Entertaining a "National Audience": A Film and Its Makers in Romania before the First World War

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In this paper I try to provide a parochial answer to a general question: *how is national culture reproduced?* Before briefly summarizing the content of the following four chapters, I want to spell out the relevance of my research question.

Let us assume that nations are communities of anonymous individuals that owe loyalty to a particular culture.[1] In other words, a community made up of anonymous members, unlike a family or a tribe, is kept together by the readiness of the majority to show commitment to a distinctive, unique, one-of-its-kind culture. On this view, a national culture is the hegemonic culture of a community of strangers. Its role is to make foreignness less conspicuous by means of enhancing social mobility and communication. Two or more anonymous individuals become less so if they share a common lot of stories about whom they are and where they come from (*Heimatkunde*). However, I do not want to suggest that coercion does not play a role in building up nations. Membership in a nation is almost always a legal category carefully defined by citizenship laws. I am well aware that culture and coercion are inseparable. Therefore, it is part of any scholar's bedtime dilemmas to make a decision. In this paper I grant research privilege to the cultural side of the nation.

Once the importance of culture is acknowledged my research question gains in gravity. For if nations are, as Ernest Gellner noticed, "culture zones" then one has to understand not only how culture is created but also how it comes to be transmitted from one generation to the next. I take culture to mean **1.** an abiding body of rules and regulations, of values and habits that organize experience and **2.** the narrative against which these constraints are deemed legitimate. Culture is - at the same time - that which influences behaviors and the reasons given in support of those particular social conducts. From a Weberian perspective then, loyalty to a national culture translates as the willingness on the part of any given

[1] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 84.

community to take it for granted. Bluntly put, a national culture becomes dominant when and only when the majority refrains from contesting it. A serious lack in voiced opposition to the standards of a national culture is the token of that culture's legitimacy. Hence Gellner: "Nationalism is not a class conflict which has failed to reach true consciousness. Class conflict is a national one which has failed to take off, for lack of deep cultural, symbolic differentiae."[2] When a minority culture (a working class culture for instance) becomes strong enough to command allegiance the legitimacy of the national one is severely damaged.

It is in this context that I seek to understand how culture is passed on intragenerationally. My first contention is that to study how this process of reproduction works amounts to examining the various social contexts in which individuals experience, at a daily level, their national culture. However, an already gargantuan scholarship dealing with these issues exists: it is focused on the school system and its textbooks, on the army and its rituals, on public ceremonies and their overall function, on intellectuals and their cerebral activity etc. As a result, my second contention is that new "spheres of transmission" ought to be welcomed as objects of study. My third contention is that the market, with its circulation of commodities, offers such a case. Therefore, in this paper I try to illustrate how a national culture is reproduced (i.e. lived or experienced) in the process of making, selling and buying a movie.

The concern with consumption as a site of cultural diffusion is neither new nor particularly original. It is rather obvious that in order for a certain culture to survive it needs a receptive audience eager to consume it. This is how Eric Auerbach describes the emergence of a literary public and hence a "literary market" in Late Antiquity: "[T]his literary public - hearers and readers, admirers and critics of the various authors, purchasers of books, was a large enough minority to sustain a literature. This large anonymous minority - we call it

[2] Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 6, 1981, 772.

anonymous because the overwhelming majority of its members remained unknown to the authors …"[3] *Mutatis mutandis*, the same process takes place in the modern world as well. Moreover, the extension of the market and the generalization of consumption make it the ideal starting point for an inquiry into the mechanisms of cultural reproduction.

In *chapter one* I develop the theoretical tools that would help me to make sense of the facts. Firstly, I sum up and criticize some of the literature on nations and nationalism. Secondly, I introduce the concepts of "event" and "national culture". Thirdly, I conclude that the Romanian national culture of early twentieth century was largely the product of the Russian-Turkish War of 1877. Lastly, I try to explain why I decided to analyze the making of a movie entitled *Romania's Independence*. I also explain why I take the movie to be only a commodity and what can be gained from tracing its social life.

In *chapter two* I look at a pile of texts, mostly history books and memoirs, produced in the aftermath of the event of 1877. On this basis I claim that a legitimate framework which organized the acts of speaking and writing about the war slowly emerged. I illustrate this contention by singling out two cultural references without which it became almost impossible to relate to the event: "the war of independence" and the "national king". These two references were brought together in a standard narrative the authority of which passed uncontested. I conclude that by the end of the nineteenth century a clearly contoured, that is to say unique national culture was already in place.

In *chapter three* I break down my main research question into more specific interrogations. This maneuver allows for a plunge into details. Firstly, I begin in the sphere of production by analyzing the way in which the hegemonic story about the war was turned into a screenplay. Furthermore, I look at the possible motivations (i.e. hopes, interests, reasons) those involved in the process of making the movie might have had. Secondly, I move on to

[3] Eric Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, translated by Ralph Manheim, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 239.

the sphere of exchange. The emphasis here falls on the reception of the movie, to wit on the various strategies of advertising and selling it. Finally, I look at the way in which the movie was perceived by the public and I finish off with a set of considerations about what turns a regular audience into a national one.

In *chapter four* I hark back to the account proposed in the second chapter and augment it with yet another component of the national culture produced by the event of 1877, namely the figure of a war hero by the name of Peneş Curcanul. I trace the birth and evolution of Peneş on various social surfaces: biological, textual, filmic. In so doing, I manage to integrate the synchronic analysis developed in the third chapter within the diachronic explanation formulated in the first chapter and put to work in the second one.

1. The "Eventful Perspective" Explained

In this chapter I set out to explain, as thoroughly as possible, what I understand by an "eventful perspective" on the study of nations and nationalism.[4]

Firstly, I shall examine the category of event. Due to either a sociological bias or to an honest eagerness to concentrate on *longue durée* dynamics of social change, most scholars of nationalism are reluctant to theoretically engage with events and their cultural consequences. A sign of this state of affairs is the fact that all textbooks still distinguish between two possible types of explanation of how nations came about: primordialism and modernism.[5] However, both approaches embrace the same "developmentalist" stance assuming that a nation is the long term outcome of a number of elective affinities: primordial ties, print capitalism, modernization etc. The stake here - as it was made famous by the Warwick Debate - is not whether nations have navels or are simply born *ex nihilo*, but rather where exactly to place their date of birth on a temporal axis that stretches from antiquity to the present. My contention is that, pitted against historical events, these theories turn out to have little heuristic value.

Secondly, I shall explore the concept of culture. In spite of being a pet word for many scholars of nationalism, this concept is rarely pondered upon and hardly ever properly defined. An invention of late nineteenth century British armchair anthropology, "culture" is arguably the most popular noun in the social sciences. However, it seems to be always accompanied, depending on its users, by some definite adjectives. Political scientists take pleasure is speaking about "civic culture"; ethnographers about "native culture"; sociologists

[4] The phrase "eventful perspective" goes back to Rogers Brubaker's seminal article "Rethinking Nationhood. Nation as Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event", *Contention*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1994, 3-14, reprinted in Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-23. I am grateful to Professor Brubaker for taking time to discuss this article with me.

[5] This analytic distinction was made popular by Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism. A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London/New York: Routledge: 1998), 18-19 and uncritically taken over by, *inter alia*, Umut Özkirimh, *Theories of Nationalism. A Critical Introduction*, foreword by Fred Halliday (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 12-57.

about “youth culture” and, finally, students of nationalism about “national culture”. Therefore it would be hazardous even to attempt to abstract an all-encompassing definition. What I shall do instead is to discuss at some length the concept as it has been employed by Ernest Gellner. Furthermore, Gellner would provide me not only the opportunity of conceptual clarification, but also of a straightforward critique. For it is my contention that Gellner has little to say about how a national culture really works.

Thirdly, I shall try to bring together the category of event and the concept of culture in order to propose an explanation for the mechanism of cultural reproduction. One can see the relationship between event and culture through a dialectical prism: while culture makes possible the interpretation of certain happenings in terms of historical events, the events themselves have the ability to radically alter the components of a particular national culture. In other words, Romanians turned a certain war into a “War of Independence” because they were already accustomed of thinking with a nationalist vocabulary that placed considerable emphasis on the notion of self-determination. Conversely, the war itself hugely contributed to the configuration of a national culture that was gradually diffused in society. There are several junction points from where scholars have looked at the process of cultural transmission: the educational system, the army, public ceremonies, etc. My wager is to prove that cinema can cast light on this phenomenon as well.

1.1 Historical Event

Among historians and social scientists, events have a bad press. This is partly the legacy bequeathed by the French historian Fernand Braudel and partly the obsession of the profession over the last fifty years to ask big “why” questions.[6] Let me briefly take them by turn.

[6] I follow here Jacques Revel and Erika Mursa, “Die Wiederkehr des Ereignisses: ein historiographischer Streifzug”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft: Struktur und Ereignis*, Vol. 19, 2001, 158-174.

From the very beginning, Braudel mounted an attack on what was then called *histoire événementielle*: diplomatic history concerned with high politics and the actions of "great man". What was in need of explanation for Braudel was the subterrain logic of historical development, both in its temporal and in its spatial (or geographic) dimension. On this view, events were quite irrelevant, mere epiphenomena destined to remain on the surface of history and hence incapable to modify its course. This perspective was supplemented by the rising of historical sociology - a discipline that sought to transfer the aims and methods of sociology onto the recorded past. Its research agenda was governed by an effort to understand what are the causes and consequences of modernization, or, to put it in a nutshell: *why* is the West different? The vast majority of "nationalism studies" fall squarely within this conceptual framework.

