with a few bottles from the wine cellar for not having brought more durable things. If this man did not take much, others made sure to take as much as possible, from expensive pieces of furniture, such as beds and wardrobes that would adorn their bedrooms for many years to come, to statues and other more precious goods. Some of these valuables were much later sold to traders who would travel throughout Transylvania, asking the villagers whether they had "old things" to sell. Others kept being hidden in various closets, to be shown only to a few trustworthy relatives and close friends.

Almost half a year after the castle had been set on fire and then looted, Bánffy Miklós returned to Bonțida in the spring of 1945, trying to secure part of his domain. According to the 1945 law for agrarian reform, he was still entitled to retain some of his land, the orchard, and a part of the park.⁵⁷⁶ Also, he was entitled to the first crop of the terrain that had already been distributed to the local people. However, he failed in his attempt: a large group of Bonțideni, both Romanians and Hungarians, signed a petition whereby they claim that he fled Bonțida together with the German army, leaving his properties behind. As such, the petition stated: "he no longer has rights over his former

⁵⁷⁶ Prefecture Cluj, Departamentul pentru aplicarea reformei agrare. No 7850/1945. Către comitetul local de reformă agrară, Cluj, 27 iunie 1945.

domain.”⁵⁷⁷ A week later (April 1945), a larger number of Bonțideni (50 Romanians and 22 Hungarians) signed a memorandum, drafted in the wooden language of communist propaganda, in which they request Bánffy’s immediate departure.⁵⁷⁸

According to my interviewees, having failed to obtain anything back and humiliated by the locals, Bánffy left the village on foot—he walked the 3 km from the center to the station.⁵⁷⁹ Even though he was forced to live quite poorly in Cluj, without any books or papers, Bánffy managed to keep his spirits up by writing his memoirs about his political career in Budapest in the 1920s, an analysis in fact of the political rivalries and clash of visions and values within Hungary’s government at that time.⁵⁸⁰ In a way, this was a “natural” method of taking himself out of a social space he no longer belonged to, by writing down his memoirs about a time in which he played a key cultural and political role. In 1949, Bánffy eventually managed to obtain a passport to leave and join his family in Budapest, where he died shortly thereafter, in 1950, without having again visited Bonțida.

Caught in Between Historical Moments: Hungarian Castles in Transylvania after 1945

The Bánffy castle therefore represented a heritage site only for a specific group of Transylvania’s Hungarians, as it stood as a symbol of a pre-1918 Transylvanian

⁵⁷⁷ The petitioners further asked:

How does count Bánffy have the guts to come back to Bonțida, where he starts to pursue the land allotment by himself, thus ignoring the local council’s decisions? Has he any official approval from the County Council? The local population is very angry about the count’s actions. Why does he not, such an ultra-democrat, leave for good, to a different region of the country? The village ploughmen have already started allotting the Bánffy domain, to a first group of 120 enfranchised, formed by returning soldiers and widows in Bonțida. The allotment is supervised by the village committee, together with the notary helping the local council.

Plugarii, 1945, April 4-11, p.3 (In Romanian, in original.)

⁵⁷⁸ *Plugarii*, 1945, April 18-25, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁹ One older Hungarian described to me the locals spitting on Bánffy Miklós.

⁵⁸⁰ Patrick Thursfield, "Introduction to the Phoenix Land: The Memoirs of Count Bánffy Miklós," in *The Phoenix Land: The Memoirs of Count Bánffy Miklós*, transl Patrick Thursfield and Katalin Bánffy-Jelen (London: Arcadia, 2003), x.

aristocracy relatively muted by the centralizing nationalist policies of the new Bucharest-based regime of Greater Romania. The ethnic dimension of Transylvania's mansions and castles, most of which had been built and were owned by a Transylvanian nobility of Saxon or Hungarian origin, was overplayed in the central politicians' post-1918 agenda. These ethnic meanings came to be more powerful after 1918, when the class divides underlying the social distribution of the suddenly doubled population of Greater Romanian were very much translated as (and reduced to) ethnic differences. Stripped of their noble titles and special rights, the Transylvanian former nobility sought a political refuge in their castles and mansions, which stood as marginal oases within the tumultuous years of post-1918 Transylvania, when Bucharest-based politicians were trying to further control the leaders of the newly included regions. Up to 1945, these buildings still offered a sense of stability and prosperity to their owners. After that, however, the state confiscated them, together with their luxurious furniture, paintings, and other cultural valuables.

Sometimes this peculiar form of "transfer" did not happen at all, as the destruction of Bánffy's immense personal library clearly illustrates. Whereas the looters still deemed the castle's paintings and furniture precious enough to take them into their own houses, the books quintessentially represented a disappearing world, whose values appeared to be forever obsolete and consequently fully dispensable. The destruction of the library stands therefore as a sign of a radical devaluing of the castle itself. In order to fit the "new world" of the post-1945 political regime, it had to be stripped of its difference. From the castle having been "worlds apart" from the village during the interwar times, the locals strove to blend the first into the latter as much as possible to the point of its gradual

physical dissolution into the rural fabric. All of the castle's components, from the luxurious furniture and paintings to roofs, tiles, and in the end, bricks, became gradually incorporated into the village. Some Bonțideans hid statues in their closets, others brought furniture into their bedrooms, while others were happy to use the castle's bricks to erect the walls of their new houses.

The looting as well as other forms of less abrupt but systematic destruction that followed during the years after the war did not happen only in Bonțida. In fact, such episodes occurred throughout Transylvania. The 1945 Law for Agrarian Reform was one of the major laws passed by the post-war government, which guaranteed the redistribution of the land to the peasants, especially those who participated in the war.⁵⁸¹ This meant, however, the expropriation of the land, as well as of the mansions, castles, and other major buildings that had been located on that land from the landowners, most of them middle to upper class Transylvanian Hungarians. The former owners were kicked out of their former estates, being sent to prison or socially marginalized, while the new government was concerned with far more important matters, such as the manipulation of the first post-war elections by the Communist Party. Those buildings were left deserted, often to be destroyed by those who were living nearby.

⁵⁸¹ Law 187 of March 23, 1945 guaranteed “the expansion of the agrarian land of the households that owned less than 5 ha, the establishment of new agricultural households for those agricultural workers who owned no land” (article 2, points 1 and 2), while other land was expropriated, land that belonged to the following categories: 1) ethnic Germans in Romania, who were accused of having collaborated with Nazi Germany (article 3, point 1), “war criminals and those who were guilty of the disastrous situation of the country,” (article 3, point 2), those who fled the country after August 23, 1944, together with all of the absentees (point 3 and 4), and those who owned more than 50 ha (point 8). The law also specified that “the buildings, mansions, roads, orchards, together with all of their facilities” were to be confiscated, the owner retaining the right to choose only one place of residence, within the maximum of 50 ha. The law was initially published in *Monitorul Oficial*, number 68 of March 23, 1945. Electronic version found at http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1569, accessed on January 30, 2010.

At the beginning of 1947, the Hungarian People's Union of Romania (the Union, henceforth), concerned with the situation of these highly endangered buildings, petitioned the Ministry of Arts to establish a special Commission for the Hungarian Historical Monuments in Romania.⁵⁸² This commission, formed of Hungarian specialists was to work under the supervision of the central Commission for Historical Monuments.⁵⁸³ The

⁵⁸² In the petition, sent on February 4, 1947, by the president of the Hungarian People's Union of Romania to the State Secretary of Nationalities, the wooden language of the communist propaganda did not entirely erase a sense of urgency about the dramatic situation of the mansions and castles of Transylvania: "In most places, the peasant victors not only occupied the estate and the park, but they also destroyed the castle, using its material to build houses or other sites." The typed petition is also endorsed by the signature of Camil Suci, the State Secretary for Nationalities, who asked that the Ministry of Arts be immediately alerted about this situation. ANIMI/ACMI, File 3842, "Protejare, amenajare, restaurare. Corespondență generalități, 1947-1948," Page 7.

The Hungarian People's Union in Romania proved itself to be an important asset for the consolidation of the Communist Party in the new government. The Union had gained consistent support in the November 1946 elections, when it attracted the votes of all Hungarians in Romania (8.6%), including those of right to more centrist political leanings. The Union then established a close link with the Union of the Democratic Parties, in which the Communist Party played the leading role, which resulted in many of the key members of the Union gaining positions in the newly established political apparatus (many of them became leaders of the county Party organizations, whereas the Union's president was elected into the Grand National Assembly, at that date the supreme institution of the Romanian state. The Union thereby showed its commitment to Romania's Hungarians but also succeeded in persuading the central authorities of the Party that it was its faithful ally. Lucian Nastasă, "Studiu introductiv," in *Maghiarii din Romania*, 17. For more information on the Union, see Lönnhardt Tamás, *Uniunea Populară Maghiară în perioada instaurării regimului comunist în România (1944-1948)* [The People's Hungarian Union at the time of the Communist Regime's Establishment in Romania], Cluj, Editura Argonaut, 2008.

Since it had indirectly helped the Communist Party to gain the majority in the new 1946 government, formed after the elections and more and more left-oriented members of the Union were entering the communist political apparatus, the central government gave the Union's requests serious attention. This was reflected also by the success of the Union's petitioning the central authorities to offer immediate support for the preservation of the Hungarian sites in Transylvania and their inclusion in the national list of historical monuments.

⁵⁸³ The central Commission for Historical Monuments agreed to work with the Hungarian specialists proposed by the Union, architect Kós Károly and historian Szabedi Ladislau, were appointed corresponding members of the Commission for the Hungarian historical buildings on Romania's territory.

Ladislau Szabedi was the director of the Szeklers' Museum in Sfântu Gheorghe. Kós Károly (1883-1977) was a renown architect, politician and intellectual figure among the Transylvanian Hungarians. He is the author of several sites of civil and religious architecture in Budapest and Transylvania, built before 1918. After 1918, he chose to return to Transylvania, where he actively took part in the political and intellectual life of the Hungarian community. He was also a good friend of Bánffy Miklós, whom he also advised on the reconstruction of one of the wings of the castle in Bonțida in 1934. Together with Bánffy, he was also one of the editors of *Erdélyi Helikon*, the magazine that captured the intellectual energy of most of the Transylvanian Hungarian literati. Like Bánffy, Kós also joined the "Transylvaniam" movement, which focused on Transylvania's particular multiculturalism to lay claims for a relative political autonomy of the region. (See also my description of Transylvaniam in the earlier section of this chapter, where I discuss Bánffy's political and cultural views and activities in the larger context of the Transylvanian Hungarian community during the interwar years.)

phrasing of the petition revealed a sense of urgency regarding the dramatic situation of many of those buildings.⁵⁸⁴ The petition offered two major reasons for the preservations

Kós also played a key role in the quest for a national Hungarian style in architecture. He drew his inspiration on the vernacular architecture and folk art of multicultural Transylvania, while also trying to identify those elements of architectural heritage that could coherently form a more refined Hungarian National Style. His book of architectural drawings and essays, *Erdély népi építészet* (1908), inspired many of the Hungarian Secessionist artists. (Mattia Moretti, “Karoly Kós and the quest for the Hungarian forms and types,” published on June 30, 2009, <http://www.szeccesszio.com/?p=572>, accessed January 25, 2010.) Secession was an adaptation of the principles of Art Nouveau to the political and aesthetic searches of a turn-of-the-century Hungary, then part of the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The movement drew upon the motifs of Hungarian vernacular architecture in order to create a more coherent National style, emblematic of a national identity. As I have already pointed out in the third chapter, where I discuss the emergence of the National Style in interwar Romania and its relative appropriation by the socialist architects in post-1960 Romania, the quest for a National Style in architecture characterized many countries in search of a new political identity in a radically redefined post-1918 Europe.

As Nastasă and Salat mention, Kós was also among the founders of the Transylvanian Guild for Fine Workmanship (*Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*), an independent publishing company which would play a major role in the promotion of Transylvanian Hungarian writers. He became the leader of the Guild publishing house until its dismantling in 1944. After the end of the Second World War, Kós became a professor of architecture at the Agricultural College (*Mezőgazdasági Főiskola*) of Cluj Napoca, while he continued his work as an architect, designing churches, houses, and holiday homes, and restoring medieval buildings. In Fall 1944, he fled his home in the village of Stâna, home which was looted and where his manuscripts were destroyed, and sought refuge in Cluj-Napoca. Once in Cluj, he immediately joined the People’s Hungarian Union in 1944 to rapidly become the president of the Union’s branch in Cluj (one of the most important offices of the Union). Between 1946 and 1948 he was a deputy in the Grand National Assembly. He retired in 1953. Sources of information: <http://hungarystartshere.com/Karoly-Kos-Kosch>, accessed January 25, 2010, and an unauthored note in Károly Kós, “Glasul care strigă, [The Crying Voice]” in *Maghiarii din România (1920-1940)*, ed. Lucian Nastasă and Levente Sălát (Cluj: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2003), 50.

⁵⁸⁴ Almost a year after the Commission had met in spring 1947 to discuss the situation of the Hungarian historical sites and to request further material from the Union, Kós Károly submitted a detailed report on fourteen sites, which included a description of each building’s history as well as its current state, together with an image (drawing or photography) of the site. He requested that the “historical monuments [in the report] be included among the national historical monuments.” By having them immediately set under “official protection,” these sites would thereby be saved from complete destruction. The letter’s writers also requested funding for the sites’ restoration. The historical buildings included in the list were the following: 1) the castles in Ardid, Bahnea, Brâncovenesti, Bonțida, Mănăstirea, Ozd, Samsond, Vințul de Jos, and 2) the churches in Benic, Cricău, Petriu, Sf. Maria Orlea, Uioara, Cetatea de Baltă. ACMI, 3842/28, Letter signed by Károly Kós and Géza Entz, dated March 24, 1948, Cluj.

