# From the "Castle" to the "Agora": Romanian Cultural Institutes Abroad in the Making of National Culture

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# Abstract

This paper presents the Romanian cultural institutes abroad in the process of making and exporting national culture. It is a particularly interesting process, as Romanian culture is a fluid concept, considering dualities like official and unofficial culture, tradition and innovation, culture and politics (particularly cultural diplomacy for cultural institutes abroad), modern and post-modern features. There are also tensions concerning practical strategies of functioning, namely between the center and the local branch, between the "fortress" and the "open space", and between the concentrated model of the state and the networking, de-concentrated supranational model of EU.

Nevertheless, though the cleavages are real, I have identified a major historical shift of the Romanian institutes: they become more open and de-concentrated, moving from the "castle" model to the one of the "agora", both as a discourse and as institutional de-concentration.

These discursive and administrative shifts in the Romanian cultural institutes abroad reflect macro sociological historical changes, such as the passage from modernity to post-modernity, the existence of two different models of discourse and strategy (the national state and the European Union), and an increasing cultural dimension as opposed to the decreasing role of diplomacy in the activities of Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

I have analyzed two Romanian cultural institutes in Italy (in Rome and Venice) and their relation to the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest. My results demonstrate that Romanian cultural institutes abroad are changing from the national model to a more European one, based on innovation, cultural networking and promotion of cultural events that motivate the public in the "host" country, all integrated in the larger frame of cultural relativism as proposed by post-modernity.

**Table of Contents**

# Introduction

"People always told stories. Much before manhood learned how to write,

people were telling and listening to stories"

(Grass 2007: blurb)

My written story is a story about another story, or maybe a story told and created by many other stories put together -which in the academic world is called a narrative, political discourse or a "mythological project" (Hobsbawm 1992), as I will further explain.

There are seventeen main characters in my story, spread around the world: the Romanian cultural institutes abroad, who move from the "castle" model to the "agora" one. The "castle" metaphor comes from Kafka's novel with the same title and represents the centralized system, the fortress that is unreachable and unattainable for common individuals, who are outside the "castle" and cannot get inside. In opposition, I use the Greek concept of "Agora" for defining the open space or open doors, where dialogue, communication and negotiation are essential for the well functioning of such a space.

The history of Romanian cultural institutes abroad can be described as a romance, because it implies patriotism. It is an adventure as it shows the happenings of European countries, a story which evolves from disastrous wars to a beautiful friendship, what we call today the European Union. It is also a story about culture, creativity and art, about taste and cultural goods, changing from a modern to a post-modern perception, as they are reflected by what we call the "national culture".

In "Catherine the Great", Henry Troyat describes a very nice episode when future Empress Catherine the second decides to wear a very simple, white dress at a very sophisticated ball. The

1

reactions appear immediately, as all the guests have something to say. Fortunately, the general opinion is a positive one.

In a similar manner, a discourse on national culture creates strong reactions, and it is desirable to have positive effects. So, in the case of cultural institutes abroad there is always the question: "What kind of dress should I wear, in order to be in the spotlight, and to be admired and appreciated?" Briefly, this is what cultural institutes do every week when they present their cultural events in front of the audience.

A research on such a topic is important not only because it presents the activity of Romanian cultural institutes, their models of functioning and their shifts in time, but because it also shows their present position among other relevant actors, like the national state or the European Union. As I will further demonstrate, these two mentioned actors (the national state and the EU) are also formed by other different actors (like The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or European Union National Institutes for Culture). Another interesting thing to notice is the relation between culture and diplomacy in the case of cultural institutes abroad, and to see how culture influences diplomacy and diplomacy influences culture.

This context raises my main research question: "how do cultural institutes abroad contribute to the creation of national culture?" which implies a series of other questions, like: what kind of narrative discourse on an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991), in this case the Romanian community, is offered by the national state?; what is the relation between tradition and post-modernity, as reflected in cultural events?; to what extent can culture innovate, so that diplomatic aims still remain?; how is Romanian culture integrated in the European shared heritage, and how does this affect the Romanian identity? Other questions, important to the same extent, refer to another "imagined community", the one of the host country, as this community

2

constitutes a part of the audience of cultural institutes abroad. From this category, the most interesting question is: what are the motivations and the expectations of audience for participating to Romanian cultural events?

I argue that Romanian cultural institutes abroad- though initially designed on a centralized, French model and presenting an official discourse on Romanian culture- become more and more autonomous with the increasing national democratic stability, larger framework of the European Union and post-modern factors. This places an emphasis on culture and not diplomacy, a variety of cultural events and artists, and de-concentration. In this manner it can be explained how discursive changes strongly affects the perception of national culture, and give way to larger interpretations, which extend from tradition to innovation. Although these changes are obvious, the initial aims of cultural institutes abroad, namely the promotion of the national language or diplomacy, did not disappear, became secondary.

My first chapter is dedicated to nationalism and culture. Though Gregory Paschalidis talks about "cultural nationalism", I claim that nationalism and culture should be treated separately, considering their complexities and possible contradictions, quite characteristic in the recent period. I start with a definition of nationalism, as presented by Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, who have similar theories, and then I continue with Craig Calhoun, who has a more balanced point of view. To begin with, both Gellner and Hobsbawm offer particular attention to high culture in the creation of national state and they mention "the invention of tradition". Moreover, their way of describing the nationalist phenomena- "educational machine" (Gellner 1983:36) or "programmatic mythology" (Hobsbawm 1992:101) is quite similar and reflects their way of dealing with the nationalism. Their pessimistic view about nationalism is contrasted by a

3

more balanced theory proposed by Craig Calhoun, who accepts the statements above, but argues that nationalism can create a shared identity, which is a refuge and comfort for the individual.

The other element taken into consideration in this first stage is culture, in its diverse meanings and understandings. Though this subchapter complicates rather than clarifies the general debate on culture, it is useful to understand the different nuances of culture, especially as the main aim of Romanian cultural institutes abroad is to promote "Romanian culture". What is Romanian culture, after all?

Moving further, another function of cultural institutes is the diplomatic one. For this reason I dedicated the first part of the second chapter to diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. Peter Bartson and Adam Watson, two important theorists on cultural diplomacy, claim that diplomacy is management or negotiation between states. Cultural diplomacy, a special kind of diplomacy, is characterized by the centrality of cultural exchange. This dimension, of exchange, was not present in the initial functioning of western institutes, as they rather tried to impose their language and national culture in host countries. Anyway, this situation has changed, and the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy emphasizes the importance of enhancing mutual socio-cultural understanding (2009). This extended cultural exchange is facilitated by internal European laws (both directly and indirectly connected to culture), like the Schengen space or a growing interest in culture inside EU, and by the post-modern mentality, accepting contradictions like a shared European identity of an "affective tribe" (Maffesoli 1988) and, on the other hand, a nationalist identity, rooted in modernism.

My third chapter includes a general history of cultural institutes abroad, as presented by Gregory Paschalidis. Apparently little research has been done on this subject. To his review I add the description of the more recent history of Romanian cultural institutes abroad. The comparison

4

is meant to highlight a difference of status for European cultural institutes abroad, as the Western countries, like France, had and still have a leading position concerning national culture, while Eastern countries try rather to demonstrate that they also have national cultures that should be promoted.

My methodology includes semi-structured interviews with key personnel (the cultural managers of institutes) and audience, discourse analysis and observation mainly in my two case studies: Accademia di Romania from Rome and L'Istituto Romeno di Cultura di Venezia in Venice, as well as the institutional discourse of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest. My research is limited to the European Union context, and the two cases in Rome and Venice were chosen in order to reflect institutions with academic background before becoming cultural institutes. I have chosen these two cases of "historical" institutes because they are the most complex, as they include academic formation and cultural institutes. Moreover, the perception of Romanians in Italy is a debated subject, considering conflicts from the last years, and it is useful to understand how the two cultural institutes abroad cope with the problem. This part constitutes the fourth chapter.

The last chapter presents my personal findings of the actual state of Romanian cultural institutes abroad. My research shows that the institutes become discursively more open and administratively less concentrated, as more and more actors (local cultural managers, directors, audience, artists, European cultural organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies etc) are involved in the cultural discourse and strategy of networking. This creates a shift in the events of institutes from traditional to innovative culture, from official to unofficial culture.

A second tendency is that culture is becoming more and more central, as a consequence of the stability and development of EU. Though a European culture is not mentioned among the

aims of the institutes, this seems to be present in the collaboration between Romanian and host country's artists, and in international programmes.

In the conclusion of my paper I restate my position, findings and main aim, offering an explanation on the complex way of creating national culture, as cultural institutes abroad seem to appear between two "imagined communities": the local (European) audience and Romanian (national) culture, which makes their activity a continuous zigzag among traditions and post-modern interpretations.