In its first embodiment, the inquiry by "cause and consequence" has convincingly demonstrated how nationalism started as a potpourri of philosophical ideas put forth by a cohort of German thinkers at the beginning of the nineteenth century and ended up, in Tom Nairn's felicitous phrase, to brake-up the various European empires and the world order thereby constituted. On this view, nationalism is a double-faced creature: couched in the form of contentious "mass" movements it can - at the very same time - bring down a state and create a new one out of the ruins of the previous. The corollary of this assertion is that nationalism can also be understood as a stable variable of collective action: it can inflame the spirits, cluster the people and convince them to die in battle etc.[7]

In its second variant, the same reasoning has been used to argue the case of nationalism as a necessary complement of that "great transformation" that brought about the modern society. On this view, nationalism is a derivative product of the "double revolution", the legitimate child of the marriage between capitalism and popular sovereignty. Its function is to

[7] This position is most clearly articulated by John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1-14.

provide a new social bond by inventing new traditions, by organizing a huge group of anonymous people into an "imagined community" and by lifting the loyalty for a specific new culture above the multiplicity of parochial allegiances people owe to their extended families, villages, towns etc. The consequence of this contention is that nationalism is a vital tool in the endless process of political legitimation.[8]

The difference between the two approaches, though not always explicitly stated, is quite striking: in the first case nationalism is a cause of social change while in the latter case it is taken to be only a consequence. Nonetheless, both explanations find themselves in accord over a basic truism: nationalism maketh nations! Not disagreeing with this conclusion, I want to challenge the underlining assumption of all these theories, namely that nations are "… stable products of deep developmental trends in economy, polity or culture."[9]

According to Brubaker, developmentalist perspectives rest on the assumption that nations are fixed, ontologically "real", entities determined by a whole gamut of exogenous factors. This is precisely why the emphasis falls on more or less fictitious units: states, nations, ethnic groups or social forces. If the fact that nations are constructed is beyond dispute, the single question that still begs answer can only be a "how" question. [10] It was Eric Hobsbawm who first drew attention to this aspect when - in the oft overlooked preface of his book - he argued that the process of nation-building "cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalistic."[11] However, this shift of perspective also involves a reconfiguration of the relation between diachronic and

[8] For this definition see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 16.
[9] Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Nationhood. Nation as Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event", *Contention*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1994, 9.
[10] Hence Brubaker: "That ethnicity and nationhood are constructed is a commonplace, *how* they are constructed is seldom specified in detail.", Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmid, Jon Fox, Liana Grancea *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton & Oxford, 2006), 7. (my emphasis)
[11] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

synchronic conceptions of historical time. For - as Koselleck argued - it is only by privileging the synchronic level that agency (or consciousness) becomes a relevant category of historical inquiry.[12] Yet, as soon as the diachronic/developmentalist framework is drastically downplayed and the limelight is turned on the ordinary people and their everyday doings, the category of the event gains in magnitude. In this conceptual setting, the legitimate question is the following: *how do people live (or experience) nationness?*

One possible answer to this question, the one that I shall try to argue in this paper is that individuals participate in a perpetual process of cultural reproduction. However, the culture people reproduce (or carry forward) in their daily social interaction is the outcome of a certain historical event. It was Marshall Sahlins who claimed, against a whole historiographical tradition that took events to be mere symptoms of long-term processes, that cultural orders are in point of fact events-systems.[13] Or, to put it bluntly, culture is a by-product of the willingness on the part of individuals to constantly relate to a certain happening from their past.

It is not hard to imagine examples of events that have radically altered the culture (or structure) of certain communities.[14] Sahlins' dealt extensively with the impact on Hawaiian culture of the arrival of Captain Cook.[15] But this is not to say that events do not also take place within the boundaries of certain communities, without any exterior intervention.

[12] Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantic und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 22 distingushes between sinchrony and diachrony as follows: "Rein theoretisch ließe sich alle Geschichte als permanente Gegenwart, in der die Vergangenheit und die Zukunft enthalten sind, definieren - oder aber als die andauernde Verschränkung von Vergangenheit und Zukunft, die jede Gegenwart ständig zum Verschwinden bringt. Im einen Fall, der auf die Synchronie zugespitzt ist, wird die Geschichte zum reinen Bewußtseinsraum depraviert, in dem alle Zeitdimensionen zugleich enthalten sind, während im anderen Fall, der auf die Diachronie zugespitzt ist, die aktive Präsenz der Menschen geschichtlich keinen Handlungsraum hätte." Keeping in mind that without diachrony there is no history proper, Koselleck further argues that the key to social history is to combine the two.

[13] Marshall Sahlins, "The Return of the Event, Again. With Reflections on the Beginnings of the Great Fijian War of 1843-1855 between the Kingdoms of Bau and Rewa", in IBIDEM *Culture in Practice. Selected Essays* (New York, Zone Books, 2000), 298.

[14] Sahlins uses the terms "culture" and "structure" interchangeably, see for example Marshall Sahlins, "Individual Experience and Cultural Order", in IBIDEM *Culture in Practice. Selected Essays* (New York, Zone Books, 2000), 281 *et passim*.

[15] Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities. Structure in the early History of the Sandwich Islands* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Suppose we take 9/11 as one of the most telling recent cases in which an event transformed the culture not only of the American society but also of the larger word as well. The terrorist attacks were instantaneously perceived, in the eyes of those whom it immediately affected, as a historical event - a rupture in the normal order of things. Naturally, this event had a plethora of consequences: political ones (the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq), economic ones (stock market fluctuations), architectonic ones (the reorganization of New York's urban environment) etc. But more importantly it had tremendous cultural consequences perceivable at the level of daily life. Under the influence of 9/11 the entire culture of air traveling has dramatically changed. A new vocabulary quickly emerged: security, risk, war on terror etc. Moreover, a reconfiguration of the relations between Muslims and the American authorities also took place. As Sewell would put it, this was an event that triggered a cascade of ruptures that finally lead to a total transformation of culture.[16] Numerous similar cases can always be invoked. For the moment, what is worth bearing in mind is that "events makeh culture."

This conclusion should be backed up by yet another distinction, namely that between historical events and incidents (or happenings). The criterion that delimits the two is precisely the magnitude of the impact an event can exert over a given culture. The incident - a category that can subsume happenings like public rituals, outbursts of collective action, etc - has only the capacity to reproduce culture, not to modify its content. Sewell argued this point as follows: "Structures are made and reproduced by human action, not by God or Nature. Because a structure is reproduced by enactments and because the situation in which a structurally shaped enactment occurs is never quite the same as the previous situation, the difference between an act of reproduction and an event is always a difference in degree, not in

[16] William H. Sewell Jr. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 228. Sewell's own example involves a bar fight that, through a series of consecutive ruptures, lead to racial segregation. This story comes close to the plot of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. Professor András Kovács repeatedly pointed out to me that this movie is actually a wonderful example of how ethnicity works in practice. But the film can also be read as depicting an event (i.e. a riot) that more or less changed the face of a multicultural neighbourhood.

kind. Distinguishing transformative events from ordinary implementations of structures is necessarily a matter of practical judgement."[17] For my case, this could translate as follows: **1.** the Russian-Turkish War of 1877 was an historical event that proved to have enormous consequences for the configuration of a Romanian national culture at the end of the nineteenth century; **2.** the making of a movie called *Romania's Independence* in 1911/12 was an incident (an exceptional one by all means) that acted upon the received national culture of the time. Accordingly, the relation between the war of 1877 and the film of 1912 is simply one between an historical event and an incident. Bluntly put, the making of *Romania's Independence* is an enactment (and hence a reproduction) of the national culture created by the Russian-Turkish War.

1.2 Culture

The work of Ernest Gellner represents the single most articulate attempt to illuminate the linkage between culture and the state. In his view, nationalism is an explicitly modern principle of political legitimation which postulates the congruence (or the coincidence) between sovereignty and culture. Therefore, nations are defined as "culture zones".[18] On the one hand, states can build nations from above by way of inventing a homogenous culture and distributing it uniformly across their sovereign territories. On the other hand, cultures can mobilize and strive for a state of their own. In both cases, the outcome is the same: one state, one national culture.

Nevertheless, Gellner is not always consistent in his use of terms. In some works, he distinguishes between "High Culture" and "Low Culture", in others between "High Tradition" and "Little Tradition". The first is the proper culture of all industrial societies, the written culture acquired during school years. The latter is the folk, illiterate and orally transmitted

[17] IBIDEM, 211.
[18] Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book. The Structure of Human History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25.

culture of the traditional community. In the passage from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, due to the inherent needs of the industrial world, "High Culture" comes to replace "Low Culture". As Gellner famously put it "culture is now the necessary shared medium, the life-blood or perhaps rather the minimal shared atmosphere, within which alone the members of the society can breathe and survive and produce."[19] Perhaps the most clear-cut example of this process is the fact that the only language that matters in an industrial society is the one learned at school, the language in which the textbooks are written and taught.

At this level Gellner's understanding of culture is reduced to the ability to read and write in a certain language - a skill indispensable in a word in which work is mostly semantic. (Before repairing a car a mechanic interprets the instructions, which involves some knowledge of geometry, mathematics, physics etc.) To cut it short, Gellner explains why a Polish mechanic can work in France (a mechanic does what mechanics do pretty much everywhere on the globe) but he does not explain what makes a Polish mechanic *Polish*. Historians following Gellner's ruminations were also convinced, rightly I think, that in the modern world the relevant culture is no longer acquired with the breast milk (within family boundaries) but during school years. Therefore, in order to understand how national culture is both produced and reproduced one has to study the educational system (textbooks, questions of historiography etc). My contention is that this is not enough because it leaves no room for agency. This argument has been voiced by a number of scholars. Perry Anderson, for instance, criticised Gellner for neglecting "the overpowering dimension of collective *meaning* that modern nationalism has always involved: that is, not its functionality for industry, but its fulfillment of identity."[20] Gellner's unwillingness to see in nationalism more that a simple solution to a problem posed by the modern industrial society lead him to disregard the whole

[19] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 37.
[20] Perry Anderson, "Science, Politics, Enchantment", in John A. Hall and I.C. Jarvie (eds.), *Transition to Modernity. Essays on Power, Wealth and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 208. (emphasis in the original)

process of culture formation. One of his celebrated essays reads as follows: "the culture which, *more or less contingently*, is chosen as the medium of that homogeneity, comes to define the political 'pool' in question, and thus becomes the object - and symbol of loyalty, rhetoric, and devotion."[21] The most Gellner was prepared to concede to the mechanisms through which culture is created and reproduced is the passing remark "more or less contingently". However, in a subsequent essay he made it clear that the singularity of a High Culture is not simply provided by the language in which it is expressed. The core of any High Tradition is occupied by a set of distinctive values, that is by culture as defined by ethnologists. In other words, all High Cultures are "ethnically coloured" and for this reason unique.[22]

Gellner's concept of national culture must be extended to encompass the social life that falls outside the educational system as well. Consumption - I argue - should receive equal attention as a site of cultural reproduction. Let me take two examples in order to shed light on this rather controversial issue.