These descriptions offered a gloomy picture of what had happened within less than five years with these historical buildings, some of them built several centuries ago. The story of their destruction was more or less similar: some of them were greatly damaged during the war, such as the castle in Bonțida, which German troops set on fire, and others were looted in the aftermaths of the war, such as the castle in Mănăstirești, Someș county, where the sculpted-in-wood vestibule, doors, and window frames, representing “the most refined wood sculpture of the 16th-17th century Transylvanian Hungarian Renaissance,” had been “sacked by the greed of the villagers.” ACMI, 3842/22 (on Bánffy castle) and 25 (on Mănăstirești).

Relying on the first study submitted by Kós, the Commission agreed that most of the sites in the report (eleven out of fourteen) represented important architectural accomplishments and consequently deserved to be granted the status of national historical monuments. ACMI, 3842/24-25. The Commission petitioned the Ministry of Arts to contact the current owners of the sites, which were either the Ministry of

of these sites: 1) the villagers could use them for cultural or economic purposes, to establish there cultural centers, hospitals, hospices, or workers' universities, and 2) many of the buildings were monuments of Hungarian art in Transylvania, representative of the heritage of the Hungarian population living in Romania. The Union knew that, in order for the demolition or any other form of destruction be stopped, these sites had to be included in the official list of historical monuments. If the Ministry of Arts had started regarding these castles as unique pieces of architecture and built heritage, the local authorities could no longer consider them simple buildings and destroy them without any consequences.⁵⁸⁵

Since many of these sites had been privately owned before the Second World War, either as part of the patrimony of the Lutheran or Catholic churches or as private estates of the formerly aristocratic Transylvanian families, the interwar Commission for Historical Monuments had less interest in studying them.⁵⁸⁶ Therefore, the urgent petition sent by the Union after the war seemed to have caught the Commission off guard, as the Commission's specialists had little to no information about many of the sites.⁵⁸⁷

Internal Affairs or the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to oblige them to set the sites under an immediate protection. Memo sent to the Minister of Arts, not dated, signed by Horia Teodoru, ACMI, 3842/18.

⁵⁸⁵ A month and a half after the drafting of the petition, the national Commission for Historical Monuments proposed an action plan for the "protection and conservation of Transylvania's castles." They asked for further petitioning of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, which were using some of "the historical castles on the expropriated estates in Transylvania," to actively pursue their conservation. The Commission also requested the Union to provide a complete portfolio of the sites, including recent photos, building plans, detailed descriptions, and short historical accounts, all of them to be used as evidence for granting the sites the status of historical monuments. ACMI, File 3842, Page 6, Petition sent to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, signed by the President of the Commission, Alexandru Lepădatu, and the Secretary, Victor Brătulescu.

⁵⁸⁶ Another factor may have been that art history research and historical literature about the Hungarian sites were at that moment mostly in Hungarian, which most of the Commission's members did not read.

⁵⁸⁷ See, for instance, the answer offered by architect Horia Teodoru, member of the Commission, following the petition sent by the Union of Hungarians in Romania. He gave some references on the Hungarian monuments in Transylvania, all of them in Hungarian, which he did not understand, and mentioned that he had been entrusted by the Commission to study only three sites: the castle in Vințul de Jos, the St. Michael Church in Cluj, and the Catholic church in Alba Iulia, all of them "without discussion meeting all of the

Suddenly, the Commission learned about a significant cluster of historical buildings, some of them of high artistic value, which, unfortunately, were already partially or radically destroyed due to their abandonment, improper care, or even willful destruction.⁵⁸⁸

However, by the middle of 1948, the internal pressure against the Commission increased, as they were asked to reduce their budget and move to a much smaller location, where the extensive archive of the Commission, with architectural plans, photography collections, and other documentation on art and architectural sites, could not be hosted.⁵⁸⁹ As I have already discussed at length in Chapter 2, it was the beginning of

standards to be included in the national list of monuments.” Internal memo, “The Hungarian historical monuments in Romania,” by architect Horia Teodoru, July 24, 1947. ACMI 3842/8,9.

⁵⁸⁸ The Commission pursued a thorough investigation of the sites that could potentially be classified as historical monuments by requiring all of the regional Cultural Councils, established within the new Mayor Halls, to submit a detailed report on the situation of the buildings in their county that were older than 100 years (built before or during 1848). The reports sent by the Cultural Councils in Transylvania offer a dire image of the post-war condition of most of the historical buildings in the region. “Partially destroyed,” “ruined due to abandonment,” “abandoned ruins,” “destroyed in the aftermaths of the war,” were some of the descriptions used for the castles listed by the Council in Blaj county. ACMI, 3842/11-12. In Mureș county, a region in the northern part of Transylvania with a large Hungarian population, the report described a similar situation: in the case of the castle in Brâncovenești, initially built in 1228 and redone in a baroque style in 1775, the war led to the destruction of art collection, while the building underwent significant damage; the 18th century Teleki castle in Gornești no longer had window frames, while the library and the art collection had been fully destroyed; the Teleki castle in Glodeni, also built in the 18th century, had most of the art collection destroyed because of the war; other 18th century castles, belonging to Zichy family in Voivodeni and Toldalaghi family in Bolintineni, underwent similar damage. The report proposed that those castles be restored and preserved as architectural monuments. ACMI, File 3842/4-5. The report sent by Cultural Council of the Mayor Hall of Satu Mare county, located in the upper northern region of Transylvania, with a large number of Hungarians, presented a similar despoliation of the castles in the region, where parts of the buildings were completely destroyed, while the building elements in interior and exterior (roof tiles, window frames, but also doors, door handles, brick stoves, etc) completely missing. ACMI, 3842/9.

⁵⁸⁹ In parallel with the investigation done by Kós, the central Commission entrusted Virgil Vătășianu, who taught art history at the University of Cluj, with in-depth research of the Hungarian sites in Transylvania, which the Union had initially proposed to be considered national monuments. There was a genuine interest of the commission to learn more about the Hungarian sites, shown by the letter the Commission sent to professor Vătășianu. In it, the president of the commission inquired into the possibility of having some of the Hungarian language studies about the Hungarian monuments in Transylvania translated into Romanian, so the Commission could publish them in their journal. ACMI, 3842/20. Letter sent to Professor Virgil Vătășianu, the University of Cluj, signed by Constantin Daicoviciu and Victor Brătulescu sent on February 13, 1948. Vătășianu was the most trustworthy specialist to pursue such an investigation, not only due to his thorough training in art history through a doctorate at the University of Vienna, completed by long postdoctoral stages of research in Italy, as the director of the Romanian school in Roma, and his linguistic

the end, even though the members of the Commission did not want to acknowledge it at that time. Confronted with the sudden shrinking of funding, the Commission could no longer pursue ample projects, but instead tried as much as possible to prevent the demolition of the castles, as well as other vandalized mansions after the war, demolition often required by the local authorities.⁵⁹⁰ This enterprise was, however, never fully accomplished, as the Commission increasingly lost its authority within the newly reorganized Ministry of Arts, to be soon thereafter dismantled.

Why is this context so important for a better understanding of the shifts in the forms and meanings of heritage in the case of Bánffy castle in Bonțida? First, it reveals the institutional gaps of that time (approximately 1945-1950) at the national level, such as

abilities (he fluently spoke five languages, including Hungarian and German), but also that he happened to be the brother-in-law of the president of the Commission, archeologist and historian Constantin Daicoviciu.

After more than half of a year, in November 1948, professor Vătășianu succeeded in completing a detailed report on a significant number of Hungarian sites in Transylvania. Vătășianu's report included 63 sites, which he proposed to be included in the national monuments' list, while the other 73 required, he suggested, more documentation. While he suggested that many of these sites must be included in the national list of historical monuments, he noticed, however, that there seemed to be a lot of confusion regarding the situation of the Hungarian sites existent at that moment in Romania. Even though he stressed that he had repeatedly requested the Commission to inform him about those Hungarian buildings that had already been included in the monuments' list, he received no answer. He proposed therefore that he travel to examine the current situation of those sites about which there had not been recent information available and therefore solicited the Commission to sponsor his research trips. This sponsorship, however, never happened. Letter sent by Professor Vătășianu to the president of the Commission, ACMI, 3842/33-34.

⁵⁹⁰ See, for instance, the answers received from the local authorities, when the Commission contacted them to ask about the legal ownership status of three castles on Károly Kós's initial list, where the owners were not mentioned: the Samsod castle in Mureș county, the Bonțida castle in Cluj county and the Arduș castle in Satu Mare county. All of the three responses, sent by the municipalities of each county, described the disastrous current state of the buildings and proposed their immediate demolition, so that the municipality could use the construction material for the new houses in the village, or for erecting a cultural house for the locals or other buildings for the public use. Letter sent by Satu Mare City Hall on October 30, 1948, ACMI 3843/11. See also letter sent by Mureș municipality asking for demolition of Samsod castle (ACMI, 3843/13,) as well as the earlier petition regarding the Bethlen castle in Someș (ACMI 3843/3, 4). Following the petition sent from Someș county, asking for the demolition of the Bethlen castle, the new president of the Commission, archeologist Constantin Daicoviciu, suggested that the Ministry of Agriculture be contacted in order to send the Commission the list of the old castles which [were] occupied by various offices and institutions of the minister (as agricultural machinery parks, offices for the agricultural chambers or state farms. He stressed that "the Commission must inform all of the public institutions to carry official protection measures of all of the civil architectural monuments, which must be restored according to norms of historical conservation and which, under any circumstances, may not be demolished without the written approval of the Commission." ACMI, File 3843/6, letter sent to Someș City Hall on September 9, 1948, signed by Constantin Daicoviciu and Victor Brătulescu.

the uncertainty or even total lack of information about the buildings of high architectural value across the country, gaps that were then greatly manipulated by the local authorities for their own benefit. Despite the attempts of the central institutions in Bucharest to mend these gaps and pursue projects of restoration of the abandoned Hungarian castles of Transylvania, these endeavors had been impeded from the bottom up, by the local institutions. An analysis of these failed projects points out that the central institutions of the socialist state were in fact very weak in the absence of support from the regional or local state agents.

More importantly, however, my discussion of the collaboration between the Commission for Historical Monuments and the Hungarian People's Union points to the concept of heritage as a palimpsest, constituted by multiple but independent layers, some of which are not always recognized as such by groups carrying distinct, even diverging political agendas. All of the castles and mansions that had been owned by the well-to-do Transylvanian Hungarians before the Second World War, capturing a life style and culture of a well situated social group in Transylvania, represented a silent but rich heritage that remained mostly unknown to Romanian art historians and most of the Commission's members. This ignorance may have also derived from the fact that the articles and research reports published about Transylvanian castles had been mostly published in Hungarian and were therefore accessible only to a Hungarian-speaking audience. It thus became very difficult for these estates to become "heritage sites" after 1945, since the interwar Commission for Historical Monuments had not included them in the list of national monuments, while the locals had looked upon them as simply luxurious estates, which could be looted once their owners had relinquished them.

Rapid industrialization, especially in Transylvania, combined with increasing social mobility of villagers going to search for jobs in the big cities or even abroad, severed earlier economic ties between a wealthy estate in Transylvania and its village community. (All of the Transylvanian Hungarian aristocratic families lost their noble titles after the reunification of Transylvania with Romania in 1918, becoming simple citizens of the new Romanian state.) Functioning more as two separate worlds, no longer connected by economic interdependency, the village communities living near those estates with their castles, mansions, parks, and orchards could not regard them as socially and historically important sites after 1945. On the contrary, the locals looked upon these sites as sources of wealth that unexpectedly could be plundered under the forgiving eye of the new local authorities, themselves very much interested in acquiring valuables without owners. Their uncertain ownership status uncertain, with their former owners being kicked out and a blurry entity such as the socialist state taking their place, these estates were suddenly up for grabs.

Despite the memos and orders sent by the central institutions, including the Commission for Historical Monuments, the process of destruction of those sites, once started, was difficult to stop. No immediate measures of protection of these sites were implemented at the end of the war. In fact, especially in the case of the Hungarian sites, this attempt was even more difficult since the two institutions—the Commission for Historical Monuments and the Hungarian People’s Union—were themselves rapidly losing political power, until they disappeared from the central institutional network.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹¹ As I have discussed at length in the second chapter, the Commission for Historical Monuments was officially dismantled in 1950. Historian Lucian Nastasă considers that “already by the end of 1950 the Hungarian People’s Union had accomplished its political purpose.” The Communist Party wanted a political body that would represent all of the ethnic minorities in the country, so the Politburo decided on

A Story of Deconstruction: The Bánffy Castle in the Socialist Period

The story of the Hungarian castles in Transylvania also offers a new perspective on the social and cultural homogenization pursued by the socialist state after 1947. In Transylvania, the majority of these estates had been historically owned by Hungarian and Saxon lines while a much smaller number belonged to Romanians. The rapid degradation of these sites meant also the disappearance of an ethnic and social marker of the Hungarians and Saxons of Transylvania. In other words, the project to protect and conserve some of these buildings, which the Hungarian People's Union pursued with so much energy immediately after the war, represented an attempt to protect their people and their forms of ethnic expression. However, while the religious sites carried an important role in the constitution of ethnic identity, the castles and mansions belonging to formerly aristocratic Hungarian lines represented merely private estates of a well-to-do group. These buildings could not stand for an imaginary of the Hungarian heritage in Transylvania as a whole. The attempt of the Union to transform these sites a posteriori into historical monuments, part of the multiethnic heritage of socialist Romania, must have been determined by something more than a genuine concern for a cluster of exquisitely beautiful buildings and courtyards. It was also a form of strengthening a political legitimacy for the Hungarian minority within the politically blurry context that followed the 1946 elections. A close examination of the unsuccessful attempts of the two

the dismantling of all of the organizations focused on the ethnic minorities, such as the People's Hungarian Union, the Antifascist Committee of the Germans in Romania, and the Democratic Jewish Committee. According to Nastasă, however, "the Politburo still feared that the dismantling of the Union would trigger negative reactions among the Hungarian population, who would have felt affronted and threatened by losing their representative political body." The Hungarian Union continued to exist institutionally until March 1953; however, it remained a marginal political body, having lost the political leverage that it had had between 1946 and 1950. Lucian Nastasă, "Maghiarii din România și etica minoritară. Repere istorice, 1920-1940 [the Magyars of Romania and the Minority Ethics. Historical Milestones, 1920-1940]," in *Maghiarii din România (1920-1940)*, ed. Lucian Nastasă and Levente Salat (Cluj: Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală, 2003), 22.

institutions, the central Commission for Historical Monuments and the Hungarian People's Union, to save most of the Hungarian sites in Transylvania from destruction, reveals how the process of social homogenization, initially meant to create a post-class, post-ethnic socialist society, endorsed in fact an ethnically homogeneous peoplehood that was becoming ever more Romanian.