# Chapter 1. Nationalism and Culture?

## 1.1 Nationalism

> "It is *imagined* [the political community] because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (Anderson 1991:6)

As pointed out before, a particular element in the creation of national culture is the national discourse. Though the three main thinkers chosen (Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Craig Calhoun) do not take into consideration the activity of cultural institutes abroad, they deal with the larger concept of nationalism, a very influential factor in both the emergence of institutes and construction of official national culture.

For Ernest Gellner, nationalism implies the two concepts of state and nation: "nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (1983:1). He considers that each nation is based on two basic principles that reflect a shared culture and a shared will. The evolution of these principles encompasses different types of society: the agrarian one, characterized by the fact that 'political boundaries are totally distinct from those determining cultural limits" (1983:12) and the industrial society, where "a high culture pervades the whole of society, defines it, and needs to be sustained by the polity" (1983:18). In brief, I describe the latter type of society because this is the context in which cultural institutes abroad appeared.

The industrial society is characterized by a universal literacy, with well trained personnel who can change easily from one task to another, be mobile and impersonal. These capabilities are assured by a well-developed, expensive and indispensable "educational machine" (Gellner

7

1983:36) which promotes the idea that every high culture should have a state of its own. As Gellner emphasizes, this kind of "homogeneity imposed by objective, inescapable imperative [of the industrial society] appears on the surface in the form of nationalism" (1983:39). What is essential to understand is that though nationalism uses historical, pre-existing cultural heritage, it usually changes and adapts the initial meanings and representations: "dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored" (Gellner 1983:56).

In a similar manner, Eric Hobsbawm's book "Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality" describes the evolution of nations and nationalism as the construction of a mythical project, based on imagination, and not the result of viable, well-known principles. Furthermore, discussing the emergence of the equation "nation = state = people", Hobsbawm states that "there was no logical connection between the body of citizens of a territorial state on one hand, and the identification of a nation on ethnic, linguistic or other grounds" (1992:19). Bringing into discussion many historical examples, he demonstrates that the building of a nation was often a top- down policy corresponding to a "programmatic mythology" (Hobsbawm 1992:101), based more on imagination than stemming from the will of people.

Nevertheless, some influential elements for the creation of nations can be identified, as are the linguistic and cultural community, or the historical mission. Connecting this idea with Romanian cultural institutes, it can be said that institutes offer free courses of Romanian language, which usually include History lessons. Also, language is a key notion both to culture and nationalism, and it is interesting to find out its role in history (of culture or nationalism), especially as languages are "almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally [...] virtually invented" (Hobsbawm 1992:54).

8

Religious and ethnic features, Hobsbawm continues, are considered part of cultural expressions; this is a present fact in some events of Romanian cultural institutes, namely exhibitions of orthodox icons. Just like Gellner, Hobsbawm emphasizes the role played by high culture in certain cases, like Germany or Italy:

> the two most prominent non-state national movements of the first half of the nineteenth century were essentially based on communities of the educated, united across political and geographical borders by the use of an established language of high culture and its literature. (1992:102)

Hobsbawm's impressive work brings into discussion states, communities, groups and minorities from all over the world during the period 1780- 1990. The two World Wars brought notable changes in the formation and evolution of political thought, which will lead, according to Hobsbawm, to the diminishing of the national state and reorganization into "largely supranational and infranational [structures]". Though the European Union represents a supranational type of organization, the first assumption made by Hobsbawm has proved to be wrong, as European national states exist and have an essential role in the EU.

Moreover, in "The Invention of Tradition", Hobsbawm presents the mechanism of constructing nations. It is an important practice related to the cultural dimension which represents a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms" (1992:1). Such an invention can explain the difficulties that appear when explaining notions like patriotism, identity or national culture, but also a way of giving a sense of order and beauty, essential to a community, so more important when the represented community, the Romanian one in my case, is not a real presence, but an imagined one.

This idea of tradition versus reality is discussed by George Schopflin in the form of myth and nations. He considers that the myth 'creates an intellectual and cognitive monopoly in that it

9

seeks to establish the sole way of ordering the world and defining the world- views" (1997:19). This manner of inventing myths can have a particular interest for Europe, as in European imagery, the old continent used to have a superior status: "the Western discourse also stresses the impotence of the other" (Schopflin 1997:17). In this context, it is not difficult to imagine the emergence of cultural institutes abroad with their "civilizing mission".

A critique of Hobsbawm's theory is formulated by Craig Calhoun, who takes into consideration both parts of nationalism, stating that "nationalism is not a moral mistake, [… ] [it] helps locate an experience of belonging in a world of global flows and fears" (1997:1).Further, Calhoun states that modern nations have their basis on pre-existing collective identities, though only with the modern state they evolved into what is understood today by the world "nation". It is obvious that nationalism is the origin of "so many evils, but it is also the framework in which the modern era produced history's most enduring and successful experiments in large-scale democracy" (1997:4).

Therefore Calhoun correlates the idea of democracy with the nation, considering that nationalist movements enforce the democratic ideal. This idea is relevant for Romanian cultural institutes abroad because democratization and EU stability create a good framework for the development of culture.

According to Calhoun, nationalism has three dimensions: first it is a discourse, as it is addressed to people who frame their idea of nation in particular settings (like language, geographical area, ethnicity, etc). Secondly, nationalism is a project, and encompasses the social movements and state policies. The nation state usually represents the centralized, concentrated model of administration. Thirdly, nationalism is envisaged as an evaluation when it reflects "political and cultural ideologies that claim superiority for a particular nation" (Calhoun 1997:6).

10

In a similar manner, Romanian cultural institutes abroad include a discourse, a project of functioning and an evaluation of their activity.

Calhoun argues that nationalism differs from setting to setting, dependent on social contexts. Even in Europe, usually treated as a whole, there are significant differences between Western and Eastern countries, a cleavage relevant for cultural institutes abroad, as Western institutes tend to have rather leading positions, while Eastern ones usually try to fit into a pre-existing framework. The nationalist explanation for such a cleavage is that in Western Europe there was a better similitude between border, political discourse and cultural, linguistic features, while in Eastern countries these overlappings did not exist to such an extent, a situation which led to "much more conflict [sic] over what constituted a nation" (Calhoun 1997:88).

This fact gave way to two interpretations of nationalism: integrative Western patriotism was opposed to "emotionally disruptive" (Calhoun 1997:88) Eastern nationalism. These particularities are important for cultural institutes abroad because they show different perceptions of conceiving the nation. Though this distinction is real, Calhoun argues that Western and Eastern countries did not constitute two different phenomena.

Concluding his book, Calhoun argues that "nationalism moves people emotionally …and is a positive source of meaning- and even sometimes inspiration" (1997:126) with the flaw that its political discourse treats identities as a static construction, a construction that remains the same along history and is not shaped by historical events and circumstances. Referring particularly to the idea of "emotion", a constant element of this paper, it can be said that it is part of nationalism, culture, and post-modernity.

To sum up, the nationalist description contributes to my paper with its clear presentation of the mythological creation of the national state. Such a national discourse demonstrates that the

11

present aim of Romanian cultural institutes abroad of "promoting national culture" (Romanian Cultural Institute 2009) is a political construct, built on the basis of an "imagined community".

## 1.2 Culture

Because of its complexity, culture is impossible to frame into a single definition. Its initial meaning appeared in relation to "the tending of something, basically crops or animals" (Williams 1976:77). Culture was often understood as similar to civilization. During the romantic movement of the 19th century, there was a theoretical shift: Herder described the term "culture" as opposed to "civilization" and "progress", as culture represented an alternative to social and historical development (Williams 1976:76). In this new definition, culture represented the "spiritual development" (Williams 1976:79), contrasting it with the material progress of civilization.

From a sociological point of view, culture is defined as contrasting several domains: biological, nature, structure or material. From an artistic point of view, one can distinguish between high culture and popular culture. High culture represents "the products made by the cultural elite (like French cinema, opera, classical music and poetry), while popular culture stands for mass people and subordinated classes (and it is represented by Hollywood cinema, most television, popular music and romantic fiction)" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2006:297). Romanian cultural institutes include both events representative of high and popular culture.

In addition, Richard Peterson connects culture with five main concepts: norms, values, beliefs or expressive symbols, and practices. If the traditional conception was that "culture has to do with perfection, is fragile, [...] sacred and ineffable" (Griswold 2004:7), a more recent sociological definition takes into consideration further points: cultural relativism, a strong relation between culture and society, the durability of culture, and an empirical study of culture (Griswold 2004:11). All these features are emphasized by Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

Accordingly, the application of the concept of culture for cultural institutes abroad is useful in its both meanings, the general one and the more restricted, artistic one. It is the first meaning of culture, referring to the common features of a community, which is strongly connected with the discursive construction of national culture. The second meaning of culture represents to the programmes and events promoted by the institutes. As I will argue, these two dimensions of culture are strongly interrelated, though the emphasized one is the artistic culture.

