

# **Cultural Nationalism alongside Official State-Building: The Romanian Cultural League in the Interwar Period**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis uses the case study of the Romanian Cultural League in the interwar period to question generally held assumptions about the development and endurance of cultural nationalism and its characteristics. The thesis finds that in the Romanian case cultural nationalism has survived the fulfillment of its goals by the creation of Greater Romania in 1918 and readjusted its program to the context of the interwar period. A survey of the League's program and activity shows that the cultural nationalism advocated by the organization coexisted and complemented the official projects aimed at creating a cohesive national culture. The League engaged in cultural practices aimed at a moral regeneration of the community and a cultural unification of the various traditions characteristic to the provinces making up interwar Romania. The League's identification with its leader, the historian and politician Nicolae Iorga, ensured its visibility but at the same time consigned it to a traditionalist niche of the public discourse.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Chapter I: Theoretical Framework: Locating Cultural Nationalism .....	8
Chapter II: Setting up a Cultural Organization.....	16
1. The Social Composition of the League: Who Were the Cultural Nationalists? .....	18
2. The Beginnings: Establishing the Organization.....	23
3. Sustaining the Network after the War .....	26
4. Financing Cultural Nationalism .....	28
Chapter III: Programmatic Cultural Nationalism .....	31
1. Mystical Organicism: Culture and Nation .....	31
2. Cultural Nationalism and Morality .....	35
3. Cultural Nationalism and the State .....	39
4. The League and the National Question .....	44
5. Further Challenges: Old Romanians and New Romanians in Greater Romania .....	49
Chapter IV: Practices of Cultural Nationalism.....	52
1. In Honor of the Past .....	52
a. Celebrations .....	52
b. Conferences .....	57
c. Publications and Other Initiatives .....	60
2. Staging Cultural Nationalism: Theatre, Music, Folk Dances .....	62
3. Alternative Education: The Summer Courses at Valenii de Munte .....	66
4. Dilemmas of Cultural Nationalism .....	70
Conclusion: The Relevance of Cultural Nationalism .....	74
Bibliography .....	78

## Introduction

Nationalism, while a political ideology, cannot be separated from cultural practices. Whether modernists, perennialists or primordialists, theorists of nationalism agree on the importance of culture in nationalist mobilization. Indeed the prevalence of cultural initiatives is evidence enough to convince some theorists to view cultural nationalism as separate from and complementary to political nationalism<sup>1</sup>. Whatever the validity of this claim, the relevance of cultural nationalism once the goal of a nation-state is achieved is subject to question. Nationalist celebrations, publications, conferences and privately organized reading rooms, libraries and museums thrive when the particular ethnic group lacks an autonomous political organization or, alternatively, the nation-state harbors irredentist aspirations towards territories it considers legitimately its own. Once all these desiderata are fulfilled, however, cultural nationalism seemingly loses its very reason of being. While history books, monuments and commemorations are still necessary, they become the responsibility of the state. Lacking a goal that would mobilize their adherents, cultural associations whose contribution has been notable in the past become decorative.

It is the aim of this thesis to question this assumption by focusing on the case-study of the Romanian Cultural League. An organization endorsing a program of cultural nationalism, the League survived the creation of Greater Romania and continued its activity throughout the interwar period. While readjusting its goals to the interwar context, the society continued to

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<sup>1</sup> John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), and "Re- Interpreting Cultural Nationalism." *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no.3 (1999): 392.

profess a program of cultural nationalism and engage in the same kind of activities which characterized it before the war. By showing the continuity between the League's prewar and postwar initiatives, the thesis will address the question of the lifespan of such private associations and the ability of the kind of nationalism they embrace to adapt to the conditions of a nation-state.

In 1890 Romanian émigrés from Transylvania and patriots from the Old Kingdom of Romania founded in Bucharest *Liga pentru unitatea culturala a tuturor romanilor* (*The League for the Cultural Unity of all Romanians*). While endorsing, as its name suggested, a program of cultural nationalism, the League's objectives were inherently political. In statutes, speeches and publications bordering on irredentism, the League systematically argued for the autonomy of the Romanians in Transylvania and ultimately, if less outspoken, for the region's incorporation into Romania. After more than two decades of militancy of varying intensity, the League unexpectedly saw its goal achieved with the end of the First World War and the creation of Greater Romania. These transformations faced the League with the challenge of readjusting its ideology as well as its very character.

Previously an irredentist organization agitating for the rights of Romanians abroad, in the interwar period the League had to adapt to functioning within the framework of a nation-state. While the goal of cultural unity was no less of a desideratum, the League now faced competition from other actors. Foremost among these was the Romanian state itself which, following the war, engaged in the politics of cultural unification, implementing educational policies aimed at assimilating Romanians from the new provinces of Transylvania, Bessarabia

and Bukovina, as well as Greater Romania's large minorities<sup>2</sup>. In the context of a conscious, planned state-led "cultural offensive"<sup>3</sup>, the activities of a private organization inevitably fade when compared with the broader scope of state intervention. This is even more the case in the conditions of political turmoil, social instability and frequent changes of regime which characterize interwar Romania. Nevertheless, even if marginal in impact, the activity of organizations like the League illustrate a different dimension of the Romanian nation-building. In a centralized and increasingly undemocratic system, private associations did have a voice, and it made itself heard in debates over highly controversial issues like the pace of cultural unification, the place of minorities in Greater Romania and the status of the Romanians from the newly acquired provinces.

The latter in particular had been the League's concern from its inception. Back in 1890, the League was officially established as a medium for assisting Romanians from Austria-Hungary financially and by other means, as well as for raising awareness in the Old Kingdom and abroad concerning the Magyarization policies of the Hungarian authorities in Transylvania. In these attempts, the League was reasonably successful. The cause of the Romanians abroad was appealing enough to ensure the participation of a public from a variety of social strata, but also the contribution of prominent university professors and politicians. In the first decade following its establishment, the League's activity was noteworthy. Starting in Bucharest, by 1893 the League already had forty-one local branches. In addition to annual congresses, the League organized meetings, conferences, and marches where occasionally thousands of people attended. Since 1896 it published a weekly newspaper, *Liga Romana* (The Romanian League),

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<sup>2</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

later to be turned into a magazine. Irregularly, the League published brochures and pamphlets, either with a pronounced political character or simply on subjects related to national history. Also seeking to promote national solidarity, the League organized celebrations of important historical dates and erected monuments of Romanian historical figures. More pragmatically, through a country-wide network of subscriptions, the League assisted the Romanian movement in Transylvania financially, either by helping individuals, or through financing Romanian-language periodicals, schools and libraries.

The League reached its maximum of visibility during the Memorandum Trial of 1894, when Romanian leaders from Transylvania were trialed and then sentenced to prison after presenting the emperor Francis Joseph with a memorandum complaining against the Hungarian nationalities policy. The League provided legal and financial assistance to the defendants and their families, popularized the cause in the Old Kingdom and abroad and stirred agitation to the extent to which the Hungarian authorities asked the Romanian government to outlaw it. Following the effervescence of the Memorandum moment, however, and despite growing membership, the League's activity declined, also due to dissensions within the leadership.

Its revival, starting in 1908, coincided with the ascension of Nicolae Iorga, by then already a prominent historian, to the position of secretary of the League. From then on, until Iorga's assassination by the Iron Guard in 1940, the Cultural League was associated with Iorga's name. His influence was so overwhelming, in fact, that at times, the League's program and ideology were completely subordinated to the historian's own. Nevertheless, despite charges of monopolizing the League, Iorga's influence was definitely beneficial. Before the war, its membership soared, reaching over 20000 active members in 1912 and 103 branches in Romania and abroad a year later. In 1914 the League also operated a symbolic change of name,



becoming *Liga pentru unitatea political a tuturor romanilor* (*The League for the Political Unity of all Romanians*).

Under Iorga's leadership, the League survived the creation of Greater Romania in 1919 and continued its activity in the interwar period. The League's activities remained essentially the same. It continued to publish periodicals and brochures and to organize conferences, meetings and celebrations. Owing to Iorga, the League became increasingly associated with the courses organized at his initiative at the summer university in Valenii de Munte. The context, as well as the targets of these activities were, however, essentially different.

The creation of Greater Romania brought both benefits and challenges to the League. In the new conditions, the League could pursue its activities unhindered by foreign interferences, without having to employ stratagems like smuggling patriotic brochures across the Transylvanian border, as had previously been the case. On the other hand, the League now had to compete, and sometimes, counteract, the state's aggressive campaign of Romanianization undertaken in the new provinces. The Cultural League had traditionally been allied with the leaders of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania and throughout its first decades of existence it collaborated closely with the Romanian Party of Transylvania. In the interwar period, however, the overly harsh centralizing policies of the Romanian government increasingly alienated Transylvanian Romanians who initially had hopes for some sort of autonomy. In these circumstances, the League had to bring together the contesting parts, if it were to remain faithful to its program of cultural unification and national solidarity.

The new political context also faced the League with the challenge of addressing the question of national minorities. As minorities made up to 29 percent of the population of Romania in 1930, the state took the problem they represented very seriously. In consequence,

so did the League, if in a less aggressive fashion. While Iorga's attitude towards minorities was ambivalent, unlike the Romanian government he did acknowledge the right of the "national minorities", by which he understood the Hungarians and the Germans, to develop their own cultures freely<sup>4</sup>. Like in the case of most Romanian intellectuals of the time, Iorga's tolerance did not extend to Jews. However, his and by extension, the League's, attitude towards minorities differed extensively from the state's. As such, this thesis will examine the League's projects involving minorities and Romanians from the new provinces and locate them within the League's broader program of cultural nationalism. In addition, the latter doctrine will be analyzed against the background of Romania's manifold interwar political and intellectual discourses.

The scholarly literature on the Cultural League is generally scarce. Its interwar activity has not been previously examined in the English or Romanian-language literature. The only available survey of its activity prior to 1918 is Gheorghe Marinescu's and Vasile Netea's "*Liga Culturala*" *si unirea Transilvaniei cu Romania*<sup>5</sup>, which, although valuable in terms of factual information and links to primary material, is written from an uncritical perspective and bears the mark of communist historiography. While strong in its pre-1900 section and especially in its presentation of the League's contribution to the Memorandum movement, the book's examination of the League after the turn of the century is superficial and minimizes the role played by Iorga. Other articles and studies mention the League only sporadically, focusing especially on its role in the Memorandum trial<sup>6</sup>. Biographies and studies on Iorga occasionally

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<sup>4</sup> William Oldson, *The Historical and Nationalistic Thought of Nicolae Iorga* (Boulder, Colorado: Columbia University Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Gh. Marinescu and Vasile Netea. "*Liga Culturala*" *si unirea Transilvaniei cu Romania*. (Iasi: Junimea, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Vasile Curticapeanu, *Miscarea culturala romaneasca pentru Unirea din 1918* (Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica, 1968); Razvan Paraianu, "National Culture as a Plot against Modernity." *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004).

mention his activity within the League<sup>7</sup>. However, understandable in the light of Iorga's diverse interests and overwhelming productivity, the League is treated marginally.

The first chapter will provide an overview of the League's history and organization. It will describe the setting up of the society, the social background of its members, the challenges faced in creating and preserving a country-wide network of sections and the ways in which a cultural society of this kind managed to finance itself. The second chapter will examine the League's understanding of "cultural nationalism" and its programmatic goals, as well as the relation between culture and morality. It will do so especially by examining Iorga's interwar doctrine and the way it related to the early twentieth century *samanatorist* trend whose main advocate he was. Special emphasis will be placed on the League's relation with state institutions and on the contrast between the League's anti-state discourse and the occasional collaboration with the authorities. In addition the chapter will examine the League's answer to the challenges of integrating the Romanians and the minorities from the new provinces in the "national culture".

The third chapter will look more closely at the practices of cultural nationalism and thus at the activities of the League's as such. It will examine the celebrations and conferences organized by the League and look at the use of theatre, music and folk dances, as well as at the League's other manifold initiatives. It will analyze separately a project closely associated with the League, namely the summer courses organized by Valenii de Munte and inquire into the causes of its enduring success. Finally, the limits of such activities and dilemmas of cultural nationalism will conclude this chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbu Theodorescu, *Nicolae Iorga* (Bucuresti: Editura Tineretului, 1968), William Oldson, *The Historical and Nationalistic Thought of Nicolae Iorga* (Boulder, Colorado: Columbia University Press, 1974) and Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography* (Iasi, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998).

# Chapter I: Theoretical Framework: Locating Cultural Nationalism

For an organization which boasted its nationalist credentials the choice of nationalism theory seems obvious. However, the peculiar character and history of the League, which covers almost half a century of major political changes, demanding equally radical shifts in the organization's goals and ideology, inevitably limits this choice. Equally constraining are the characteristics of Romania itself. Essentially an agrarian country, with an industry in an incipient phase and a still large proportion of illiterate population, Romania, for most of the League's lifespan, does not meet the prerequisites postulated by major theories of nationalism.

The characteristics of the organization and its setting limit in fact the application of most modernist theories of nationalism. While Ernest Gellner's<sup>8</sup> view of nations and nationalism as essentially modern is certainly to be retained, his structural theory is otherwise of little use. Gellner's powerful argument tracing the advent of nationalism to the emergence of mass public education and industrialization is less rewarding in this case, as the Romanian society of the time scarcely meets these conditions. Moreover, as opponents of the modernist approach have pointed out, the latter presupposes "mass participation in the social and political life of the nation"<sup>9</sup> and is thus inapplicable in areas where general enfranchisement is lacking or has only recently been introduced. At the same time, focusing on the state, Gellner's theory leaves little room for the role of private associations complementing or challenging the official nation-building project. Culture itself, the very reason of being of associations like the League,

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Anthony D. Smith, "The genealogy of nations: an ethno-symbolic approach" in *When is the nation?: towards an understanding of theories of nationalism*, edited by Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (Abingdon, Oxon ; N.Y. : Routledge, 2005), 96.

bears little relevance to Gellner. Inasmuch as he refers to culture, Gellner is interested in the standardized “high culture” disseminated through the mass system of education. Only when becoming public, official and state-directed culture becomes “national culture”. Otherwise, if outside the sphere of the state, culture remains, in the formulation of a later criticism of Gellner’s theory, “the rhetorical ammunition of nationalist activists”<sup>10</sup>.

A similar understanding of cultural practices emerges from Eric Hobsbawm’s work on the “invention of tradition”<sup>11</sup>, more relevant in this case than his later study on the dichotomy between civic and ethnic types of nationalism<sup>12</sup>. In the former work, Hobsbawm focuses on the emergence of the practice of commemorations, festivals, parades and monuments as a modern way to channel the participation of the masses in the political life of the nation<sup>13</sup>. Like Gellner, focusing exclusively on state-directed initiatives, Hobsbawm disregards the presence of similar private projects. As such, while insightful in its analysis of the factors contributing to the successful institutionalization or, on the contrary, the limited appeal of such commemorative practices, Hobsbawm’s theory is incomplete and therefore inapplicable in this case.