As I have already discussed in the first section, this ethnic homogenization occurred through two complementary strategies adopted by the central institutions of the new state. The first one entailed a systematic displacement and reordering of people and communities, by resettling them in new living habitats, such as the socialist cities and towns to be developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The second method was the nationalization of immovable cultural goods, such as valuable buildings and estates, whose rich cultural histories were to be “cleansed” of any traces of a past that did not fit the ideological requests of the present. As much as the specialists working for central institutions, such as the Commission for Historical Monuments, attempted to preserve their economic value, they simply did not have the means to enforce a policy of protection and conservation of those sites. The local agents of the communist state did not always submissively implemented the dispositions of the central committees in their territory. Some of them played in fact a major role in accelerating the degradation of sumptuous sites and mansions by allowing the locals to continue plundering these suddenly available places. Their gradual destruction and silent incorporation of their materials into the village fabric was accompanied—in fact, accelerated—by the local campaigns of erasing or distorting the singular histories of each of those sites and their owners, with all of them being collectively portrayed as “bourgeois exploiters.”



Figure 24 The northern wing of the castle, 1968. Constantin Rusu, the album “Castelul Banffi,” 1969. Courtesy of József Bálint.

The Bánffy castle in Bonțida was one of those places. Following nationalization, a large machinery park (*SMT* in Romanian) was established in Bonțida in the west wing, the castle’s largest building. Until 1964, the machinery park stood as a major regional center for agriculture, serving many communes and even the city of Cluj and the town of Gherla. If we recall, already in 1947, as part of the larger project initiated by the Hungarian People’s Union in Romania, the Commission for Historical Monuments contacted the town hall of Cluj county as well as the offices of the machinery park in Bonțida to ask them to actively pursue the conservation of the castle. The local authorities informed the Commission that it was not their responsibility to take care of the site, since it was administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, whereas the *SMT* replied that their funding could not cover the large expenses required by the buildings’ preservation, as their budget should be exclusively channeled towards agricultural projects.⁵⁹² By the beginning of the 1960s, people started moving into some rooms in the

⁵⁹² AINMI/ACMI 3843.

other parts of the castle, which had been previously abandoned.⁵⁹³ In 1964, the recently established Department for Historical Monuments, then part of the Central Committee for Architecture and Construction, began a national campaign of restoration, preservation and conservation of major architectural sites across Romania, which had been abandoned after the end of the war. An initial restoring attempt was initiated by the regional Direction of Architecture and Construction, attached to the People's Council of Cluj County, in 1968. Due to this planned renovation of the castle, the SMT offices moved to another location. According to a former engineer from Bonțida, who had worked at the *SMT*, at the time of the move the rooms in the western wing of the castle had been well preserved, with doubled doors, wood floors, and tiled stoves.

The initial budget clearly included materials and labor force of high quality, designated to preserve the details of craftsmanship and architectural skill reflected in the baroque and renaissance elements of the building. The central Direction for Historical Monuments unambiguously stated that the reconstruction should be carried out in conformity with the principles of historical building renovation. For example, the specialists required that the roof be redone in “its original form and with no modifications”, for it “must be preserved” as “an example of the art of the 18th century building craftsmen.”⁵⁹⁴ Notwithstanding all the good intentions underlying the

⁵⁹³ A Roma family lived in the tower of the Miklós building between 1962 and 1972, while other six or seven families lived there until 1967-1969, until the renovation started. The “Miklós building” is the building where Bánffy Miklós lived when he returned to Bonțida. As he did not get along too well with his father, the old Bánffy, he moved into the eastern wing of the castle, which was used as the offices for the machinery park after 1948. The larger building, L-shaped, marking the western and northwestern wings of the castle, had been more affected by the fire and consequently abandoned after 1948. See photos 1 and 2.

⁵⁹⁴ Authorization nr. 1329 of February 8, 1971. The initial strategy of rehabilitation also suggested a set of social measures (such as, “the evacuation of families living on the castle’s premises, who contribute to the destruction of the monument; the hiring of a watchman, who could stop the destruction of walls perpetrated by locals; the building of a fence around the castle in order to stop the demolition and theft of materials”). Memoriu Justificativ, Castelul Bánffy din comuna Bonțida, județul Cluj, initial draft, page 5. Octombrie

enterprise, the initial project of the castle's complete renovation was eventually canceled, since "the funds had not been properly spent," while the funding was channeled to other projects underway in the county.⁵⁹⁵ These suggestions did not even make it to the final draft of the document, but the project was handed over to the People's Council of Cluj county, which supervised the renovation project carried out at the castle between 1969 and 1970. Some parts of the architectural complex were, indeed, reconstructed, though only partly, others were covered with a tiled roof, which locals gradually made to disappear by stealing the tiles.⁵⁹⁶ On the other side, the "industrial bricks" used in the reconstruction succeeded in altering the quality of the building as a historical monument.⁵⁹⁷

Since the renovation project did not last beyond summer of 1969, with the machinery station already relocated to a different site, the castle was eventually left in the hands of those who used to live on its premises and who moved back afterwards (some of them were new-comers to the village, who had not enough money to construct a house).

1968. All those suggestions were though taken out from the final text of the document, *Fișa proiectului privind lucrările de conservare și consolidări la castelul Bánffy din Bonțida*. Beneficiar: Consiliul Popular Județean Cluj, Dir. Tehnică. Proiectant: DSAPC-Cluj. Mai 1969, Cluj. I am grateful to Architect Dávid Gyula for offering me a copy of those materials from his personal archive, as I was not able to retrieve those copies in the archives in Cluj.

⁵⁹⁵ The Archives of the City Hall, Cluj-Napoca. People's Council of Cluj county, the Executive Committee, Decision nr. 745, December, 28, 1970.

⁵⁹⁶ Dávid Gyula *A Bonchidai Bánffy-Kastély*, 61.

⁵⁹⁷ All of these made the specialists involved in the castle's rehabilitation after 1998 view the 1968 renovation work as fake. More specifically, even if they admit that "it was only this project of reconstruction that eventually saved the castle from utter destruction," contemporary experts call the 1969 project an "intervention" in the original architectonical structure of the castle, while stressing the damages and the poor work done on the buildings. Sectia 5. Date istorice, concluzii. In *Studiu de parament și studiu de istoria artei. Castelul Bánffy corp V, Proiect 171/2002*, Poza 350. Source: the archives of the commune Bonțida.



Figure 25 The western building, 1968. Constantin Rusu, the album “Castelul Banffi,” 1969. Courtesy of József Bálint.

Even the tiled roof, redone during the 1970s renovations, slowly disappeared in five years. The statues on the roof were thrown down to the ground, because, as one of the people who lived there put it, they “could have fallen on the children playing in the courtyard.”⁵⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the castle and the park continued to function as one social site up until the mid-1970s, especially during the warm season. People would often come there on weekends. Young mothers would go there with their children, the youth would gather at the kiosk, wander around the park and “sometimes even get lost in the alleys.” There was an organic connection between the castle and the park—one could not live without the other. People would come to the park and, to a certain extent, enliven the castle as well. Very importantly, it was not only through the locals that the park had been temporarily integrated within the local social space.

⁵⁹⁸ Interview with a Roma old man in Bonțida, August 27, 2007. He had moved to Bonțida in early 1960s. As the local council could not offer any better accommodation, he moved directly into the Miklós tower (the east wing tower). He admitted to me that, as the rooms were so high and large, he had to cut many trees from the park to warm up his place during cold winters.



11. kép. Részlet a bonchidai szoborgalériából. A jobbszélen Ceres alakja
(A szerző felv.)

Figure 26 Some of the statues on the roof of the stable. The statues surrounded the entire courtyard. Source: Biró József, *A kolozsvári Bánffy-palota és tervező mestere, Johann Eberhard Blaumann*, Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva rt, 1933. Photo included in the album “Castelul Banffi,” Constantin Rusu, 1969. Courtesy of József Bálint.

The events organized in the park during the communist holidays formed an important part of this temporary “re-awakening” of the site, which also simultaneously entailed a project of resignifying its history. The locals no longer talked about the Bánffy castle and its presocialist history since it became a site to celebrate the international workers’ day and other national events. The castle became a meeting place within the new symbolic geography of the village. However, by the mid 1970s, with the help of the locals and the local authorities, the park slowly disappeared, as its large trees were systematically cut. The castle was abandoned as well. Official celebrations were no longer held there, as the regional authorities chose a different location, closer to Cluj, the largest city in the region. While before it was “everyone’s,” a key social site at least for weekends and holidays, the castle became no one’s property, and the locals felt entitled to appropriate it in various ways—by taking bricks, wood, tiles, etc.



Figure 27 With the tacit consent of the local authorities, the park was eventually depleted of its large trees. Photo included in the album “Castelul Banffi[sic],” Constantin Rusu, 1969. Courtesy of József Bálint.

They reasoned that “so what, am I stupider than others? If they take, I should take as well,” as a highly respected Bontidan put it.⁵⁹⁹ Moreover, after the machinery park had installed its office in one of the castle’s wings, the site became regarded as state property. To steal from the state, far from being regarded as ‘theft’, was in fact socially valued.⁶⁰⁰ Thus, once the site was relatively abandoned, this “transfer” of construction materials from the “state” (the castle’s premises) into private courtyards only became easier.

The slow literal disappearance of the castle into the village’s built environment stands as a striking image of the radical transformation of the local social and political

⁵⁹⁹ Informal conversation, August 30, 2007.

⁶⁰⁰ There are other analyses of property transformation in post-socialist Romania, studies that point out the key difference, even linguistically signified, between “to take” and “to steal”. While “taking” from the state was a way to re-establish a relative balance within a world that was unbalanced from the start (the state had everything and the people had nothing), “stealing” did not involve state property in any form, but regarded only a relation between two individuals. See, for instance, Oana Mateescu, “Furt, vânzare sau dar: bucuriile privatizării într-un sat din Oltenia [Theft, Sale or Gift: The Joys of Privatization in a Village of Oltenia,” in *Economia Informală în România*, ed. Oana Mateescu and Liviu Chelcea (București: Polirom, 2004).

landscape after 1945. The furniture, the statuettes in the lobbies, the bottles and barrels of exquisite wine in the castle's cellar appropriated during the first looting of the castle in the autumn of 1944 were soon followed by the roof tiles, bricks, wood, and other parts of the buildings that continuously moved to the village. All of these components were slowly incorporated into the new houses erected on the land in the immediate vicinity of the castle, land once owned by the Bánffys and now divided and distributed to the villagers as house plots. By the mid 1970s, with the Department for Historical Monuments fully dismantled and with the local institutions denying its architectural value and functionality and eventually abandoning it, the Bánffy castle openly became a "source" of construction materials for the villagers of Bonțida.

Heritage as Recognition, History as Ruptures: The Trust and the Decentralization of Heritage Making in Postsocialist Transylvania

The full abandonment of a castle, which once had been an emblematic piece of architecture, also signaled the central government's willful ignorance of the terrible state of destruction of key Hungarian cultural sites in Transylvania. This silence reflected a broader radicalization of the Romanian socialist state's repressive attitude towards the German and especially the Hungarian minorities during the 1980s. It is due to this tense political context that immediately after 1989, when the political regimes in the Eastern bloc changed, the Hungarian government offered, via its Ministry of National Heritage, generous support for the reconstruction or rehabilitation of the churches, castles, and vernacular architecture of Transylvanian Hungarian origin. Among the Transylvanian

organizations that received financial support and expertise in order to develop such projects, the most important one has been the NGO *Ardeal Trust* (the Trust, henceforth).

The NGO was established in 1996 at the initiative of Transylvanian specialists, mediated also by the heritage experts of Hungary, and sponsored by private foundations from abroad. The Trust has grown into the main organization that works in the field of conservation of built heritage in Transylvania.⁶⁰¹ While collaborating with Hungarian and British experts, the NGO's own specialists are mostly Hungarian Transylvanians. They started their projects by focusing on Hungarian built heritage, as they felt that the regional Commission for Historical Monuments, working under the supervision of the Romanian government's central Commission (part of the Ministry of Culture), had not shown enough interest in funding and protecting the non-Romanian historical sites of Transylvania.

Generally, the Trust's specialists clearly stress that their enterprise does not entail interethnic political agendas nor interfere with political debates.⁶⁰² Their aim is purportedly to save the abandoned sites, while giving them a novel role in the development of local communities. As the one of the Trust's directors put it, all they care about is "what heritage can do for the community."⁶⁰³ Another expert, this time a Hungarian Transylvanian working for the Trust, pointed out that such a project of heritage rehabilitation *outside* the framework of state institutions could have been pursued only in Transylvania. His explanation was that in this region such grassroots

⁶⁰¹ Source: online reports.