In the next chapter I present the way in which cultural diplomacy and the EU as a post-modern supranational construction complete the system of ideas about the evolution of national culture.

# Chapter 2. Discourses and Practices

## 2.1 Diplomacy

> "When I close a book
> I open life.
> I hear
> faltering cries
> among harbours.
> Copper ignots
> slide down sand-pits
> to Tocopilla.
> Night time."
>
> (Pablo Neruda "Ode to the Book")

When Pablo Neruda wrote the lyrics above, he might have had in mind his double profession: of a poet ("*I close a book*") and of a diplomat ("*I open life*"). I will not go in any detail about his life, nor his political orientation, but refer to his career, that of a cultural diplomat, which constitutes a very interesting mix of culture and international relations. As mentioned in the previous chapters, diplomacy is a function of cultural institutes abroad. Their emergence is connected to an increasing need of diplomacy and security, especially in the context of cold war. In order to achieve a good understanding of cultural diplomacy, I will begin with a presentation of diplomacy nowadays.

As defined by Ronald Peter Barston, diplomacy means "the management of relations between states and between states and other actors" (1992:1). Adam Watson replaces the term "management" with "negotiation", situating the latter at the core of diplomacy (1982). Furthermore, describing particularities of European diplomacy, Watson argues that the tradition of Christianity, shared historical events and political arrangements strengthened the diplomatic ties between states: "in the European society of states, diplomacy emerged as an organizing

institution, bearing its distinctive styles and manners and its own network of procedures, rules, treaties and other commitments" (1982:17). Cultural institutes abroad are representative for such a diplomatic system.

Highlighting the Western context, Barston establishes that Western diplomacy was initially restricted to a "small international elite", a fact that changed with the new democratic conception of international relations which was responsible before the citizens, and led to a more "open" kind of democracy (1992:3). Focusing on European cultural institutes, there was and partly still is a difference of status between cultural institutes, as the Western institutes had and still have rather a leading position, while Eastern institutes try to fit in the existing frame. Even though this is true, cultural institutions are now spread worldwide and excellence in cultural events can establish a leading position for any country.

Going back to Barson, he identifies six broad areas covered by diplomacy, which I find representative for cultural institutes abroad: the representation of states; the awareness of international climate ("acting as a listening post"), initiative, the reduction of friction in a problematic, conflictual context; an ability of order and change; and "the creation, drafting and amendment of a wise body of international rules" (1992:3), though the objective of diplomacy in cultural institutes abroad is an emphasis of cultural exchange.

## 2.2 Cultural diplomacy

Milton Cummings, a well recognized American political scientist and author, refers to cultural diplomacy as **"**the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding" (Institute for

Cultural Diplomacy 2009).  It is part of the "soft powers", as Joseph Nye describes it, which means that cultural diplomacy tries to convince through culture, values and ideas. "Soft power" opposes "hard power", which is represented by military actions and coercion (Nye 2009). For some thinkers this kind of "soft power" was integrated in the cultural context. As an example, George Liska states that cultural diplomacy is part of culture: "culture in a broad sense may be said to encompass the arts of diplomacy; when the two are distinguished, the nature and limits of their role in international politics still have much in common" (1960:8).

The increasing role of cultural diplomacy at international level is reflected in the growing number of cultural institutes abroad. Such a trend stems from the wider, connective and human values that culture has: culture is "both the means by which we come to understand others, and an aspect of life with innate worth that we enjoy and seek out" (Bound, Briggs, Holden, Jones 2007:11). Though this definition of culture is touchy, the "clash of civilizations", as Samuel Huntington called it, can have completely different effects than a mutual, cultural enjoyment.

So what is the role of cultural diplomacy? Christopher Nash highlights cultural exchange as a main characteristic of cultural diplomacy: "cultural diplomacy, as an academic field or political practice […] can be defined as the deliberate facilitation of any type of cultural exchange" (Cultural Diplomacy News 2008). This offers precious information about beliefs, traditions, language, or customs from another culture, which can also explain certain decisions and way of acting on the international scene of political actors. For cultural institutes abroad, but also for other cultural institutions, cultural exchange can take place in domains like art, sport, literature, music, science, cuisine or economy, having the aim of building and strengthening relations of peace and friendship among different nations and states (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy 2009).

16

The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy states that cultural diplomatic organizations and institutions promote national interests, build relationships or enhance socio-cultural understanding, depending on their orientation. Though this may be true, especially as aims of institutions, discussions and even scandals can appear in relation to particular cultural events, where the political discourse is in contradiction with artistic innovation.

From the point of view of applying cultural diplomacy, there are different models: the Norwegian model is based on a "cultural niche" that will promote simple and limited messages; the UK system is more at arm's length, France represents the centralized, state funded model, while China or US are described as having a "propaganda" model of promoting themselves (Bound, Briggs, Holden, Jones 2007:24). The Romanian network of cultural institutes abroad was based on the French model, though its present way of functioning is much more de-concentrated and more local actors are involved. The openness exist also at the discursive level, reflecting a growing importance of culture and a partly replacement of diplomatic aims. As it will be further detailed, this happening is caused by the influential cultural network of European Union, especially EUNIC, and also by the postmodern framework.

## 2.3 European Union: a discourse and a practice

Though history and role of culture in the EU are rather debatable, as federalists on one hand argue that culture was and still is an important component in the creation of the EU, while realists on the other hand position culture under the effect of spillover (of economy and politics), I would say that the appearance of the world "culture" in The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 represents a significant, distinct stage in the evolution of cultural policy within European Union.

As Marie Cornu argues, the notion of subsidiary can be described in terms of replacement ("suppléance") or of help ("secours"). The first dimension refers to "a mechanism of substitution of a social group by a more qualified one in a certain domain", while the second one envisages "an engaged action of a default community, this time without excluding it [the community]". (Cornu 1993:142). As she further explains, the principle of subsidiarity has its impact in the cultural domain, as there are cultural competences at the EU level, though their possibilities of action are restricted (1993). This means a common cultural policy and a particular attention to the particularities of Member States, as "culture is pluralistic, with many differences among the peoples of Europe, it is obvious not a question of communitarian harmony in this domain" (Magnant 1993:11).

The Treaty of Amsterdam keeps within its articles the above statements, as the Clause 2 of the Article 151 aims the improvement of "the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples" (Amsterdam treaty, title XII, art 151). In fact, till the present moment, the European Union has kept similar principles for culture, as it is shown in the Treaty of Lisbon, where "each institution shall ensure constant respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality" (Treaty of Lisbon, Protocol, article 1) and respect for cultural diversity. In addition, the European Commission web site establishes that "the European Union is very active in the field of culture. It encourages co-operation between Member States and complements their actions, while respecting their national and regional diversity" (European Commission 2009).

Considering the quotations above, it is obvious that the EU tries to clarify its priorities for the cultural domain. What is not mentioned is the difficulty of applying these statements in real life and of advancing a European cultural policy that will not contrast the national one. The action taken by the European Union wants to reach a "new spirit of capitalism": it is no longer the

18

centralized, bureaucratic model, but "a nomadic <network-extender>, light and mobile, tolerant of difference and ambivalence, realistic about people's desires, informal and friendly" (Budgen 2000:153). It corresponds to "an ideology that that identifies decentralization with individual liberty, a pluralistic society, grass-roots democracy and local self-government" (Bogdanor 1987:83) and opposes national centralization.

Furthermore, Tony Bennett offers a structural perspective on the role of culture. Unlike Eric Hobsbawm, who concentrates his research on the "invention" of the national state and culture, Bennett is rather preoccupied with the actual situation of culture. In his book "Differing diversities. Cultural policy and cultural diversity", Bennett analyses the concept of culture situating it in the actual spatial-temporal context. He identifies different categories of the "differing diversities", such as multi-nationalist states, autochthonous regions, Diaspora, or indigenous population.

Bennett emphasizes that all these relate to each other, especially in the context of international relations. Not only that different social groups or communities form the debate of culture, but on a larger scale culture cannot be seen as separated from other key domains like democracy, immigration issues and citizenship. As he analyses six case studies (Luxembourg, Belgium, The United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada and Bulgaria) he notices that there are differences of tradition, of economic status, of dealing with "the other" (Bennett 2001). In this context, can the activity of cultural institutes abroad be compared either between different countries or between different cultural institutes of one country?

Bennett's work provides six contexts that influence highly the creation of cultural policies: the civic contexts, which deal with civic rights, the administrative contexts, which refer to the dynamics of policy, the social contexts, which are mainly concerned with social objectives like

19

social integration, the <u>economic</u> contexts, which reflect the economic background, but also issues like management, and <u>conceptual</u> contexts, like the definition of culture and the scope and direction of cultural policies (Bennett 2001). This is important for cultural institutes because their activity should be evaluated taking into consideration the above six variables.