Writing at the beginning of the 20th century, Octavian Goga described what it meant for somebody born in a Romanian-speaking family to go through the entire educational system in Transylvania. "How many of our graduate students - he observed - who cannot utter one sentence in Romanian without mixing in some Hungarian words, have not returned home with their souls ruined … poor rootless boys, neither Romanians nor Hungarians."[23] Bilingualism was a common trait among most of the educated petty bourgeoisie, with Romanian spoken within the privacy of the household and Hungarian reserved for the public sphere. For a nationalist like Goga, this situation was first and foremost a token of alienation made possible by the monarchy's educational and cultural policies. Those young Romanians whom, after

[21] Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 6, 1981, 768. (my emphasis)
[22] Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 41.
[23] Octavian Goga, *Însemnãrile unui trecãtor. Crâmpeie din sbuciumãrile dela noi [Jottings of a Passerby. Glimpses from Our Struggles]* (Arad: Tribuna Institut Tipografic Nichin şi Cons, 1911), 60.

finishing primary schooling, went to Cluj or Budapest to get their higher education were immediately assimilated into the hegemonic culture of the elites. All of them, he continues, end up reading *Budapest Hirlap* and enjoying Hungarian poetry. As a consequence, they are more aware of what happens in Budapest and Vienna that in Bucharest or Jassy. However, one should not blame only them for abandoning their roots. In Cluj, Goga argues, Romanian students cannot even buy books written in their mother tongue or read Romanian newspapers. Not that students cannot afford them or the state forbids such cultural items, but simply because such commodities do not exist. This state of affairs, Goga concludes, is similar to what happened in Scotland during the 19th century. But unlike the Scots - he goes on - Romanians do not have somebody like Carnegie to finance the building of public libraries.

Such were the problems haunting the minds of many Romanian intellectuals living in *fin-de-siècle* Transylvania. The literary critic Horia Petra-Petrescu was arguably the most conscious of the role the market had to play as mediator between Romanians. In his lectures he constantly raised the question of the publishing industry in Transylvania. On a particular occasion he told a short anecdote.[24] In one of his trips to Germany, Petra-Petrescu had the opportunity to meet a young bank clerk. His new acquaintance turned out to be quite fond of books and culture even though he could barely support himself. In spite of his modest salary he was in the habit of visiting each Sunday the local museum and going two or three times a month to the theatre. But what really surprised the Romanian traveller was the young man's willingness to spend up to four or five Marks on books on a regular basis since, as he himself acknowledged, "by helping my German authors, I am really helping my nation"[25]. This confession deeply moved Petra-Petrescu. Nothing of the sort seemed to take place in his native Transylvania. He noticed how those bookshops that sell Romanian books were most of the time on the brink of bankruptcy. Books written in Romanian, he concluded, have never

[24] Horia Petra-Petrescu, *Îndemnuri: broşuri volante [Injunctions]* (Braşov: Editura Librãriei Ioan I. Ciurcu, 1914), 8.
[25] IBIDEM, 9.

reached a second or a third edition. For Petra-Petrescu the solution was clear: "Don't you people realize that if our booksellers thrive, our national culture will flourish as well?"[26]

To conclude, what both Goga and Petra-Petrescu understood - perhaps better that Gellner - was that consumption of cultural commodities is vital to keeping a certain culture alive.[27] The best way to resist assimilation was to engage in consumption: to buy Romanian newspapers and books. Otherwise, the fate of their culture was doomed.[28] Of course, this assumption rests on a more general point: if it is true that national culture is disseminated through school textbook, it is also true that the very same national culture is liable to undergo a process of commoditization. Bluntly put, national culture (or any culture for that matter) can be sold and bought under the embodiment of a variety of commodities: newspapers, books, images, films etc.[29]

1.3 Cinema

Thus far I have put forth a twofold argument. Firstly, I claimed that individuals interpret certain happenings in terms of historical events and that this very process of selective remembering and calculated forgetting ends up modifying or even changing their national culture. Secondly, I maintained that national culture thus produced enters a process of commoditization that runs parallel to the educational system and sometimes overlaps with it. The inhabitants of the modern world live (or experience) their culture not only by way of

[26] IBIDEM, 11.

[27] The relation between consumption and national culture in the U.S. was wonderfully research by Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century*, (London: Verso, 1996). My thanks go to Professor Paul Willemen from the University of Ulster for drawing my attention to Ohmann's work and for sending me his course notes on this book.

[28] Upward mobility among "cultural minorities" combined with the absence of institutional support for their (often folk/oral) culture greatly favours acculturation. This argument has been put forward with respect to immigrant communities and their "ethnic culture" in the U.S. by Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 128-129. It also works for turn of the century Transylvania.

[29] For the commoditization of religious (mostly protestant) culture, see Laurence Moore, *Selling God. American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Apart from the book market as a milieu of commoditization, Moore also considers various forms of entertainment, but curiously does not touch upon Hollywood film production.

contemplating the written word, but also in the form of consumption. My further contention is that cinema is part of this setting.

According to Miriam Hansen - "from its inception in 1895-6, cinema was defined as the projection of films upon a fixed screen before a paying public."[30] The more or less obvious question raised by such conceptualization is whether cinema can be thought of as being part of the public sphere. And if this is indeed the case, the subsequent question is: whose public sphere?

Hansen herself seems to believe that primitive cinema belonged to a "proletarian public sphere" opposed in many respects to the bourgeois public sphere. And judging by the social composition of the audience, she is very much entitled to this observation.[31] However, Hansen goes on to criticise Habermas for arguing - in what seems to be a typical German mandarin manner - that the first half of the twentieth century saw the partial demise of the public sphere at the hands of a consumerist culture that turned its back on the concern for public matters. But for Habermas this state of affairs rests on a too strict definition of the public sphere as a social space that makes possible the articulation of a public opinion.

In the long run, this public opinion is supposed to have served some political purposes acting as a constraint on power - a sort of popular mechanism of "checks and balances." With the advent of consumerism however, the extended government by discussion made possible by the public sphere is shrank to insignificance and even replaced with a government by interests.[32] But this does not lead, as Hansen assumes, to a plurality of public spheres, some less bourgeois than others. Instead of conceiving cinema as part of a distinctively proletarian

[30] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26. This is the most compelling definition of cinema that I found.
[31] Miriam Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" *New German Critique: The Origins of Mass Culture: The Case of Imperial Germany (1871-1918)*, No. 29, 1983, 162. "Primitive cinema" is defined by "a relative absence of editing and a nearly monolithic concept of the shot unsubordinated to any editing schema." by Tom Gunning in his "Primitive Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick's on Us", *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1989, 5. From a technical point of view, this applies to *Romania's Independence* as well.
[32] Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)", *New German Critique*, No. 3, 1974, 49-55

public sphere I content that one should understand it as simply part of the public sphere at large. However, this argument does away with both Habermas' definition and Hansen's critique. The Habermasian distinction between *debate* and *lobby* is - I dare say - irrelevant for defining the public sphere. According to Norberto Bobbio, a genuine public sphere is concomitantly made up from an association of equals (i.e. citizens) and from one of unequals (i.e. consumers).[33] These identities are not, *pace* Habermas, mutually exclusive but complementary. The "paying public" that Hansen refers to in her definition is simply a group of consumers. And one can easily imagine the same public - say two hours after the screening - casting a ballot as voters or being conscripted into the army as soldiers.

This argument could also prove to be a helpful starting point for a definition of movies. The emphasis here falls on the "paying" or "pricing" aspect of a movie. Films - I contend - address consumers as private goods. According to Paul Samuelson, the criterion for distinguishing between a private and a public good is non-excludability.[34] In other words, private goods are not for everyone to enjoy. Conversely, a public good is a good made available without any kind of restrictions. This reasoning somehow parallels the above made distinction between citizens and consumers. For example, primary education - the *locus classicus* of the distribution of a national culture[35] - is a public good produced by the state to the benefit of its citizens. In opposition, movies are private goods made by producers to the pleasure of consumers. They both circulate the given national culture of a certain political community, but in radically different ways.

[33] Norberto Bobbio, *Democracy and Dictatorship. The Nature and Limits of State Power* translated by Peter Kennealy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 5-9. The terms of Bobbio's critique of Habermas echoes Marx's distinction between bourgeois and citizen in "On the Jewish Question".
[34] Paul A. Samuelson, "Aspects of Public Expenditure Theories", *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1958, 335.
[35] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 19.

The crucial word here is *circulation* since a private good is nothing more and nothing less than a simple commodity - "an item with use value that also has exchange value."[36] Marx noticed how, at a closer inspection, a commodity "is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[37] This was meant to be read as an injunction to uncover the alleged bizarreness of the whole social system that underlines the exchange of commodities. I shall not pursue such analysis here. Nonetheless Marx touched a soft spot. The social life of a commodity is indeed able to reveal (or to unveil) the entireness of the social world in which it circulates. Art historians - for instance - have long been aware of the fact that a painting is the embodiment of a social relationship between artists, commissioners and the destined audience.[38] Hence, if films are conceived as commodities then one can trace by way of moving along the thin red line that links all those involved in the process of circulation the agents that participated in the acts of production, exchange and consumption. In other words, the social biography of *Romania's Independence* is bound to include the experiences of those who thought, wrote, directed, acted in, financed, supported, advertised, sold, screened, saw and finally commented upon the movie. It is only in this way - I argue - that one can get a sense of what it means to live a national culture and to participate in its daily reproduction.

This theoretical perspective also carries some methodological instructions. Paul Veyne argued that historical facts (i.e. raw data) acquire meaning only in light of a particular concept.[39]

[36] This definition is provided by Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" in Arjun Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 64.
[37] Karl Marx, *Capital. A New Abridgement*, translated by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.
[38] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy. A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.
[39] "Les faits historiques ne s'organisent pas par périodes et par peuples, mais par notions; ils n'ont pas à être replacés en leur temps, mais sous leur concept.", Paul Veyne, *L'inventaire des differences. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), 48.

The historian's relation with the archival material is necessarily mediated by the concept(s) selected to be employed. However, the concept itself comes along with it its own plot (intrigue) that - once put to work - organizes the facts in a certain coherent framework. For my case, the concept of commodity makes explicit the circulation model elucidated above. Moreover, to say that a movie is a commodity discloses a refusal to subject it to an ethno-symbolical reading. Anthony Smith defended this view in the following terms: "The artist and the writer alike have been at the heart of the project of popular national representation and renewal, clothing the ideal of the nation and its historical myths, memories and symbols in palpable, dynamic forms which are easily accessible to the mass of the 'national' membership."[40] Be that as it may, I do not think there is much to be gained from a deep, sophisticated iconological or iconographic analysis of movies or paintings - a method that tends to see visual representations of the nation in the most trivial of things.[41]

[40] Anthony D. Smith, "Images of the Nation - Cinema, Art and National Identity", in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds.) *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 43.
[41] I tackle head on this issue in the last chapter.

2. The Making of an Historical Event

Marshall Sahlins' aphorism according to which cultures are events-systems needs some preliminary clarification. It seems obvious that most historical events have been either wars or revolutions. However, one should be aware not to exaggerate this line of reasoning. Let me take one example in order to shed light on this rather confusing statement.