⁶⁰² As one of those experts put it, "We do not care about this 'minorities' rubbish!"

⁶⁰³ During this informal conversation, one of the managers proudly mentioned that Princess Margareta of Romania accepted to be the Patron of the Bánffy castle's rehabilitation project. At this point, I pointed out that it is interesting that a member of the old aristocracy of Romania (the former royal family) is now the patron of a castle symbolizing the Hungarian aristocracy of imperial Transylvania. Here, he replied that he is not at all interested in politics, but only in what the heritage could do for the development of the current communities.

initiatives — i.e., belonging to “the civil society” — are much stronger than in other regions of Romania, where the state had (and still has) full control over the know-how, strategy and resources of heritage conservation. Moreover, the same expert stressed that the Trust’s projects of rescuing built heritage sites are informed by an all encompassing approach to *Transylvania as a whole*. In other words, the overall project focuses on rescuing Transylvania as a site of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. He believed that everyone living in Transylvania would care about all of Transylvania’s sites (no matter if they stand for Romanian, Hungarian, or Saxon heritage) and would engage in protecting them. In support, he offered the example of an art historian—“a pure Romanian” as he phrased it—who, after the Bánffy castle had been abandoned and turned into playground, saved some of the baroque statues thrown down on the ground. This historian simply went to the castle, filled a truck with the remaining statues he found in the courtyard, all the while being confronted with serious threats from the villagers (such as beating). The statues were brought to the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca.⁶⁰⁴ “This is,” the man said in conclusion, “what it means to be a true Transylvanian!”⁶⁰⁵

Since its inception the rehabilitation of the Bánffy castle represented a pivotal goal for the Trust.⁶⁰⁶ In fact, immediately following the reestablishment of the National Commission for Monuments in 1994 (even before the Trust was founded), a Cluj-based private “Center for Built Heritage Research and Planning,” whose specialists eventually became the Trust’s employees, had already started an initial feasibility study on the abandoned castle. Following this study, in 1999 at the request of the National Office for

⁶⁰⁴ This was confirmed by the art historian himself, Professor Nicolae Sabău, interview September 27, 2007, Cluj.

⁶⁰⁵ Informal conversation with one of the managers, fieldwork notes, August 15, 2007. Bonțida.

⁶⁰⁶ Contract of concession.

Patrimony Protection, the Center carried out a small project of urgent intervention, during which the main buildings were tile-roofed. In 1996, benefiting from the funds of the Hungarian Minister for Cultural Heritage, the Trust was established as an institutional body independent from the Center.⁶⁰⁷ It started the reconstructive work with an archeological dig and an art history study, both pre-requisites for the rehabilitation of the building itself.⁶⁰⁸ From the very beginning, the Trust's specialists acknowledged that if they wish to save the Bánffy castle from full destruction, they must bring it to the awareness of the international community. They knew with absolute certainty that a project on such a scale could not ever rely only on governmental funding. Consequently, the Trust submitted an official request for including the castle on the World Monuments Watch List. They also published booklets with photographs prior to the Second World War, showing the castle in its full splendor. Money started coming in from governmental sources (Ministries of Culture in Hungary and Romania), private foundations (Getty Foundation in USA, Hedley Trust in UK) and transnational organizations (such as the EU).

The Trust's team felt therefore very fortunate upon meeting Prince Charles during his first visit to Transylvania in the summer of 1998. Prince Charles admitted to have been "deeply impressed by the beauty of both its landscape and its built heritage."⁶⁰⁹ He was enchanted by "the churches and the villages which are spread across [Transylvania]"

⁶⁰⁷ Information offered by one of the Trust's managers.

⁶⁰⁸ Reports: *Săptămâni arheologice 2000*, investitor Ministerul Patrimoniului Cultural, Budapesta, [Archeological research 2000, sponsor: the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Budapest through the Foundation "Ardeal Trust"] and *Cercetări de parament și studiu de istoria artei*, investitor Ministerul Patrimoniului Cultural, Budapesta. Source: the archives of Bonțida commune.

⁶⁰⁹ Appraisal letter of HRH Prince Charles in *Built Conservation Training: The Aiud Conservation and Trans-national Trade Project (ACTT)* [henceforth, ACTT book], 2000, sponsored by Headley Trust and the Prince of Wales Foundation. Cover 2.

and their “extraordinary, timeless integrity.”⁶¹⁰ On this very occasion, he decided to sponsor and coordinate the Mihai Eminescu Trust, a foundation that has been focusing on the renovation, protection, and revival of the Saxon heritage in Transylvania.⁶¹¹ He also offered the Trust’s specialists his assistance.⁶¹² The conclusion was that the highest need at the moment consisted of a conservation officer, who would discuss the heritage situation with Romanian authorities.⁶¹³

Constructing Civil Society: Learning Democracy by Performing Craftsmanship

Another outcome of Prince Charles’s visit to the castle was the direct involvement of the British Council in the rehabilitation project. The Council helped the Transylvanian specialists develop and maintain a close partnership with established British professionals in the field (such as, the National Trust, the English Heritage, the Institute for Historical Building Conservation). During their first visit to the UK in the spring of 1999, together with some of the Trust’s specialists, a group of 21 Romanian craftsmen acquired methods and techniques of building conservation from their British colleagues. Under the

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ As one could read on their web page, Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET) is currently “dedicated to the conservation and regeneration of villages and communes in Transylvania and the Maramureș, two of the most unspoiled regions of Europe.” The NGO was founded, in fact, before 1989, as a reaction of the Romanian diaspora and some other intellectuals to the village systematization policy (read, erasing entire villages) initiated by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the mid 1980s. Starting in the mid 1990s, the MET resumed its involvement in Romania by restoring houses in the abandoned Saxon villages while trying to make the Roma who move in appreciate and contribute to such restorations. However, MET no longer has a good reputation among the Romanian specialists and other international foundations working in the heritage field. The latter accuse MET of mercantilism. As a Norwegian architect put it, after having failed to work with MET: “After their initial work, MET became investors. They bought houses, when land was very cheap, now they are restored, and now this is English controlled property. They look at Mălâncrav as a new Tuscany, they want the place to look nicer, the visitors see only the façades.” A Scottish conservation specialist ironically described the managers of MET as fake aristocrats who want to have their lands in Transylvania, because they could not have such property in Great Britain.

⁶¹² According to one of the Trust’s directors, he asked them: “how can I help you?”

⁶¹³ Field notes, discussion with one of the Trust’s directors. See also discussion with Maria Berza, about the minister of finance who said that “when it comes to the national budget, the monuments would [should] always be in the last row.”

institutional umbrella of the British Council in Romania, the project of establishing a Built Heritage Conservation Training Centre at the Bánffy castle in Bonțida began to develop. Since 1999, British specialists have come to Romania with the goal of “train[ing] and retrain[ing] craftsmen who are trained in historic building conservation based on traditional skills and materials.”⁶¹⁴

Inasmuch as the preliminary studies were still under way at the Bánffy castle, the first training project opened at Aiud in 1999. It envisioned the restoration of the building of the Bethlen Gábor College, which was another Hungarian site that had been abandoned after the Second World War, located approximately 80 km from Bonțida. The workshop was to be transferred to the Bánffy castle starting in 2000 and has been organized there every summer ever since. The textbook used during the practical workshops and lectures reveals the Trust’s and IHBC’s approach to the built heritage.⁶¹⁵ Its overall strategy was “to redress the balance following the years of destruction and devastation in Romania, by helping to establish a system for the re-introduction of traditional building craft skills and techniques.”⁶¹⁶ The main goal was to develop the Training Centre as “a basis for the dissemination of information and craft skills throughout Romania,” which will further “non-governmental initiatives...in order to enhance public awareness.”⁶¹⁷ In other words, the Trust has aimed at breaking the state’s monopoly over built heritage (at the institutional and expertise level) by developing an active network of heritage professionals. This network would operate in a decentralized manner and become as independent as possible from the governmental actors. Moreover,

⁶¹⁴ Introduction to the ACTT textbook, 4.

⁶¹⁵ The format was trilingual, with the original English text accompanied by both Romanian and Hungarian translations.

⁶¹⁶ ACTT textbook, 4.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

having admitted that “Romania is a fledgling democracy which...is looking to western Europe for guidance to ensure its democratic stability,” the project managers intended to transform the mindsets of Romanian craftsmen. The managers claimed that these craftsmen “[were] not only unfamiliar with traditional techniques, but also [did] not understand the concept and compatibility between modern and traditional building materials.”⁶¹⁸

As a result, the project aimed at changing the craftsmen’s values formerly based on the equation “modern = good” versus “traditional = old, and therefore bad.” The British specialists intended to reverse this equation by proposing an approach that would revalue, restore and integrate older buildings into the current built environment, rather than one framed within a “cycle of decay and rebuilding.”⁶¹⁹ Their goal was to make the local craftsmen reevaluate the historic buildings by regarding them as valuable economic assets, instead of ruined and/or abandoned sites. At the same time, this project may be understood as a strategy of reversal. During the learning process, Romanian craftsmen were un-taught the skills they had previously acquired during “proper” craftsmanship (i.e., the construction of modern buildings). The British specialists encouraged the Romanians to search for a germane combination of traditional and modern methods. In a sense, the craftsmen were to be persuaded that their past skillfulness, acquired during the communist period, was more or less out of date. The attempt to persuade the craftsmen to change their own perspective on their own skills and the environment in which they were working also represented an ironic paradox. The British specialists, though they attempted to salvage a past embedded in buildings from pre-communist times, had

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Aims and Objectives of the ACTT, in ACTT Textbook, 8.

simultaneously performed a different erasure of the past: the immediate past of craftsmen trained during the socialist regime of Romania.

In 2001, the training center moved to the Bánffy castle with the precise purpose of starting the site's renovation. Ever since, teams of craftsmen and architecture students from various countries came to work and learn stonemasonry, carpeting, and stone carving during the two week intensive workshops ("modules") organized twice per year. Besides this significant, albeit temporary, labor force, a permanent team of 12 craftsmen began working on the site in the summer time. During one of my first visits to the castle in summer 2007, the team leader explained to the visitors the specifics of their work (the materials and techniques they use). Once, he showed us two vaults in the building where the team had been working that summer.⁶²⁰ Though they looked similar, a closer look revealed that the bricks used in one of the vaults were smaller and more tightly arranged to form the vault shape, whereas the other one was made of bigger bricks, not so closely connected. Whereas the first vault was done two hundred years ago, the other was created during the attempted renovation of the building at the end of the 1960s. His explicit intention was not to cover the bricks with layers of paint so that everyone would notice the difference between two kinds of craftsmanship: the "proper," good work that lasted two hundred years, and the shoddy job, with larger bricks, done much later. As the craftsman put it, "here you can see how building was done a hundred years ago, [in comparison] to how the communists worked!"

I wondered at the time why he did not assume a different approach to his whole presentation. Why did he not say, for instance, that during the communist period there existed an attempt to renovate the castle, which eventually failed? Why did he say

⁶²⁰ Fieldwork notes, Bonțida, August 2007.

instead, with the backup of the Trust's expert voices, that the renovation done back then, between 1969 and 1970, has actually *accelerated* the building's collapse? I suggest that we find here a particular illustration of the dichotomous social and moral landscape that the Trust has tried to project upon the castle. In this case, the two kinds of bricks stood for much more than simple construction materials. They were taken to signify two different work ethics, accompanied by different moral evaluations of persons and social relations, thereby reinforcing for both the craftsmen and other visitors an image of the castle as the signifier of a moral past—as the quintessence of *heritage*.

The British specialists (the main collaborators of the project) approached the buildings' traditional restoration as a means to reinstate "civil society" as imagery and practice among the local craftsmen, who should then promote it to their own apprentices in various regions of Romania. As such, by becoming involved in recreating a specific built environment (that of the past), people were taught to embody the values associated with this past—that is, a personal responsibility towards buildings as forms of ownership, combined with a particular work ethic and aesthetic dispositions. We witness therefore a peculiar instance in which representations of "tradition" under the form of crafts and skill are being called upon to endorse a project of modernization, in which the locals "learn" democracy through re-learning how to "see" and work on the old buildings. In this case, the castle becomes a vector for mediating novel social relations among people, as the Trust's specialists attempt to impose a semiotics of the moral society onto the buildings themselves. However, through this very process of resignifying the castle to imbue a *Weltanschauung* of morality and responsibility, the NGO creates new forms of exclusion,

by automatically rejecting any renovation done during the communist period and consequently any form of personhood and value created at that time.

Therefore, the Trust adopted an attitude of doing away with the communist times, by asking the construction workers to forget how they used to construct under socialism. Interestingly, they wanted to teach Romanian workers traditional construction techniques, but these skills would be applicable only to renovating older buildings. The knowledge that the craftsmen acquired during the workshop could not be directly applicable in the new construction sites for modern buildings, which bloomed all over Romania in the 1990s and required a significant labor force. The Trust thus not only projected a dichotomous perspective on buildings and the two opposite ways of construction techniques, but they extrapolated it to social relations, as well. They did so by nostalgically idealizing the social worlds represented by the castle before 1945. On one hand, they promoted an image of the castle as the social and cultural center of the village, a perspective that starkly contradicts the more complex economic changes occurring in the interwar times. On the other, they grossly simplified the world in which most of these construction workers lived before 1989.