The use of the other highly influential modernist theory, springing from Benedict Anderson’s<sup>14</sup> interpretation of nations and nationalism as cultural artifacts, poses similar dilemmas. While Anderson addresses the question of professional intellectuals and their associations in more detail, he assigns them a limited role. Accordingly, the intelligentsia is responsible with disseminating and making accessible the specific vernacular languages which for Anderson are the medium of nationalism. But while the emphasis in Anderson’s account of

<sup>10</sup> Joep Leersen, “Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture,” *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (4) 2006: 560.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of tradition* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780 : programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, 263.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 1995).

nationalism is on invention and imagination, little attention is dedicated to the internal mechanisms of these processes. Anderson does distinguish between “official” and “popular” nationalisms, the former being prompted by the latter<sup>15</sup>. As critics have emphasized, this interpretation is reductionist, some historical examples pointing to the opposite taking place<sup>16</sup>. In any case, in Anderson’s account this phenomenon appears as a linear process, leaving no room for debate and conflict between the various agents of its propagation. Similarly, there is no suggestion of the possibility for official and popular nationalism to coexist.

Consequently, alternatives to modernist theories of nationalism constitute more fertile ground in what the role of culture and private associations is concerned. In this sense, applying Anthony D. Smith’s<sup>17</sup> ethno-symbolist theory, a more substantial analysis of the contribution of the intelligentsia to imagining the nation, is more fruitful. Unlike primordialism or perennialism, which postulate the antiquity of nations, ethno-symbolism, whereas acknowledging that nations are modern, argue that they emerge out of pre-modern ethnic ties. While controversial in its own right, ethno-symbolism remains relevant because of its combined “historical, cultural and sociological character”<sup>18</sup>. For the case in question, it is especially appropriate because unlike modernist theories, it focuses mainly on the field of culture<sup>19</sup>. As one critic has argued, for ethno-symbolists, like for nationalists themselves, nations are “forms of cultural communities”<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>16</sup> See Breuilly’s critique of Anderson in Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of nationalism: a critical introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 154-155.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> *When is the nation?: towards an understanding of theories of nationalism*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 99.

The cultural character of the nation being dominant, the propagators of culture become relevant as well. According to Smith, the rise of the secular intellectuals replaces the traditional religious authority with a rational one which derives its legitimacy from the use of science. He gives due credit to the importance of recurrent myths, traditions and beliefs and rehabilitates the work of historicist intellectuals whose creative return to the past reconstructs the historical memory of the community and reinforces its cohesion. But as the work of any historicist scholar is the expression of a particular interpretation of the past, Smith allows for the emergence of rival intellectual factions, which proceed to select different myths from the available memories of the past. Thus the process of reaching a comprehensive vision of the nation can be a lengthy one of trial and error and conflict and competition between groups with divergent understandings of the past. However, while the idea of inherent contest between different intellectual groups committed to shaping the nation is valid, Smith's argument overlooks the case of the competition between the agenda of various intelligentsia groups and voluntary associations and the state-led nation-building effort.

As the very name of the League suggests, for the nature of the particular nationalist project contemplated by the association, the use of John Hutchinson's theory of cultural nationalism is most apt<sup>21</sup>. Following Smith, Hutchinson contends that intellectuals, historians in particular, committed to the study of the past and the revival of the society play a distinct role in creating a unitary image of the nation. However, Hutchinson goes further and argues in favor of cultural nationalism as separate from and complementary to political nationalism. Consequently, cultural nationalism is a recurrent movement, emerging at times when political nationalism fails. Like in the case of the Cultural League, cultural nationalism comes forward

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<sup>21</sup> Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish State*.

when a state bent on modernization and reform challenges established identities and social categories.

This view develops and at the same time challenges another influential theory, that advanced by Miroslav Hroch. In his three-phases theory of nationalism, Hroch has argued that cultural manifestations are not a simple rhetorical, propagandistic addition to social and political processes, as Gellner would have it, but are developments in their own right which anticipate political transformations. Accordingly, Hroch's Phase A in the development of national movements is characterized by the emergence of activists devoted to the inquiry into and the dissemination of the group's language, history and traditions<sup>22</sup>. However, as subsequent commentators have pointed out, cultural agitation is not restricted to the incipient phases of nation-building but can remain prominent, emerging in "successive"<sup>23</sup> stages, even after the accomplishment of political goals or independent statehood. Consequently, here is where the significance of Hutchinson's characterization of cultural nationalism as a *recurrent* movement comes in.

According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalism perceives the nation as an organic being in danger of moral decay. However, unlike previous theoreticians who perceived cultural nationalism as a regressive movement, Hutchinson insists that its purposes are regenerative, not reactionary. In fact, by envisaging themselves as "*moral innovators*"<sup>24</sup>, cultural nationalists reject traditionalism and modernism alike, seeking to reconcile them in a feasible project of the

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<sup>22</sup> Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe," in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (Verso: London, New York, 1996), 81.

<sup>23</sup> Leersen, 563.

<sup>24</sup> Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish State*, 30.



nation. Consequently the integrative character of cultural nationalism explains why the movement remains in most cases a “minority enthusiasm”<sup>25</sup>.

The typical advocates of cultural nationalism are historians, philologists and artists who equally typically organize themselves in private cultural societies, establishing a “loose network of language societies, dramatic groups, publishing houses, lending libraries, summer schools, agricultural co-operatives and political parties”<sup>26</sup>. However, while endorsing a strictly cultural program, the objectives of such movements are inherently political. Cultural nationalism competes with political nationalism in providing contrasting solutions, communitarian versus state-led, to the challenges of modernization<sup>27</sup>. According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalism is doomed to fail, as its program is periodically adopted by the state and turned official. However, the case of the Cultural League will question this assumption by showing how private cultural initiatives and agendas can coexist along official ones without becoming institutionalized.

Later elaborations on the relationship between cultural nationalism and the state are, however, of particular relevance in this case. In a text from 2001, Hutchinson argued that

“State modernization is an important factor in the formation of national cultures, but not as is generally assumed in creating the cultural homogeneity necessary for a common citizenship. It ignites competing ethnic traditions with their different visions of community, and recurring conflicts that generate an exploration of different strategies by which nations can negotiate contingencies”<sup>28</sup>

Hutchinson’s formulation leaves room precisely for the kind of private organizations like the League, which had the same misgivings about the state’s ability to undertake the cultural

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>28</sup> John Hutchinson, “Nations and Culture” in *Understanding Nationalism*, edited by Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 93.

unification of its territory and aimed to complement or at times replace the initiatives of the authorities. As scholars of nationalism have underscored, the main quality of ethno-symbolist approaches is that they are “concerned to conceptualize culture as a relatively autonomous process, in no way reducible to politics”<sup>29</sup>. This framework, asserting a separate domain for culture, even if intertwined with politics, allows for a more accurate interpretation of the League’s projects as well as of its program of cultural nationalism.

While A.D Smith’s ethno-symbolist approach and Hutchinson’s theory of cultural nationalism can reasonably explain the League’s origins, ideology and practice, they do not sufficiently account for its impact and reception. While Hutchinson assigns the limited success of cultural nationalism to its integrative character, most reports of the Cultural League reflect not dissatisfaction with the particular politics of the League, but apathy towards the national cause in general. Time and again the League’s propagandists, especially those sent in rural areas, describe the mood of the population in terms reminiscent of what historians of nationalism elsewhere have qualified as “national indifference”<sup>30</sup>. The theoretical framework behind this view belongs to Rogers Brubaker whose insights, even if scarcely complementary to those of Smith and Hutchinson, should be nevertheless retained<sup>31</sup>.

While most scholars have long argued in favor of a fluid understanding of ethnic and national identities, Brubaker challenged even the most acknowledged modernist theories by questioning the validity of concepts like “identity” and “ethnic group” altogether. In Brubaker’s view, the many correctives used when employing the term “identity”, whether in stating its

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 182.

<sup>30</sup> Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2006), 2. Also Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).

constructed, flexible or multi-layered character, speak against its legitimacy as a conceptual tool in general<sup>32</sup>. Most importantly for students of nationalism, Brubaker's theory consequently reevaluates the understanding of key terms like "ethnicity" and "nationhood", which, in his words, should be interpreted not as "things *in* the world", but as "perspectives *on* the world"<sup>33</sup>. The challenges encountered by the League's activists in popularizing the national cause testify to the difficulty of imposing *their* perspective on the masses at large. While problematic as an explanation of the emergence and development of nationalism, Brubaker's suggestions should be kept hold of when analyzing the League's reception, appeal and uncertain mobilization.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Chapter II: Setting up a Cultural Organization

Proponents of cultural nationalism thought of themselves as having a unique contribution to the national cause. Their program of cultural enlightenment was thought fundamentally different from political ones and was believed to build cultural affinities and a moral solidarity that no official or state-directed initiative could instill. Iorga believed the Cultural League pursued a crucial goal for the future of the Romanian nation. He also believed that its cultural program was above politics and its cultural activities independent and different from state-initiated ones. Theorists of nationalism who regard cultural nationalism as an analytic category in itself also believe in a unique set of characteristics which differentiate cultural nationalism from political nationalism. The emphasis on culture, the integrative character, the focus on moral regeneration and the adversarial relation with the State and official nationalism are considered key features which can reflect the experiences of cultural nationalists everywhere.

The interpretation of both practitioners and theoreticians of cultural nationalism is, however, incomplete without a proper contextualization of each case of cultural nationalism. Many variables come into play in shaping the character of such a movement and give birth to significant nuances without which the assessment of a particular kind of cultural nationalism would be superficial. Like in the League's case, the presence of a dominant personality whose doctrine becomes identified with the one of the movement he leads can be one such factor. Competition with different trends, fashions and visions of the nation's future can be another. Together, they can amend both the way in which the designers of such movements themselves

imagined their cultural nationalism and the way in which it was subsequently interpreted by analysts.

For the nationalist activity itself, the historical context is crucial and the League's evolution provides ample proof for this. Before the war, the independent character of the League allowed it to engage in irredentists activities which the Romanian state could not possibly sponsor openly. During the war, the active lobby in favor of entering the war against Austria-Hungary had a significant echo in political circles. Immediately afterwards, at the beginning of the interwar period, the League benefited from the initial disarray to occupy a niche of commemorative practices and educational projects which the State did not yet take on. By mid 1920s, as the internal situation stabilized, the League's visibility declined. However, while the creation of Greater Romania deprived the League of its main reason of being, the challenges of the integration of the new provinces provided new avenues for the League to channel its activity. The Depression hit the League severely and its activity stagnated for a couple of years. Iorga's other priorities, as prime-minister in 1931-32, also affected the organization. By mid 1930s, however, the League was again on the rise, recovering from the financial collapse and restarting its activities.

Political and economic context aside, the cultural and intellectual atmosphere influenced the impact of the cultural nationalism advocated by the League. Interwar Romania had been the stage of prolific debates on Romania's national identity and the right path for its development. Whether scholars divide thinkers by labels such as Europeanists and traditionalists<sup>34</sup>, Westernizers, pro-Orientals or indigenists<sup>35</sup>, or even argue that such

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<sup>34</sup> Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 292.

categorizations simplify the otherwise blurred and overlapping boundaries between them<sup>36</sup>, the multiplicity of discourses was overwhelming. As expected, such strong competition influenced both the impact of the League's discourse and its very character. Cultural nationalism, even if propounding a distinct program, is not immune to the evolution of the public discourse in general. Following the radicalization of the Romanian public sphere in the 1930s and the increased presence of an anti-Semitic discourse, the League drastically readjusted its goals by focusing on a program of "Romanization of commerce". In other circumstances, such a turn would have been unthinkable for an association of cultural nationalism. Circumstances, however, influenced who cultural nationalists would be, how their priorities would look like and how they would act as a movement.

### **1. The Social Composition of the League: Who Were the Cultural Nationalists?**

The cultural nationalism predicated by the League cannot be separated from the *samanatorist* trend whose main proponent was Iorga<sup>37</sup>. Emerging at the turn of the century and taking its name from the journal *Samanatorul* (*The Sower*) which appeared in 1901, *Samanatorism* was an agrarian current aiming at the emancipation of the peasant and his rescue from the alienating world of capitalist towns and corrupt politics. Unlike other advocates of the

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<sup>35</sup> Katherine Verdery, "National Ideology and National Character in Interwar Romania", in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. by Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 111.

<sup>36</sup> Irina Livezeanu, "After the Great Union: Generational Tensions, Intellectuals, Modernism and Ethnicity in Interwar Romania," in *Nation and National Ideology: Past, Present and Prospects* (Bucharest: The Center for the History of the Imaginary and New Europe College, 2001), 111.

<sup>37</sup> For the main study on *samanatorism* see Z. Ornea, *Samanatorismul* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1971). For an overview of the trend see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866- 1947*, 67-71.

peasantry, however, the *samanatorists* aimed to help the rural world not through social and economic projects but through a moral and cultural revolution. As Keith Hitchins pointed out, proponents of this trend “believed that the peasant did not so much lack land as ‘light’”<sup>38</sup>.

Under Iorga, in charge of the newspaper since 1904, concern with the peasantry took the form of its glorification. Like previous critics of what they considered to be Romania’s hasty modernization, Iorga was an adept of organic evolution<sup>39</sup>. In Iorga’s view change can only be slow and gradual, without disrupting structures which took centuries to take shape. Moreover, change should not overcome tradition, which should retain a leading role in spite of the necessary transformations a country like Romania must undergo. Iorga saw the peasant and the rural world as the unspoiled embodiments of this tradition. Even the peasantry however, was doomed to change in a modernizing world. While idealizing the village, Iorga could not help but recognize that it will eventually be taken over by the town<sup>40</sup>. His concern was to ensure that in these conditions the peasant will preserve its purity and moral values. His *samanatorism* thus amounted to both the emulation of the traditional values personified in the peasantry and its protection from the alienating influence of the outside world. Its idealism and lack of practical focus prevented *samanatorism* from proving enduring as a trend. By 1910 it was already no longer relevant, being replaced by more pragmatic agrarian currents like *poporanism*. Iorga’s outlook, on the other hand, can be said to remain a *samanatorist* one for the rest of his life. Consequently, the League’s program itself can be interpreted to a certain extent as a vehicle for the prolongation of *samanatorism* at a time when the trend itself was no longer appealing.

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<sup>38</sup> Hitchins, 67.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more detailed analysis of Iorga’s organicism and its sources.

<sup>40</sup> Hitchins, 71.