On the 5th of July, 1906 the sixth Congress of the International Institute of Sociology took place at London University. During the first session A.D. Xenopol - one of Romania's foremost historians of the time - gave a lecture in French entitled "The Role of Wars in the History of Civilization". Xenopol set himself the task of proving that all nations of the world are the outcomes of wars and revolutions: "A superficial glimpse at history - he wrote - shows that the vast majority of ethnic and social groups are the result of those violent eruptions (violents soubresauts) caused by wars: either by interior wars (revolutions) or by exterior wars (proper wars)."[42] The Romanian nation - Xenopol further claimed - was also born out of a war. However, this was not a recent war, but a very ancient one, perhaps the oldest recorded war that ever plagued the region: the Roman conquest of Dacia.

Compared with some current theories of nationalism, Xenopol's judgement is not that eccentric. Here is how Anthony Smith takes a similar stand: "While it would be an exaggeration to deduce the sense of common ethnicity from the fear of the 'outsider' and paired antagonisms, there is no denying the central role of warfare, not, as Simmel suggested, as a crucible of ethnic cohesion (war may fracture that cohesion, as it did in the Great War in some European countries) but as a mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, a centralizing force in the life of the community and a provider of myths and memories for future generations. It is perhaps this last function that enters most deeply into the constitution

[42] A.-D. Xénopol, *Le role de la guerre dans l'histoire de la civilisation* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière, 1907), 2. (my translation)

of ethnic identity."[43] This contention, however, stands on the shakiest of grounds. Even if one takes for granted the reality of myths and symbols fostered by wars, it is still not clear how people transmit them from one generation to the next. The whole argument is grounded in a blatant sociological fallacy. It might be true that some national communities take pleasure in upholding some ancient symbols, but this does not mean that those particular communities were kept together by the belief in those symbols. To put it bluntly, a symbol or a myth might or might not be ancient, but a community is always young. Any attempt to connect the two is simply frivolous. Moreover, myths and symbols change with the passage of time and even fade away under the influence of new events. From a sociological point of view, one ought to first make clear the material basis (i.e. paper, stone, spoken word etc.) on which these "myths" rest in order to make the theory less implausible. It is preposterous even to ask what eleventh, sixtieth or late eighteenth century "Romanians" thought about their alleged "Roman" roots.

Nonetheless, read against the grain, Smith's argument might prove to carry some commonsense. It goes without saying that all genuine "national cultures" are thought to be unique by both those who share them and by those who contemplate them from the outside. Therefore, I find it reasonable to believe, following Smith, that to explain the distinctiveness (or singularity) of a national culture is to explain the influence certain collective experiences have had on its articulation.[44] Consequently, in this chapter I shall try to single out the main components of the Romanian national culture as it emerged in relation to the Russian-Turkish War of 1877.

[43] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 27.
[44] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), ix.

2.1 The Question of Independence

In what is still the best single work on the Russian-Turkish War written by a Romanian scholar, Nicolae Iorga argued that, in the months that preceded the armed conflict, most of the political and intellectual elite, not to mention the lower strata of society, was utterly unaware of what this war could bring about for the Romanian state. In this respect, Iorga continued, it is impossible to compare it with the First World War which - the argument goes - "was the end-result of a period of struggle and sprung out of the hearts of a long repressed people."[45] Roughly the same impression was shared by the foreign correspondent of New York Times:

> "This sort of occasion (e.g. the war against the Turks) would have triggered in the U.S. the consumption of tones of whiskey, in France or Italy people would have danced *Carmagnole* and sung la *Marseillaise* or the hymns of Garibaldi or other popular songs. But here (e.g. in Romania) nothing is happening."[46]

However, Iorga's contention ought to be taken with a grain of salt. The two events can definitely be compared in terms of their results. While the 1877 war produced a peace agreement that gained Romania's political independence, the 1918 Paris peace treaty generated a similar effect: it created the new, multicultural and larger state called Greater Romania. Both outcomes are the consequences of a plurality of causes among which an international balance of power agreed upon by the most influential European states ranks the highest. What Iorga had in mind was that the administrative incorporation of Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia had been accompanied not only by the war effort and the Versailles verdict, but more importantly by plebiscitarian popular movements. Nothing of the sort happened in 1877, when Turkey's suzerainty over Romania was removed by way of some happy "external circumstances" (prin împrejurări din afară).[47] Consequently, one might conclude that Iorga was on the one hand willing to leave much more elbow room for

[45] Nicolae Iorga, *Războiul pentru Independen□a României. Ac□iuni diplomatice şi stări de spirit [The War for Romania's Independence. Diplomatic Actions and States of Mind]*, (Bucureşti: Cultura Na□ională, 1927), 5.
[46] Quoted from Radu R. Florescu, "La presse américaine et la guerre d'indépendance Roumaine", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, Vol 27, No. 1, 1980, 146. (my translation)
[47] Nicolae Iorga, *op. cit.*

historical contingency in the case of 1877 and on the other hand determined to see fate in the case of the First World War. Biased as this judgement may seem, it stands at odds with respect to an entire national historiography that tends to read Romania's independence as a natural consequence of the union of 1859.[48]

The proper question in this context is the following: *when and by whom was the Russian-Turkish War turned into the War of Independence?* The importance of this interrogation is immediately evident. Most historical events end up creating the vocabulary in which their interpretation becomes legitimate. It is words that authorize memory and not the other way around! For example, the Swiss Peasants' War of 1653 was never recalled as a "war" by those against whom the popular violence was directed - the patricians. The cultural posterity of the event took it to be a simple, run-of-the-mill conflict between the aristocracy and the plebe.[49] In this particular case, the vocabulary of the event was the vocabulary of the ruling class.

A quick glace at the general bibliographies on the event of 1887 revels that, with the exception of Kogãlniceanu's speech delivered in Parliament on the 9th of May 1887, the word itself is almost absent from contemporary sources. Perhaps the only other instance where the word is appropriately mentioned is a collection of diplomatic documents published in 1878 in four volumes which apparently contains a chapter under the rubric "the war of independence".[50] The rest of the written evidence produced in 1877 - opinion brochures, occasional pamphlets, speeches - do not seem to refer to the war in terms of a "war of

[48] This kind of determinism became a common place of the historiography produced under the communist regime, for a typical case see Dan Berindei, *Cucerirea independen□ei (1877-1878) [The Conquest of the Independence]* (Bucureşti: Editura ştiin□ificã şi enciclopedicã, 1977), 124-126. This argument is nevertheless strongly documented in Ştefan Pascu, Jean Livescu, Dan Berindei, Constantin Nu□u, Ion Matei (eds.) *The Independence of Romania. Selected Bibliography* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1980), especially 23-89.

[49] Andreas Suter, "Theories and Methods for a Social History of Historical Events: A Reply to Hermann Rebel", *Central European History*, Vol. 34, No. 3, The Peasantry in Early Modern Central Europe: The State of the Field, 2001, 393.

[50] Ioan C. Bãcilã, *Bibliografia rãzboiului pentru independen□ã, 1877-1878 [The Bibliography of the War of Independence, 1877-1878]*, (Bucureşti: Cartea românească, 1927), 20.

independence."[51] This conclusion is supported by Iorga's argument according to which "nobody even bothered to enlighten the masses: the press was not worried with such matters, there were no speeches and no public declarations in support of the war."[52] On the basis of the preserved archival material, it is reasonable to conclude that the idea of a "war of independence" was manufactured only after the Berlin Treaty.

To argue that the word "independence" was missing from the daily vocabulary or was at any rate used with utmost reluctance is not to downplay the importance of the happening. Even before Romania decided to join, the war was closely monitored by the both the local press and by the Romanian-language press from Transylvania.[53] However, one should not hasten to deduce that the "public opinion" was aware of the moment's significance. Firstly, due to the high rates of illiteracy the reading public was severely restricted to a minority. Secondly, what newspapers wrote cannot be simply equated with what the whole population thought.[54] It is likely that the first time the event entered peoples' lives was on the 6th of April 1877 when the army and the civic guard were mobilized.

It might be true that the aspiration for an independent state was a nationalist project entertained by the Romanian political and cultural elite, a project that can be traced back at least to the events of 1848.[55] And one can certainly find a vast literature that militated for a sovereign state in the preceding decades of the war of 1877. The dream of self-determination did not have to wait its Wilson and Lenin to be turned into a genuine political goal. However,

[51] I have also checked Anton Oprescu, *Rãzboiul pentru independen□ã. Contribu□iuni la bibliografia lui [The War of Independence. Contributions to its bibliography]*, (Bucureşti: Institutul de arte grafice 'Bucovina', I.E. Toron□iu, 1928). Even more, political figures like Dumitru Brătianu or Ion Ghica published brochures against the war and for neutrality.

[52] Nicolae Iorga, *op.cit*, 164.

[53] For an almost day-by-day analysis of the main newspapers see Beatrice Marinescu, Aurel Du□u, Şerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *Bucureştiul şi epopeea independen□ei, 1877-1878 [Bucharest and the Epic of Independence, 1877-1878]* (Bucureşti: Editura Acedemiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1978). For the case of Transylvania, the most involved newspaper in reporting on the course of the events was *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, Sextil Puşcariu, *Răsunetul războiului pentru independen□ă în Ardeal [The Echo of the War of Independence in Ardeal]* (Bucureşti: Conferin□e □inute la Ateneul Român, 1927), 192.

[54] "We are today less likely to confuse, as historians once habitually did, editorials in select newspapers with public opinion.", Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

[55] Frederick Kellogg, *The Road to Romanian Independence* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1995), 80.

this contention does not go against the possibility that in 1877 nobody dared to believe that the outcome of the war could be what it eventually turned out to be, namely political independence. My contention is that the catch-phrase "war of independence" and the narrative it stands for was the creation of the late nineteenth century historiographical tradition (i.e. military history, war memories, literature etc.). To conclude, the "war of independence" came after the actual war ended and after the independence was secured.

2.2 The Standard Narrative

Surprisingly, the first dress-up of the war in a nationalist garb was planned and carried out in Transylvania. In 1879 two Romanian history teachers published a voluminous book with the title "The Oriental War (Resbelulu orientale)". Interestingly enough, the book was printed in Graz. On the first page one can read the following dedication: "For the brave Romanian army and its distinguished leaders, to the heroes of Pleven, Grivitsa and Vidin and for all those who died for the cause of Romanianness (Romanismu)."[56] This would soon become the typical encomium to be found on virtually all opening pages of the books that narrated the war. However, the two authors - Alessi and Popu - were aware that Romania played a minor role in the conflict, hence the title. Their work was still pretty much conceived as a general history of the clash between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, yet another episode of the "Oriental Problem". But there was more to the story.