While the Trust's project stands as a noteworthy ambitious project of restoring a beautiful architectural assemblage back to life, the justificatory framework of the project appears to be far too simplistic. First, it rejects the earlier projects of restoration and conservation that the specialists of the Department for Historical Monuments had promoted and supervised, sometimes after long negotiations with both central and local authorities. Some of these projects may have been more successful than others, but more than twenty years of intensive work of the Department's specialists in built heritage

conservation could not just be dismissed as if it never existed. It is not so much that no heritage concept or policy of heritage preservation was being promoted during the socialist period but that it was significantly thwarted by the gaps of centralization. The Trust makes a broad-brush erasure in suggesting no heritage preservation was in place prior to 1989, which comes in part from their ignorance of the political mechanisms of the socialist state that underlay the heritage-making processes within a centralized system.⁶²¹

Second, by constructing a dichotomous temporal framework with an idealized pre-1945 period, which they want to revive, set in contrast to a purely bleak communist period, the justifications the Trust employed deny a more acute form of continuity. This continuity refers to the intricate links between the former structures of power, such as the local apparatchicks who controlled the regional economic transactions in the communist regime and other forms of networking, and the ones emerging after 1990 by relying on a system of connections and political and economic resources that they had acquired during the communist times.

It is this denial that greatly complicates the Trust's project to transform the castle into a heritage site, accepted as such both by external actors (specialists, politicians, foreign tourists, etc.) and Bonçıda's villagers. Whereas the first category has no doubts about the invaluable cultural richness of the castle, the villagers who have lived for decades with the castle continuously degrading under their eyes cannot easily accept this perspective. Some of them could not understand why a ruined castle, which only a decade ago, as late as the mid-1990s, was considered a ruin, some non-place that respectable people would not dare enter, should suddenly be seen as a unique cultural treasure, a

⁶²¹ I thank Britt Halvorson for drawing my attention to this aspect.

heritage site, of which they should be proud.⁶²² Moreover, by employing tropes of “tradition,” “revival of traditional crafts,” “cultural revival” of the castle, imagined as a representation of a turn-of-the-century idyllic and multicultural Transylvania, the Trust only accentuates the contrast between their project and the plans and hopes of the locals. In an economically unstable region, many of the villagers in Bonțida have been going through prolonged hard times, as most of them have been living off subsistence agriculture or leaving temporarily to search for work in other locations or even abroad.

At the same time, the community’s revival via built heritage is an important trope in the discourse adopted by the Trust when they present their project to EU-funding agencies and other international audiences. The Trust won two Culture 2000 grants (in 2004 and 2006), which was a rare achievement among the non-governmental organizations involved in the heritage field in Romania. The first grant proved to be instrumental for the establishment of a “built heritage conservation training centre,” which I mentioned earlier. Whereas the first grant had exclusively focused on the renovation works, the 2006 project presented the castle as an integrated element within the larger community of the village. This time, the Trust’s intentions were to “[d]isseminat[e] know-how at a European level and promot[e] good practice examples in using a built heritage site of European significance for the furtherance of social integration and citizenship.”⁶²³ As the proposal further argued, the NGO’s projects would start from the castle as a nucleus of inspiration for the local community. The castle’s “revival” would extend then into the village by attempting to engage the local inhabitants

⁶²² Time and again I would hear these lines—why on earth would they [the Trust] put so much money into these ruins, they would never make [the castle] as it used to be—from various people, both Romanians and Hungarians of Bonțida, some of them the local leaders in the village.

⁶²³ The Trust’s Reports and their 2006 application to the Culture 2000 Programme.

in a new appreciation of the site's uniqueness. The application explicitly pointed out the novelty of such a project in a country like Romania, where, despite a "wealth of heritage sites of European significance," no one had so far approached those sites as a potential source of community development. The main goal was to use the expertise gained in projects of community integration developed in the UK and transplant that into the "new" sites. As they put it,

the purpose of this project is to provide a mechanism for the transfer of know-how based on the UK experience; for the mechanism to be tested and the results evaluated through the implementation of a Pilot Project at Bánffy Castle, Bonțida, Romania, and to be easily transferable to other countries as a potential model for promoting social integration through the historic environment.⁶²⁴

The Trust envisioned developing a cultural event that would "help the social cohesion of the region" while enticing the local inhabitants as well as visitors to rediscover the place via cultural performances and socialization *in situ*, on the castle's premises.⁶²⁵ Launched in 2002, three years after the initial reconstruction work on the castle, the Bonțida Cultural Fair became an important focus point for the Trust personnel, as it followed the two summer modules of teaching and preservation work scheduled for May and July every year. In my first conversation with the Trust's manager, he clearly stated that "our agenda is to demonstrate the value of the heritage in order to regenerate the community and not the other way around!" He further elaborated:

The basis of the renovation project is to bring the community [back] into the castle. As the castle used to be economically and socially responsible for communal wellbeing, we wish in turn to reintegrate it into the community, for the community to use the castle's facilities. We want to return [the castle] to the people, so that the castle will never be isolated from the community.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ www.pact-online.ro/en/case-studies/Bánffy-en.htm

⁶²⁶ He offered me a detailed account of how this "return of the castle to the community" would take place: upon their renovation, some of the buildings would be opened as sites for community use. More specifically, there would be 3 areas (set to be used by the local community): the former chapel, which could

When I had arrived in Bonțida at the beginning of summer 2007, I had expected even more that people would talk to me a great deal about the Trust's endeavors of involving the village community in the activities at the castle. Instead, some of my informants displayed a circumspect attitude toward the Cultural Fair. Others were more bluntly critical of the event itself, perceiving it more as an extravagance, something prepared for and enjoyed by visitors and urbanites from nearby Cluj, who would come to listen to chamber music concerts and watch the equestrian competitions. When I asked my host, an old woman born and raised in Bonțida, who lived within a 3 minute walk to the castle's gates, whether she would go to the event in August, she answered me that she had not been to the castle for years and years. "What is there for me to see?," she replied. "Just people selling old things..." Only when I went myself to the castle for the Cultural Fair in August 2007 did I begin to comprehend what Aunt Ana wanted to express.

The entire castle yard was covered by blankets, cars with their trunks wide opened, large tables, all displaying various objects, ranging from Rosenthal china and Nazi Gothic inscribed beer mugs to Baroque golden-framed armchairs that traveled as far as Budapest, together with their owner. Instead of a folk fair, I found a thrift market.

Indeed, to my surprise, during the three days of the Cultural Fair the immense courtyard of the castle was covered by a wide range of mostly old things, which are brought by traders from all across Romania and advertised as "antiques." The traders came because they were fully aware of the classic marketing technique through which the

be used by the community for private celebrations or events; the two rooms at the entrance: for the reception area, then for a small library and computers to be used by the community; the former stables would hold small businesses in traditional crafts.

old objects could become “antique” by capturing an additional market value if displayed in the right site: a ruined aristocratic castle.



Figure 28 Sellers at the Bonțida Cultural Fair, August 2007.

But why did the Trust invite them to the site, when they could potentially mark the Cultural Fair as a flea market? I suggest that this invitation was not grounded in an exclusively economic rationale, with the Trust being only interested in making money from the “display fees” they make the traders pay. This action of bringing these old, seemingly-antique objects into the castle signals also a form of revival of the castle as a form of assembly of things, as an action aimed to reverse the dismantling of the castle that had occurred through its looting immediately after the war and then gradually afterwards.

As I have already shown, the reconstruction of the castle that started in 1999 appeared as a worrisome situation for most of these apparatchiks, who had based their own investment plans on the land and the castle. The revitalization of the castle into a

heritage site of the Transylvanian Hungarian former aristocracy wreaked havoc on the plans of the latter group to build an unusual form of “heritage” for themselves.



Figure 29 Objects, the Bonțida Cultural Fair, august 2007.

As much as the Trust wanted to bring the castle into the open, by developing publicity campaigns and bringing international cultural and political figures to the site in the hope that these celebrities would further publicize the castle abroad, the local politicians wanted to keep it out of sight as much as possible, hidden in various forms in the walls, roofs, and closets of some of the village houses. “It” represented two diverging things, set within two different temporal frameworks: 1) the castle as imagined and promoted through the Trust’s publicity campaigns, and 2) the material remains of a dispersed castle, perhaps purposefully detached from their origin and bearing little connection to the castle as a historical site or as part of a unified historical narrative.



Figure 30 The Bonțida Cultural Fair, August 2007. The castle appears both as an object on display and a display background.

Symbolically, I suggest that the temporal reassembling of the castle with objects brought from far away was meant to counteract the current status of the castle. Besides the site itself, as many Bonțindeans know, the “castle” is literally distributed across the village, in the form of dislocated pieces caught within its built fabric as bricks, roof tiles, or even statues or pieces of furniture hidden in some bedroom closets. Moreover, this temporal rearrangement of disparate material things, endorsed by the Trust during the Bonțida Cultural Fair, together with their being glued onto the castle, both an object of and a background for display, stands also as a powerful metaphor. It illustrates, in fact, how representations of “European heritage” as well as the very concept itself are being made through disparate cultural and material forms, strangely glued together. On the other hand, it could also be a way of resignifying the place as an economic marketplace, as the Trust employs a powerful historical narrative in order to transform the castle into a lively site of transaction, social intercourse, and exchange. Exchange could then serve

ideologically as a metonym for the process hoped-for by the Trust, that of bringing together these often opposed entities of castle and village.⁶²⁷

The Bonçida Cultural Fair represents an attempt of the Trust to rearrange the castle into a culturally coherent site out of an assembly of no longer connected things. Exchange could be the most immediate and persuasive strategy to ground it as an economic and cultural site; however, it is this combination of flea market and cultural site that the Trust proposes that the villagers as well as local officials, each for their own reasons, find most unsettling. I will examine some of these tensions in the last part of the chapter.

Heritage as Proximity, History as Continuity: Conflicting Historical Frameworks in Bonçida

As I will show further, the negotiations over what “heritage” represents in Bonçida and to whom it belongs should be situated within a broader context of tense conflicts emerging not only between various local and external actors, but also distinct and even diverging historiographies, historical frameworks and regimes of property. I will first discuss the stakes that the local authorities currently hold in relation to the castle and the land surrounding it and the duplicitous relationship developed between some of the local leaders and the Trust. I then move to analyze the conflicts over “heritage” as a means employed by different groups in the village to gain access to various political and economic resources.

⁶²⁷ I owe the last point and phrasing to Britt Halvorson.



Figure 31 The center of commune Bontida in summer 2007. The site is marked by the Orthodox Church, the monument of the Romanian soldiers who died during the Second World War, and the Romanian flag. The Bánffy castle lies behind the blue building in the back, but no sign indicates its existence.

The locals' distrustful attitude towards the Trust's project has also been encouraged by some of the local leaders in the village, each of whom would like to retain a significant share of the 400 ha land surrounding the castle, land that used to be in the administration of the village authorities during the communist times. The restoration of the castle has wreaked havoc on more specific plans of the local authorities to maintain full control over the castle and the land. In fact, it was the restoration project that played a significant role in prompting Bánffy's only heir, his adopted daughter who lives now in Morocco, to reclaim the castle and the land back from the Romanian state. This action made the Romanian Ministry of Culture stop any further investment in the project.⁶²⁸ The

⁶²⁸ In his introduction to the English edition of Bánffy Miklós's memoirs, Patrick Thursfield mentions an agreement between the restaurateurs of the site and Bánffy family, which states that, should the castle be regained by Katalin Bánffy, the castle will be used for multiple activities, functioning also a hotel and conference center for visitors, whereas a part of the western building will form private apartments, to be used by Katalin Bánffy and her family during their visits. Patrick Thursfield, "Introduction to the Phoenix Land: The Memoirs of Count Bánffy Miklós," in *The Phoenix Land: The Memoirs of Count Bánffy Miklós*, transl Patrick Thursfield and Katalin Bánffy-Jelen (London: Arcadia, 2003). At the time of my fieldwork in 2007, the managers of the Trust were investigating the possibility of developing a touristic circuit within

local council, and especially the mayor, who held the position between 2000 and 2008 and is himself a very controversial figure, has constantly rejected those claims. He has constantly questioned the right of inheritance of Bánffy's daughter by pointing out that she was not his natural child. Moreover, in one of his first responses—a note sent directly to the prefect of the Cluj county—he inverted the story of the castle's destruction by claiming that:

the notification of the restitution of the Bánffy castle contains a series of inaccuracies. Following some investigations among the older citizens of Bonțida, we found out that at the withdrawal of the last German troupes, the castle had been set on fire by the last owner, Bánffy Miklós, himself. At the moment when it had been taken over by the Romanian state, it was practically an incipient piece of ruin. The state had invested in its conservation starting in 1970.[...] Since 2000, the Ministry of Culture invested [funds] in this castle, investment that is currently [*the note was written in 2001*] going on/active. Consequently, we propose that, given its importance, this monumental assemblage be not included under the Law 10/2001 mandating restitution in kind.⁶²⁹

As of this writing (September 2009), the castle's ownership status is still uncertain. The court has not yet reached a final decision. Meanwhile, the mayor collected various kinds of evidence that would make his position stronger. He shared with me the file containing the correspondence between the lawyers of Bánffy's daughter and Bonțida's town hall, the justifications he sent to the court and the county prefect, copies of older documents, petitions signed by the villagers in 1945 as well as excerpts from the regional press published between 1945 and 1947 with information about Bonțida. Interestingly, he seemed not to have any problems with taking the socialist propaganda against the

the area, which would have included some other sites nearby, such as the Hungarian village of Szek (Sic, in Romanian), famous for its grand, two-floor houses, the local women's folk costumes, and the four churches included in the national list of historical monuments. The village annually holds Szek's Days at the end of August, a cultural fair attended by many tourists from Hungary. It is very likely that the Trust drew inspiration from this cultural fair in Szek when they came up with the idea to organize a similar cultural fair at the castle, also at the end of August.