Nevertheless, Bennett offers a description of how cultural markets and public spheres interrelate in everyday life. The role played by government is a crucial one, as it allocates the cultural resources and plans artistic events (Bennett 2001). "Differing diversities. Cultural policy and cultural diversity" is an important book because it brings into discussion very practical difficulties of culture within EU, like management, administration, budget, social factors or relations between different communities etc, relevant issues for cultural institutes abroad, too.

## 2.4 Post-modern articulations of the EU and Romanian cultural institutes abroad

Many theories of post-modernity give the central role to cultural factors. These include the "growing importance of the culture industries; the aestheticization of everyday life, in which an individual's life is increasingly seen as an aesthetic or cultural project" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 2006:302). It means going further than rational choice theory, and giving the individual the possibility to fragment his/her identity in different categories.

Post-modernity is a very good framework for the Romanian cultural institutes abroad because it explains many contradictory dimensions of the institutes (for example, the official-unofficial culture). At a larger scale, post-modernity can present an explanation of the European Union, both as an administrative and cultural model (administrative for the importance of regionalization and de-concentration, cultural because of European cultural policies and

importance of cultural networking between European organizations). Referring to cultural issues, what the European Commission tries to do in the construction of national and European identity can be explained with Maffesoli's expression: "a harmony of contraries" (1996). To this end the philosopher claims that "the images circulate, opposed to one another, rivals to one another, the competing mythologies are in the public domain, different ideologies are met together […], and all these realities are obliged to co-exist and so to accept each other" (1996:43). In other words, Maffesoli takes into consideration different realities, which learn to co-exist and to relate to each other in the life of the individual or community. As an example of "harmony of contraries", the EU is a supranational construction formed on different contradictory bases, like the principle of subsidiarity (which encompasses both notions of replacement and sustainability), cultural diversity and shared heritage, or the European culture and the national one.

Post-modernity is constructed in opposition to modernity, and this makes me note that the modern national state, characterized by rationality, control, order, or balance opposes the post-modern context in which the European Union was created. The "European context" is represented by regionalization, a factor already mentioned, multiplication of channels and means of information, the transformation of the Fordist society into the knowledge society, and the "glocal" phenomena, which means "the globalization of the local, and the localization of the global" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2006:170).

If modernity was characterized by rational decisions of a 'binary logic of separation" (Maffesoli 1988:26) between body and soul, material and spiritual, ideology and production, etc, post-modernity combines these so-called oppositions, and adds new dimensions: emotion, unforeseen happenings, looseness. For Maffesoli, emotion is placed at the core of temporal social connections, which are based on the unpredictability of the moment. This is how the variety of

21

cultural events and activities of Romanian cultural institutes abroad can be explained. The audience has various events to choose from: one day the screening of a football game, the next day a philosophical discussion. Moreover, the post-modern "social connection" (Maffesoli 1988) can be explained as networking at the level of Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

Audience, generally speaking, may be conceived as an "imagined community", as the public is not constant, modifying itself depending on events, personal interests and other factors (like time, mood, etc), though considered representative of a larger community, the people of the host country, in my case the Italian one. The same model applies to the Romanian community, or to artists, or to the Diaspora. This system of mirrors that reflect each other to some extent stands for a possible definition of the other: "in a decentered [sic] world, the Other cannot be easily defined. The postmodern world is therefore slowly learning to live with ambivalence. It is a bitter lesson." (Szkudlarek 2002:101).

However, the bitterness is softened by a "peculiar hope" (Szkudlarek 2002:101) of ambivalence, as post-modernity imposes cultural relativism and demystifies dominant ideologies created by modernity. Szkudlarek applies this contrast or duality of perceiving identities to Eastern and Western Europe and compares their differences with a wall or a mirror: "What people in the East and West saw through the wall were rather their mirror reflections, their own reversed images. In the mirror, what seems to be ahead is really behind you; what seems to be left is right indeed". (2002:99).

Romanian cultural institutes abroad often operate on this system, trying to conceive images of the others and like this to foresee their cultural desires and expectations. This task is attributed mainly to the directors of the institutes, as they represent the first filter of cultural projects.

22

Besides, cultural events are the expression of emotion, interpretation and interior feelings/ thoughts and create a personal reality for each artist or person of the public.

In my next chapter I describe the emergence and history of cultural institutes abroad, as they evolve from an imposing promotion of national discourse towards European cooperation and networks of culture.

# Chapter 3. Cultural institutes abroad

"It's my country, my native land, and I love it. You don't

love *because:* you love *despite*; not *for* the virtues, but *despite* the faults."

(Faulkner 1989:336)

It was at the beginning of the 20th century that cultural institutes abroad appeared for the first time, in the context of new imperialism. The greatest European powers tried to export their language, culture and habits in order to obtain influence over other countries and to keep or gain the title of main world power. The changes and different evolutions of cultural institutes abroad led Gregory Paschalidis to identify four main historical phases: cultural nationalism, cultural propaganda, cultural diplomacy, and cultural capitalism.

## 3.1 Cultural nationalism

This first phase represents the emergence of cultural institutes on the international scene and their very beginning. The first countries that created their institutes were France, Germany and Italy, each of them proclaiming similar cultural, linguistic ends. The institutes abroad proclaimed to share with the host country their exceptional culture through language courses, scholarships to study abroad, libraries. This policy was also a very useful way of impressing the other powerful actors with the national cultural heritage.

Alliance Française was formed in 1883 under the directorate of Paul Cambon and Pierre Foncin and had the aim of "propagating the French language in the colonies and abroad" (Paschalidis 2008:2), an expensive programme financed by the French government "at a time when France was still struggling to feed its people" (Paschaladis 2008:2). The German institute

was created in 1925 with the name of Deutsche Akademie and the Italian one was initially entitled Società Dante Alighieri and appeared in 1889.

Though apparently international recognition was the aim of cultural institutes, Gregory Paschalidis considers that this is the case of France, but not of Italy or Germany, which unified later: "What characterises, then, this particular pattern [of Italy and Germany] is not assimilationist colonial policies, but anti-assimilationalist nationalist politics" (2008:4). Further, he argues that these two countries achieved unification in a manner in which many ethnic communities were left outside of the new formed nation, so that cultural programmes were addressed to these communities and not other ethnic groups. Monica Joița strengthens his argument referring to the Italian cultural institute in Bucharest, but not only:

> The development of an Italian cultural offensive in Romania (likewise in the entire world) can be noticed as having two main aims: the promotion of Italian language (especially achieved through courses activity and [sic] University seminars and the creation of an Cultural Institute in Bucharest) and the maintenance of linguistic and cultural identity of Italian citizens and communities (2007:15).

As Paschalidis highlights, cultural nationalism is characterized by academic programmes addressed either to ethnic Diasporas or to geostrategic areas, always having nationalism at the core and the spread of a specific, superior culture.

Moreover, cultural institutes abroad used to have a "mission civilisatrice" (Paschalidis 2008), which was highly related to the propagation of the national cultures of those states. This is especially the case of France, as France is an early formed nation, with a particular approach to colonialism, based on the assimilation of French culture. As an illustration of French imagery and self-perception, Martin Evans states that "France imagined itself as dynamic, modern, vibrant: France saw itself as a coherent nation state with a superior culture" (2004:6). For these reasons during the 20th century cultural capital started to have an increasing importance on international scene, especially as it was doubled by political power and economic wealth. Exporting language

25

and traditional culture represented a way in which powerful countries, like France, tried to maintain their decreasing influence in the world.


## 3.2 Cultural propaganda

Cultural propaganda developed in the period between the two world wars, in the context of fascist expansion and international conflict. There are many things to say about this period, but I will sketch only the changes of cultural institutes abroad. First of all, the national dimension was replaced by cultural propaganda with particular political ends. Language, scholarships and programmes were to spread a "spiritual imperialism" (Paschalidis 2008), as Mussolini argued in his speech in 1926. For similar reasons, in 1941 Hitler transformed the Deutsche Akademie into an official institution with propaganda aims, heavily supported by the state.

Though in a milder manner, France also emphasized a particular kind of French spiritual enlightenment, named cultural radiance, which was developed by Leon Blum during the socialist government of 1936-1937 (Paschalidis 2008:5). Great Britain, another important political actor, founded the British Council in 1934, having the goal of promoting language and democracy. After the Second World War, though not having a cultural institute abroad at the time, the United States established similar democratic goals (Paschalidis 2008:8) .

The general conclusion of this period is that state became the main "owner" of these institutes, imposing their discourse and usually situating them under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Not only a particular discourse was imposed, but also the spread of cultural institutes abroad was based on geostrategic factors and political interests.