Though both authors closely followed the war as it was chronicled in the press, they felt the need of grounding their narrative on first-hand reports. Therefore, before starting to work on the book, they sent a number of letters to the Romanian army's leaders asking for private memories, war journals and battlefield notes. All this was required not only in order to effectively convey the "bravery of the troops" but also to set in stone (a eternisá) the

[56] A.P. Alessi & M. Popu, *Resbelulu orientale [The Oriental War]*, (Graz: Editura lui Paul Cieslar, 1879), 1. See also Nicolae Iorga, *op.cit*, 166.

patriotism and heroism of the Romanian people.[57] The vivid descriptions of the battle scenes had only an instrumental role, namely to form the backbone of a story in which the Romanians rightfully freed themselves from the oppressive Turks. However, the independence itself had to be first deemed legitimate: "The national idea is as old as humanity itself, identical in origins with language."[58] All the nations of the world - the authors further argue - have a right to self-determination. However, apart from this claim, Alessi and Popu also strive to make it clear that strategically "Romania's independence is in the interest of the European states."[59] This would later become the sole valid framework within which the event of 1877 had to be remembered.

Ten years after the event of 1877, a group of officers of the Romanian army published the first historical account of the war. Again, what matters here is the framework in which they thought it necessary to write the history of the war. The first two chapters of the book are devoted to the effort of tracing back the origins of the nation to ancient times. Naturally, the war is seen as the apex of a long and tortuous journey undertook by the Romanian nation throughout the centuries in search of its independence. The proclamation of independence - the collective authors write - "was received with unparalleled enthusiasm … all Romanians suddenly became aware of their sacred duty to guard the independence of the Romanian state (sã se asigure neatîrnarea Statului românŭ).[60]

It is perhaps the moment to add some further remarks on the concept of national culture. In one of his remarkable essays, Sorin Alexandrescu made the point that a sort of anonymous, diffuse and almost unconscious censorship regulated the cultural posterity of the war of 1877. This would explain why in spite of the consecutive and radically opposed ideological upheavals, social revolutions and cultural fashions the basic narrative Romanians

[57] IBIDEM, 5.
[58] IBIDEM, 24.
[59] IBIDEM, 26.
[60] *Istoricului Rĕsboiului din 1877-1878. Participarea României la acestu rĕsboiu [The History of the War of 1877-1878. Romania's Participation in this War]*, (Bucureşti: Tipografia Academiei Române, 1887), 127.

tell about the "war of independence" remained unchanged and unchallenged.[61] In other words, a standard story about the war was passed over from one generation to the next irrespective of the ideological background of the day. If there is one definition of an authentic national culture then this is it: a national culture is made up of a number of interpretative frameworks through which past events are continuously validated. To share a national culture simply means to accept the authority of the dominant paradigm. As teleological as it may sound, the Russians and the Turks do not refer to the event of 1877 as a "war of independence" precisely because they do not call themselves Romanians. Be that as it may, what Alexandrescu labeled as "censorship" deserves a bit more analytical acumen.

In January 1891 the first war recollection was published in book form. Its author was a certain St. G. Sergent. In due time, the book was to become a bestseller. The last paragraph of the preface reads as follows: "I have written these memories convinced of the fact that by so doing I contribute to our national culture."[62] However, on the very first page of the sixth edition of the book one can also read: "Approved by the Ministry of War by decree No. 9262, 27th of March 1913"[63] This was not a singular case of official censorship. The same applies for the recollections of Colonel Niculescu, published in the previous year.[64] Of course, one should not hasten to conclude that all the books that dealt with the war were subjected to censorship. The memories of Ludovic Filla, for instance, printed at his own expenses, do not present us with an official stamp.[65] However, the army (or the state at large) played a colossal role in making available for a large audience the narrative about the war. In 1902 the Ministry

[61] Sorin Alexandrescu, *Privind înapoi, modernitatea [Looking Back, at Modernity]* (Bucureşti: Editura Univers, 1999), 37. My thanks go to Professor Constantin Iordachi for making me aware of this truly astonishing essay.
[62] St. G. Sergent, *Amintirile mele din rãzboiul pentru independen□ã. Edi□iunea VI [My Recollections from the War of Independence. The Sixth Edition]*, (Bucureşti: Carol Göbl, 1913), 7.
[63] IBIDEM, 1.
[64] P. Niculescu, *Rãsboiul din 1877-78 în Bulgaria. Luptele dela Grivi□a, Etropol şi Belograjek [The War of 1877-78 in Bulgaria]* (Bucureşti: Atelierele grafice SOCEC & Comp., 1911).
[65] Ludovic Filla, *Reminiscen□e din resbelul româno-ruso-turc [Reminiscences from the Romanian-Russian-Turkish War]*, (Bucureşti: Imprimeria şi librãria C. Sfetea, 1906).

of War even offered to sponsor the translation of the official multi-volume Russian interpretation of the event.[66]

This state of affairs should be corroborated with a visible interest on the part of the reading public. It is sound to suppose that the topic of the "war of independence" managed to attract quite a large audience. Otherwise, it would be hard to justify the plethora of books poured on the market at the beginning of the twentieth century. To take but one example, in 1912, the Bucharest-based publishing house "Minerva" released a translation of the war recollections of the Russian painter Vereşaghin.[67] The price of the book - 30 bani - was extremely cheap for its time. By comparison, a ticket to the movie *Romania's Independence* ranged between 2 and 8 lei.[68] Moreover, Vereşaghin's memories were published in a collection that displayed such names as Gogol, Daudet, Eminescu, Sadoveanu, Slavici etc. The low price of the book strongly supports the inference that it was destined for a wide public.

To conclude, in a matter of nearly thirty years from the war of 1877 a standard narrative was steadily popularized. However, the process itself was partly accompanied by a catena of state regulations. The official censorship played a role - perhaps marginal on the whole, but nevertheless significant - in structuring the cultural posterity of the "war of independence".

[66] *Resboiul Ruso-Turc din 1877-78 în Peninsula Balcanicã. Tomul I, traducere din limba rusã de I. Gãrdescu [The Russian-Turkish War in the Balkans. Volume I, translated from Russian by I. Gãrdescu]*, (Bucureşti: Tipografia L'Indépendance Roumaine, 1903), 2.
[67] V. Vereşaghin, *Amintiri din rãzboiul dela 1877, traducere de Nicolae Pandelea [Recollections from the War of 1877. Translated by Nicolae Pandelea]*, (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1912.)
[68] *Diminea□a*, Vol IX, No. 3053, 3 September 1912, 2. These were the prices advertised for "Cinema Palace" - a cinema hall placed at the heart of Bucharest. 1 leu equalled 100 bani.

2.3 The Nationalised King

There is another, infinitely more important, form of censorship working to produce a distinctively Romanian national culture in the aftermath of the war of 1877. Here Alexandrescu is perfectly right: this kind of censorship had nothing to do with the state. It came from bellow and it remained anonymous, unconscious and for these very reasons extremely powerful.

With the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the war, Alexandre Rubin - the editor-in-chief of the influential magazine *L'Indepéndance Roumaine* - published a booklet to honour the day. What strikes the eye in this case is the role attached to the figure of the King. The whole narrative revolves around Carol I: it is by means of his miraculous intuition that Romania was able to seize the moment and join the war; it is he who led the army; it is through his military genius that the offensive succeeded etc. The author makes it clear who are the main characters of the story: the collective one is the army, while the individual one is the King. The final victory is the outcome of their perfectly coordinated venture.[69] Nearly all narratives about the war are centered on the King.

However, one should not exaggerate this point. This tendency followed naturally from a practice of historical writing that, in the classical nineteenth century manner, favoured "great men" and their actions. The presence of the King had yet another role. All the books that recall the war begin with a ceremonial acknowledgement addressed to Carol I. For example, in the introduction to his recollections Colonel Lupaşcu writes: "My modest contribution to the history of the war of independence originates in my boundless love for the nation, for the Romanian army and for our great and wise King Carol I."[70] Similarly, a pamphlet that sought to explain the role played by geography in the war of 1877 is dedicated

[69] Alexandre Rubin, *Une année jubilaire* (Bucarest: Imprim. de l'indèpendance roumaine, 1903), 79.
[70] Gheorghe Em. Lupaşcu, *Amintiri din rãzboiul independen□ei, 1877-1878 [Recollections from the War of Independence, 1877-1878]*, (Bucureşti: Tipografia modernã 'cultura', 1915), 3.

to "the first Romanian (Primul Român), King Carol I."[71] Lastly, on the first page of a book that examined the military technology of the war it reads: "We now celebrate twenty-five years since the Romanian army - under the brave leadership of Prince Carol I, won Romanian's independence."[72] This "literary device" doubles the framework within which telling the story of the war was deemed legitimate. The practice of honouring the king roughly corresponds to what Laurence Kirmayer referred to as "landscapes of memory".

According to Kirmayer, memory (collective and individual) is always authorized by the social milieu in which it is required to be produced, hence: "recollection is based on the past context in which the story is historically rooted and the current context in which the story is retold."[73] Firstly, Kirmayer refutes the naïve (folk) view of memory as "snapshot"; a mere photographic record of experience. He argues for a more nuanced concept underlining its implicit selectivity: people recall what fits their knowledge, beliefs and/or interests. Secondly, he shifts the emphasis from an explanation grounded on defensive mental mechanisms to one that takes into account the social context that governs (hence shapes/alters) the acts of remembering, recollecting and retelling. On this view, narratives are socially constructed stories about the past produced under the constraints of the present. A landscape of memory can be seen as a mechanism that censors what people are indulged to remember. Bluntly put, one could not mention the war without mentioning - at the very same time - the "King" and the "independence". In the end, this amounted to the nationalization (or should one say "domestication"?) of the King - the embodiment of national self-determination.

[71] Nicolae Vicol, *Factorii geografici în reuşita rãzboaelor din punctul de vedere medical [The influence of geographical factors on the success of wars, from a medical point of view]*, (s.n., s.l., 1915), 4. This lecture was initially delivered in 1911.
[72] Ion Ştefãnescu, *Studiu critic asupra rãzboiului ruso-româno-turc, 1877-1878 [A Critical Study of the Russian-Romanian-Turkish War, 1877-1878]*, (Bucureşti: Tipografia şi fonderia de litere Thoma Basilescu, 1902), 1.
[73] Laurence Kirmayer, "Landscape of Memory: Trauma, Narrative and Dissociation", in M. Lambek and P. Antze (eds.) *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (Routledge: London, 1996), 191.