⁶²⁹ Archive of the Bonțida commune. Note addressed to the prefect of the Cluj county, sent on August 24, 2001.

“bourgeois exploiters” at face value. He in fact intended to use the articles on Bánffy, all of them written in 1945-1946, as real proofs of his “exploitative” demeanor towards the villagers. At the same time, the file that the mayor has used as the main proof to deny Katalin Bánffy’s request for the castle’s restitution also contains a declaration signed by a group of local Hungarians in 1945 attesting to Bánffy’s involvement in the community and his generosity toward Boņida. This very document complicates the account that the file is meant to deliver, as it could act as a counterproof undermining the entire architecture of evidence concocted by the mayor. However, if the same document is read against the contemporary distribution of power among the ethnic groups in Boņida, it could very well stand as proof of the ethnic bias embedded in the project of the reconstruction itself. It would thus confirm the rumor that the castle is being restored by the Hungarians (the Trust) for themselves (also, for the Hungarians), a line that I kept hearing from different Romanians who were visiting or living in Boņida.

The mayor’s attempt to vilify Bánffy could be read not only as a form of validating the new elites (or local leaders) by trampling on the old ones, but also as an effort to keep the castle within its post-1945 uncertain functionality, as a space in between, whose own liminality could still offer the leeway needed to use it for various purposes. The village leaders opposed the reconstruction of the castle not only before, but also after 1989 by downplaying its historical importance. They did so while continuing to exploit its uncertain ownership status and use it as a private resource. At the same time, those leaders, most of them working directly with the former local apparatchiks, managed to justify the unbalanced “redistribution of resources” by relying on and very likely

directly participating in the circulation of an all-inclusive narrative of destruction in which the village participated as one.



Figure 32 The Main Street in Bonțida, summer 2007.

Most of the stories I heard in Bonțida included the elements of violence and destruction as a significant part of the narrative. But those elements were tamed, as they were deemed things from the past (“this was all in the past”). The collectivity appeared as a whole as a single social actor—“the whole village stole”—while the justification was offered immediately afterwards: “anyhow, the Germans had set it on fire, so there was not much left.” This relegation to a past that no one ever wants to see again, not even merely with words, signifies the reluctance of a will to memory, which is also very much orchestrated by some of the local elites. I suggest that it is they who have contributed to endorsing a sense of collective responsibility for the castle’s destruction. More specifically, they made this destruction much easier for the villagers to bear and thus eventually to be forgotten. They not only portrayed the looting of the castle as having been a collective act, one shared across the whole village, but also described it as an insignificant consequence of an event (the fire set by the German troupes) occurring in wartime (in other words, a different temporal frame than the post-1945 period).

When I complained that people in Bonțida kept saying that they did not remember much about the castle, a Hungarian stonemason who kept coming to the castle every summer for the the Trust workshops said that actually “they [the people of Bonțida] do not want to remember because they feel guilty” for having destroyed and looted the castle in 1945 and afterwards. This explanation was then strengthened by a remark of a person with high status among Bonțida’s Hungarians, who came to live in Bonțida in the late 1980s. Due to his particular position in the local reformed community, people entrusted him with detailed accounts about the Hungarian community, and implicitly of what had happened during earlier times. Also, as his house was located right across from the castle gates, he had direct knowledge of what had been happening in his “neighbor’s backyard.” According to him:

[t]he people in the village had not had many links to the castle and the Bánffy family. The castle was a special site of Bonțida. People had not had much contact either with the Bánffy people, or the castle. They were not allowed to enter the castle’s courtyard. This distance was later reflected in the way [the Bonțideni] destroyed the castle, by constantly stealing and looting. If they had cared about the castle, it would not have been destroyed. At least this was one thing they could have done: not steal. We cannot say they had the castle in their heart, that they felt anything [good] for the castle. [...]

It was not the Gypsies who destroyed the castle, even if people say this now in order to find a scapegoat. It was the people with power and connections [my underlining]. It wasn’t the Gypsies who needed so much wood and construction material. The Gypsies don’t need much. I saw with my own eyes how as late as 1996 those guys [the people with connections] were taking away tractor-loads of bricks from the castle. All they could get...it is easy to blame the Gypsies or someone else. The big trees (from the park)—it was not the Gypsies who took them. The Gypsies took just the bark on the trees; this way the trees dried out and it was easier to cut them down.[...] In fact, people sometimes used to call them names when talking about the Bánffy family. This hate came over the castle during the communist times, and then afterwards. [...] No one from the village ever wanted to save the castle. They were just fine with the castle as it became [abandoned and ruined].⁶³⁰

⁶³⁰ Interview, Bonțida, August 27, 2007.

This story was confirmed by another person in Bontida, a well-situated Romanian, highly respected in the local community, who told me that the Gypsies were putting nails into the taller trees to go up to cut the branches. Once the branches were cut off, then the staff at the local *Ocolul Silvic* could obtain approval to cut down the tree.



Figure 33 The Roma quarter, the poorest neighborhood in Bontida.

The conversation with the local Hungarian adds to the political economical framework that I presented in the first part of the chapter a sociological explanation of the formation of a new elite in the village post-1945. More importantly, it points out the interests of this group to legitimize their newly acquired privileges. These local actors succeed in strengthening their position in the village's hierarchy by literally grounding themselves in a new environment built out of the remains of the castle and by buying various favors with the large amounts of wood generated by the old trees cut from the park. My interlocutor's particular situation enabled him to provide a fuller picture of the tense social landscape of the village. (As a newcomer, he was relatively neutral to the village history and therefore less enmeshed in local struggles for political and economic

resources, while his high rank within the local Hungarian group enabled his access to a wealth of information). First, he stressed that the people “with power and connections” actively and continuously pursued the destruction of the castle before and after 1989, being those who carried away bricks with tractors. He then pointed out that the Roma, who usually took what the others left, such as dried tree branches, had been merely used as scapegoats by the first group of well placed villagers, especially when they felt put on the spot and questioned about the sudden and massive disappearance of a key local resource (the castle, the park, and the land).

This narrative sheds more light on the intricate relationship between the local authorities and distinct groups in the village. To better understand the ways in which the local authorities, and especially the mayor, have developed different relations with specific groups in Bonțida is a prerequisite for an in-depth analysis of the negotiations over what “heritage” represents and to whom it should belong. During the informal conversations I had with the mayor, he openly accused the Roma of being lazy and for having devastated the castle’s site. Later on, I learned, however, from other conversations with villagers, including some Roma, that the latter had been systematically hired by the mayor to work on his domains or to perform various tasks, such as taking down an abandoned building on land to be then sold by the city hall.

This relationship between the mayor and the Roma was harshly criticized by other people in Bonțida. For instance, my Romanian host and her Romanian and Hungarian neighbors accused the mayor of having encouraged the Roma, some of whom moved into the village after 1995, to display a cheeky attitude towards other residents, born and bred in Bonțida. This was a more overt criticism towards the mayor, which I got to hear in

more relaxed settings of small social gatherings. Most of the villagers, however, did not dare to challenge the mayor straightforwardly, since he supervised the land restitution in Bonțida in the late 1990s and they therefore felt somewhat obliged to him for having their land plots back. The locals found themselves ensnared in a network of obligations towards the mayor for the land they had managed to obtain back from the state. At the same time, they have had to confront difficulties in making their land profitable, with some of them ending up selling it to people from the city (Cluj) or to others in the village who have the technology and economic means to work it.

As in other locations, the local authorities in Bonțida who held the allocation rights in the postsocialist land reform managed to acquire an immense and immediate political capital, as well as important resources from maneuvering the redistribution of land plots.⁶³¹ Many of those characters, well versed in the complicated workings of the socialist economy, managed to create a new niche within the local social hierarchies. From this position, they have aimed to build upon the already accumulated capital in order to fashion themselves into the new local economic and political elites.

In Bonțida, the mayor, who in 2007 was already almost at the end of his second 4-year term, perfectly fits the description. During my first meeting with him, I mentioned to him that I had heard that among other projects, the Trust planned to open a stud farm within the territory of the castle, one that would conjure up the memories of the famous stud farm of count Bánffy. The mayor's immediate reaction upon hearing my comment was "we have our own horses, as well!" somewhat hinting that his horses would be no worse than any others to be brought to the castle for potential tourists. At the same time,

⁶³¹ For a detailed discussion of this complex process, see Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

as critical as he was about the Trust's support for Bánffy's heir to reclaim the castle back from the Romanian state, the mayor kept cultivating a duplicitous alliance with the Trust. For instance, on the occasion of the Bonțida Cultural Fair in summer 2007, which had been annually organized by the Trust on the premises of the castle, the mayor held his inauguration speech and then offered the title of honorable citizen of Bonțida to one of the Trust's managers, who gladly accepted it. In exchange, the Trust offered the city hall a significant number of tickets to the three-day event, the Bonțida Cultural Fair, which should have been distributed to the more important people in the village (the teachers, the priests at the Orthodox and Reformed churches, as well as to other local persons of means). However, the mayor did follow strictly the local hierarchy, as he used the tickets to solidify his own alliances in the village while ignoring others who should have been theoretically invited, but with whom he was no longer on speaking terms.

This complex triangle of reciprocal mistrust and duplicitous alliances among three distinct groups—the Trust, the villagers, and the local authorities—sets the discussions about the castle and its preservation as a unique heritage site in a different light. These fierce debates raises the question: what does stand as heritage, for whom and in which historical time? The Trust struggles to receive recognition from the locals for the efforts to reconstruct and preserve the Bánffy castle as a heritage site of *fin-de-siecle* Transylvania. They hope to transform it into a luxurious residence for well to do tourists who would pay a wealth of money if they could turn, even for a few weeks, into some of the characters of Bánffy Miklós's novels. The other group, such as the mayor and his local acolytes, want to preserve a different type of "heritage." The latter represents the resources that the local authorities had managed to accumulate in the early years of a

blurry postsocialist economy via the collective farm land restitution and other forms of speedy privatization, in which valuable assets of the former economy were being sold for nothing.

These two groups want to keep the castle within a distinct historical time, either as a private estate, restored to a symbol of pre-war Hungarian heritage, or as a non-place, a dispersed collective possession that stood as the “property of our village,” as the mayor put it. In contrast with these two agendas, the most important and acute form of heritage for the villagers is the land. It is this land that they strove to receive back from the state, but that many of them, due to lack of financial resources and management knowhow, cannot fully transform into a profitable enterprise.

The project of restoring the castle and according it a heritage value therefore stands as a window onto larger social and economic processes occurring in contemporary Romania. An analysis of this process offers new insights into the ways in which claims for cultural heritage have been increasingly employed by various groups as strategies to gain political visibility. However, notions of heritage-making in Bonțida are just one among several competing claims to the castle, which still fails to be fully intelligible or at least sensible to villagers.⁶³²

As I have shown in this chapter, the local authorities have their own interest in keeping the castle within the collective ownership of the village. They have appropriated the discourse of heritage in order to use it to counter the claims for the castle’s restitution that had been put forth by the heirs of the former owner of the castle, Bánffy Miklós. The mayor and his acolytes shifted from treating the castle as a resource of construction materials to suddenly deeming the castle the village’s heritage, which should belong to

⁶³² I owe this observation and phrasing to Britt Halvorson.

the villagers and not to the inheritors who never visited the site after 1945, as they claim. I suggest that this group of apparatchiks-turned-into-entrepreneurs set their arguments within a framework of heritage as practice or heritage as proximity. That is, they draw upon a historical span of the last fifty years when the castle and the estate, as a state-owned good, had been under their own administration. This actually meant that the local officials regarded the entire estate as disparate parts of property or valuables that they could appropriate in order to further individual economic goals or political alliances.

By contrast, the Trust and its funding agencies, including Hungary's Ministry of National Heritage, are working within a framework of heritage as recognition. In it, they approach the castle as one of the most important Hungarian sites in Transylvania, which must be restored and preserved as a private estate, rightfully returned to its original owners, the Bánffy family. They present the restoration of the castle as an active preservation of an important ethnic group of interwar Romania: the Hungarians of Transylvania and especially its political and cultural elites, among whom Bánffy Miklós was an important figure. This framework of heritage as recognition also helps the Trust to be eligible for European funding. They promote their project not only as a restoration of a site significant for the cultural history of Europe, but also as yet another indicator of cultural diversity and political stability in the EU-zone, to which Romania gained access in 2007. The success of the Trust's enterprise lies in their conflating two distinct historical frameworks. Specifically, they call upon a turn-of-the-century multicultural Central Europe to use it as a political metonym for an EU-zone that seeks to justify itself by invoking a transnational European heritage.

Conclusion

The ongoing reconstruction of the Bánffy castle in Bonțida, supervised by the Trust, represents one of the most important projects of built heritage revival in Transylvania. As a project aiming for ethnic minorities to have their heritage recognized, the restoration of the Bánffy castle and its transformation into an international heritage site stand as a promise to heal historical wounds and restore social fabrics torn apart during and after the socialist regime. Even though many of the villagers, both Romanians and Hungarians, took part in the looting of the castle immediately after the war, very few locals would be willing to talk about their relatives' participation in this long operation of disassembling the castle and spreading it into various pieces across the village. Most of the villagers accuse the local Roma of having stolen these things, but the Roma are in fact the scapegoats. This complex, immense rearrangement of material forms, a decentralization and recentralization of capital, was orchestrated in fact by the new village leaders after the Second World War. They were the local authorities of the socialist state, some of whom continued to have significant political leverage even after the regime change in 1989.