## 3.3 Cultural Diplomacy

The end of the Second World War meant also the beginning of the Cold War. For this reason all decisions, implementations and policies of cultural institutes abroad were guided by diplomatic norms and procedures, especially important for the maintenance of peace. As a consequence, the need of cultural diplomacy became more and more obvious and cultural institutes abroad developed important diplomatic skills.

Their main difficulties consisted of the existent cleavages: one was the West- East conflict. It can be said that "the cold war was in many respects a cultural war" (Paschalidis 2008:8). Another cleavage, South-North, was reflected by the tension between the ex-colonies and the metropolitan countries. The USA- Europe relation can be described as a third cleavage, especially because Europe was losing its leading international cultural position as it was reconstructed with American money (Paschalidis 2008).

## 3.4 Cultural capitalism

The economic European construction, as alluded to, gave birth to a new stage and in time there was a redefinition of the role of culture within the European Union; "cultural capitalism" is a descriptive trait of Western societies and not representative of the whole of Europe.

The evolution of cultural institutes abroad can be associated with the emergence of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1945, made by "those countries [who] were looking for ways and means to reconstruct their systems of education once peace was restored" (UNESCO 2009). Forty-four countries participated at the meeting, though the most influential and determined for the creation of such an organization were France and

27

Great Britain, "two countries that had known great hardship during the conflict" (UNESCO 2009).

For Eastern Europe, the communist regime and the Russian influence represented an obvious involution in their economic, cultural and social systems, with the result that cultural institutes abroad emerged in these countries only after the fall of communism. After the end of the Cold War, Eastern Europe started to contribute to the cultural network. The signing of the Treaty of Maastricht and the accession of Eastern states to the European Union were important factors in the development of culture (Paschalidis, 2008). Because of the recent evolution of the EU, this latest stage can be called "the cultural tribe", referring to an emerging European consciousness among the Member States, consciousness based on emotion and affective belonging.

In the next chapter of my paper I include detailed information on methodology and a description of Romanian cultural institutes abroad, with a particular focus on my two case studies: Accademia di Romania and Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia.

# Chapter 4. Methodology

"The initial task in analyzing qualitative data is to find some concepts that help us to make sense of what is

going on in the scenes documented by the data" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:209)

In order to conduct my research I have chosen two Romanian cultural institutes abroad: Accademia di Romania and Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia, both in Italy. These cases are particularly important because of their historical development, the debates on their status (whether they are academies, cultural institutes or both) and their functioning, considering the Romanian- Italian tensions.  Further, for a better insight I have also interviewed a cultural manager from the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) in Bucharest. I used documentary research, semi-structured interviews and observation.

To begin with, documentary research includes data and information found in the publications, web-sites and emails received from cultural managers working for Romanian cultural institutes abroad. The information describes the general history of these institutes up to the present, their institutional aims and cultural events promoted. In this section, I will present the difference between cultural institutes abroad formed in 2004 and older cultural centers, restructured in 2004 into cultural institutes abroad, the latter keeping most or some of their initial ends. Further I will explain the context that triggered such a change in 2004, mainly identified as a post-modern need of "aestheticization of everyday life" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 2006:302) and a practical strategy for Romania's future integration in the EU. Another main interest of my research is given to ICR Bucharest because it is the coordinating institution.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews are to give a new dimension to my research. I used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews because this format enables good, partly controlled

communication, easy analysis of the data and it was better fitted with the time frame. I have interviewed six people (cultural managers, librarians, deputy directors and directors) from the institutes in Bucharest (for the interest of coordination and in order to map the relation between coordinator institute and abroad institute), Rome and Venice (to see "local" perception of aims, activities and other relations with institutions). I prefer not to reveal their names or functions, and for this reason I will simply call them "cultural managers" no matter of their function, and distinguish them by adding a number (for example: cultural manager 1, cultural manager 2 etc). For the two cases abroad the main topics of interviews were inquiring about the history of the institution, the capacity of decision for cultural events, the latest cultural projects, the manner in which projects are developed, the frequency of events, audience. The interviews reflect the perception of the local actors on the national culture, with particular emphasis on what should be promoted in the host-countries where they conduct their activities. For Bucharest the questions were similar, but more focused on collaboration and coordination between the centre and local branch.

Further, I have interviewed 16 people (eight in Rome and eight in Venice) from the audience in order to grasp formal and informal relations during the event attended, the feedback of the public, popular/ tabu subjects, motivations etc.

Thirdly, observation helped me establish my opinion on the complex network of actors and the way they deal with Romanian national culture. It was a useful method as I could enter what I call "the second field", namely the public. One of the general shortcomings of this method is that it is quite difficult to establish the borders between objectivity and subjectivity (especially as it is mainly based on informal interviews or analytical inductions). I tried to avoid subjectivity and

lack of time by having short, structured interviews with people from the public. Observation was useful also because I listened to the speeches and noted the reaction of the public.

## 4.1 Romanian cultural institutes abroad

On 11 July 2003 the law no. 356 established the emergence of Romanian cultural institutes abroad under the guidance of Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest -ICR- and the administration of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The honorary president of ICR is the president of Romania, who names the president of ICR. The presidency of ICR is incompatible with membership in any party.

ICR was formed on the bases of the former Romanian Cultural Foundation, a necessary change in the context of the larger framework of transition to democracy. This decision meant not only an institutional change, but also a change of status, as the Romanian institutes were created to fit into a larger European cultural scheme. Horia Patapievici, the actual president of ICR, states that one of the essential responsibilities of institutes is 'the affirmation of ICR as a true national cultural institute in markets abroad (one that is on equal footing with longstanding national cultural institutes)" (2008:1).

The directors and deputy directors are chosen by ICR, and approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture and Cults, with one exception: in Italy, the directors of Accademia di Romania in Rome and of Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia are appointed by the Romanian Academy, with the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Cults and the Romanian Cultural Institute.

31

Law no. 356 was enforced by the governmental decision no. 492 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2004, which established the reorganization of cultural centers abroad into cultural institutes abroad, the creation of new Romanian cultural institutes abroad and their mode of functioning. The cultural centers reorganized into cultural institutes were to be found in Paris, New York, Budapest, Berlin, Venice and Rome. The new institutes that were to emerge were situated in Vienna, Prague, London, Madrid, Lisbon, Warsaw, Moscow, Beijing, Belgrad, Stockholm, Athens, Tel Aviv and Istanbul. Not all of these new institutes emerged, considering that not all bilateral accords were signed between the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the respective minister in the partner countries, which led to the impossibility of establishing cultural institutes. (decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 1 and 2).

The main aims of the institutes are to reflect traditional values, (governmental decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 4, point a), recent values, (governmental decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 4, point b), and increasing cultural exchange on the international market (governmental decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 4, point c, d e, etc). The roles of cultural institutes abroad are: a) to promote Romanian language, history and cultural-artistic values on the international scene; b) "to promote performing scientific and cultural creations from Romania"; c) "to stimulate the dialogue with the audience from the resident country"; d) "the growth of international visibility of Romania by promoting a complete, actual, and objective external image" (governmental decision 492/ 2004, art. 4, point a, b, c, d, e).

Economic and political dimensions are also present, as the aim of the institution is to "enforce the cultural, scientific and technological ex-change in the spaces of maximum political-diplomatic and economic interest of Romania" (governmental decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 4, point 1 e). In what concerns the Romanian Diaspora, point j states that cultural institutes abroad should

32

"maintain and develop cultural and spiritual relations with Romanians abroad, with the aim of cherishing the language, tradition and cultural identity, and of involving them [the Romanians] in the achievement of Romania's national interests" (governmental decision no. 492/ 2004 art. 4, point l, j). These last two statements refer to a 'national interest' that should be achieved and promoted, though there is no definition of "national interest", nor a clear strategy of achieving it. This type of discourse reflects "an imagined community" to which national interest can be attributed.

Today Romania has 16 cultural institutes abroad (in Berlin, Brussels, Budapest, Istanbul, Lisbon, London, Madrid, New York, Paris, Prague, Rome, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Warsaw, Venice and Vienna) and a filiation in Szeged, coordinated by ICR (Romanian Cultural Institute, 2008). Their main activities consist of cultural events (namely exhibitions of photography, paintings, sculptures; performances of play theaters and dance; poetry readings or writers' nights etc), conferences and debates on various subjects, from artistic issues to politics, scholarships and accommodation for fellows, promotion of cultural magazines, courses of Romanian language. As it is obvious, the most influential policy is the one involving cultural events, as it is designed to attract a large number of people rather than a small group interested in Romanian language or scholarships.