Let me try to put some flesh on this theoretical skeleton. In the political world of the nineteenth century it was perfectly legitimate to bring in a foreign ruler, be it prince or king.[74] There were several reasons that justified this constitutional practice. Prestige aside, the most important is this: the foreign ruler had the advantage of distance and could play the role of a mediator between the various local interests of the political elite. Not being a native of the land, the ruler could stand above national feuds and hence guarantee the rules of the political game.

Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was shipped to Romania in 1866 and made prince by the first modern Romanian constitution adopted several weeks after his arrival. However, the public figure of the prince underwent a slow process of domestication that manifestly increased after the event of 1877. This is how Dimitrie Onciul describes the process: "The election of Prince Carol, today's glorious King of Romania, made possible the ideal of the nation dreamed by the heroes of 1848: the Union, the Dynasty, the Independence (Neatârnarea) and finally the royal steel Crown."[75] Carol's public biography was marked through the ceremony of the 10th of May: the date when he set foot in Bucharest, the date when the national parliament took notice of the "proclamation of independence" and also the date when Carol became king (1881). Of course, Onciu was ready to trace the significance of this public ritual (i.e. the celebration of independence *and* of the king) to the age of Michael the Brave.[76]

It is almost a bromide to argue that invented traditions are not invented only by overzealous historians. The public body of the king had to be associated not only with a national narrative (i.e. the age-old thirst of Romanians for independence) but also with a

[74] Karl Loewenstein, "Réflexions sur la valeur des Constitutions dans une époque révolutionnaire. Esquisse d'une ontologie des Constitutions", *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1952, 8.
[75] Dimitre Onciu, *Alegerea regelui Carol I al României. Conferin□ã □inutã la 9 Aprilie 1906 în Ateneul Român [The Election of King Carol the First of Romania. Speech Delivered on the 9th of April 1906 at the Romanian Athenaeum]*, (Bucureşti: Atelierele grafice SOCEC & Co., 1906), 40.
[76] Dimitre Onciu, *Zece Maiu. Conferin□ã □inutã la serbarea şcolarã din 10 Maiu 1900 [The 10th of May. Speech Delivered with the Occasion of a School Ceremony on the 10th of May 1900]*, (Bucureşti: Atelierele grafice SOCEC & Co., 1900), 20.

number of memorial sites. Medals are also charged with a commemorative value. Therefore, in 1881 (the year Carol made the transition from prince to king) a certain Mr. Kullrich from Berlin is hired by the state and endowed with the mission of fabricating a 84 millimeter medal engraved on one side with a battle scene from the "war of independence" and on the other with the head of the king.[77] In 1911 a book about a ceremonial house dedicated to Carol and located in the village of Poradim, Bulgaria was translated into Romanian. This time Carol was celebrated for having contributed to the Bulgarian national liberation as well.[78]

2.4 A National Culture

In this chapter I argued that a Romanian national culture was manufactured in the aftermath and under the influence of the event of 1877. I further claimed that the core of this culture is inhabited by a standard narrative that brings together the idea of a "war of independence" and that of "national king". My third argument was that something that we can loosely refer to as "censorship" - a blend of official rules directed at the publishing industry and informal social mechanisms directed at the individuals' memory - regulated the cultural posterity of 1877 by means of authorizing the general framework within which one could speak publicly about the war. Therefore, an uncontested and hence legitimate national culture slowly emerged. It has also been my contention that we can trace its development and articulation through time at the level of published texts. This, however, is only half of the story. For a comprehensive portrayal of the Romanian culture of the time - an endeavor that

[77] N.G. Krupensky, *Medaliile române sub regele Carol I şi alte câte-va medalii mai vechi [Romanian Medals under the Reign of Carol the First and Some Other Older Medals]*, (Bucureşti: Lito-tipografia Carol Göbl, 1894), 41.
[78] George Capceff, *Casa-Muzeu Carol I, regele României din satul Poradim, traducere de St. Nicolaescu [The House-Museum dedicated to Carol the First, King of Romania from the village of Poradim]*, (Bucureşti: Atelierele Grafice SOCEC & Co, 1910), 3.

falls outside the scope of this paper - one should also look at the various attempts on the part of the state to put it into practice.[79] Let me take one final example.

Six years after the end of the war, the scholar-politician Constantin Esarcu lectured before a rich audience gathered at the Athenaeum (an institution he helped create). In a moving speech, he demanded donations in order to build a monument for those whose death at Pleven was a "burst of heroism (*fu o flóre de eroism*)"[80] that gained the independence. This was but one of the innumerable attempts - some less successful that others - to build a public memory of the war. As Mosse cogently noticed, "the burial and commemoration of the war dead were analogous to the construction of a church for the nation, and the planning of such sacred places has received much the same kind of attention as that given to the architecture of the churches."[81] Later on, in 1906, the Parliament decided to allocate an enormous sum of money for the construction of the largest monument celebrating the independence and the king.[82]

[79] For a painstaking study of the school textbooks and the formation of a "national canon" see Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *Între 'bunul cre□tin' □i 'bravul român'. Rolul □colii primare în construirea identității naționale române□ti (1831-1878)* [*Between the 'Good Christian' and the 'Brave Romanian'. The Role of the School in Building a Romanian National Identity]* (Ia□i: A '92, 1999), especially the last two chapters.

[80] Constantin Esarcu, *Rolul monumentelor in istoria unui popor. Monumentul Plevnei. Memoriu citit în şedin□a Atheneului de la 3/15 Noembre 1883 [The Role of Monuments in the History of a People. The Monument of Pleven. Paper Read at the Athenaeum on the 3rd/15th of November 1883]* (Bucureşti: Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1883), 6.

[81] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 32-3.

[82] Andi Mihalache, *Manusi albe, manusi negre. Cultul eroilor in vremea dinastiei Hohenzollern [White Gloves, Black Gloves. The Heroes' Cult during the Hohenzollern Dynasty* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007), 139. Once more my thanks go to Professor Iordachi for lending me this book.

3. Setting the Social Scene

In the previous chapter I tried to follow - gamboling over a variety of printed texts - the development of a distinctively Romanian national culture that was shaped by the transformative consequences of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877. In so doing, I covered a span of time that stretched from the late 1870s to the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century. This was a diachronically-framed exercise that sought to reveal unique cultural markers and their historical evolution. I shall return to this kind of exploration in the fourth and last chapter of the paper, this time by narrowing the scale down to a single cog of the cultural wheel: "Peneş Curcanul" - an invented literary character that populated the hegemonic narrative about the "war of independence".

In this chapter I abandon the diachronic perspective in favor of the synchronic one. This shift in method can be illustrated with the help of two sibling cinematic metaphors. It was Siegfried Kracauer who distinguished between two complementary ways of writing history: the long-range view and the close-up. For Kracauer as well as for the entire historiographical tradition nourished by his ruminations, the first is another name for macro-history whilst the latter, with its "immersion in minutiae"[83] and episodic suspension of chronological time leads to micro-history.[84] Consequently, what I shall attempt to do here is a microanalysis of how individuals experience (i.e. make use of, employ, live with) their national culture. It then follows that the cynosure of my research will be constituted by a series of social practices: production, exchange, consumption.[85] This statement, however, demands additional elucidation. Let me try to cast some light on it.

[83] Siegfried Kracauer. *History: the Last Things before the Last*, completed by Paul Oskar Kristeller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 115 *et passim.*

[84] The importance of Kracauer's posthumous book for the development of micohistory is evaluated by Carlo Ginzburg, "Minutiae, Close-Up, Microanalysis" translated by S.R. Gilbert, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34, 2007, 174-189.

[85] The injunction to study how individuals experience their culture at the level of social practices comes from Bernard Lepetit, "Histoire des pratiques, pratiques de l'histoire", in IBIDEM (ed.), *Les formes de l'expérience. Une autre histoire sociale* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1995), 13-17. Written at roughly the same time,

In one of his numerous volumes of reports on the daily life in Bucharest at the turn of century, the journalist Constantin Bacalbaşa mentioned the following episode:

"Yet another artistic phenomenon: Mr. Pascal Vidraşcu recently made a deal with Leon Popescu, an important landowner from the county of Ialomi□a, and intends to make a movie about the war of independence. To carry out the plan they formed a company named "Leon Popescu". It counts among its members: Constantin Nottara, Soreanu, Toneanu, Aristide Demetriad, Ion and Grigore Brezeanu, all of them actors of the National Theatre from Bucharest. A relative of General Aslan - now secretary of the minister of war - Mr. Pascal Vidraşcu managed to get the support of the army so that the movie can be an authentic document of our war of independence."[86]

This fairly accurate depiction represents the starting point of my inquiry. At a given moment in time - roughly the first months of 1911 - a bunch of individuals decided to make a movie. The topic they selected for the film was the "war of independence". The social actors involved in the enterprise were three: a group of remarkable artists, a wealthy entrepreneur and the state. The making of this movie, however, has to be seen as an instance of a much larger process, namely the commoditization of national culture. Therefore, the analysis of this happening is bound to reveal how individuals interact in the process of commodity production. The question that concerns me here is the following: *how do those involved in the process of production justify their endeavor, their pick of topic and the overall relevance of their actions?*

However, once the movie is released, that is to say once the commodity enters the market, the attention is shifted from the sphere of production to that of exchange. On the 13th of September 1912 the daily newspaper *Epoca* published the following advertisement:

"Boulevard Theatre (Eforie Hall): The Romanian Company for Art Film 'Leon Popescu' presents three times per day the greatest movie in the world: Romania's Independence. The Romanian-Russian-Turkish War of 1877-78; executed with the help of the Romanian army and the artists of the National Theatre from Bucharest. On Sunday and on official holydays it will be screened four times per day."[87]

Lepetit's research agenda does for the historian what Brubaker's methodological revolt discussed in the first chapter does for the sociologist.

[86] Constantin Bacalbaşa, *Bucureştii de altãdatã. Volumul IV [Old Times Bucharest. Volume IV]* (Bucureşti: Editura Ziarului Universul, 1930), 31.

[87] *Epoca*, No. 252, 13th of September, 1912, 2.

This move necessarily entails a change in social background - from the studios to the cinema halls and the press. Moreover, this also brings to the fore new actors that make use of the commodity in various ways: owners of cinema halls, critics, journalists etc. Here, the question is the following: *how was the movie advertised, reported and commented upon?* Naturally, exchange and consumption cannot be always lined up in a strict succession. The comments the movie solicited are obviously part of the reception as well. Some magazine articles were published during the making of the movie, yet others well after it was screened for the first time.