In this chapter, my aim was to examine the multiple meanings of “heritage” in Bonțida and how distinct groups employed them. I pointed out that the Trust could not so far gain significant local support because it simultaneously advances two contradictory agendas. On one hand, in their official description of the project, the Trust argues that they aim for a revival of the local community via the transformation of the castle into a heritage site, a vision very much informed by projects already successfully implemented in the UK. In other words, they want to teach the local population to relearn to appreciate

what they had next to them—the castle—something that once had been destroyed, but that could be rekindled back to life with the villagers’ support. On the other hand, the Trust’s rehabilitation project has been instrumental in having the Bánffy heirs initiate the request for the castle’s restitution and its transformation into a private estate. However, the local authorities of the village adamantly oppose the castle’s restitution.

In order to counteract the authorities’ maneuvers to retain the castle within the collective ownership of the village, the Trust presented the castle’s partial reconstruction as a form of moral obligation. They assert that the castle’s destruction during socialist times could be undone not only by restoring its original form, but also by being returned to its original owners. Moreover, they claim that people could better comprehend the model and practices of civil society by learning traditional building techniques at the castle. However, in contrast to the case of Sibiu, where GTZ initiated workshops for the residents of the city’s center to learn how to restore and preserve their houses, the villagers in Bonțida were never invited to the Trust’s workshops held at the castle every summer.

Like other projects of built heritage rehabilitation under development in Transylvania, the strong desire of Transylvanian heritage specialists to reconstruct the Bánffy castle met not only the interest of foreign architects and other specialists in building conservation. It also fulfills the increasing demand of EU institutional bodies for cultural agents to produce material representations of “European heritage.” In order to present the castle as a site of European significance in the present, the Trust called upon an idyllic image of a multicultural central Europe of the turn of the 19th century, which they conflate with an EU-centered discourse of cultural rights and unity in diversity in a

21st century Europe. Unfortunately, the “local community” that the Trust’s managers invoke in their funding application does not exist in reality. The villagers find themselves caught between two historical frameworks and two opposite ways of defining the relationship between people and things, with neither of which they could identify. One represents the turn of the century *Mitteleuropa* that the Trust invokes as the period characteristic for the heritage of the castle. The other is an idealized socialist economic order, which the local officials call upon in order to render an illusionary sense of collective ownership of the community over the castle.

Both strategies have entailed distinct forms of maneuvering history for individual benefit. The Trust has been trying to excavate data and stories that would consolidate their discourse about the castle’s historical importance in the economy of the community at large, while ignoring earlier projects of restoration implemented at the castle. A distinct erasure of history underlies the idyllic, politically saleable narrative about multiethnic society that the Trust has tried to attach to the castle project in order to make it appealing to funding bodies. The local officials, on the other hand, would like to dismiss exactly what the Trust had been trying to unearth: the history of the former Transylvanian Hungarian aristocracy, who played an important role in shaping the political and cultural context of contemporary Transylvania.

In conclusion, the conflicts over heritage in Bonțida stem not only from the distinct relations between different groups and the things they regard as heritage, but also from the different historical frameworks that are called upon by those groups in order to justify the “heritage” value of specific things. Diverging understandings of history underlie the heritage-making process in the case of the Bánffy castle. An approach to

history as a set of ruptures (from the interwar period to communist times, and then from the latter to a democratic postsocialist setting, currently within the EU zone) underlies the Trust's project of restoration and preservation of the castle as a heritage site. From the perspective of the Trust's specialists, the site's restitution to Bánffy's heirs and its potential transformation into a privately owned estate, opened to luxurious international tourism, would also signify a restored social order, in which the locals would have (re)learned the political tools of democracy, lost during the communist regime.

In contrast, the refusal of the local authorities to accept the restitution of the castle signal an understanding of history as multiple continuity. By presenting the castle as the most important collective possession of the village, this group keeps relying on the social practices and economic mechanisms developed during the communist times in order to legitimize their current position in a postsocialist order. Ironically, they make these claims at a time when an intense transnational migration and a new regime of property have led to a broader individualization of rights in communities all across the former socialist bloc.

Therefore, the Trust's management should start paying more attention to the post-socialist class structure under formation in the mirror of earlier social hierarchies. Such attention would also help them acquired a more nuanced understanding of the complex and dynamic relations among the local groups in Bonțida, which are far from forming a homogenous "community," self-defined through an equally homogenous form of heritage.

CONCLUSION

The main question that this dissertation has attempted to answer relates to the broader imaginaries of political and social order underlying projects of heritage-making in a location that underwent radical political upheavals during the 20th century: socialist and postsocialist Romania. What do the three case studies of built heritage rehabilitation or revival tell us about how various groups (socialist technocrats, British experts in historical preservation, German coordinators of development projects, Romanian politicians, and people living on or within the vicinity of “heritage sites”) imagine and pursue diverging, often conflictual, representations of history, politics, citizenry, and social relations? First, these case studies (the Old Court in socialist Bucharest, the beautification of Sibiu’s historical downtown, and the rehabilitation of the Bánffy castle in Bonțida) show that debates around what heritage is and what it is good for are deeply embedded in economic, social, and political processes of global significance. As I pointed out in the Introduction, what “heritage” means in the year 2010 is vastly different from what the same word connoted as recently as 1978, the year when the UNESCO World Heritage List was established. In the last 20 years, the discourse of heritage has been embraced as a powerful way of marking and requesting political visibility. Many groups invoke heritage as a way to ground current claims of political recognition by calling upon a history of cultural uniqueness, which distinguishes them from other

groups. The paradox, therefore, is that in an increasingly interconnected world, cultural boundaries between groups and people are being redrawn again as strategies to preserve cultural difference as economic value. A close reading of the ways in which “heritage” is invoked, represented, and practiced could therefore reveal how discourses about “history” are employed in order to justify or reject situated interconnections among cultural, political, and economic concerns.

Heritage as Assembly of Things

By searching for the meanings taken by “heritage” during two politically distinct periods in 20th century Romania—socialist times and the post-socialist, contemporary period—I aimed to understand the specific political and semiotic processes through which historical meanings have been assigned to material forms, be they historical buildings, archeological artifacts, or cultural goods. At the same time, I sought to inquire into the opposite process, by asking under what conditions particular material forms, such as castles in Transylvania, had been divested of political meaning and what other signification they acquired instead. This field could be further explored, I suggest, if we begin to analyze the processes of signification that are engendered by the particular ways in which things are ordered in relation to one another. One possible line of research that would add a new perspective to the processes of heritage-making in socialist Eastern Europe is an approach that brings recent insights from science and technology studies to bear on the political pursuit of new urban imaginaries in the socialist bloc. More specifically, I have drawn upon Bruno Latour’s argument that things, far from being mere receptacles of ideas of social order, in fact constrain and construct it. He contends that

things should always be understood as contingent *assemblies*. If we apply Latour's statement to the urban landscapes of the socialist bloc, we could better understand how urban forms acquired signification and a history via a constant negotiation among the strategies whereby politicians assigned ideological meanings to urban landscapes, as well as the very material contingencies—the stubbornness of things, as Latour would call it—that challenge those associations. Such an approach could lead to comparative research that considers the formation of a specific regime of *socialist* heritage as a specific type of assembly, entailing a particular distribution of value to things, which took shape across the Eastern bloc during the Cold War period. Moreover, as I also suggested at the beginning of this dissertation, this socialist heritage may have emerged as a way to represent and justify a particular relationship between history and modernity, one grounded in Marxist ideology and its emphasis on materialism. Moreover, an increasing monitoring of the cultural field, pursued by transnational institutions such as UNESCO, appealed to both political blocs (the socialist countries and the capitalist ones). They began to treat the cultural domain as an alternative field to wage more subtle political conflicts during the Cold War period.

In socialist Romania, I argued, heritage represented a form to legitimize and even literally ground the new state. A heritage regime offered legitimacy to a communist government that had been forged and imposed by external political actors within the radical redefinition of global geopolitics in the aftermaths of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War period. The first part of the dissertation showed how this complex process relied not only on a collection and rearrangement of material forms

(movable and immovable goods), but also on the resignification of the ways in which these things were reordered in relation one to another.

From the old walls found in the center of Bucharest, planned as an urban pinnacle of socialist architecture, to the houses in Sibiu or the castle in Bontida, this dissertation has moved from one kind of *assembly* to another. It did so by examining different contexts in which things become meaningful and enter the heritage domain. The thesis also followed the trajectory of distinct political projects, by analyzing the consolidation of a field of heritage at two different political moments in 20th century Romania. To understand how materiality was imbued with highly conflictual meanings in two multiethnic locations in Transylvania right before and immediately after Romania's inclusion in the European Union in January 2007, I argued that it is crucial to first analyze how the relationships between people and things had been defined during socialist times. Therefore, the project of heritage-making currently being pursued at the Bánffy castle offers some interesting parallels to the rehabilitation of Sibiu's historical center between 2000 and 2006, as well as to the rebuilding of a part of the Old Court Palace in socialist Bucharest between 1968 and 1971. In the first part of the dissertation, I explored how in the early socialist period some walls, those of the Old Palace in the center of Bucharest, were being assigned political meaning by being set within a historical framework linking feudalism to socialism. A similar process, but informed by a different political agenda, has occurred in Sibiu in the late 1990s, where Sibiu's houses that had been owned by the Saxons have been portrayed as extensions and signs of their former owners through the rehabilitation project sponsored by the German state. The rehabilitation project pursued at the Bánffy castle illustrates yet another case of diverging

groups vying for political recognition, whose claims take distinct material forms in the ways in which they relate to the castle as an assembly of things. More specifically, the heritage specialists have attempted to reassign the site a coherent meaning, by linking a ruined castle to many of its original pieces lying hidden, spread around the village, and bringing other objects to the premises of the castle, via the Bonțida Cultural Fair. In order to reverse this process and maintain their administrative rights over the estate, the local officials deemed the castle an irreversible ruin, unworthy of preservation. In sum, this dissertation explored how the physical actualities of the sites themselves, the building materials, their appearance in the middle of a socialist Bucharest, their migration into surrounding structures in Bonțida or their redesign, as was the case with the house facades in Sibiu, conveyed the non-verbal dimensions of competing temporal frameworks, historical narratives, aesthetic preferences and visions of social order. An analysis of these competing narratives could tell us more about the distinct groups that assigned meanings and values to such forms, about why they chose one framework over another, about the ways they imagined themselves as historical actors and the deeper reasons underlying their aesthetic choices.

Imaginarities of Social Order: Configuring Peoplehoods through the Built Environment

The first part of this dissertation also inquired into the specific institutional mechanisms, ideological arguments, and material forms employed by the post-1947 socialist government to create a post-ethnic, post-class workers' state of "socialist nationalities" out of an ethnically diverse and culturally heterogeneous Romania. More

specifically, I argued that architecture and urbanism, as technologies of redefining spatial and social relations, played a pivotal role in this political project of homogenization emerging in the early 1950s across the socialist bloc, under the direct influence of a Stalinist USSR. Furthermore, I contended that this technocratic project of defining Romania's identity as a socialist country must be set in conjunction with the complementary enterprise of creating a past that would ground the imagery of the socialist future. The latter concerns the creation of a "peoples' heritage" formed of selected movable and immovable forms: those buildings and objects that had been collected from the ethnically and regionally diverse groups that formed the middle and upper class of interwar Romania. I showed how the state officials of early socialism aimed to de-ethnicize those forms, by stripping them of their localized historical and cultural value in order to assign them an exclusively political dimension. These things became symbols of a post-class socialist society, in which they represented the inviolable possession of the socialist people, and thereby materially constituted and legitimized the body politic of the new state.

Moreover, this reordering of things accompanied a reordering of people. The latter were moved from one social status to another, or from one part of the country to another where labor power was needed for the developing industrial field, or even from their residences to forced residence in the countryside or even to political prison. The making of a socialist heritage was a project of endorsing a new vision of social and political order, that of an increasingly homogenized post-class and post-ethnic socialist peoplehood. As the transformation of the ruined walls of the Old Court in the center of Bucharest shows, the "new" heritage sites of the socialist regime came to be the very

material embodiments of the political regime's conceptions of peoplehood. The intense negotiations among technocrats, architects, and archeologists regarding the making of the Old Court into a museum reveal broader political shifts occurring in Romania after Stalin's death in 1953. That is, the creation of the Museum of the Old Court illustrates how Romanian communists tried to create national heritage within a political environment dominated by their struggles to diminish Soviet domination.

Beginning in the late 1950s the regime changed its tactics. In an attempt to limit Soviet influence over every domain of Romania's social and cultural life, Party officials began to develop a project of national heritage-making that would no longer need Soviet "expertise." As such, institutional efforts were directed to produce a framework of historical continuity for the Romanian nation on the territory of 20th century Romania. Consequently, the processes whereby material forms were assigned meaning shifted as well. Movable or immovable things acquired a political meaning only if there were good reasons for them to carry the label of "(Romanian) national history."

The national heritage-making pursued by the socialist state reflected the workings of a heavily centralized system. It represented a project of cultural homogenization by producing a dichotomous map of things and people. Heritage-making in socialist Romania aimed to create simultaneously a homogeneous form of peoplehood inhabiting a politically homogeneous territory, set within a framework of historical continuity. (For instance, the attempts to reconstruct the Bánffy castle in Bonțida were justified only through aesthetic arguments, and not as forms of recuperating the Hungarian heritage in Transylvania.)