In order to have such an impact, Romanian cultural institutes abroad can opt for a collaboration with a series of institutions from the "host" country, such as universities, cultural organizations, theatres, exhibition spaces, cinemas, music halls and other cultural institutes abroad. There is a more "official" connection with state institutions, both in Romania and in the host-country, namely with The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry for Culture and Cults and embassies, and, of course, The Cultural Institute in Bucharest. To this adds a third layer,

which implies "networking" with European and international cultural organizations and institutions, as illustrated by the European Commission, DG Education and Culture or UNESCO.

The most active actor representative of this third dimension is the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), as it is a European organization promoting national cultures: "EUNIC creates effective partnerships and networks between EU National Institutes for Culture in order to improve and promote cultural diversity and understanding between European societies" (EUNIC 2009). This partnership, manifested through cultural projects, has increased the visibility of Romanian cultural institutes abroad (Romanian Cultural Institute 2009). The strength of this partnership is enforced by the fact that Horia-Roman Patapievici, the actual president of ICR and vice-president of EUNIC, will become the main president of EUNIC in 2010 (Romanian Cultural Institute 2009).

Next I present my two case studies, the Romanian institutes in Rome and Venice, in order to show how different actors, settings and circumstances influence their evolution.

## 4.2 Accademia di Romania in Rome

The first project of a Romanian School of History, Archeology and Belle Arti in Rome dates from 1914, but because of the First World War the plan was postponed till 1920, when the Romanian Parliament voted for the project. The plan was initiated by many important scholars of the time, especially Vasile Parvan, an archeologist, and his teacher and friend, Nicolae Iorga, a great historian, academician and nationalist politician (Lazarescu 1996:14). The idea of a Romanian school in the heart or Rome was part of a larger Italian project in Valle Giulia, an empty park at that time that was to host elitist academies from different countries. The emergence

of these academies was a tribute to the Italian nation and cultural heritage, a highly desirable wish of the fascist movement (cultural manager 1).

When the Romanian National Bank paid the expenses and the building was constructed, Parvan settled as director, while a similar Romanian school emerged in Paris, at Fontenay-aux-Roses, having Iorga as its director. Later, Iorga initiated the construction of a similar school in Venice. As Lazarescu argues, Accademia di Romania "assumes its responsibility to maintain and strengthen on humanistic and national bases the programme of great Latinists before" (1996:36), which implies a strong connection with Latinity and Latin people, a nexus that is still emphasized today on different occasions at the Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

For 20 years the Academy of Romania functioned as an elitist school for Romanian talents. Unfortunately, in 1947 the communist regime did not approve fellowships anymore and made the Academy exclude itself from "Unione Internazionale degli Instituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte"-the network of foreign academies in Rome. The elegant building lost its status of school and apparently was transformed into accommodation for devoted communists (cultural manager 3). It is not clear what happened with the Accademia under the communist period, "maybe some people know [what happened], but do not want to say" (cultural manager 1), though one thing is sure: it was no longer the Romanian school of history, archeology and belle arti. Maybe this is why on the site of Accademia di Romania it is only written that "the Romanian authorities decided to close the institution" (Accademia di Romania 2009) and the degradation of the building during the period is noted. One possible explanation is that the communist regime is generally perceived as a cultural involution, corruption or "degradation" of Romanian culture. It is a modality of excluding the shame and guilt attributed to Romanian communist history from the collective memory and an attempt to restore the prestige of the institution.

Though in 1968-1969 the building was partly restored and offered eight scholarships for Romanian students, it also continued to host loyal communist members. Those eight scholars constituted the only generation, and only after the Revolution in 1989 did the institution regain its status of academy, starting to host young researchers, fellows, and the "Vasile Parvan" scholars. In 2004 the academy regained its membership in the "Unione Internazionale degli Instituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte" (Vian 2008). In the same year Accademia di Romania became a cultural institute abroad, though maintaining its academic status.

During my short research in Rome, I attended one cultural event at Accademia di Romania: the "Mur Nero" film screening, a story about how an old Italian lady and her nurse, a young Romanian woman, move from disliking each other to becoming friends.

The public was constituted of about 40 people, both Italians and Romanians. The event started with several short discourses: the deputy director of Accademia di Romania highlighted a relation of cousinship between Italians and Romanians and noted that "the movie makes us [Romanians] feel good about ourselves, which does not happen very often these days", alluding to the Romanian-Italian conflicts of recent years. A Romanian diplomat from the embassy gave a short speech and offered diplomas of recognition from the Romanian state to the Italian film director and main Italian actress. Other talks were made by a member of the Romanian Association in Italy and by the Italian actress. I mention these speeches because they reflect the role of cultural diplomacy in Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

Before and after the film I interviewed eight people from the public in order to see their interests and motivations for attending the events: Italians emphasized the wish "to know more about the countries around the world" and their attendance in different institutes in Valle Giulia, while Romanians stated the importance of keeping in touch with Romanian culture and

community; as an illustration, a young translator (from a Romanian mother and Italian father) argued about an identity need to be involved in both cultures, and sometimes in a mixture of these cultures ( in which category the movie Mur Nero fits very well).  Networking is another motivation for attending such events, as people like to meet, talk and even establish ways of collaboration between artists, translators, etc.

Further I will briefly present my second case study, the cultural institute abroad in Venice.

## 4.3 Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia

In 1930 Nicolae Iorga inaugurated "The Historical-Artistic Institute from Venice", also called "the Romanian House" in a palace from the sixteen century: palazzo Correr. This was possible because beginning with 1928 the Romanian state bought several rooms in the same building and at the moment of the inauguration there was a total of 25 rooms, "decorated and furnished with sobriety and elegance" (Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia 2009).

The institute was destined for Romanian historians and art critiques that, once back home, were to take with them "a little bit of Venice" (Iorga; inaugural speech). When in Venice, Iorga organized cultural evenings and conferences that had the aim of strengthening the relations between the two countries and to offer cultural models for Romanian students. The flourishing of the institute ended with the death of Nicolae Iorga in 1940 and after the Second World War the communist dictatorship imposed itself. The institute, just like the academy in Rome, "was abandoned" (Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia 2009).

In 1988 the advanced degradation of the building prompted the municipal council of Venice to "ask the Romanian government to do something about the problem of the Romanian House" (Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia 2009). The repairs started in 1989, were postponed during the revolution and restarted after it, so that in 1992 the institute opened under the name of Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica, with the aim of promoting cultural activities. In 2004, the governmental decision no. 492 reorganized the centre into a Romanian cultural institute abroad.

During my short stay in Venice, I visited the Orlando Donadi exhibition and attended a poetry night, followed by a musical concert, both at the Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica.

The exhibition presented about 20 paintings of the Italian painter Orlando Donadi in the exhibition room of the institute, offering free entrance to visitors. The poetry night had as main guests: Eugenia Bulat, the Moldavian poetess established in Venice, who presented her volume of poems "Venice as a gift"; Ion Hardau, a poet from Chisinau; Gabriela Molcsan, a translator; Anna Lombardo, a poetess from Venice; and Iurie Bojonca, a poet from Chisinau.

The several speeches and talks given by the poets, especially the ones from Chisinau, were focused more on the Moldavian issue than on poetry. The evening continued with the reading of poems, both in Italian and in Romanian (the latter at the request of the Italian public willing to know how poems "sound" in Romanian) and ended with a musical recital.

I noted that the public, most of it between 65- 80 years old, was familiar with the events and personnel. These people seemed to know each other, fact which explains their initiative to ask for the Romanian version of poems. My interviews showed that they formed a stable Italian audience, a compact community that came to most of the events. When interviewed, one

gentleman argued: "I am retired now and have nothing to do. I like to come to this institute and attend their events". Another one mentioned his personal love for paintings, as he was born in a family of painters. A lady stated she enjoyed meeting her friends at these events, while a gentleman argued that his Romanian wife takes him to such events, where he has befriended so many people. Except for the Italian community, I noted also a Romanian talking group, and during the interview I found out they were a Moldavian family established in Venice, friends with Eugenia Bulat, attending such an event at the institute for the very first time.

My last chapter is dedicated to the analysis and personal findings about Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

# Chapter 5. Romanian cultural institutes abroad: from the "Castle" to the "Agora"

> "[Civilization] is set in motion blindly, and kept in motion by the autonomous dynamics of a web of relationships, by specific changes in the way people are bound to live together" (Elias 2000:367)

The main argument of my thesis is that Romanian cultural institutes abroad are in a process of de-concentration, understood both as a discourse and as administration, which I called the process from the "Castle" to the "Agora". This is a general shift, but I cannot argue that this happens for each Romanian institute abroad, especially as local governance is essential and can situate one institute on whatever standing point on a continuum with the two extremes: the "castle" and the "agora".