The circulation of the movie-commodity finally ends up in the consumer's mind. The audience is the social actor that waits at the other side of the spectrum. One year after the success of *Romania's Independence (RI)*, in an interview for the newspaper *Rampa*, Leon Popescu (1864-1918) described his immediate plans concerning Romanian cinema in the following terms:

> "I have just managed to book Cinema-Classic, a most popular hall run by brilliant owners. We will start to show Romanian films by next Monday. Afterwards, I plan to organize, at an interval of ten days, a special day for Romanian productions only. I am confident that the audience, always intelligent and kind, will come to appreciate our autochthonous movies."[88]

What matters here is not so much the number of those who saw the movie or the experience of seeing it. Important as they no doubt are, the size of the audience and the feelings and emotions aroused by the movie are at best secondary. The concept of "audience" bears a twofold definition. Firstly, the audience is the addressee, the "target" for whom the movie was made.[89] For the case illustrated hereafter, the audience is the social actor - the Romanians - envisaged by the producers, an ideal consumer ready to rank the preference for his own culture above the rest. Secondly, the audience (or the public) is a "living organism",

[88] *Rampa*, No. 513, 12th of June, 1913, 5.
[89] This point is made by Gerben Bakker, "Building Knowledge about the Consumer: The Emergence of Market Research in the Motion Picture Industry", in Roy Church and Andrew Godley (eds.) *The Emergence of Modern Marketing* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 99. I also thank Professor Bakker for sending me comments on the draft of this thesis.

empirically measurable and brought together by the very act of consumption. In this understanding of the term, an audience is a fugitive, anonymous and uncoordinated "imagined community". It disintegrates the moment consumption is over and reconvenes the moment people enter the cinema hall. Here, the question is the following: *what turned the viewers of* Romania's Independence *into a national audience?*

3.1 The Making of

The idea of making a movie about the "war of independence" is commonly attributed to Grigore Brezeanu (1891-1919).[90] For lack of direct evidence, most historians of Romanian cinema tend to agree with the journalistic account published in the newspaper *Cuvântul* in 1933. Brezeanu, the son of Ion Brezeanu - a famous comedian working for the National Theatre - seems to have come up with the idea as early as 1910.[91] This is not, by all means, an improbable supposition. A modest graduate student of Drama School, Brezeanu could have decided on this topic under the influence of the success of war movies showed around that time. Constantin Ivanovici, a contemporary of roughly of the same age who later became a well-known projectionist, remembers having seen at least one movie about the Russian-Japanese war.[92] However, the authority of this hypothesis rests on whether one is willing or not to credit somebody in his early twenties with such aspirations.

It is equally plausible to claim that the actors themselves came up with this project on their own.[93] The evidence to support this assertion is anything but scarce: on the 5th of May,

[90] Marius Teodorescu, "Cincizeci de ani de la realizarea primului film românesc [Fifty Years since the Making of the First Romanian Movie]", *Cinema*, Vol. I, 1963, 23.
[91] *Cuvântul*, 21st of December, 1933, 4. The author of the article, a certain "Quick" (the journalist Constantin Zãgãnescu), even mentions the place where Brezeanu voiced the thought for the first time: the café of the Grand-Hotel.
[92] Quoted in Tudor Caranfil, *Vâstele peliculei. O istorie a filmului in capodopere. De la Stropitorul stropit la Crucişãtorul Potemkin (1895-1925) [The Ages of the Reel. A History of Film from* l'Arroseur Arrosé *to Battleship Potemkin (1895-1925)]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1982), 101. Caranfil is by far the most reliable guide to my topic.
[93] Cãlin Cãliman, *Istoria filmului românesc (1897-2000) [The History of Romanian Film]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Fundaiei Culturale Române, 2000), 41.

1912 one could read in the daily *Flacãra* the following information accompanied by a series of pictures from the shooting:

"Some of our actors from the National Theatre have formed an association with the aim of making the movie *The War for Independence*. This movie will show to the whole world the glory of the heroes of 1877."[94]

Roughly the same time, the cinema review Mozi based in Cluj and published exclusively in Hungarian wrote that "some members of the National Theatre from Bucharest have established the first Romanian movie factory, which would make movies inspired from the history of the Romanian nation."[95]

Chronologically, this would put the birth of the legal association with the intent of making the movie before the involvement of both Brezeanu and Popescu. This inference is confirmed by a cover article published by the newspaper *Viitorul* on the 14th of October 1912:

"Last October, the late Petre Liciu, knowing that Mr. Leon Popescu is an art lover and a passionate patriot, informed him that together with Nottara, Ion Brezeanu, Toneanu and Soreanu he founded a legal association in order to remake, using the means of cinema, the war of independence … After reading the screenplay, Mr. Popescu agreed to become the producer of the movie and offered 15, 000 lei."[96]

In December 1911, the newspaper *Rampa* wrote that the great actor Constantin Nottara (1859-1935) was preparing to launch a patriotic film about the "war of independence".[97] Nottara was arguably the most important actor of his generation and an ardent patriot. As his memoires make clear, during the last stages of the war of 1877, the young Nottara used to feverishly recite on the streets of Bucharest, in front of flesh mobs, the

[94] Quoted in Ion Cantacuzino, "Grigore Brezeanu şi Leon Popescu, ini□iatori ai primelor filme artistice româneşti [Grigore Brezeanu and Leon Popescu, the Makers of the First Romanian artistic films]", *Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei. Seria teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 50.
[95] Tudor Caranfil, În căutarea filmului pierdut. Trei "romane" cinematografice [In Search of the Lost Film. Three cinematic "novels"], (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1988), 39.
[96] *Viitorul*, No. 1683, 14th of October, 1912, 1.
[97] Quoted in Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc. Privire Istoricã. Volumul 4[The Romanian Theatre. A Historical View. Volume 4]* (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1972), 462. According to Massoff, the actors even demanded money from the director of the National Theatre to set up a production studio.

patriotic lyrics of Alecsandri's poem *Peneş Curcanul*.[98] According to one of Nottara's biographers, a turning point in the actor's career took place in 1902. This was the year when Nottara was asked to play the leading role in Alexandru Davila's *Vlaicu-Vodã*. The play featured the main character, Vlaicu, fighting for the independence of his country and ending up making many sacrifices out of "love for his country".[99] Whether Nottara was the true mastermind behind the project is still pretty much a matter of debate. However, he did play an important role in the writing of the screenplay.

Leon Popescu, a wealthy proprietor and entrepreneur, was not a stranger to cinema. In the first decade of the twentieth century, he made a name of himself in the cultural ambience of Bucharest as the owner of an amazingly popular theatre: the "Liric Theatre". According to D.I. Suchianu, a director in the interwar period, as far back as 1906, at the initiative of a German businessman Popescu sponsored the opening of a small cinema hall right at the heart of the city, near Cişmigiu Park.[100] Unfortunately, the building was devastated by a fire. However, Suchianu's memory is anything but accurate. In his recollections he claimed that the impetus for making *RI* came as a result of Romania's participation in the Balkan Wars.[101] This speculation fails to acknowledge the brute fact that the movie was shot and screened in 1912, one year before the outbreak of the war.

The historical truth seems to be somehow caught in the middle. Nevertheless, a reasonable judgment on the origins of the film is expressed in a note published in late March, 1912 by *Gazeta Ilustratã*:

"The original idea, at the same time patriotic and practical, of filming the war of 1877 - when our glorious army won the independence - is about to be finished … The idea of the movie belongs to the young artist Grigore Brezeanu, the son of our beloved comedian. Fortunately, a man with a taste for art, a true patriot decided to finance the making of the movie with 200,000 lei, without even demanding a profit from the sales. This benefactor is none other than Mr. Leon Popescu, a former member of the Senate, now the owner of the Liric

[98] Constantin I. Nottara, *Amintiri [Recollections]*, (Bucureşti: Editura de stat pentru literature şi artã, 1960), 44.
[99] Virgil Brãdã□eanu, *Constantin Nottara*, (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1966), 125-6.
[100] D. I. Suchianu, "Contribu□ii la o istorie a cinematografiei româneşti I [Notes on the Beginning of Romanian Cinema I]", *Film*, Vol. VII, No. 3, 1957, 56.
[101] D. I. Suchianu, "Contribu□ii la o istorie a cinematografiei româneşti II [Notes on the Beginning of Romanian Cinema II]", *Film*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1957, 35.

Theatre. Additionally, Mr. N. Filipescu, the Minister of War, highly moved by the patriotic intention of this project, acknowledged that the Ministry would not only cover some of the expenses but it would also provide logistic support for the producers. This is needed in order to make sure that the war is as authentically represented on tape as possible."[102]

Concerning the figure of Pascal Vidraşcu (1877-1962) - mentioned by Bacalbaşa as the one who started the project - it is assumed that initially he was a business associate of Popescu and a member of the society named "The War of Independence Film". After the movie was released, however, Vidraşcu sued Leon Popescu, claiming property rights over the film and consequentially demanding a chunkier part of the revenue. According to Caranfil, he ended up loosing the case against his former partner.[103]

We can only speculate about the reasons behind this extraordinary joint venture. Brezeanu could have been drawn to the project from simply careerist calculations. By late 1911, he had already directed a movie that did not fare particularly well at the box-office. Entitled *Amor Fatal* (Lethal Love) the movie was based on a cheep love story and featured some of the younger actors that would be later distributed in *RI*. Conceivably, a more serious topic could have secured a larger audience and could have brought the sought after accomplishment. It is also likely that the actors were attracted to the project for at least two reasons: their devotion to the "national culture" (as with Nottara) and their interest in this new invention called cinema. Moreover, 1912 was a commemorative year in which the state authorities were prepared to celebrate 35 years of independence. With reference to the state sponsorship one can read it both ways: as a result of a situation in which being "well connected" paid off and as a promptness on the part of the Ministry of War to logistically support a project that openly celebrated the "war of independence". The topic was definitely on the agenda and it is perhaps safe to conclude that it naturally popped up.

[102] *Gazeta Ilustratã*, 24th of March, 1912, 2.
[103] Tudor Caranfil, *În cãutarea filmului pierdut. Trei "romane" cinematografice [In Search of the Lost Film. Three cinematic "novels"]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1988), 56.

Strangely enough, the idea of making a movie about the "war of independence" enjoyed such popularity that it caught the attention of Raymond Pellerin, the head of the Bucharest-based branch of the French film production company Gaumont. According to cinema historian Georges Sadoul in 1912 Gaumont managed to sell 293 movies to Romanian cinema halls and distributors while its rival Pathé sold nearly 386.[104] In the fall of 1911, Pellerin hired a group of Jewish actors lead by the Goldenberg brothers in order to shoot a movie about the war. In a matter of weeks, the movie was completed. However, it seems that the head of the police requested a private screening before the official release. Offended by the fact that Romania's great personalities, *y compris* the king, were played by Jews, the inspector ordered the film to be destroyed. A note published by the daily *Adevãrul* on 31st of December, 1911 reads as follows: "According to the police, this movie does not accurately depict the historical facts."[105] Further on in the note it is said that a group of actors assisted by the Ministry of War is already working on a film with a similar topic. Provided this story is true (and there are good reasons to believe it is true) the case makes for another instance of state administered censorship.