As such, when becoming secretary of the League, Iorga understandably focused the organization's activity also on the rural world. Members of the League were likely to include those close to the rural world, who could help educate the peasants, "awaken" them to the national cause and at the same time preserve the traditional character of the village. For disseminating its program, the League relied especially on the so-called "intellectuality of the villages", namely teachers and priests. Before the war the League's brochures used to include appeals to teachers and priests to join the cause of the League<sup>41</sup>. In this they were moderately successful. Reports from 1910 and 1912 record many cases of teachers from rural areas joining the League<sup>42</sup>. The fact that the League was often willing to help their schools financially or through book donations undoubtedly constituted an incentive in poor and remote rural areas. Nevertheless, as letters from members attest, the League's propaganda for Romanian abroad occasionally also struck a sensitive chord<sup>43</sup>. Feelings of genuine patriotism thus went hand in hand with pragmatic concerns. In any case, this worked in the League's benefit, as teachers were the most likely to fulfill one of the League's main desiderata, namely the founding of sections of the League in the villages<sup>44</sup>.

Higher echelons of the educational establishment proved less responsive. If initially the League benefited from the allegiance of well-known university professors, their contribution, like the activity of the League itself, declined after the turn of the century. After 1906, when re-established under Iorga's leadership, the League failed to attract members of the academia to the same extent. Most likely Iorga's own position in the academic world attracted few

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<sup>41</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Neamul Romanesc, 1910), *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*. (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii "Neamul Romanesc", 1912).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 14.



sympathies. While university professor since 1893 at the age of twenty-four, his rapid ascension triggered envies and suspicions and he was denied entrance in the Romanian Academy until 1811. Neither was Iorga an amiable personality. The dictatorial and egocentric outlook isolated him from most of his colleagues<sup>45</sup>. His organization's appeal therefore found little support among fellow professors. Sections in other university towns like Iasi complained that professors seldom attend the League's meeting and conferences<sup>46</sup>.

The priesthood was a more compliant category. In this case, apart from the allegiance of the lower ranks, the League enjoyed the support of the higher hierarchy. The League's brochures featured letters of support from metropolitan bishops or other high representatives of the Church<sup>47</sup>. Apart from stimulating the priesthood to join the League, the leaders sometimes also contributed financially. For its part, the League did its best to strengthen this connection. It organized conferences on religious subjects, made important figures of the Church honorary members and occasionally invited them to preside over the congresses of the League, like was the case in 1922 and 1924<sup>48</sup>. The alliance with the Church enhanced the League's credibility especially in the rural world but at the same time added to its traditionalist character. Other categories symbolically associated with traditionalism and morality constituted target audiences of the League. This was the case of army members, to which the League issued similar calls.<sup>49</sup>. While never reaching the numbers of teachers and priests, officers and army employees remained a constant source of members for the League.

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<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography*, 134.

<sup>46</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*. (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii "Neamul Romanesc", 1912), 106.

<sup>47</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale (ANIC) Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/1919-1925, 21.

<sup>49</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 23.

Students constituted a target group with a different history. While one of the most active groups at the League's founding in 1891, their presence declined constantly throughout the years. The League, nevertheless, never gave up the hope of incorporating them. In the early 1900s, the plan was for every section to found an additional student sub-section<sup>50</sup>. While the initiative failed in most cases, at the time some section could still claim substantial participation of the students at their meetings<sup>51</sup>. After the war, however, students became almost a lost cause. Iorga, whose impact over students at the turn of the century has been impressive<sup>52</sup>, no longer exerted the same influence. In a desperate move, the League requested the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1923 to ask all students to join the League<sup>53</sup>. While the request remained unanswered, even if accepted it would have meant an abdication from the League's principles, which was essentially a voluntary organization. The fact that the League turned to such extreme measures only testifies to the decline and confusion experienced after the war. Almost a decade later, the League would try again to lure students, if in a less aggressive way, with similar results.<sup>54</sup> While the League was never altogether repulsive to the youth and its members always included students, it never gained the mass adherence it hoped for.

At the very time the League failed to penetrate the students, other social groups were more permeable. The League's registries from 1929 and 1930, recording all requests to join the Bucharest section of the League, suggest that the majority of aspirants were clerks, artisans and militaries and workers<sup>55</sup>. The presence of the latter owed to the League's increased emphasis

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography*, 149.

<sup>53</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/1919-1925, 44.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter 3 for an examination of the conferences designed especially for students and their impact.

<sup>55</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.25/ 1929-1930.

on the communist threat and its propaganda in factories<sup>56</sup>. The League was popular also among housewives and pensioners, who represented significant segments of its supporters<sup>57</sup>. Later on in the interwar period the League seemed to have penetrated the liberal professions as well. The registries from 1942-1945, the last years when the League functioned, even if only in theory, listed almost only doctors, lawyers and engineers<sup>58</sup>.

That aside, the League's stronghold was for most of its existence the rural world and the lower middle classes from urban centers. From the beginning the focus of the League's propaganda has been the province and the rural areas and village teachers and priests have proved the League's most truthful agents. While *samanatorism* was long extinct and attempts at *neo-samanatorist* revivals proved futile<sup>59</sup>, the League continued its legacy throughout the interwar period. The establishment and maintenance of such an organization was not, however, without challenges.

## **2. The Beginnings: Establishing the Organization**

In 1891, when it was founded, the League had 591 members and was restricted to Bucharest<sup>60</sup>. According to Marinescu and Netea, the authors of the only available monograph on the League's prewar history, a year later the League had 21 local sections. By 1913 the number would raise to 102, with over 20000 active members<sup>61</sup>. While the data is questionable, especially since not all the sections were actually active and not all registered members

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., File no. 49/1931-1935, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., File no.25/ 1929-1930.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., File no. 76/ 1942-1945.

<sup>59</sup> Z. Ornea, *Traditionalism si modernitate in deceniul al treilea* (Bucuresti: Editura Eminescu, 1980), 216.

<sup>60</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 2/ 1981.

<sup>61</sup> Gh, Marinescu and Vasile Netea, "*Liga Culturala*" si unirea Transilvaniei cu Romania (Iasi: Junimea, 1978), 130.

participated in its activities, the fact remained that the League experienced a rapid ascension. This, however, proved more difficult than the above mentioned authors' emphasis on the appeal of the League's patriotic message would suggest.

At its inception, the League did not break new ground in what nationalist activity was concerned. Other societies, especially in the territories outside the Old Kingdom were long active. Societies like *Astra*, *Carpatii* (*The Carpathians*) or *Transilvania* enjoyed a long tradition. The League's merit was to attempt to channel the interest of the Romanians inside for the fate of their "brothers" abroad. Once Iorga was entrusted with its leadership, the League contemplated more ambitious goals. If not very explicitly, the League in fact aimed to become an umbrella organization for channeling cultural projects. As such, it often flirted, even in the interwar period, with the idea of the federalization of all cultural associations under its leadership<sup>62</sup>. While this was never accomplished, the League endeavored and to a considerable extent succeeded in creating a country-wide network of sections.

In this they often competed with other associations which, without aspiring to a network or a visibility similar to the League's, nevertheless were strongly anchored in their local communities and refused to allow other organizations to take the stage. Reports from local sections record competition with societies based in the towns. In one case, in Sinaia in 1910 the League's program was contested, the rival local society advocating the primacy of economic nationalism over the cultural one<sup>63</sup>. In the same year in Mehedinti, the local cultural society boycotted the meetings of the League<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/1919-1925, 62.

<sup>63</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 80.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

In the first decades most sections struggled with logistical difficulties. The goal of most of them was to acquire their own headquarters, many sections meeting in locations they could not actually afford or whose rent took up all their incomes. Most sections failed to collect all subscriptions dues and some deliberately abstained from doing so out of fear of losing their members. Consequently sections used to appear and disappear overnight and an assessment of the League's real network is therefore difficult.

More than anything else, the League had to confront the prevailing apathy of the population. Report after report complains about the stagnation and lack of interest of the public. The brochure of the 1912 congress includes relevant examples of this kind. The Campina branch reported that "things go slowly, since people cannot rise above the material and understand the importance of the sacrifice for our ideal"<sup>65</sup>. The League's members in Caracal claimed they would "have accomplished more if [they] didn't meet the indifference of the public"<sup>66</sup>. In Constanta, the indifference was blamed on the "cosmopolitan character of the town", which made "the great majority of the Romanian elements, engaged in petty struggles, to look down on the League and regard it at best with indifference"<sup>67</sup>. Finally, the League in Turnu-Magurele denounced "the condemnable indifference shown by our public for idealistic enterprises and especially for the national cause"<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

### 3. Sustaining the Network after the War

After the war the challenges faced by the League multiplied. Once the political goal of the unification was achieved, the League's program understandably lost much of its appeal. While the League's leadership acquiesced to this reality, it nevertheless sought new ways to reach its audience. The League consequently established more ambitious goals for penetrating the rural world. By 1924 the goal was for each urban section to establish ten rural subsections<sup>69</sup>. While the number was unrealistic, many rural branches were set up.

Throughout the interwar period many sections were thus established. While each year new sections were founded, many were ephemeral. The lifespan of some sections did not even reach one year. Like before the war, often sections disintegrated only to be reestablished a couple of years later. While the official number of sections increased almost every year, in practice many no longer answered the convocations of the central committee and most likely existed on paper alone. For example the brochure of League's congress from 1928 lists 96 sections but mentions that 36 are inactive<sup>70</sup>. A year later the ratio of active to inactive sections is 111 to 35. In 1930 as many as 54 sections out of 116 were no longer active<sup>71</sup>. In 1931 the ratio changed again to 53 out of 128<sup>72</sup>.

During the Depression the membership understandably declined. While it is difficult to assess the League's total membership, the registries of the Bucharest section provide an eloquent sample of the decline in membership (see Table 1).

<sup>69</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 58.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., File no.30/1929, 97.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., File no. 39/ 1930, 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale: tinut la Focsani in zilele de duminica, 13 si luni, 14 septembrie 1931, dari de seama si rapoarte.* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1931).

Year	Members
1930	1300
1931	655
1932	594
1933	Not available
1934	350

**Table 1: Membership of the Bucharest section of the League<sup>73</sup>**

Numbers alone, however, can be misleading. While the table suggests a sharp decline in membership from 1930 to 1931, in fact in that period almost 800 members were erased from the lists because of failure to pay the annual contribution<sup>74</sup>. In 1934, in a desperate attempt to reverse the downturn, the League would approach the former members with the promise of erasing their debt if they agree to rejoin and pay only the subscription for the current year<sup>75</sup>. What this figures fail to reveal, however, is that even in these troubled years people continued to join the League, even if in small numbers.

Following the Depression, the League seem to have recovered, if not numerically, then at least financially. The brochures of the congresses from the second half of the 1930s no longer contain lists of the sections, or reports of individual sections specifying the number of their members. However, from the general reports which emphasize the activity of the most productive urban and rural sections it can be reasonably speculated that the League's network

<sup>73</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 49/1931-1935.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 128.

remained relatively stable even if all sections were probably inevitably affected by a decline in membership. The lack of information concerning membership is compensated by reports of the League's financial situation. In 1938 general M.C. Schina, the League's administrator claimed that the League has never been more thriving<sup>76</sup>. What he had in mind was not the League's activity, which indeed apparently intensified in the second half of the decade, but its finances. For the first time since the end of the war, the League was not only no longer in debt but enjoyed a surplus in its budget. The story of the League's financial odyssey is relevant not only for the history of the League, but also for an understanding of the challenges faced by cultural nationalism itself

#### **4. Financing Cultural Nationalism**

"Without money, nothing can be done"<sup>77</sup>. The statement, dating from 1933 and coming from Ilie Ardelean, the secretary of the Bucharest section of the League, reflects one of the main difficulties faced by the League throughout the years. The League's most stable source of financing, the subscription fees, did not cover the expenses required by the League's activities. The fees were not only small, many members benefiting from discounts, but also seldom collected in their entirety. In fact, as the overview of the League's history suggested, in periods of decline, like during the Depression, the fees were often cancelled completely in order to retain members.

In the absence of substantial revenue from inside, the League turned to various other means to supplement its income. Fundraising balls and lotteries were among the most frequent.

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<sup>76</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale: tinut la Botosani in zilele de 29 si 30 iunie 1938, dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1938), 14.

<sup>77</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 49/1931-1935, 118.



At times, the League's calendar included advertisements to support the costs of its publication. Apart from these, however, the League depended on loans and subventions. This was the case especially after the war, when the League's savings were taken to Moscow and never recovered<sup>78</sup>. While the League hoped the National Bank would compensate for the loss, the plan never came to fruition. As such, the League turned to various banks in search for loans. In 1920 the League obtained a loan from Marmorosch Bank, followed by others from Banca Urbana (The Urban Bank) and Casa de Depozite (The Deposits House)<sup>79</sup>.

All the funds went into the building of the League's Palace, one of Iorga's main ambition but an unrealistic project for a financially-challenged society like the League's. The scale of the Palace (today the Bulandra Theater in Bucharest), whose building took almost twenty years, was a disproportionate headquarters for a society which lost much of its visibility in the interwar period. For Iorga, however, this was a goal beyond questioning. Like nineteenth century nationalists who relished in the building of national museums and state operas, Iorga dreamt of the palace as not only the League's house, but the "house of the Romanian people and the Romanian culture"<sup>80</sup>. More pragmatically, the construction once began, the Palace was supposed to sustain itself and even become a source of income for the League. Indeed as soon as parts of the building were finalized they were rented to the Romanian Railways Company. The long-term contract allowed the League first to repay parts of its loans and then to earn an additional revenue<sup>81</sup>.

State subventions sustained the League in times of financial distress. While Chapter 3 will address the question of the relationship between the League and the State in more detail,

<sup>78</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *O viata de om asa cum a fost* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1981), vol. 3, 55.

<sup>81</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.39/1930.

suffices to say that the authorities saved the League in critical moments either through donations, by reimbursement or by taking up the League's loans. Apart from official subventions, Iorga's political connections ensured other kinds of sponsorship. As such, in 1922 the banker Aristide Blank, later prominent member of king Carol II's camarilla<sup>82</sup>, main shareholder of the Popular Theater, donated his shares to the League, which was thus able to retain control over the theater<sup>83</sup>. However, this kind of support from private individuals with a clear political agenda undermined the credibility of the League. At a time when the League claimed to be above party politics and against the financial oligarchy, this kind of association made its discourse seem hypocritical. As a survival tactic, however, it proved effective. The 1938 claims concerning the League's prosperity were not just empty propaganda. By that year, the League was not only no longer in debt but its budget actually recorded a significant surplus<sup>84</sup>. Given the idealistic cultural nationalism embraced by the League this was indeed remarkable.