As established before, the main aim of Romanian cultural institutes abroad is "to promote Romanian culture" outside the borders. Not only that "culture" cannot be framed in one single definition, but also it is impossible to establish what kind of "culture" (traditional/ contemporary, high/ popular etc) is representative of one nation. This happens because nations are "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) based on different perceptions and interpretations about a real community. In this context, no one could say what Romanian culture really is, nor give a standard definition of it, as we are no longer in a modern time when a nationalistic discourse could impose its definition on national culture. Still, this does not mean that cultural institutes abroad should abandon their aim of promoting culture.

During my research I have noted seven crucial, interrelated cleavages of Romanian cultural institutes abroad, namely: 1) the fortress/ the open space; 2) the centre/ the local branch; 3) the national state/ the European Union; 4) modern/ post-modern features; 5) traditional/ innovative

40

culture; 6) official/ unofficial culture 7) diplomacy/ culture. These cleavages represent discursive tensions of different historical periods, which vary from macro-sociological changes (like the modern/post-modern; culture/diplomacy cleavage) to practical strategies of the institutions, such as organization and administration (like the fortress/the open space; the centre/the local branch cleavage). At the same time, cleavages (namely traditional/ innovative culture; official/ unofficial culture) reflect possible options, tastes, expectations and motivations of different "imagined communities": the public, the population abroad, the Romanian community, artists. The national state/the European Union cleavage represents both a discursive and a practical cleavage.

## 5.1 The fortress versus the open space

The fortress/ open space cleavage refers to the historical discursive evolution of cultural institutes abroad. Gregory Paschalidis points out their emergence as national institutions abroad with the aim of promoting national culture, especially by the means of language and high-culture. It was a way of defining culture on the cultural market were they emerged, and of imposing themselves as superiour.

Regarding my two case studies in Rome and Venice, they can also be described as the castle-fortress model moving to the open model of functioning. Not only that the buildings are indeed castles, but also their emergence was connected to elitist aims: the formation abroad of national talents that were to "bring home" (Iorga- inauguration speech) the know-how in archeology, history, humanities and belle arti.

Nowadays, however, the aim of Romanian cultural institutes is to export "Romanian culture", an end totally opposed to the classical one (that of imposing). This is why Accademia di

Romania and Instituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica are no longer just academies, but cultural institutes that promote cultural events, so they are open spaces for communication. This leads to another new feature of all cultural institutes abroad: the one of attracting the audience and trying to please it. The audience, which needs motivation in order to come to such events, can be compared with the citizens of the Agora, welcoming space for sharing and negotiation.

## 5.2 The Centre versus the Local branch

The cleavage reflects an administrative issue, it represents the central or local capacity of making decisions concerning cultural events and organization of the institutes, in other words, the degree of autonomy and de-concentration the institutes abroad have. This is an interesting point, as it is not clear who the "centre" is: the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

First of all, regarding proposals of cultural events, Romanian cultural institutes abroad are coordinated by ICR, namely the "Directorate General for Romanian cultural institutes abroad". The "coordination" implies that ICR sends cultural projects to the institutes abroad or directors and deputy directors of cultural institutes abroad propose a set of activities and events for their institutes that are either approved by ICR or not. Everything is just fine when the negotiation finishes with an agreement; the problems appear when the positions are opposed to each other. As one cultural manager complained, the process of preparing an event, sending the necessary documents to Bucharest, and expecting the answer can be frustrating and inefficient, especially when the project is not approved:

> …once we tried to work in parallel: on one hand with ICR, on the other with an exhibition place. With great difficulties we arranged to hire this proper space for a painting exhibition, everything was ready, and just then we received a negative answer from Bucharest. We had to abandon all

and apologise for not wanting to hire the exhibition room anymore, just in the last moment […] Imagine going to the same place wanting to arrange another exhibition…(Cultural manager 5).

On the other hand, ICR takes the decisions of approving cultural events based on the decision of a Director Committee and a Board of Experts in domains like theatre, film, literature, etc (cultural manager 6).

In a similar manner regarding discrepancies, I note another centre: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The relations between ICR (as an institution including the cultural institutes abroad) and the ministry were rather tense in the beginning of their collaboration, although the situation improved by establishing spheres of influence: administrative for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and cultural for the Romanian Cultural Institute. Referring to the situation in 2005, the president of ICR Horia Roman Patapievici, argued:

> With the exception of the directors, named by ICR, the personnel [of Romanian cultural institutes abroad] was elected by MAE [ Minister of Foreign Affairs] on criteria that had nothing to do with professional competences, but with a personnel policy of an institution [MAE] for which the problem of institutes [abroad] could be nothing else but secondary (Patapievici 2008:10).

Though the conflicts above show that relations between several institutions do not run smooth and questions of best governance are not answered yet, it is still good that different actors can argue for or against a decision or a way of functioning, which will hopefully lead to institutional improvement.

## 5.3 The national state versus the European Union

In the paragraph above, when I expressed my wish for "institutional improvement", I had in mind the model of the European Union, which is not against the member states, but one that includes them. In a similar manner, I hope that Romanian cultural institutes could evolve on the principle of decentralization, encompassing different actors from different levels, and being

active and cooperative. Further, a national discourse imposed on culture can no longer be central for any European country, which means that a change of discourse is also necessary.

It is true that differences between Eastern and Western countries exist and "the separation of East and West in their formative years created a particular stiffening" (Szkudlarek 2002:100), but for Member States the initial "stiffening" is slowly transforming into a shared present. Romanian cultural institutes abroad are also influenced by some features of the European framework, such as common decisions and legislation (for example transport or the principle of subsidiarity), European cultural policies (as an illustration, cultural institutes have years with a specific interest, on the EU model) and European style of life (visible in the general tendencies of becoming "European" by adopting Western practices).

It is not by coincidence that only three Romanian cultural institutes are outside the EU (institutes in New York, Tel Aviv and Istanbul), as the Romanian cultural interest is to integrate in the EU. To enforce this statement, I quote Patapievici referring to the 2007 strategy, the year when Romania joined the EU: "[Romanian cultural institutes abroad] are meant to prepare our visibility as a ‹normal country› in the eyes of common people in European countries" (Patapievici 2007:22). I think the meaning of "normal" in the quotation above is "European".

EUNIC, a European cultural network already brought into discussion, enforces my argument about the de-concentration of Romanian cultural institutes and their distance from state subordination. Anyway, this distance could not appear in modern circumstances.

## 5.4 Modernity versus Post-modernity

The changing process in which the state finds itself implies the abandoning of its initial discourse and the construction of a new one, based on different national perception, a change

explainable by the passage to a new age: post-modernity. I argue that this institutional redefinition of Romanian culture is a top-down change brought by post-modernity. There is also the inverse direction, a bottom-up change visible at the level of individual cultural experiences and expectations.

In the case of Romanian cultural institutes abroad, the centrality of post-modernity for understanding the functioning of the institutes does not exclude modernity, especially in the emergence of the institutes. In order to see how modernity and post-modernity co-exist in the Romanian cultural institutes abroad, I will exemplify the relation between characteristic features of modernity/ post-modernity as demonstrated by the functioning of institutes.

To begin with, modernity is characterized by rationality, commodification, regularity and measurement, features still present in what concerns the activities, schedules and communication of cultural events (as everything has to be precise, clear, logical). The increased modern formalization is reflected by the complexity and formality of choosing the personnel. In addition, diplomatic functions of institutes are also part of "formalization". The speeding up of the pace of daily life is present for institutes abroad in the manner in which they present two events in one evening, trying to motivate the public to come, as the event is a double one. Another feature of modernity, the increased need of evidence, can be applied to Romanian cultural institutes in what concerns their preoccupation to record, photograph and make reports of cultural events.

Nevertheless, considering the need for "creating a general opinion, to be known [by the local inhabitants] that there is something special happening at the institute" (cultural manager 4), I argue that the creation of such a public is based on a previous idea about "an imagined community" and its interest. This is very similar to Maffesoli's post-modern conception of an "affective tribe", which means sharing a collective experience, involving particular attention to

45

"here and now" and to emotion. This is also the explicit aim of cultural events: to present such events that attract and "seduce" the public.

Further, referring to the relativism brought by Post-modernity, the notion is essential also for the emergence of European cultural networks, like EUNIC, which include both national and European dimensions.

## 5.5 Traditional versus innovative culture

If the cleavages above were more or less present in the preoccupations of Romanian cultural institutes abroad or ICR, the debate between traditional and innovative culture, or "old" and "new" culture, is an obvious, discursive fact. Both tradition and innovation have advantages and disadvantages in what concerns Romanian cultural events abroad.

To start with, tradition has a history in the collective memory of each community and occupies a central place in the creation of identity. It represents a "safe ground" which is generally accepted, though as Hobsbawm, Gellner and Calhoun argue, it is based on an "invention". I argue that the "invention of tradition" is not characteristic only of the national state, but also of the Romanian institutes abroad when they present "traditional evenings" (such as folk concerts, serving of specific "Romanian" food, etc), as they embed the national discourse on tradition.