Despite this intended social homogenization that was to be pursued not only discursively, but also through a radical reordering of place, built environment, cultural objects and even people (moved from one part of the country to another), new strategies of social and ethnic differentiation emerged as subtle responses during the 1960s and developed during the 1970s. A comparison between the forms of social homogenization deployed in Bucharest of the 1960s and those pursued in Sibiu and Bontida during the 1970s and 1980s, as they came across in my interlocutors' accounts, offers an interesting perspective on how the concept of "heritage" was understood and manipulated by different groups in Romania. The second part of the dissertation examined what particular shape the centrist project of social homogenization took in two sites in Transylvania (Sibiu and Bontida), as well as the extent to which this former socialist project still informs the recent social and economic transformations in these sites. I showed how the dichotomous forms of spatialized knowledge that the postsocialist state wanted to impose by designating concentrated urban areas as "heritage sites" and contrasting them with socialist urban landscapes of modernist architecture were subtly countered by local histories of multiethnic inhabitation. Those histories informed the ways in which groups were actively creating a situated heritage-as-practice, which countered forms of heritage imposed by the state. At the same time, some interesting oxymorons appeared at the conjunction of local social patterns, multiethnic histories, and the centralizing project of the socialist state.

The cases of Sibiu and Bontida illustrate how centrist models of "socialist peoplehood" had been adjusted to locally and historically thicker social differences projected onto a map of ethnic distinctions. Thus, the shift between the two sections of

the dissertation is also a scale-shift between the center and the margins of the state project of creating a post-class, post-ethnic socialist peoplehood that, in fact, becomes ever more Romanian. Far from being too homogeneous, this peoplehood was divided along the Party-line, in which the officials within the Party, starting from local affiliation to the central ones, were a distinct group, almost a different kind of people. One of the contributions of this dissertation is to show not only how imageries of social order were being concocted and negotiated among technocrats at the center of the socialist system, but also how they took shape on the ground and became enmeshed within more heterogeneous cultural patterns, especially in multiethnic regions such as Transylvania.

These complex situated social patterns continue to undergird the local responses to the heritage-making projects that have been pursued in both sites during the 1990s and 2000s. At the same time, they have intersected with new cultural models, which are being brought along by external actors, ranging from international heritage specialists, technocrats pursuing projects of local development in the region, as well as agendas of cultural diversity and ethnic recognition set forth by EU actors especially in the new member states, such as Romania. In the last two chapters of this dissertation, I analyzed how these new external interests meet long-durée histories of interethnic cohabitation and social patterns endorsed by the socialist regime. I used the two projects of heritage revival in Sibiu and Bonțida to also explore how they endorse new clusters of political capital by adding to them an ethnic significance. As such, the rebuilding of a castle or the rehabilitation of medieval houses become political projects through which novel forms of “European” peoplehoods, such as Saxon or Hungarian, are being imagined and debated. From a different point of view, the two ethnographic sites and the projects of heritage-

remaking taking place in Sibiu and Bontida represent two instances of response to the still cumbersomely centrist social and cultural policies of the postsocialist state. Both signal claims for ethnic recognition understood as cultural and economic decentralization. More specifically, the rehabilitation of Sibiu's medieval houses as well as the reconstruction of the Bánffy castle in Bontida are forms of revaluing these material forms as instances of European heritage in order for local and transnational groups to reclaim their restitution by the postsocialist Romanian state. As such, these rehabilitation projects claim forms of political currency in a broader European cultural landscape set both outside of and within an increasingly decentralized state, now part of the EU zone.

Centripetal Socialism, Centrifugal Europeanization: Regimes of Expertise and Projects of Heritage-Making in Fluctuating Political Geographies

This dissertation also analyzed the formation of distinct regimes of cultural expertise within contrasting political geographies. More specifically, Part I emphasized the consolidation of a localized framework of expertise through the attempt of the Politburo, led by Gheorghiu-Dej, to reject any counseling from the Soviet specialists by increasingly relying on Romanian professionals. In the first chapters, I showed how the socialist state was engaged in producing “experts of the past” *across* several key institutional sites, set within different disciplinary frameworks. A new regime of expertise emerged, in which the central political actors entrusted specialists from adjacent professional domains (archeology, architecture, museum curatorship) with the creation of a heritage for the new state. In an attempt to limit Soviet influence over every domain of Romania's social and cultural life, Party officials began to develop a project of national

heritage-making that would no longer need Soviet “expertise.” The creation of the Museum of the Old Court in Bucharest illustrates how Romanian communists tried to create national heritage within a political environment governed by their struggles to diminish Soviet domination. Gheorghiu-Dej’s strong determination to lessen Moscow’s direct intervention in Romania’s internal affairs after 1953 is proven by the compromise that he made of inviting formerly ostracized local professionals, “the old elements” who had built a career during the interwar “bourgeois” period, to help younger professionals build a socialist Romania. However, as I showed in Part I, the encounter between these “older elements” and the younger professionals coming of age in the socialist period turned out to be rather tense, due to their diverging professional visions, emerging out of different training, education, and experience. Instead of a smoothly running system of obedient technocrats that the central political actors had initially envisioned, the regime of indigenous experts set in charge of the project of socialist modernization turned out to be ridden with internal conflicts.

Ironically, this turmoil was amplified by further struggles for resources within a centralized state-owned economy. The formation and arrangement of networks of cultural expertise in socialist Romania, set in a dynamic tension with one another but always oriented towards a single center of power, mirrored broader mechanics of the socialist system as a whole, a system that drew its political legitimacy by incessantly guzzling resources and hoarding them at the center. The project of transforming the Museum of the Old Court into a national heritage site, which I discussed in Part I, reveals the merry-go-round model of the socialist system, in which cultural capital was constantly gravitating around a political center, with the cultural actors fully depending on the

political apparatus for resources. The unilaterality of these accumulations of capital (be they political, cultural, or economic) at the center had a direct impact on the development of the cultural expertise networks, which became increasingly obtuse and sluggish, more and more prone to serve no other cultural values but the ideological tenets of a socialism with a strong nationalist penchant.

Thus, if we set our analysis within a political economic perspective, the two parts of the dissertation illustrate different relationships between cultural and political capital in two distinct historical times. In Part I, I show how specialists possessing unique technical expertise, such as architects and archeologists who had made a career in pre-communist times, were employed by key political actors to create further concentrations of political capital at the “center.” (In this case, the “center” was symbolically as well as institutionally represented by the capital of the country, Bucharest.) But the competition was high, as many professionals from various disciplinary domains vied for the attention of a relatively small group of politicians. The fights among these specialists therefore occurred not only within their professional domain, but also across distinct disciplinary areas, as different groups attempted to validate and impose their own hierarchies of cultural capital. Thus, the debates over what kinds of things—be they buildings, walls, or areas in the center of the city—represented “cultural heritage” expose the efforts of different groups of specialists owning different kinds of cultural capital, who were striving to outdo each other in defining what disciplinary grounds would “count” (archeology, architecture).

In contrast to the centripetal configuration of socialist networks of expertise, the case studies of heritage building in contemporary Transylvania, which I analyzed in Part

II, illustrate the constitution of a more fluid form of transnational European expertise. This regime of expertise emerged from a more dispersed, indeed centrifugal, institutional landscape. Here, cultural producers compete for funding and resources coming from different sources, ranging from EU funding to private monies of aristocratic families of Europe, such as Prince Charles of Wales, or even public monies from western states, such as the UK, Germany, or the Netherlands. At first glance, this network of expertise appears to have a more rhizome-like configuration, in which cultural actors (in our case, specialists in cultural communication, built heritage, architecture, or art) continuously draw up new paths, as they participate in multiple heritage projects simultaneously and migrate from one to another with ease and efficiency.

During the first decade after the dismantling of the communist regime, the central government showed little interest in transnational NGOs pursuing heritage revival projects in Romania. However, starting in the late 1990s, many of the NGOs turned to be increasingly important for central political institutions. Romanian politicians became more open to systematic collaboration, inviting these transnational experts to work as external consultants for the Ministry of Culture, to join national commissions for the protection of built heritage (as Romania's president, Traian Băsescu, did in 2008), or to apply for substantial funding from the national budget for heritage projects. Especially after the establishment of liberal governments in 1997 and again in 2004, the central political actors realized that they could no longer rely exclusively on local experts and specialists to create and control the cultural domain, a role that the latter had fulfilled within the centripetal model of cultural production under socialism. This radical turn signaled that Romanian politicians were gradually becoming aware of the importance of

transnational networks of expertise, including the NGOs pursuing projects of heritage revival for transnational institutions like the EU. In other words, we encounter here yet another case in which cultural capital is being called upon to legitimize political agendas, except this happens within a more flexible environment, set under the competitive dynamics of the global markets.

Especially after the inclusion of Romania in the EU in 2007, these transnational networks of expertise exerted increasing leverage on the reconfiguration of meanings and representations of “culture” in Romania. For instance, in contrast to the localized and self-sufficient model of cultural production under socialism, which promoted exclusively autochthonous assessments of “national culture,” the cases of heritage-making in Bontida and Sibiu show how foreign experts assume the leading role in creating a heritage for another group. The field of cultural production, as it is being reconfigured in the cases of Sibiu and Bontida, appears therefore as much more dynamic and porous than the one produced in socialism. In it, different groups or individuals pursue the making or reproduction of cultural forms, including representations of heritage, according to multiple possible dispensers of resources and their specific agendas. Currently situated in a centrifugal landscape, where Europeanization is supposed to sweep away national representations of culture, these groups must adjust quickly to the new demands. Some of them embrace this process, as they see in it a promise of obtaining a stronger cultural identity and thereby political recognition that national authorities had previously denied them. The projects of heritage-(re)making in Sibiu and Bontida show how the EU-instituted cultural policies prompt groups such as Transylvania’s Saxons or Hungarians to draw upon their cultural capital, already augmented through the heritage projects

sponsored by transnational experts, in order to formulate stronger claims for political recognition within the national borders. Sometimes, however, the multiple participation of these actors in heritage-making projects, be they foreign experts, national politicians, local politicians, or representatives of ethnic groups, reveal that “heritage” itself means different things for different factions.

In the case of the two projects, specialists from abroad managed to promote them to an international audience by emphasizing the value of these sites for European culture as a whole. Moreover, they pointed out these sites’ relative marginality within a framework of national heritage that continued to be tightly controlled by the central political actors in Romania (especially until the late 1990s). Notwithstanding their good intentions, these experts (such as GTZ in Sibiu or Ardeal Trust in Bontida) could not help evaluating these projects of local heritage-making through a clearly defined grid of representations of European culture and political values, which are currently promoted by the EU. Therefore, as the projects in Sibiu and Bontida illustrate, the transnational regime of cultural expertise proves to be less rhizome-like and heterogeneous than it initially appeared. Despite enthusiastic appeals for a more heterogeneous cultural landscape for Europe, transnational institutions exert an increasing pressure on local actors to prove their Europeanness by setting themselves within a rigorously defined cultural scale. In short, these actors, be they minority groups or other kinds of community, are encouraged to present themselves as both *different* enough to obtain a political recognition as a separate group and *similar* enough to maintain claims of belonging to an overarching European community.

In conclusion, this dissertation analyzed the shift from a perspective on heritage rooted in a material culture framework, in which heritage is mainly represented by (specific) objects, to one set within a much more dynamic environment, prone to rapid changes and ever increasing challenges. Part I analyzed the political endorsement of a perspective on heritage-as-object, which not only reinforced a Marxist understanding of culture, rooted in dialectical materialism, but also drastically encroached upon the options of cultural producers. That is, within a centripetal political system that thrived on accumulation of resources at its center, a perspective on heritage as objects allowed the center to limit the range of forms of legitimate cultural expression. The socialist state was not interested in developing too fluid a cultural field, but rather one that could be easily manipulated. A vision of heritage set within a material culture framework permitted greater control over cultural production, as controlling objects was somewhat easier than supervising culture as a process.

This previous model of making heritage through accumulation of objects clashed with the later perspective on heritage as a strategy of “taming down” cultural forms-in-the-making by setting a broader, complex and highly dynamic field of cultural production within a more rigid semiotic grid. Within a global knowledge-based economy, the privilege of claiming a “heritage” has been won by those groups who possess the knowledge and resources to endow objects, gestures, or words with the most persuasive meanings. From a strictly economic point of view, “persuasive” would translate as something that carries financial value. Heritage then becomes a means of clarifying and cutting down a more fluid cultural domain into separate pieces, to be then evaluated and administered by specific political actors (an ethnic group, a national state, or a

transnational institution such as the EU). In order to be effective, cultural forms must be semiotically and economically congealed—hence, the paradigm of intellectual property (IP), in which one cultural act or form must carry only one meaning (become a brand), and nothing else, with this singularity being legally guaranteed by the IP model. This shift from heritage-as-objects to heritage-as-signification must be therefore understood also as an effect of the shift from a Fordist system focused on mass production and a regulated conformity, to a knowledge-oriented economy, which has promoted “uniqueness” and innovation as the main economic and social currencies of the 21st century. The latter has been accompanied by a broader individualization of rights, which further spurred various actors (individuals or communities) to set forth claims for cultural or political recognition.

At the same time, within an increasingly centrifugal landscape such as postsocialist Romania, in which a broader individualization of rights, rapid social polarization, and massive international migration concurred with other forms of economic and social dislocation, different groups have struggled to maintain a sense of cultural identity or/and of ethnic belonging. When “everything that is solid melts in the air,” in a fluid cultural and institutional setting where groups and individuals must continuously adjust to the diverging demands of dispensers of resources, how would individuals or groups search for meaningful forms of cultural identity, based on which they could make further claims for political recognition? I suggest that “heritage” has had the role of partially decanting this fluid environment, by offering a historical narrative as a kind of a sifter for a sense of identity that sometimes becomes, under various kinds of institutional, social and political pressure, increasingly questionable. “Heritage” then

stabilizes and coalesces the cultural domain and enables its use to ground political claims.

This dissertation has argued that, by watching closely how specific regimes of heritage take shape, we can better understand the political imageries of the present.

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