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<sup>82</sup> Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, 386.

<sup>83</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 40.

<sup>84</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale: tinut la Botosani in zilele de 29 si 30 iunie 1938, dari de seama si rapoarte*, 18-19.

## Chapter III: Programmatic Cultural Nationalism

### 1. *Mystical Organicism: Culture and Nation*

The League's projects and activities derived from a self-styled program of "cultural nationalism", which individualized the League and separated it from both the state and other nationalist movements. Springing from Iorga's thought, the League's programmatic cultural nationalism had its roots in the historian's peculiar understanding of the relation between culture and nation. Originating in the conservative canon inaugurated in Romania by the Junimea cultural and political group, Iorga's discourse would retain the latter's emphasis on organic development while acquiring an increasingly nationalistic and populist bent<sup>85</sup>.

The original Junimist perspective, which took coherent form in Titu Maiorescu's theory of "forms without substance", emphasized the dangers of the indiscriminate and untimely adoption of Western institutions and behaviors in a society which was far from reaching Western standards<sup>86</sup>. The theory, however, was more ambiguous than subsequent conservatives would have it. Undoubtedly Maiorescu understood the "forms" to refer to the liberal institutions whose inauguration he considered premature, as well as to the Western mores and fashions to which the Romanian intelligentsia got accustomed abroad and continued to practice at home.

<sup>85</sup> Ioan Stanomir, *Spiritul conservator de la Barbu Catargiu la Nicolae Iorga* (Bucuresti: Curtea Veche, 2008), 113.

<sup>86</sup> Titu Maiorescu, "O cercetare critica asupra poeziei romane de la 1867," in Titu Maiorescu, *Opere I* (Bucuresti: Editura Minerva, 1978), 26.

It is, however, less clear what he understood by “substance”. While Western historiography interpreted this as referring to the “innate” character of the Romanian people<sup>87</sup>, this assumption is questionable. Whereas Maiorescu himself noted with regret that the Romanian society is no longer in a *tabula rasa* condition that would allow its molding according to predetermined principles<sup>88</sup>, Z. Ornea, the exegete of Junimea, insightfully notes that Junimea nevertheless constructed its theory as if this was still true and Romania was in an original state allowing social experiments<sup>89</sup>. In effect, it can be argued that Maiorescu warned against the imposition of Western forms in the absence of *any* substance. He expressly argued that the first manifestations of modern Romanian culture started as late as 1860, thus repudiating any previous achievements of the nation<sup>90</sup>.

Iorga’s outlook could hardly have been more different. In this his model was not Maiorescu, with whom he was temperamentally opposed, but Mihai Eminescu, the poet associated with Junimea but never a mainstream Junimist because of his nationalistic excesses<sup>91</sup>. While appropriating the discourse against “forms without substance”, Iorga, like Eminescu, had no doubts as to where this substance was to be found. For Iorga the answer was the nation, progressing through ages and mystically embodied in its culture.

Nations, in Iorga’s view, were organic, just like individuals. Iorga’s organic outlook, however, went beyond that of most nationalists. According to him, nations were “divine, mysterious formations, which cannot be harmed”<sup>92</sup>. A mystical concept of the nation and its

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<sup>87</sup> Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas about, and Reactions to, Modernization in the Balkans.” *Eastern European Quarterly* 31:2 (1997), 164.

<sup>88</sup> Titu Maiorescu, “Observari polemice,” in Titu Maiorescu, *Opere I*, 141.

<sup>89</sup> Zigu Ornea, *Junimea si Junimismul* (Bucuresti: Eminescu, 1978), 204.

<sup>90</sup> Titu Maiorescu, “O cercetare critica asupra poeziei romane de la 1867,” in Titu Maiorescu, *Opere I*, 26.

<sup>91</sup> Stanomir, 113.

<sup>92</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Ce dureaza: conferinta la Liga Culturala din Brasov octombrie 1939* (Valenii de Munte, 1940), 9.

destiny made Iorga argue that a “supernatural power” governs the existence of nations, which do not have to be “ready or right” in order to fulfill their goals. Instead, circumstances, controlled by the mystical power, work in their service<sup>93</sup>. The condition, however, is for nations to fight for their greatness. In this sense, Iorga did not blame the Hungarians, whose quest to ensure the “glory and strength” of their nation was just as legitimate as any other<sup>94</sup>. Later on, in mid 1930s, he would still claim, this time referring to the Jews, that he harbors “no hatred against any nation”, each nation having the right to develop organically<sup>95</sup>.

For Iorga the reservoir of the nation’s strength was its culture, which in its own turn was shaped and depended on language, the first and foremost expression of a nation’s spirituality. According to Iorga, language was “the highest and most complete embodiment of a nation’s soul”<sup>96</sup>. Language, seen as inexorably linked with nationality, was also a living organism, transformed through generations, bearing the mark of the past but also the potential for change in the present<sup>97</sup>. For Iorga language was not a simple tool for communication but was inseparable from the ideas it expressed.

Like the nationalism described by Anthony D. Smith, Iorga’s also had the “cult of authenticity”<sup>98</sup>. For Iorga, the authentic Romanian culture was the traditional one, embedded in the peasant world. The *samanatorist* trend postulated that literary works are valuable to the extent to which they reflect the realities of the rural world. While most literary critics regard

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<sup>93</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Cultura nationala si politica nationala* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Neamul Romanesc, 1908), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1937), 5.

<sup>96</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Lupta pentru limba romaneasca* (Bucuresti: Minerva, institute de arte grafice si editura, 1906), 16

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>98</sup> A.D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67.

literary *samanatorism* as an aesthetic failure<sup>99</sup> its message was influential for a time and faithfully reflects Iorga's beliefs.

While the traditional, rural and patriarchal culture was paramount for Iorga, he was nevertheless not altogether adverse to change. In this sense, Iorga's discourse was at times controversial. While arguing that each Romanian can contribute to the national culture which was also bore the imprint of successive generations<sup>100</sup>, Iorga would alternatively also insist that Romanian culture has achieved a definite form, no longer necessitating change or alteration.<sup>101</sup>

As William Oldson pointed out, Iorga's understanding of culture was teleological<sup>102</sup>. Through culture, people should rediscover their roots. Time and again Iorga emphasized that the past is the nation's only "fortune"<sup>103</sup>. In turn, this rediscovery itself would lead to the further development of culture. In addition, only by being familiar with their own culture Romanians can understand and appreciate other cultures. For Iorga, mutual comprehension between cultures is conditioned by each nation being in constant contact with its own<sup>104</sup>.

Knowledge of the national culture, understood as a mystical force in itself, was the prerequisite for the creation of "national solidarity", also an important concept in Iorga's thinking. According to Iorga, when a culture achieves a certain stage in its evolution it gives way to an instinctual type of moral cohesion, understood as "national solidarity". The latter manifests itself by putting the interests of the nation above any other and by disregarding social differences and political affiliations<sup>105</sup>. The degree to which a nation can achieve this kind of

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<sup>99</sup> Z. Ornea, *Samanatorismul*, 278.

<sup>100</sup> Nicolae Iorga, "Condițiile adevăratei culturi" *Neamul românesc*, July 17, 1937.

<sup>101</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale ținut la Iași în zilele de 27, 28 și 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama și rapoarte*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Oldson, 62.

<sup>103</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Pe ce se poate sprijini un popor* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Soc. Neamul Românesc, 1910), 13.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Nicolae Iorga, "Solidaritatea națională", *Neamul românesc*, January 26, 1935.

national solidarity has ramifications in the political field. According to Iorga, there can be no difference between “national culture” and “national politics”<sup>106</sup>. The state itself is organic, emerging from the “national life” of the people and reflecting its characteristics<sup>107</sup>. Consequently, it is efficient as long as the organic link between the state and the nation, represented primarily by the peasantry, remains intact. Different phases in the development of the national culture can demand different political actions. As such, Iorga argued in the first decade of the century that the emancipation of the peasants was demanded by the stage achieved by the national culture itself<sup>108</sup>.

## **2. Cultural Nationalism and Morality**

Characteristic of the League and of cultural nationalism more generally, is also a constant concern with morality. Springing from Iorga’s *samanatorist* convictions, the preoccupation with ensuring standards of decency in the Romanian public space remains a regular objective of the League. In part, concern for morality is a natural continuation of the League’s interpretation of cultural unification and the means to achieve it. From its inception, the League perceived itself as the institution around which the Romanian nation, divided by borders between provinces and by political and social differences within the Old Kingdom, should coagulate. Amid divested interests and prevailing apathy, the League set to build a new sense of national solidarity. In this, morality came paramount. As Hutchinson had emphasized,

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<sup>106</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Cultura nationala si politica nationala*, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Ideile abstracte si statul organic”, *Neamul romanesc*, April 3, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Avem nevoie de o organizatie sanatoasa, de o natiune unita, de o natiune multumita..” in Nicolae Iorga, *Discursuri parlamentare 1907-1917* (Bucuresti: Editura politica, 1981), 297.

cultural nationalists saw themselves as “moral innovators”<sup>109</sup>. Their work was supposed to regenerate a community in disarray. In the League’s case, the disarray became especially obvious in the first decade after the war. At the League’s congress in 1928, Iorga deplored the “the lack of a moral bond that would link the different provinces and the different social classes”<sup>110</sup>.

Apart from its idealistic perception, the League acted as a guardian of morality in a pragmatic sense as well. Its alliance with village priests and teachers made this possible. Among the many subjects covered by the League’s conferences, in 1912 one dealt particularly with the question of concubinage and the means to prevent it<sup>111</sup>. More often than not, however, the League’s interest in morality affected not the private lives of the citizens but the League’s main field, culture. In the latter, the League’s initiatives were at best questionable. Iorga’s literary taste was notoriously conservative. In his subordination of literature to the national cause, and the indiscriminate glorification of the peasant and the nation, Iorga promoted obscure writers and denigrated valuable ones. The main targets of his criticism were modernism and symbolism, perceived as decadent. Understandably, Iorga thus made flagrant errors of judgment, discarding artists and writers that would become part of the canon. For example, for over two decades Iorga directed his criticism against Tudor Arghezi, today and at the time an acknowledged poet, but to Iorga the incarnation of moral abjection and pornography<sup>112</sup>. Other prominent figures like Brancusi or Tristan Tzara were the subject of

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<sup>109</sup> Hutchinson, 30.

<sup>110</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, 87.

<sup>111</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central.* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii “Neamul Romanesc”, 1912), 106.

<sup>112</sup> Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreapta romaneaca.* (Bucuresti: Est, 2008), 520-527.



unrelenting scorn<sup>113</sup>. On the other hand, Iorga's concern with morality also underpinned his condemnation of the "unhealthy mysticism"<sup>114</sup> prevalent in the 1930s in the writings and teachings of "gandirists" and "trairists". While the supporter of traditional, Christian culture himself, Iorga rose against the "orthodoxism" prevalent at the time, which identified the essence of the Romanian soul in the Orthodox religion. In reaction to Nichifor Crainic, founder of the journal *Gandirea* and the main advocate of "orthodoxism", Iorga denounced the "orthodox mysticism" as not only unrepresentative for the Romanian nation, but as an imported idea itself, originating in philosophical circles in Germany and Austria<sup>115</sup>. Undoubtedly, however, while reticent to this kind of extremes, Iorga's cultural nationalism remained essentially conservative. In this sense, there is a significant variation from the model advanced by Hutchinson which assumed that cultural nationalism is generally an attempt to reconcile traditionalism and modernism<sup>116</sup>. While not questioning the validity of the model itself, this case suggests that additional factors, like the overwhelming influence of a leader, which in the League's case determined its essentially traditionalist outlook, can influence significantly the character of a particular cultural nationalism.

The League thus imitated Iorga's idiosyncrasies with consistency and perseverance. As time passed by, however, its voice in the matter, just like Iorga's, became increasingly anachronistic. In the interwar period the days of *samanatorism* were long over and its echoes seemed out of place. Paradoxically, at the same time, the League's demands became more and more radical and unrealistic. The 1928 congress of the League witnessed the traditional rally

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<sup>113</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Lupta mea contra prostiei: conferinta la Liga Culturala* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1936)

<sup>114</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1937), 4.

<sup>115</sup> Z. Ornea, *Traditionalism si modernitate in deceniul al treilea*, 557.

<sup>116</sup> Hutchinson, 33.

against pornographic literature and its corrupting effect on the youth<sup>117</sup>. An internal memo of the Bucharest section, however, reveals more drastic plans. Dated March 7, 1934, the memo reiterates the League's commitment to the fight against modernism and pornographic literature, also stating the League's ambition to become a "kind of ministry for these ideas and struggles",<sup>118</sup>.

This time, however, instead of vague commitments, the memo allows for a more precise understanding of the way the League intended to implement its goals. As such, the League planned to form teams of referents, fluent in a couple of languages, which would check books proposed for translation in Romanian for moral inadequacies. In addition, the League would organize "intervention teams" which would supervise publishers and booksellers. Following the uncovering of purveyors of immoral works, lawyers appointed by the League would then sue the culprits. Finally, other teams would ask the assistance of the Police in burning the decadent books. Intense propaganda would complement these practical actions<sup>119</sup>. By 1937, the League tempered its zeal, this time announcing at its annual congress its intention to establish its own bookstores, where only "healthy" literature was supposed to be sold<sup>120</sup>. The 1934 memo, however, remains revealing of how far some of the members were willing to go in achieving this purging of the Romanian cultural space. Designed by a local section, at a time when Iorga's interests rested primarily in politics, it is uncertain whether the plan would have met his approval. Undoubtedly, however, the origins of the League's censorious agenda lie in his views.

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<sup>117</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 30/1928.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., , File no.49/ 1929-1935, 136.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>120</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte*, 10.

### 3. Cultural Nationalism and the State

The League's interest in safeguarding standards of morality also sprang from its distrust in the ability of the State to accomplish the task. The same was true for more crucial problems affecting the life of the nation:

“Who should address, in Romania, the national question? The society? But the society does not exist yet, outside the State. In normal circumstances, the society creates, controls, corrects the State. In our case it does not work this way. The State does not represent the society but replaces it; does not serve it, but dominates it, destroying it spiritually”<sup>121</sup>

Iorga's statement, dating from 1913, seems to confirm the conclusion reached by Hutchinson in his study on cultural nationalism in Ireland according to which the relationship between cultural nationalism and the state is necessarily adversarial<sup>122</sup>. Accordingly, cultural nationalism emerges in times when the state undergoes through periodical crises. Alternatively, once reconsolidated, the state takes up the attributions of cultural nationalism. Practice, however, like in the case of the Cultural League, reveals a relationship a lot more ambiguous than this model allows. While often tense, the relationship between the League and the Romanian state would be more accurately described as one of complementarity. More often than not the activities of the League complemented the official projects of the authorities, whether in terms of culture or national propaganda.