Innovative culture, on the other hand, is "fresh" and actual, stirring the imagination and challenging traditional values and esthetic patterns. This means that innovative culture is in the process of being accepted or rejected by the community. This recognition is strongly related to the promotion and media communication of a particular innovative cultural good. For the Romanian case, it has been argued (an idea that I share) that traditional culture is not enough for

46

Romanian national culture, especially as it has been framed in some patterns used and re-used (like Dracula, national food: "sarmale" and polenta, etc).

The difficulty of innovative cultural goods is that they imply the creation of new esthetic criteria and a new system of values. The last year scandal concerning ICR- New York illustrates this case. They organized a street art exhibition, entitled "Freedom for lazy people", a well promoted event that appeared in the media as a very successful initiative of the Romanian institute. With its popularity, a new detail appeared in the press: one exhibit was a pink toy pony with a Nazi symbol on one of its legs. A scandal broke out, especially because the Romanian cultural institute in New York shares a building with the Romanian consulate (Romania Culturala 2008).

So, there were two arguments against such an event: the diplomatic one and the nationalistic one. The argument for it was the success of the exhibition and its innovative character, which cannot be judged from traditional criteria.

As a general conclusion for this cleavage, a combination between traditional and innovative culture is extremely important, as both can give a better perspective on national culture. This strategy has already been applied by Romanian cultural institutes abroad, a fact that strengthens my statement about the discursive openness of these institutes.

## 5.6 Official versus unofficial culture

Official culture refers to the type of culture promoted by the official authorities of the state (for example, one Romanian official authority is the Ministry of Culture and Cults). By recognizing an artist and making him/ her part of the official culture, official institutions offer

support and promote his/ her artistic works. In a similar way, international recognition can lead to national recognition.

Without doubt, the aim of cultural institutes abroad during their emergence was the promotion of official culture. The institutes were built under the discourse of national state and the principle of rationality, as it was better to increase (cultural) diplomacy and try to avoid open conflicts.

ICR is "a public institution of national interest, […] under the authority of the President of Romania" (Patapievici 2008:15), and it may be understood that its objective is the promotion of official culture. However, the results of my interviews contradict this idea:

> we are an institution of the Romanian state, but we do not propose an official culture, we do not export only classical music, only Caragiale [Romanian writer], etc, because the network of institutes is so diverse and spread mainly in Europe […] we emphasize very much the local market (cultural manager 6).

There are two important things to notice in this cleavage. Firstly, there is a paradox: national interest is promoted by unofficial culture (illustrated example: not the culture recognized by the national state), which implies not only cultural changes, but also a reorientation of the state. Secondly, the examples given reflect traditional values rather than innovative culture, which may be interpreted as a wish for supporting new Romanian artists abroad.

## 5.7 Diplomacy versus culture

The diplomacy/ culture discursive and historical cleavage is particularly relevant, as it represents the two most important features of cultural institutes abroad; in fact, the two were considered as one feature, already mentioned several times in this paper: cultural diplomacy.

The aim of cultural institutes abroad, during their emergence and most of the history, was to promote national culture, language and values by diplomatic means. There was no opposition between diplomatic activities and cultural ones because the kind of culture promoted was the official, traditional one, recognized and promoted by the national state.

Nowadays this situation has changed, as "national culture" encompasses also complex and innovative features, but cultural diplomacy still functions. Such an example was illustrated at Accademia di Romania, where the Italian actress of the film presented that evening was awarded a prize by the Romanian embassy.

In contrast, as they appeared in the media, other cases reflect a possible discrepancy between diplomatic aims and particular cultural products (or at least), as illustrated by the scandal in ICR-New York with the pink pony with a Nazi symbol. The questions are: are Romanian cultural institutes abroad diplomatic institutions? And if so, to what extent? The answer from the cultural institute in Bucharest was a negative one: "no, no, [there is not an emphasis on diplomacy], we emphasize culture and cultural relations, much less accent on cultural diplomacy" (cultural manager 6), though in Rome one interviewee argued that "I would be afraid to invite to the institute certain gypsy style bands considering the tense relations between Italians and Romanians" (cultural manager 3), which demonstrates that certain diplomatic features are more than present in the daily existence of Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

In the conclusion of my thesis I will restate my arguments and conclusions of Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

# Conclusion

*"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were" (John Donne Meditation XVII)*

Romanian cultural institutes abroad find themselves at the crossroad of several discursive, institutional, organizational, historical, practical and strategic tensions, induced by macro and micro level sociological changes. In the first part of my research paper I have shown the most important historical discourses and institutional models that influence Romanian cultural institutes abroad: the national state, culture, cultural diplomacy, the European Union and post-modernity. The scope of my thesis is in terms of time 2003 - 2009, and in terms of space Bucharest, Rome and Venice. All my assumptions and arguments refer to the Romanian cultural institutes abroad situated in the European Union.

To begin with, if a century ago cultural diplomacy could represent an option for promoting peace inside Europe, the emergence of the European Union represents a much greater democratic assurance for the Member States than any cultural institute. In a similar manner, the post-modern human condition, in search of emotion and collective feelings, cannot be satisfied with the strict, rational cultural compositions of modernity and representative of the national state. For this reason, the public of cultural institutes abroad can accept and integrate in their lives a large variety of cultural goods: nowadays national cultural production promoted by ICR has to respond to the (foreign) audience's tastes and expectations. A rapid and efficient spread of cultural events is enabled both at a local level (such as institutes themselves), and a global, international or European one, based on cultural networks and organizations, (such as EUNIC).

50

I have identified several crucial dimensions that influence and modify the discourse and the administration of Romanian cultural institutes abroad. Firstly, the general framework is the modern tradition and the cultural-relativistic "post-modern condition" (Mafessoli 1988). This is a macro sociological change from modernity to post-modernity, and does not concern directly cultural issues, but sociological shifts of mentality, a wider capacity to give interpretations and to act in the world, both individually and collectively.

Another preoccupation of my literature review is the relation between the national state and the European Union. They are connected to each other, connected to modernity and post-modernity, and represent a combination of theory and practice: on one hand, both the national state and the European Union offer a discourse on culture. On the other hand, the national state and the EU can be perceived as two different models of administrative and practical strategies of functioning for institutions, including Romanian cultural institutes abroad.

The third level of analysis is a theoretical one and concerns diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and culture. These issues are strongly related to the discursive creation of "national culture". Cultural diplomacy is essential for understanding cultural institutes abroad, as it used to be the main aim of the institutes, especially during their emergence, but also after. Concerning Romanian institutes, I argue that during their emergence cultural diplomacy was used in order to strengthen the process of democratization and a better integration in the European Union.

I have applied the factors above to the Romanian cultural institutes and found seven historical cleavages, namely: 1. the fortress/ the open space; 2. the centre/ the local branch; 3. the national state/ the European Union; 4. modern/ post-modern features; 5. traditional/ innovative culture; 6. official/ unofficial culture 7. diplomacy/ culture. Though they may appear quite different, the cleavages depend on one another as in a mirror game, representing substantial,

interrelated, historical, strategical and mainly discursive changes of Romanian cultural institutes. Further, I have identified these cleavages as influences of internal and external changes in different discourses on national culture, both top-down and bottom-up shifts of perceiving national culture. In addition to this dimension, recently there have also been practical debates on the best institutional functioning, which imply a necessity of network cooperation and flexibility for Romanian cultural institutes.

I argue that Romanian cultural institutes abroad are becoming more de-concentrated and open, shift concerning both their discourse on national culture and their ways of administrative functioning. Though the cultural institutes were initially designed on a centralized, French model and presented an official discourse on Romanian culture, with historical changes of various discourses Romanian cultural institutes abroad are becoming more and more autonomous in their adaptation to the increasing national democratic stability, the larger framework of European Union and post-modern factors.

As a result, there is an emphasis on culture rather than diplomacy, with a variety of cultural events and artists promoted, administrative de-concentration and increasing emphasis on networking, especially with European organizations and institutions. Romanian culture is perceived as a European one and cultural events, addressed to the public of the host-country, reflect such a dimension of an "imagined" European community, with its similarities and differences, but still a compact community. Although these shifts are obvious, the initial aims of cultural institutes abroad are still present in the background of the events: the promotion of the national language or diplomacy.

Taking into consideration both sides of the coin: traditional and innovative cultural goods, official and unofficial art, diplomacy and culture, modern and post-modern features, strategic

issues of organization, the "global" phenomenon and cultural networking, etc, I argue that the best functioning of Romanian cultural institutes, both as a discourse and as administration, is the de-concentrated, flexible, open model of the "Agora".

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