Understandably the League's, and especially Iorga's, rhetoric, would seldom admit this. Even before the war the League envisaged its actions as not only different, but also qualitatively better than the state's. Speaking at the 1914 commemoration of the 1848

<sup>121</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Doua apeluri catre rominii din Regat si cuvantarea tinuta la intrunirea Ligei Culturale de la 9 iunie 1913* (Valenii de Munte, Tipografia Soc. “Neamul Romanesc”, 1913), 26, my translation.

<sup>122</sup> Hutchinson, 43.

revolution, Iorga contrasted the commemoration organized by the League with the sterile ones directed from above:

“I think we have enough commemorations which come from the state, from the officialdom and I don’t see why we would add, to the state’s and the authorities’ celebrations, another one that would fail to change anything in anyone’s soul and fail to stimulate people to put all their resources in the service of the country”,<sup>123</sup>

Apparently, in contrast with the artificial, strictly formal official celebrations, the ones promoted by the League had the merit of really connecting the present with the past and thus achieving a spiritual re-awakening of the people<sup>124</sup>.

In Iorga’s view, however, and in tune with a prevailing discourse of the time, the state was guilty of a lot more than failure to instill feelings of national solidarity. After the war, following the philosopher Constantin Radulescu-Motru, who first coined the term<sup>125</sup>, Iorga accused the state of “politicianism” or the practice of politics for the sake of politics. Accordingly, the state was corrupt, dominated by either the old oligarchy or the newly rich. Party interests and the “rotten bureaucracy” consequently suffocated any project. Even if initiated, the frequent changes of ministers and the high turnover of offices prevented their completion<sup>126</sup>. All these prevented the state from becoming the “great predicator and patron of moral order”,<sup>127</sup> which the League envisioned.

In its more moderate moments, however, the League saw itself as accomplishing a task which the state, given the many social and political challenges of the interwar period, was yet

<sup>123</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *La comemorarea zilei de 3 Maiu 1848* (Bucuresti: Editura Ligei Culturale, 1914), 8, my translation.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>125</sup> Constantin Radulescu-Motru, *Cultura romana si politicianismul* (Bucuresti: Libraria Socec, 1904).

<sup>126</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Targoviste in zilele de duminica 3 si luni 4 iunie 1928. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Bucuresti, 1928), 6.

<sup>127</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Liga Culturala, ce a fost, ce este, la ce foloseste” in Nicolae Iorga, *Sfaturi pe intunec: conferinte la radio* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1996), 65.

unable to undertake. In 1928 Iorga complained that the “new unified Romanian state does not rest on a unified culture”<sup>128</sup>. As the state, sunk in corruption and bureaucratic practices, is unable to achieve it, the conclusion was that “only free associations can undertake this beautiful but difficult task”<sup>129</sup>. Only a year later, however, Iorga would play down his previous radicalism. This time, the League was supposed only to supplant the state temporarily, until the latter would be capable to achieve the desired cultural unity. Talking about cultural projects in front of the League’s members, Iorga claimed that “the state will take care of these when it will be able to do so financially; until then it is our duty”<sup>130</sup>. Iorga’s attitude was hardly constant. A year later still, he argued that the state could only fulfill its role by limiting itself to administration, national defense and primary education. Otherwise, municipalities should be in charge of higher levels of education and private associations like the League should be in charge of actions pertaining to the cultural sphere<sup>131</sup>.

Iorga’s inconsistencies derived from the fact that the League, despite its reticence to admit it, depended financially on the state. Iorga’s own discourse in this respect is highly contradictory. Even in the same speech, following his boasting that the League had performed its activity without subventions, Iorga complains about the “the difficultly squeezed mercy” of the State<sup>132</sup>. The fact was that, while self-sustaining to a considerable degree, the League benefited from important subventions in key moments of its activity. Examples of such instances are many. In 1924 the League received from the Bucharest town hall the donation of

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<sup>128</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Targoviste in zilele de duminica 3 si luni 4 iunie 1928. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Bucuresti, 1928), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.34/1929, 30.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., File no.39/1930, 6.

<sup>132</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.35/1929, 130

the site where the future palace of the League would be built<sup>133</sup>. Subventions obtained from various ministries contributed to the building itself<sup>134</sup>. More importantly, in 1937 the Ministry of Finances took over the payments for two important loans, contracted by the League at Casa de Depuneri (The Deposits House) and Societatea Creditul Urban (The Urban Credit Society)<sup>135</sup>. Equally relevant was the cooperation with the state in lobbying for the national cause. In 1921, the League requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be entrusted with “written Romanian propaganda” abroad and stated its willingness to contribute in any way<sup>136</sup>. A year later the League received a subvention for publishing and distributing a brochure in French which would refute “tendentious allegations” against Romania<sup>137</sup>.

The League’s collaboration with other state-owned institutions was no less fruitful. For most of the 1930s the League repaid its loans by renting parts of its palace to the Romanian Railways<sup>138</sup>. The latter, since 1921, granted a fifty percent discount for the League’s members when traveling at its congresses<sup>139</sup>. Also since 1921 the League was exempted from paying postal taxes<sup>140</sup>. Apart from administrative arrangements, the League, in spite of Iorga’s rhetoric, was not reticent to seek the collaboration of the authorities for its own cultural initiatives or to participate in state-sponsored ones. Consequently, the League had a long relationship with Casa scoalelor (The Schools’ House). Accordingly, the League selected the books offered as prizes for students at the end of the school year and was afterwards

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., File no.5/1919-1925, 55.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., , File no.35/1929, 130.

<sup>135</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte*, 14.

<sup>136</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.5/1919-1925, 20.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>138</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.39/1930, 90

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., File no.5/1919-1925, 43.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 32.

remunerated from the state budget<sup>141</sup>. Moreover, despite the League's condemnation of official celebrations, it occasionally took part in organizing them together with state institutions<sup>142</sup>.

The League's relationship with the state cannot be dissociated from Iorga's own political affiliations. Following Iorga's fluctuating relationship with the political establishment, the League's attitude was either critical or supportive. At times when his own short-lived party proved to be a failure, Iorga vehemently denounced the "politicianism" and corruption of those in power. Alternatively, when his pupil Carol II returned to the throne and established his personal dictatorship, the League was officially entrusted with printing and disseminating the brochure of the new constitution<sup>143</sup>.

The relation between the League and the state was therefore ambiguous and undoubtedly considerably closer than the League would have liked to acknowledge. The League certainly longed for complete independence from the state. Claiming to be above politics, it resented interference with the authorities and the party interests they represented. Nevertheless, the League would not have survived without the financial support of the state. Moreover, its actions seldom came in opposition to official ones. More often, they amounted to a parallel sphere, which complemented the projects of the state<sup>144</sup>.

Iorga's own ambitions and involvement on the political scene can question the validity of the Cultural League as a case study of the relationship between cultural nationalism and the state. Nevertheless, cultural nationalism can seldom be completely dissociated from politics and the fact that its proponents often also play political roles confirms this. Except for isolated

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>142</sup> See chapter 3 for the example of the Aviation Day in 1928.

<sup>143</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.66/ 1938, 41-48.

<sup>144</sup> See the case of the summer courses at Valenii de Munte, designed as an alternative to formal education, discussed in chapter 3.

cases, however, the performance of cultural nationalists while in office is generally unimpressive. The advocates of cultural nationalism focus disproportionately on culture and come poorly equipped for party politics. Their cultural nationalism, however, even if at times in opposition to the state, can hardly endure without it. More likely, in practice associations endorsing a program of cultural nationalism coexist along the state and complement its activity.

#### **4. The League and the National Question**

Especially before the war but also afterwards the main venue for the League to complement the state was to address the national question. The League's national goals mirrored Iorga's understanding of cultural nationalism. In the integrative mode which Hutchinson defined as characteristic of cultural nationalism in general, the League protested against social, political or religious divisions permeating the society<sup>145</sup>. The national question should stand above class differences, political allegiances or religious distinctions. Back in 1910, referring to the Transylvanian Romanians' division in the Orthodox and Uniate (Greek-Catholic) confessions, the League deplored

“the hideous and destructive enmity springing from the religious accident of separating the Romanians across the mountain in two confessions, which have the right to compete in the Romanian cultural field, but not to antagonize in the benefit of foreigners.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Hutchinson, 30.

<sup>146</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Neamul Romanesc, 1910), 18, my translation.



Prior to the war, dissensions amplified the danger of denationalization which jeopardized the Romanians from outside the Old Kingdom<sup>147</sup>. At the time, the League's projects naturally focused on Romanians abroad and especially Transylvania. For Iorga and the League, there was no question about which region should receive priority. In Iorga's words, Transylvania was the "right hand" which, once freed, would help acquire the other regions:

"One thing I can tell you for sure: with Bessarabia, lagging behind, overwhelmed by foreigners, we will not accomplish the takeover of Transylvania, but with a free Transylvania we will be able to fulfill our historical mission in its entirety"<sup>148</sup>

Throughout the first decade of the century the League militated more or less explicitly in favor of Transylvania's unification with Romania. While claiming to endorse Romania's neutrality at the beginning of the war, since, in the League's view, the nation should rally behind the Crown in times of crises<sup>149</sup>, the League nevertheless continued to lobby in favor of entering the war and succeeded in influencing the foreign policy of the state<sup>150</sup>.

In the interwar period, the integrative character of the League's program was reconfigured to include the Romanians from the new provinces and the minorities. In 1928 the League's slogan advocated "cultural unity between Romanians, cultural cooperation with minorities, cultural collaboration with neighboring countries"<sup>151</sup>. The following chapter will address in more detail the specific projects designed to promote mutual awareness and tolerance between the new categories of Romanian citizens. However, at the very time when

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<sup>147</sup> *Politica Ligei Culturale. Bucuresti 14 Decembrie 1914. Raportul secretarului general.* (Bucuresti: Tipografia Romaneasca, 1914), 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Intrunirea Ligei culturale tinute la Bucuresti in ziua de 15 februarie 1915* (Valenii de Munte: Atelierele Tipografiei "Neamul romanesc", 1915), 35, my translation.

<sup>149</sup> *Politica Ligei Culturale*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> Marinescu and Netea, 263.

<sup>151</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, 88.

the League designed courses and conferences encouraging solidarity, the danger of denationalization resurfaced as one of its chief concerns.

In the 1930s, following the general radicalization of discourse in Romania, the League did not remain immune to the xenophobic tendencies ravaging the public sphere. Iorga's, and implicitly the League's, discourse on minorities have always been ambivalent. Before the war, denunciations of foreigners within the Old Kingdom appeared sporadically in the League's reports, especially in those from towns in Moldova where the proportion of Jewish Population was high<sup>152</sup>. After the war, however, the League's official discourse changed radically. According to Iorga,

“We, the Romanians, are no longer alone in our country. A fate we must understand and welcome with pleasure and humanity had given us people of different languages and cultures as neighbors and fellow citizens.”<sup>153</sup>

The nationalities Iorga had in mind were the Hungarians and the Transylvanian Szeklers, who should be appreciated for and emulated in their contribution to universal culture<sup>154</sup>. The Szeklers in particular ranked highly in Iorga's view, who considered them hard-working, cultivated and intelligent. In spite of this however, by the end of the 1930s Iorga found reasons of displeasure with them, as he did with minorities in general. While acknowledging that the Romanian administration had often been inept, Iorga accused the minorities of revisionist plans. This was the case with the Szeklers who, Iorga claimed, approached him after the war in

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<sup>152</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 98, *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*. (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii “Neamul Romanesc”, 1912), 57.

<sup>153</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, 88. My translation.

<sup>154</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 35/1929, 129.

order to “introduce them in the Romanian consciousness” but by mid 1930s retreated in their “Transylvanian fortress” where they plotted against the Romanian state<sup>155</sup>.

Hungarians were suspected of doing the same, in their case, Iorga hypocritically asserting that Romania has been “very tolerant, very noble, very just and very merciful”<sup>156</sup>. His constant reassuring of the desire for understanding and good relations went hand in hand with anti-revisionist propaganda against Hungarians agitating for the changing of borders<sup>157</sup>. Two decades after the war the League exhibited the same ‘besieged fortress’ complex. In the members’ view, the League was in competition with the schools of the minorities, which “mocked” the Romanian nation<sup>158</sup>. In spite of the League’s integrative discourse, minorities were still a danger, rather than a potential ally:

“The others are few, but richer and more cultivated [...] the others don’t come to Bucharest but stay at home and strengthen their position, unlike Romanians, who led astray by party interests, abdicate from their first duty.”<sup>159</sup>

Fear of denationalization remained a central concern of the League in the interwar period. Especially in the 1930s, the League warned constantly against the danger of denationalization in the predominantly Szekler counties as well as in Bukovina, where the Romanian population was in danger of being “Ukrainianized”<sup>160</sup>. Similar fears were expressed concerning Bessarabia and the 1937 congress demanded the “reromanization” of towns in Moldova<sup>161</sup>.

The underlying problem behind this hysteria was the Jewish question. Resurfacing periodically throughout the history of modern Romania, the problem became particularly acute

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., File no. 34/1933, 30.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>157</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 49/1931-1935, 182.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File 34/1929, 30 my translation.

<sup>160</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte*, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 6.

in the 1930s when violent anti-Semitic demonstrations took place in university towns. While officially condemning the violence<sup>162</sup>, Iorga's attitude was nevertheless ambivalent. Iorga was definitely an anti-Semite, although the claim that he "was one of the fathers of Romanian anti-Semitism in the twentieth century" may be exaggerated<sup>163</sup>. More likely he belonged to a tradition of anti-Semitism which affected Romanian intellectuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>164</sup>. In most cases, however, like in Iorga's, anti-Semitism did not exclude the possibility of dialogue with the Jews. Iorga's own anti-Semitism went through phases of varying intensity, being most virulent at the turn of the century, temperate at the beginning of the interwar period, and vehement again in the 1930s<sup>165</sup>.

For Iorga, the problem was that Jews were inassimilable and therefore could not constitute a "national" minority. In more pragmatic terms, his concern was with Jewish domination of the economic life of Moldovan towns. Consequently, from 1934 the League would abandon its strictly cultural initiatives and embark on a project to "re-romanianize" Romanian commerce. Since then on, the League would neglect its cultural projects in the benefit of propaganda in favor of Romanian merchants<sup>166</sup>. Iorga's slogan, "We amongst ourselves, for ourselves" expressed the new autarchic credo of the League<sup>167</sup>. As the League's case suggests, in cases of real or perceived danger for the nation, cultural nationalism can cease to remain strictly cultural and emerges in new forms, in this case economic nationalism. Most likely, its imprecise and idealistic goals allow it to take on an amphibian character.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Radu Ioanid, "Nicolae Iorga and Fascism" *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 3. (Jul., 1992), 472.

<sup>164</sup> See William Oldson. *A Providential Anti-Semitism: Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991) and Leon Volovici, *National Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991).

<sup>165</sup> Oldson, *The Historical and Nationalistic Thought of Nicolae Iorga*, 85.

<sup>166</sup> Congresul Ligii Culturale: tinut la Botosani in zilele de 29 si 30 iunie 1938, dari de seama si rapoarte. (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1938), 6-10.

<sup>167</sup> Ioanid, 477.

## 5. Further Challenges: Old Romanians and New Romanians in Greater Romania

Minorities alone did not constitute the single challenge faced by the League in the interwar period. The end of the war and the creation of Greater Romania translated in the fulfillment of the League's goals only apparently. While the political unification had been achieved, there was still a long way to the cultural cohesion and national solidarity the League aspired to. In spite of its occasionally idealistic rhetoric, and in spite of declining membership once the goal of political union has been achieved<sup>168</sup>, the League saw this clearly. In the 1930s, its standard forms for requests for joining the League read:

“Although God has found us worthy to see the fulfillment of Romanianism's greatest dream, Greater Romania, the accomplishment of our cultural unity still requires our unrelenting effort”<sup>169</sup>.

The obstacle to cultural unity was the difficult integration not only of minorities, but also of Romanians from the new provinces, into Greater Romania. Decades of propaganda in favor of Romanians in Austria-Hungary, of financial support and collaboration with Romanian leaders from across the border and of trips to the “unfree” regions did not quite prepare the League, or the public in the Old Kingdom at large, for the challenges of integrating the Romanians from the new provinces in Greater Romania.

The state took up the challenge in a forceful and determinate way engaging in an aggressive campaign of cultural unification<sup>170</sup>. In her study of cultural politics in Greater Romania, Irina Livezeanu has examined the educational policies implemented by the Romanian

<sup>168</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 49/1931-1935, 121.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., File no. 25/ 1929-1930. My translation.

<sup>170</sup> See Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle*.

state with the explicit goal of leveling regional differences and creating a unified national culture. The state's "cultural offensive", led by teachers but backed up by the army, encountered resistance not only among minorities but also among Romanians from the new provinces whose traditions were disregarded. More importantly, and one of the crucial insights of Livezeanu's book, the modernizing policies of the state in the educational field, coupled with inadequate resources and ethnic competition, led to a radicalization of the student body and implicitly to the rise of the extreme right.

From the League's perspective, the state handled a very delicate problem with carelessness and short-sightedness. Its alienating policies had worsened already existing tensions by spreading "hatred" and "animosity"<sup>171</sup>. In a speech from the League's 1933 congress, Iorga advised the authorities to handle the Romanians from the new regions, and especially Transylvania, tactfully and without "offending" them<sup>172</sup>. Otherwise, in case they disregard the Transylvanians' own political traditions, the central authorities could produce a long-lasting and profound schism. Iorga's phrasing is revealing in this sense:

"Here in the old Romania, it is not good if some mess around. But if they want to, they can do it. But in Transylvania, in Bukovina, in Bessarabia, nobody should be allowed to mess around"<sup>173</sup>

Of course, Iorga's counsel came late. At the time, the Transylvanians' autonomous institutions were long abolished and centralization was well under way. In the mediating tradition of cultural nationalism, however, Iorga reproached not only the Romanian state, but the Romanian leaders from the provinces as well. In a transparent allusion to Iuliu Maniu, leader of the Romanian National Party from Transylvania, Iorga argued that while the desire of

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<sup>171</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 34/ 1929, *Calendarul Ligii Culturale 1933* (Bucuresti: Editura Ligii Culturale, 1933), 33.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. my translation.

Transylvanian leaders to dominate the political life of Romania is legitimate, their priority should be the governing of their own provinces<sup>174</sup>. Personal dislikes aside, Iorga's speech did touch upon a valid point. Reiterating a recurrent theme, Iorga complained about the mutual ignorance which characterized relations between the Old Kingdom and the provinces<sup>175</sup>. At least in this the League had a right to speak. Iorga himself, through extended travel and research, and the majority of the League's members were more familiar with the lives of the Romanians outside the Old Kingdom than most Romanians were. Precisely familiarity with the new provinces made them wary of the danger of regional identities<sup>176</sup>. For cultural nationalists like the members of the League, regional identities, even without the threat of separatism, and even when embodied in benign appellations like "Transylvanians" or "Bessarabians", were jeopardizing the goal of national cohesion<sup>177</sup>. Instead of emphasizing differences, interwar Romanians had to be reminded constantly of what they had in common. For its own part, the League contributed to this by organizing celebrations, conferences and cultural projects aimed at bolstering the feeble sense of solidarity.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File 30/1928, *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Targoviste in zilele de duminica 3 si luni 4 iunie 1928. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Bucuresti, 1928), 6.

<sup>176</sup> ANIC Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File 35/1929, *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Cluj in zilele de sambata 22 si duminica 23 iunie 1929. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Bucuresti, 1929), 5.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter IV: Practices of Cultural Nationalism

“The dead are dead only for those who forget them. Anything can be taken from us except the past.”<sup>178</sup>

### 1. In Honor of the Past

#### a. Celebrations

“The contact with the past is a national necessity”<sup>179</sup>. When making this assertion at the League’s congress in 1933, Iorga was in fact confessing his life’s creed. The key to national development, to the achievement of solidarity and cohesion, of the spiritual union which was the very purpose of cultural nationalism, was not only didactic knowledge of the nation’s past, but the very materialization of that past in the eyes and minds of the contemporaries. As Anthony D. Smith had argued about the nationalist intelligentsia, their concern for history was never “a disinterested enquiry into the past ‘as it really was’”<sup>180</sup>. Instead, the goal was to “breathe life into it, to create a truly living past”<sup>181</sup>.

For Iorga and other cultural nationalists there was no better way to stay in touch with the past than by celebrating it. Commemorations, festivals, monuments and exhibitions celebrating the nation’s achievements and its heroes have been the League’s hallmark since its inception. The League inaugurated this tradition by organizing a flamboyant celebration in 1904 at the Putna Monastery, in Bukovina, celebrating four hundred years since the death of

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<sup>178</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Pe ce se poate sprijini un popor*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.34/1929, 31.

<sup>180</sup> Anthony D. Smith *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 180.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



the legendary Moldovan ruler Stephen the Great<sup>182</sup>. While the tradition of celebrations held at Putna started in 1871<sup>183</sup>, subsequent events failed to materialize until the League took the initiative in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Instruction<sup>184</sup>.

The League's politics of commemorations was essentially twofold. As such, the League would celebrate either famous leaders or other revolutionary figures, or important dates, usually connected with the unification of the Romanian lands. Under Iorga's direction, the League established a genuine cult for medieval rulers. Apart from Stephen the Great, the favorite was Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), the author of the mythical "union" of 1600 between Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania, later to become the patron of the League<sup>185</sup>. A significant figure of the national pantheon<sup>186</sup>, Michael the Brave was of special relevance to Iorga. Accordingly, Michael the Brave's "union" was not only the starting point in the development of the idea of the political union of the Romanians, but also the initial stage in the evolution of a "superior Romanian culture"<sup>187</sup>.

Even in times of financial distress, like in the beginning of the 1930s, the commemorations of Michael the Brave, as well as that of January 24, the date of the 1859 union of Moldova and Walachia, were the only ones the League was certain to keep. But the League did a lot more than annual celebrations. It published brochures, issued commemorative medals and organized pilgrimages to his grave<sup>188</sup>. Like other committed nationalists, the members of the League were fascinated with what Patrice Dabrowski, in his study of

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<sup>182</sup> Curticeanu, 159.

<sup>183</sup> Teodor Balan, *Serbarea de la Putna: 1871* (Cernauti: Tipografia Mitropolitului Silvestru, 1932).

<sup>184</sup> Marinescu and Netea, 206.

<sup>185</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, 90.

<sup>186</sup> Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central University Press, 2001), 192.

<sup>187</sup> Nicolae Iorga, "Constiinta nationala romaneasca de la Mihai Viteazul pana astazi", in Nicolae Iorga, *Conferinte* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1987), 179.

<sup>188</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 13.

commemorations in Poland, called “eloquent ashes”<sup>189</sup>, tangible evidence of the nation’s greatness. The contact with the past was not only spiritual, but, if possible, physical. As such, in 1919 the League organized the transport of Michael’s ashes, “his honored head”<sup>190</sup>, from Iasi to the Dealu Monastery, where the League planned to erect a proper mausoleum<sup>191</sup>.

The League, however, did not limit itself to festivities dedicated to Michael the Brave. Especially in its more active phases, other figures, sometimes even obscure ones, were celebrated. Before the war, the idea was for each local section to have its own patron, who would thus provide the section with its “specific heroic meaning”<sup>192</sup>. While this desideratum was seldom achieved, especially due to the fast pace at which some sections used to disappear and then re-emerge, the League’s pantheon was nevertheless comprehensive. In 1920 the League organized an exhibition in Bucharest commemorating one hundred years since the birth of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the one responsible for the 1859 union<sup>193</sup>. A year later, the League would organize an array of manifestations in Targu Jiu, to commemorate one hundred years since the death of Tudor Vladimirescu, leader of the 1821 revolt. The League would hold its annual congress at the same date, publish a brochure, open a museum and a public library, unveil commemorative plaques and organize contests of Tudor’s portrait<sup>194</sup>. In 1924 similar activities were undertaken in honor of Horea, Closca and Crisan, initiators of a revolt in Transylvania one hundred and fifty years before<sup>195</sup>. In all years the League would organize

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<sup>189</sup> Patrice M. Dabrowski, *Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 77.

<sup>190</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 13

<sup>191</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.5/1919, 8.

<sup>192</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 9.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 20, 22.

<sup>195</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no 49/1931-1936, 167.

pilgrimages to the graves of various medieval rulers, as well as commemorations of the revolution of 1848<sup>196</sup>.

The League's favorites were, nevertheless, the commemorations of the unification of the Romanian provinces. As such January 24 and December 1, the date of the union with Transylvania in 1918, were celebrated with religious devotion. In the spirit of the union, celebrations were often organized in collaboration with other cultural associations. The League traditionally collaborated with the Transylvanian societies *Astra* and *Carpatii* (*The Carpathians*). The cooperation continued into the interwar period, the societies often organizing the December 1 celebrations together<sup>197</sup>. As the state was slow to take up the celebration of December 1 in the first years after the war, the commemorations organized by private associations were the only ones taking place and where thus of particular significance<sup>198</sup>. Usually the program for the celebration of major events such as these was decided by the Central Committee in Bucharest and then communicated to the local sections, whose duty was to organize them the best they could. Otherwise, in the cherished "spirit of decentralization"<sup>199</sup>, sections were encouraged to organize their own celebrations dates, with programs as they saw fit.

Celebrations ensured the League's visibility. Major ones were advertised in newspapers and managed to gather large crowds. Apart from serving the League's programmatic goals, they were also a source of financing. During the building of the League's palace, which lasted for almost two decades, celebrations were often accompanied by lotteries. While only

<sup>196</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central.* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii "Neamul Romanesc", 1912), 17.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>198</sup> Maria Bucur, "Birth of a Nation: Commemoration of December 1, 1918, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Romania" in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, edited by Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>199</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 5.

occasionally amounting to a significant sum<sup>200</sup>, the selling of lottery tickets was nevertheless a constant source of revenue.

In the rural areas, where celebrations seemed to have been the most successful, they also served as means of recruitment<sup>201</sup>. At times urban sections would organize celebrations in villages precisely with the purpose of setting up a rural section there<sup>202</sup>. Like always in the case of the Cultural League, the support of the village priest and teacher proved crucial. The intensity of the local section's activity varied greatly. Some would boast the organization of weekly festivals and gatherings ("sezatori")<sup>203</sup>. Others would limit themselves to the celebration of January 24. Before the war, larger local sections would generally organize every year an average of ten such celebrations and gatherings including conferences, folk dances and music performances<sup>204</sup>.

As John R. Gillis pointed out about nineteenth-century commemorations, "they were largely for, but not of, the people. Fallen kings and martyred revolutionary leaders were remembered, generals had their memorials, but ordinary participants in war and revolution were consigned to oblivion"<sup>205</sup>. Even after the war the League's celebrations could largely fit this description. In terms of themes of celebration, there was in fact a remarkable continuity between its prewar and interwar activity. Aside from the date of the unification with Transylvania itself, the League incorporated surprisingly few symbols of the First World War in its plethora of important dates and people. On one hand, later on in the interwar period this became the domain of the state. On the other, they most likely belonged to a history too recent

<sup>200</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*, 6-8.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36; *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 41.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>203</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*, 26.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>205</sup> John R. Gillis, *Commemorations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 9.

to be easily incorporated in the League's pantheon. While the union itself was of recent date, it was precisely the long history of the goal which made it so important.

The exception was the Aviation Day of 1928, probably one of the most grandiose celebrations organized by the League in the interwar period. Benefiting from the support of various ministries, including those of Instruction, Internal Affairs and Cults, as well as of other cultural associations, the League practically mobilized the entire country. The program of the day included conferences in all towns, speeches in all villages, lectures in factories and schools and theater and cinema performances in all towns in the benefit of the army<sup>206</sup>.

Otherwise, the League's celebrations remained conservative. In the interwar period the League occupied a niche of traditionalist discourse. The cultural nationalism advocated by the League proved largely refractory to change. This was most likely a consequence of Iorga's understanding of national culture, which he thought was permanent, requiring no modification or innovation<sup>207</sup>. Moreover, times of change and instability required an even more solid anchoring in the past. Constant return to traditional myths and figures was thus welcome.

## b. Conferences

This conclusion can also apply to the League's other main instrument of education and propaganda, the conferences. Like in the case of celebrations, the thematic of the conferences shows surprisingly little variation between the prewar and interwar period. Predictably, the League's prewar conferences had a patriotic and nationalistic tone. Romanian history and culture were favorite subjects, although, in tune with the *samanatorist* tradition, the peasantry

<sup>206</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.30/1928, 6, 20, 26.

<sup>207</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de 27, 28 si 29 iunie 1937. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Datina Romaneasca, 1937), 4.

also enjoyed ample coverage. While the conferences in Bucharest were designed for an educated audience, featuring more elaborate subjects pertaining to history and culture, the ones in small towns and villages were tailored to the listeners' interests, including, in addition to the historical-nationalist program, conferences dealing with religion, health, agriculture or law<sup>208</sup>. Whereas the number of lecturers was few, leading some sections to complain about their inability to organize more conferences in their absence<sup>209</sup>, in the years before the war the League, like most nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, benefited from the unfailing enthusiasm of historians<sup>210</sup>. In the League's case, Vasile Parvan was the absolute champion in touring the country, followed by A.D. Xenopol and Iorga himself<sup>211</sup>.

After the war the League's conferences proceeded along the same lines. The registries of the Bucharest section between 1931 and 1936 provide a telling sample of the frequency and the content of the conferences in the interwar period. In 1934 and 1935 the League was largely inactive because it lacked a conference room, its own being rented to the Romanian Railways and the rent being used to repay the League's loans. Nevertheless, between January 1931 and April 1936 the League organized eighty conferences. Out of these, thirty were on Romanian history and twenty on Romanian culture, including literature, linguistics and folkloric traditions. Twelve dealt with various questions related to social sciences (psychology, pedagogy, sociology), six treated religious matters, six addressed the sciences, and five dealt with various other issues<sup>212</sup>.

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<sup>208</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910.*

<sup>209</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central.* (Valenii de Munte: Tipografia Societatii "Neamul Romanesc", 1912), 56.

<sup>210</sup> See Dennis Deletant and Harry Hanak, *Historians as nation-builders : central and southeast Europe* (London : Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>211</sup> Marinescu and Netea, 220.

<sup>212</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.49/ 1931-1936, 78, 117, 156, 169, 172, 189.

As can be seen, history remained paramount in the League's concerns. Moreover, the choice of themes was reminiscent of the League's prewar interests and typical of its obsessions. No less than ten conferences discussed the unification of the Romanian lands and the national movements that preceded it. Key dates in Romanian history, as well as in the League's calendar of celebrations, were subject of more than one conference. For example four conferences, in different years and by different lecturers, were dedicated to January 24. The 1918 union, as well as the history of the newly incorporated provinces, were also recurring subjects. Favorite figures of the League, like Michael the Brave, also appeared more than once. Unfortunately the memos record nothing about the audience, in case the conferences proceeded as planned. However, there were cases, if few, when conferences were cancelled because of too few people attending<sup>213</sup>. The traditionalist character of the conferences, together with the general decline of the League at the time, undoubtedly contributed to this.

At the beginning of the 1930s, even if in obvious regress, the League, in an uncharacteristically innovative move, tried to attract a social group previously reticent to its appeal: the students. In Bucharest it did so by inaugurating a series of lectures especially for high-school students, entitled *Conversatii Amicale (Amicable Conversations)*. The initiative failed miserably. Only nine lectures were held in 1931 and 1932 before the plan was eventually abandoned. Often the lectures were cancelled because too few students attended<sup>214</sup>. Even when held, the conferences could at best gather forty people<sup>215</sup>. The League ostensibly made an effort to adjust its program to the interests of the youth. None of the usual historical patriotic subjects

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 8, 58, 90, 116.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 79, 158.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 55.

typical of the League were present in this series. Instead, the conferences featured subjects like “Darwinism”, “Questions in sociology”, or “The personality”.

The League’s attempt at readjustment, however, was both insufficient and tardy. The youth was long accustomed with more appealing and up-to-date conferences. The League’s initiative unluckily coincided with the series of conferences inaugurated by the *Criterion* group led by Petru Comarnescu. In 1932 *Criterion* mesmerized the youth with conferences on Freud, Gandhi, Lenin, Mussolini, Chaplin, Proust, Gide, Picasso and Stravinski<sup>216</sup>. Understandably the public was more attracted by the lectures of the “new generation” rather than to the dusty sermons of the League. Moreover, except for Iorga, who had long lost the influence it had over students in the first decade of the century, the League lacked magnetic speakers. It was thus beyond its ability to compete with the charismatic orators like Nae Ionescu whose influence over students, at least between 1928 and 1933, was overwhelming<sup>217</sup>.

### c. Publications and Other Initiatives

Aside from conferences, the League’s most regular way of popularizing its cause consisted in publications. Before the war these publications were naturally designed for consumption in the provinces outside the Old Kingdom. The League took pride in the way its messengers deceived the vigilance of the customs officers and smuggled patriotic brochures across the border. The story of Iorga’s “History of the Romanians”, circulated under the title “Guide for potato cultivation”, is well-known<sup>218</sup>. The League distributed 10000 copies of the

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<sup>216</sup> Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreapta romaneaca*. (Bucuresti: Est, 2008), 181.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>218</sup> Curticeanu, 221.



latter in the provinces and 1000 copies of “Faptele stramosilor” (“The Ancestors’ Deeds) for propaganda abroad<sup>219</sup>. Similar stratagems were undertaken for the distribution of Iorga’s newspaper, *Neamul romanesc*, and for the League’s calendar, important vehicles for rallying the masses in support of the national cause especially in Transylvania. The calendar in particular was designed as a “repertoire of Romanian life abroad”<sup>220</sup>. Other actions also focused on popularizing the Romanian cause in Transylvania. The League for example organized protests when scandals involving Romanians broke out in Austria-Hungary<sup>221</sup>. Before the war the League urged its sections to subscribe to Romanian language newspapers from the “unfree” provinces and thus contribute to their survival. As such, by the time of the 1912 congress, most sections were subscribed to at least one journal from every province<sup>222</sup>.

After the war the League’s activity inevitably declined. For most of the interwar period the League’s funds were committed to the building of the palace. Still, the League still managed to publish at least its calendar in most years<sup>223</sup>. In 1921 the League sold 20000 copies of the calendar and experimented with its own bookstore and printing house, as well as with its own book series, entitled “Cartea buna” (“The Good Book”) which started with a republication of Eminescu’s works<sup>224</sup>. While the project proved ephemeral, the League however, continued to sell or donate books and brochures available in its deposit. Understandably many of them were written by Iorga and treated historical subjects. In addition, the League offered patriotic postcards and paintings of famous Romanians.

<sup>219</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910.*

<sup>220</sup> *Pentru Congresul din Constanta al Ligii Culturale. Rapoarte si informatii publicate de Comitetul Central*, 5

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor , File nr.39/1930.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 32.

Emerging naturally from the League's concern with the dissemination of patriotic works was its propaganda for libraries and museums. In 1920 the League set to found "civic" and regional museums at its local branches<sup>225</sup>. By 1929 all rural sections had their own libraries and in 1933 the central library of the League in Bucharest had its official opening<sup>226</sup>. In the same spirit of supporting education, the League, both before and after the war provided prizes for students, offered scholarships to students from the new provinces coming to the University of Bucharest or subsidized the university's residence halls<sup>227</sup>. In addition, it sponsored schools in the new provinces, most often with donations in books but also financially. As expected, the League received considerably more requests for help than it could honor and many appeals remained without response<sup>228</sup>. At a time when the state did not yet take up the charge to equip rural schools, its contribution was nevertheless significant.

## ***2. Staging Cultural Nationalism: Theatre, Music, Folk Dances***

Important as they were in the League's program, the mobilizing potential of celebrations, conferences and publications was nevertheless limited. Regardless of their frequency, celebrations remained occasional events. Conferences, on the other hand, depended on the availability of the lecturers and the interests of the audience. The League's leadership was aware that patriotic declamations alone would not create the national solidarity that it aspired to. What were needed were grass-roots activities which would keep the communities engaged throughout the year. The League thus looked with envy at the nationalist credentials of

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., File no.49/ 1931-1935, 109.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 62.

gymnastic associations like the Czech *Sokol* and the Bulgarian *Iacut* and urged local sections to emulate their example<sup>229</sup>. While gymnastics clubs never really took off, the League compensated with theater troupes, choirs and folk dances ensembles.

The League's affiliation with theater had a long history. Before the war the central committee recommended sections to create amateur troupes which would give representations with historical and patriotic themes<sup>230</sup>. Since 1919 the League became an associate of the Popular Theater in Bucharest. The relation was initially fraught with conflict. While the terms were favorable for the League, the troupe performing under the League's aegis but without any financial support from it, by 1922 Iorga was unsatisfied with the leadership and the repertoire of the theater and severed the ties<sup>231</sup>. In the same year, however, the banker Aristide Blank, main shareholder of the theater, donated his shares to the League<sup>232</sup>. With the help of subventions from various ministries the League consequently became the official owner of the theater. Under the League's direction the Popular Theater would continue to function until the League's demise. While under financial pressures in the years following its acquisition, by 1928 the theater became profitable<sup>233</sup>.

The theater served the League's propagandistic purposes but above all its educational ones. In Iorga's view, theater was not a form of entertainment, but a "school of civic education"<sup>234</sup>. From the beginning the target audience of the theater was not necessarily the educated audience of Bucharest, where the troupe would compete with many other fashionable theaters, but the population of the countryside, which the theater would tour every year. The

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<sup>229</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/1919-1925. 35.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>233</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 30/1928, 90.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, File no. 49/1931-1936, 150.

repertoire, meant to be a “sanctuary of light for the people”<sup>235</sup> would thus include works of moral and national character.

Undoubtedly, Iorga’s own ambitions as playwright influenced the important role played by theater in the League’s propaganda<sup>236</sup>. However, Iorga’s plays, although omnipresent, did not monopolize the repertoire. Instead, the latter featured classical authors which in Iorga’s view could instill the moral and civic virtues advocated by his cultural nationalism. Thus, Greek authors, Corneille or Racine were especially recommended. In practice, however, light comedies were often preferred<sup>237</sup>. Not only were they more appealing to the masses, but they constituted a “healthy” form of distraction in contrast with what Iorga’s traditionalist outlook perceived as the depraved fashions of the time. In its propagandistic zeal, the League proved unusually receptive to modern technology and in 1922 incorporated ARCA, *The Romanian society for cinema and film production*<sup>238</sup>. In the twenties and thirties conferences were often accompanied by projections and cinema was seen as a promising tool for propaganda.

Theater and cinema, however, were not the only way to bring the nation together. The brochure of the 1910 congress stated that “the role played by choirs in the life of Romanians abroad is well-known. The harmony of sounds is the surest way to achieve the harmony of souls”<sup>239</sup>. They were not the only ones to reach this conclusion. Nationalist movements across Eastern Europe were known to have turned folk music into a vehicle for nationalism. While some scholars restrict this development to the nineteenth century<sup>240</sup>, most would argue in favor

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>236</sup> Pamfil Seicaru, *Nicolae Iorga* (Bucuresti: Clio, 1991), 125.

<sup>237</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 49/1931-1936, 177.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., File no. 5/ 1919-1925, 33.

<sup>239</sup> *Pentru Congresul Ligii Culturale 1910*, 6.

<sup>240</sup> In a classic study, Carl Dahlhaus argued that “Nationalistic music, it seems, invariably emerges as an expression of a politically motivated need, which tends to appear when the national independence is being sought,

of the nationalist character of folk music way into the twentieth century. Accordingly, “by the turn of the twentieth century national song and the music of nationalism were ubiquitous phenomena throughout Europe” inaugurating an era in which music was to take a decisively national character<sup>241</sup>.

The League was quick to pick up on the mobilizing potential of music. Apart from organizing music performances at celebrations, the sections were encouraged to have their own choirs. In 1938 the choir of the Bucharest section, counting seventy members, received the support of the General Direction for National Propaganda to undertake a tour abroad with a repertoire of Romanian folk music<sup>242</sup>. Closely related to this initiative was the project of folk dances ensembles. Like in the case of the theater, folk dances performances initially ran a deficit but soon became profitable<sup>243</sup>. Even more than the choirs, the folk dances representations served the League’s objective of preserving and popularizing manifestations of the national culture. The interest for folk dances came as the natural continuation of another project, serving also Iorga’s agenda of integrating women in the national cause, of collecting national costumes and national sewing patterns<sup>244</sup>. In the case of the latter Iorga’s passion as a historian and a collector seemed to have superseded his nationalist fears. While resenting regionalism to the extent to which he considered appellations like “Transylvanian” or “Moldovan” dangerous<sup>245</sup>, Iorga appreciated regional diversity when it came to national costumes and made an effort for their preservation. Theater, choral representations and folk

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denied, or jeopardized, rather than attained or consolidated”. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1989), 38.

<sup>241</sup> Phillip. V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism* (Santa Barbara, CA : ABC-CLIO, 2004), 58.

<sup>242</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 66/1938.

<sup>243</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.49/ 1931-1936, 93.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>245</sup> File 35/1929, *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Cluj in zilele de sambata 22 si duminica 23 iunie 1929. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Bucuresti, 1929), 5.

dances were more discreet ways in which the League popularized its cause. While not as ostentatious as the celebrations or as ideological as the conferences, artistic representations reminded the public of the League's mission on a regular basis.

### **3. Alternative Education: The Summer Courses at Valenii de Munte**

Among the League's many educational and propagandistic projects, no other reached the fame and the amplitude of the summer courses organized by Iorga at Valenii de Munte. While not an initiative of the League *per se*, the society would become closely associated, and even identified with it. From the beginning, the courses were the perfect embodiment of Iorga's idea cultural nationalism. Far from being a traditional school, the one month courses were supposed to instill feelings of national solidarity and to boost spiritual growth. Their goal was the "rectification of the Romanian mentality", so that Romanians would "wash themselves of lack of self-confidence, of despair and of humility towards foreigners"<sup>246</sup>. Iorga took pride in the fact that interest in the Romanian culture and the national cause alone animated both lecturers and audience. The school provided no gratifications for professors and no diplomas for students. Both categories had to cover their own expenses<sup>247</sup>. Only disinterested passion for knowledge and for national communion would thus drive the participants.

In part the origins of this ideal of alternative education sprang from Iorga's repulsion towards state education. He himself a graduate of the University of Bucharest at the age of nineteen, Iorga deeply resented his formal education, which he considered dehumanizing<sup>248</sup>. The courses at Valenii de Munte would thus constitute an alternative to "the infamous abstract,

<sup>246</sup> *Neamul romanesc*, August 27, 1910.

<sup>247</sup> Barbu Theodorescu, *Nicolae Iorga*, 218.

<sup>248</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *O viata de om asa cum a fost*, vol.1, 90.

standardizing school, the same for every place, every people, every character”<sup>249</sup>. Instead of mechanical lecturing and memorizing, the courses would provide an environment where students and professors would learn from each other. Also, instead of the “amalgam of subjects which is the misfortune of educational institutions of all times”<sup>250</sup>, the courses would focus on essential cultural questions, aiming at a “vulgarization” of encyclopedic knowledge<sup>251</sup>. Iorga’s traditionalist outlook blended with this ideal. The location itself, a small town in Walachia, was not very remote but also not easily accessible. As visitors later remembered, it was a bucolic place, where time seemed to have stopped “a hundred years ago”<sup>252</sup>. For Iorga this was an “absolutely patriarchal” place of untainted by modernization, the ideal repository of the traditional way of life and of authentic Romanian culture<sup>253</sup>.

The courses started in 1908, under Iorga’s direction but in response to an earlier proposal from the Bukovinian teacher and journalist Gheorghe Tofan who suggested the idea of specially designated courses for Romanians from outside the Old Kingdom<sup>254</sup>. After an unspectacular beginning, with only six lectures and few attendants in 1908, the courses gradually gained in popularity, reaching their prewar climax in 1912<sup>255</sup>, with a large audience, mainly Transylvanians, and twenty-seven lectures, some delivered by important personalities of the Romanian academic world, like the historians Vasile Parvan, Constantin Moisil and A.D. Xenopol, the economist Virgil Madgearu, the philologists Vasile Bogrea and Simion Mandrescu and the politician A.C. Cuza. In the meantime, after initially competing with

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<sup>249</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Asezamintele mele” *Boabe de grau* 1930 (8), 64.

<sup>250</sup> Iorga quoted in Isabela Sadoveanu, “Valenii de Munte: Centru de cultura nationala” in *Boabe de grau* 1930 (8), 278.

<sup>251</sup> Theodorescu, 213.

<sup>252</sup> Sadoveanu, 272.

<sup>253</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *O viata de om asa cum a fost*, vol.2, 204.

<sup>254</sup> Theodorescu, 211.

<sup>255</sup> Curticapeanu, 226.

courses for teachers organized by the authorities in Iasi<sup>256</sup>, Iorga's summer courses gained official support from the Ministry of Instruction. The subvention, granted in 1911, served for acquiring the school's own site, previously the courses taking place in rented locations<sup>257</sup>.

Interrupted during the war and a couple of years later, the courses would restart in 1921, this time featuring also foreign lecturers as well as representatives of the minorities who would lecture on their national cultures. Part of the audience would consist of minorities (see Table 1), for whom special Romanian language courses were organized. In 1922 the courses officially changed their name into the "Popular University Nicolae Iorga". By 1924 almost a hundred lecturers would come at Valenii, most of them from the Universities of Bucharest, Cluj, Iasi and Chisinau.

Year	Romanians	Minorities
1921	200	40
1922	420	90
1923	380	60
1924	390	60
1925	380	70
1926	375	55
1927	390	50
1928	385	65
1929	350	68

**Table 2: Participants at the summer courses between 1921 and 1929 by ethnicity<sup>258</sup>**

In time Iorga would add other institutions to the summer courses. In 1922 Iorga established the "The Queen Mary School of Moral and National Missionaries". The institution, part of Iorga's goal of regimenting women in the service of the national cause, would provide

<sup>256</sup> Theodorescu, 212.

<sup>257</sup> Sadoveanu, 274-275.

<sup>258</sup> Reproduced from Sadoveanu, 278.



one-year long courses for young women, high-school graduates, who would then work as village teachers. The school enrolled Romanians, but also members of the minorities, usually Germans. The university boasted other facilities for minorities, like the specially founded “King Ferdinand Institute”<sup>259</sup>, where Hungarian and German teachers could learn Romanian.

The summer university was undoubtedly the most successful of Iorga’s cultural initiatives. The courses proved remarkably enduring, attracting a plethora of personalities of the Romanian cultural and political life. More than any other project, it also gained official recognition. King Carol II himself would attend both the inauguration and the celebration of 25 years since their establishment. Various officials would also attend the latter. This success cannot be explained by Iorga’s prestige alone. His frequent travels abroad made him indeed popular with the Romanians from the new provinces<sup>260</sup>, for whom the courses were originally intended. This, however, cannot account for the success in its entirety. After all, he was behind other initiatives of the League which proved less thriving. More likely the idea of an informal popular university was in itself attractive. The League contributed to making it also more accessible. Many local sections granted scholarships to people attending the courses<sup>261</sup>. As participants later recalled, even if benefiting from the presence of prominent lecturers whose outlook and doctrine would inevitably differ from Iorga’s, the courses were very much infused with their founder’s ideal of cultural nationalism<sup>262</sup>. Even if in the form of one month long summer courses, Iorga seemed to have found a formula in which his cultural nationalism would be appealing.

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 281.

<sup>260</sup> *Un moment cultural: un sfert de veac de la intemeierea Universitatii populare “N. Iorga” din Valenii de Munte* (Valenii de Munte: Editura Ligii Culturale, 1934), 20.

<sup>261</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no. 5/1919-1925, 52.

<sup>262</sup> *Un moment cultural: un sfert de veac de la intemeierea Universitatii populare “N. Iorga” din Valenii de Munte*

#### 4. Dilemmas of Cultural Nationalism

In 1931, Iorga warned the members of the League gathered at the annual congress in Focsani that by busying itself with “celebrations and excursions” the League would unwillingly contribute, through “inertia and indolence”, to the “destruction of a country received from the ancestors but left to die in the absence of a common spiritual bond”<sup>263</sup>. For Iorga, the last decade of his life seemed to have brought awareness of many relevant shortcomings of the League. A couple of years later, at the 1934 congress, he would admit that his monopolizing of the League was detrimental to its activity and especially its future. Characteristically, he blamed it on the members who supposedly lacked initiative. Nevertheless, he came to realize the fact that the complete identification of the League with himself could not but be unproductive<sup>264</sup>.

As far as the League was concerned, his remarks from 1931 were, however, more disconcerting. After all, Iorga himself was one of the main promoters of the cult of the past and celebrations and festivals have been one of the best ways to achieve the League’s goal of cultural nationalism. Commemorations were associated with the League’s image and in fact ensured its survival in the interwar period. To question the utility of patriotic manifestations was similar to questioning the League’s main pillar of existence.

While Iorga’s prestige gave weight to the question, the concern was not unheard of in the League’s history. Almost thirty years earlier, in 1902, Ovid Densusianu, former member of

<sup>263</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Focsani in zilele de duminica 13 si luni 14 septembrie 1931. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Asezamantul Tipografic “Datina Romaneasca”, 1931), 7.

<sup>264</sup> *Congresul Ligii Culturale tinut la Iasi in zilele de duminica 15 si luni 16 iunie 1934. Dari de seama si rapoarte* (Valenii de Munte: Asezamantul Tipografic “Datina Romaneasca”, 1934), 6.

the League, voiced similar worries in a more vehement tone<sup>265</sup>. Lamenting the obvious decline of the League at the time, Densusianu directed his attack against V.A.Urechia, the leader of the League at the time. Urechia, a self-taught, romantic historian and philologist and an exalted nationalist, excelled in speeches rather than in actions<sup>266</sup>. In Densusianu's words, for Urechia "the Transylvanian question could be solved in a merry way, over a bottle of champagne"<sup>267</sup>. Under his leadership the League succumbed to "a parody of the patriotic sentiment", fuelled by "nationally-decrepit literature"<sup>268</sup>. The solution was to abandon "the old custom of noisy and unwelcome manifestations, of buffooneries and national feasts"<sup>269</sup> and resume serious work.

While Iorga was no Urechia despite their similar nationalist devotion, and while the League undoubtedly achieved more than noisy agitation under his leadership, the concern with the validity of the League's strategy was not unfounded. While many actions were successful, the League never gained the following it hoped for. The periodically declining membership and the cancelled sessions of the Bucharest session attest this. Both before and after the war reports of the local sections abound in complaints about the communities' "apathy", "stagnation" and "indifference" to the national cause<sup>270</sup>.

The explanations for this phenomenon are manifold. On one hand, before the creation of Greater Romania, the League's agents faced challenges familiar to nationalist activists everywhere. As recent case-studies in nationalism have shown, "national indifference" has

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<sup>265</sup> Ovid Densusianu, *Romani buni si romani rai: Pareri impartiale asupra activitatii patriotice a "Ligii Culturale"* (Bucuresti: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Grobl, 1902).

<sup>266</sup> See Vistian Goia V.A. *Urechia* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1979).

<sup>267</sup> Densusianu, 20.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>270</sup> Most reports from the 1910 and 1912 congresses.

been the norm rather than the exception<sup>271</sup>. Mobilization for the national cause has not been an easy target, especially in cases like Romania, where people were asked to support, financially and otherwise, the “brothers” abroad. On the other hand, while the League readjusted its goals after the war, the fulfillment of the political union made its calls less stringent and less appealing. This was obvious enough for the League’s members themselves, who sought various ways out of the stalemate<sup>272</sup>.

The League’s case thus illustrates several dilemmas of cultural nationalism. The major one is clearly the adjustment of a previously irredentist organization to the conditions of a nation-state. The occasional dissenting voices, like that of Densusianu and the late Iorga, however, suggest more about the internal dynamics of such movements. Apparently movements such as the League’s are characterized by periodical questioning of their role, tactics and overall effectiveness. In this sense, Densusianu’s diatribe can be considered legitimate. While focusing on cultural activities, the implicit goal of the prewar League was the political union with Transylvania. As such, Densusianu had a right to demand more decisive actions. Iorga’s attitude, on the other hand, is more intriguing. After all, the League’s stated objectives, both before and after the war, were hardly measurable. While the numbers of minorities and Romanians from outside the Old Kingdom attending the courses at Valenii de Munte could provide clues about the League’s appeal, there was no way to ascertain the level of cultural integration and national solidarity which was the League’s objective.

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<sup>271</sup> Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2006) and Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>272</sup> ANIC, Fond Liga pentru Unitatea Culturala a tuturor romanilor, File no.49/ 1931-1936, 121.

Neither is this inability necessarily a shortcoming. According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalism inevitably fails “in terms of its communitarian goals”<sup>273</sup>, because the state gradually takes up its attributions<sup>274</sup>. As the case of the League suggests, however, private initiatives can coexist with the state. The summer academy at Valenii de Munte competed successfully with similar courses organized by the authorities and proved enduring. While it is true that the “minority enthusiasm”<sup>275</sup> which animated the League diluted even more in time, the League survived considerably longer than is expected of associations endorsing a program of cultural nationalism in times when the latter is no longer necessary. At the same time, the elusive goals prevented clear diagnoses of both success and failure. More likely, the kind of nationalist activism undertaken by the League could not be but difficult to assess and therefore always prone to questioning.

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<sup>273</sup> Hutchinson, 17.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Conclusion: The Relevance of Cultural Nationalism

Dilemmas notwithstanding, cultural nationalism in the form promoted by the Cultural League proved enduring despite all odds. Lacking a goal that would mobilize the masses, with a declining membership and visibility and competing with many other influential trends and actors, the League survived the interwar period engaging in the same kind of activities that consecrated it before the war. Consequently, in the Romanian case at least, cultural nationalism was not restricted to the periods before the establishment of the nation-state or the incorporation of all the territories claimed by the latter. Instead, cultural nationalism in the form advocated by the League underwent a readjustment of its goals. While the building of cultural cohesion and national solidarity remained chief objectives, the League no longer focused on the Romanians abroad but on the effective integration of the Romanians and minorities from the new provinces in Greater Romania.

A single case study certainly cannot challenge or even confirm a theory. John Hutchinson's theory of cultural nationalism, even if controversial, remains a valid starting point for an analysis of nationalist movements of this kind. Cultural practices, goals of moral regeneration and social harmonization remain essential features of cultural nationalism. However, even a single case study can reveal nuances and variations which, even if relevant for that case alone, suggest the diversity of forms which cultural nationalism can take. Moreover, case studies, being inseparable from the context which generates them, reveal the way the political and historical background influence a doctrine otherwise constant. As such, the implications of the analysis of the League's cultural nationalism are noteworthy since even if

they do not mirror a general pattern, they exhibit features which can be reasonably expected to characterize other similar movements as well.

In the League's case cultural nationalism coexisted with official nationalism. Even if at the level of discourse the League portrayed what Hutchinson characterized as an adversarial relation to the state, the League in fact often depended on the authorities. The League undoubtedly revolted against and criticized the state and dreamt of complete independence from its institutions. In fact, however, the League never achieved that much sought after autonomy. Instead, in its case, the relationship between cultural nationalism and the state was one of complementarity. The League replaced the state's initiatives when the latter were missing, like in the case of the early interwar commemorations, or offered alternative to its projects, like in the case of the popular university at Valenii de Munte.

More than anything else, the League suggests the extent to which the personality of a strong leader can shape the character of a particular cultural nationalism. Iorga's *samanatorist* beliefs dictated the League's organicist stance. While organic evolution is characteristic of cultural nationalism in general, Iorga's influence also determined the League's less typical focus on the rural world and the peasantry. At the level of doctrine, it shaped its traditionalist outlook and its anti-modernist direction. Instead of reconciling tradition with modernity, as other cultural nationalist movements did, the League held tight to its conservative tenets and its archaic understanding of morality, at times becoming anachronistic. Also, occasionally, Iorga's often contradictory convictions deprived the League of a definite direction. While the shortcomings of having an organization depend on a single individual are many, at the same time it is questionable if without Iorga the League would have enjoyed even its limited visibility.

The historical context influenced the League's appeal greatly. Competition from other social and intellectual trends prominent in interwar Romania explains why the League proved successful in mobilizing some social groups and less so in other cases. Priests, teachers and clerks always filled the League's ranks while students remained largely aloof to its calls. The changing political context, the radicalization of the public discourse in general and the political affiliations of its leader also led to unexpected turns in the League's activities. The League's program of the Romanization of commerce from the late 1930s is unusual for cultural nationalism and testifies to the way these movements can adjust according to circumstances. While the doctrine and activities of cultural nationalism everywhere present significant similarities, the particular contexts in which they evolve can individualize them to a considerable extent.

If Iorga and his followers defined their movement as one of cultural nationalism, the validity of the concept as an analytic tool is more questionable. Hutchinson's theory, even if inspiring similar studies, is still controversial. Hutchinson himself, when asserting that cultural nationalism is inherently political, opens the door for criticism of his model. The League itself, at least before the war, while engaging in strictly cultural activities, made no secret that its goal was the political unification of Romania with Transylvania. In the eyes of the critics, looking for fine distinctions between political nationalism and the "cultural but inherently political" one can amount to an unnecessary exercise in which intricacies confuse rather than illuminate our understanding of nationalism in general.

However, even if the validity of cultural nationalism as a theoretical concept is not yet confirmed, the work of Hutchinson and other ethno-symbolists have the merit of emphasizing the relationship between nationalism and culture. While an unusual approach initially,



nowadays few overviews of debates in the field on nationalism studies would overlook the subject. The work of Hutchinson drew attention away from the state and politics towards private actors and culture. Previous theories, like Gellner's, either downplayed culture or took it for granted as a state-directed way to create a standardized public space. Hutchinson instead looked at the role of private organizations, of cultural practices as such and the small-scale dynamics of such movements. Thus, even if the concept of "cultural nationalism" itself has not yet passed the test of scholarly analysis, it remains a welcome addition to state and politics-centered theories.

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