The screenplay was also a collaborative affair.[106] For a long time, historians have blindly attributed the authorship of the screenplay to Grigore Brezeanu (allegedly assisted by a certain Corneliu Moldovanu, Popescu's secretary).[107] However, while writing a biography of Petre Liciu (1871-1912), the theatre historian Ioan Massoff discovered some manuscripts according to which the authors of the screenplay were the actors themselves and not the director.[108] The first scene of the screenplay went like this: "A village, peasants, an old man recalls the war between the Russians and the Turks, the youngsters laugh. The old man warns

[104] IBIDEM, 42.
[105] IBIDEM, 112. Caranfil's account is based on an interview with Constantin Ivanovici.
[106] The screenplay was published in "100 de ani de la rãzboiul pentru independen□ã [100 Years from the War of Independence]", in *Caiet de documentare cinematograficã*, No. 7-8, 1973, 24-52.
[107] Manuela Gheorghiu, *Filmul şi armele. Tema pãcii şi a rãzboiului în filmul European [The Film and the Weapons. The Idea of Peace in European Cinema]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1976), 62.
[108] Ioan Massoff, *Petre Liciu şi vremea lui [Petre Liciu and his Age]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1971), 181.

his audience: beware! You might be confronted with the same situation one day. Everybody laughs. At this point the bailiff arrives and invites everyone to come to the town hall."[109] After Liciu's sudden death, the task of finishing the screenplay was taken up by Aristide Demetriade (1872-1930) who made significant changes. Demetriade was very much interested in cinema. In 1910, he wrote to his wife from Egypt: "I am spending my evening going either to the cinema or to the theatre."[110] In a first version, he reduced Liciu's opening to: "Some young peasants dance in circles. The elders sit nearby. When the dance is over, Peneş asks one of the elders to recall the war…"[111] Later on, Demetriade changed the whole beginning and introduced a scene in which Prince Carol summons the ministers (I.C. Brătianu, M. Kogălniceanu, P.S. Aurelian, Gh. Chi□u, I. Câmpineanu etc) in order to decide what do to with respect to the upcoming war between the Russians and the Turks. Moreover, while in Liciu's version, Peneş's wife is never mentioned, Demetriade added her as a character under the name Rodica and oscillated between a scene in which the two say goodbye and one in which Rodica, carrying a baby in her arms, watches Peneş leaving for battle. Caranfil also mentions a letter sent by Nottara to Demetriade on the 6th of April (two days after Liciu's death). Previously, Demetriade suggested to Nottara that the sergeant (i.e. Peneş) be a boyar's son, but Nottara disagreed: "Couple of days ago, you told me … that you think the sergeant should be a boyar. I was under the shock of Liciu's death to think it over, but I believe that Alecsandri's sergeant should be a peasant, this is how the poet wanted it to be and this is how the legend has it. If we would depart from this story, we would receive harsh criticism from the public."[112] Nottara's suggestion finally prevailed.

What are the intellectual origins of the screenplay? Or, to put it differently, where did the authors get their inspiration from? Again, here we enter the realm of guesswork. It seems

[109] Quoted in Tudor Caranfil, *În căutarea filmului pierdut. Trei "romane" cinematografice [In Search of the Lost Film. Three cinematic "novels"]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1988), 60.
[110] IBIDEM, 39.
[111] IBIDEM.
[112] IBIDEM, 61.

obvious that the plot is drawn from the "cultural pool" created by the event of 1877 since the story told fits perfectly within the framework discussed in the second chapter. At least one source is clearly identifiable: Vasile Alecsandri's poetry. This was hardly an odd reference. Alecsandri's poems about the "war of independence" were so popular in the epoch that they constituted the lyrics for the music of a whole generation of composers: Julius Wiest, Iacob Mureşianu, Ciprian Porumbescu, Iuliu Crişan etc.[113] The war produced not only words (stories) and pictures (representations) but sounds as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century ethnographers were capable of collecting and cataloguing some 200 popular (hence anonymous) folk songs about the war of 1877.[114] Caranfil also claimed, without quoting any relevant source, that Liciu and Demetriade were inspired by the various pictorial representations of the war. This is a sound inference. It might not be too far fetched to presume that the screenwriters consulted some history books while making up the plot. Most of these books were filled with graphics that depicted a range of war scenes.[115]

In the fall of 1911, Popescu sent Brezeanu to Paris in order to buy the necessary equipment and to hire a cameraman - a certain Franck Daniau-Johnston. Among the great names of the theatre scene that took part in the film it is enough to enumerate Demetriade (playing King Carol I), Nottara (Osman), Jeni Metaxa-Doro (Rodica), Aurel Athanasescu (Peneş), Maria Filotti, Elvira Popescu etc. The filming began in February 1912. The sheer length of the final product was quite spectacular for the time. According to a note that

[113] Elena Zottoviceanu, "Războiul de independen□ă şi crea□ia muzicală vocală şi instrumentală a secolului al XIX-lea [The War of Independence and the Musical Culture of the Nineteenth Century] in Ion Frunzetti & George Muntean (eds.) *Arta şi literature în slujba independen□ei na□ionale [Art and Literature in their Relation with National Independence]* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1977), 213.
[114] IBIDEM, 205.
[115] For a sample of these pictures see Mircea □oca, *Războiul pentru independen□ă în grafica contemporană [The War of Independence in contemporary Graphic Arts]*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1977), 7-32.

appeared in the newspaper *Clasic* on 15th of September, in an epoch when the average length of a movie was about 20 minutes, *RI* lasted three quarters of an hour (45 minutes).[116]

On the 20th of July 1912, Leon Popescu organized a private screening of the movie for the royal family at Peleş Castel (the royal residence). Subsequently, the king decorated the whole cast.

3.2 The Selling of

In the first chapter I made a distinction between public and private goods - that is to say between two complementary ways of reproducing a national culture. I further argued that just like the school, the army and the public rituals (i.e. ceremonies, national elections etc) circulate culture within the citizenry, cinema circulates the very same culture within the sphere of consumption. This argument, however, needs additional amendments.

A movie is a private, *cognitive* and *non-durable* good:

i. It is non-durable because it evaporates in the act of consumption. Economic historians of cinema usually describe movies as having a "shelf-life".[117] Unlike a sofa or a car, for instance, which can be used repeatedly for a long period of time, a movie (a book or a newspaper) is "used up" in the process of consumption.[118] As Hirschman suggested, the distinction between durable and non-durable goods can also be expressed as an opposition between perishable goods and possessions. Consequently, non-durable goods can be "considered as consumer capital, similar to children's toys, that yield a stream of services rather similar, from the point of view of the potential for disappointment, to such nondurable

[116] Tudor Caranfil, *Vâstele peliculei. O istorie a filmului in capodopere. De la Stropitorul stropit la Crucişătorul Potemkin (1895-1925) [The Ages of the Reel. A History of Film from* l'Arroseur Arrosé *to Battleship Potemkin (1895-1925)]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1982), 116.
[117] Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialised. The Emergence of the International Film Industry, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 277 *et passim*.
[118] I follow here Albert O. Hirschman, *Crossing Boundaries. Selected Writings* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 14-17.

purchases as a ticket to the opera or the stadium, a pleasure trip, or even an ice cream cone."[119]

ii. It is cognitive because, by virtue of its inherent properties, it sets limits on the potential consumers. Benedict Anderson expressed this idea as follows: "Anyone with money can buy Czech cars, only Czech-readers will buy Czech-language books."[120] Similarly, anyone could have enjoyed a movie about war, but only the Romanian audience would have been able (and perhaps eager) to see it as depicting a "war of independence." This is a crucial point that deserves elucidation.

On the 12th of February, 1914 the daily *Rampa* translated an article first published in the Viennese newspaper *Illustrierte Wiener Extrablatt*. The opening lines of the article go like this:

> "The movie screened last night at Schäfier cinema proves that the interest of the audience is not restricted to the much trumpeted banal and melodramatic Romanianism (românism). A nice series of battle scenes aroused the attention and attracted the curiosity of a mesmerized spectatorship."[121]

What the author of the article noticed was that the public took pleasure in viewing the movie without caring too much about the narrative. For the average Austrian, *RI* depicted interesting war scenes worth seeing for their vividness and monumentality. It is perhaps not entirely correct to suggest that cinema was at the beginning global and became national only with the introduction of sound.[122] It is closer to the facts to assume that at least some primitive movies were received differently by their audiences. Furthermore, the variations in reception were propelled by the differentiations visible at the level of the cultural habits of the audiences. Hence, it seems reasonable to claim that an audience that had a certain familiarity

[119] Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements. Private Interest and Public Action*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 34.
[120] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, (London: Verso, 1991), 34.
[121] *Rampa*, No. 623, 11th of February, 1914, 3.
[122] Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema" in Alan Williams (ed.) *Film and Nationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 59. I thank Professor Higson for commenting on the draft of this paper.

with the story told on screen was able to relate differently to the movie. This is all to say that some films cater specific audiences.

Leon Popescu was well aware of this fact. The movie he helped made had to bring in profit. In June 1912 Demetriade, Brezeanu, Popescu himself and the rest of the crew left for Paris. On the 12th of June, Demetriade sent a postcard to his wife saying that they visited three production companies: Gaumont, Lux and Alter Ego. The negotiations ended with a contract signed with Alter Ego, which was supposed to do all the editing work for the price of half a Franc per meter. From Demetriade's correspondence with his wife, one can find out some interesting details: Popescu decided to make a special version for the Russian distributors and after some harsh discussions they finally sold 20 replicas, each copy worth of 2500 Francs. In the end, after the production company was paid, Popescu got some 58,000 Francs out of the whole business. Demetriade's also claims that Pathé offered to buy 25 copies (1500 meters each) worth of 100,000 Francs. However, the deal could not be finished due to some legal issues.[123] Caranfil argues that it was during this stay in Paris that Popescu bought the property rights over the film from those who were members of the actors' society. At the end of the day, each actor received 15000 Francs for their share.[124]

Hobsbawm has famously argued that a "conscious invention succeeded mainly in proportion to its success in broadcasting on a wavelength to which the public was ready to tune in."[125] Was it possible to make any profit out of selling the movie in Romania? Were Romanians ready to let themselves be entertained by a movie about the "war of independence"? Before discussing this issue, however, I find it helpful to have a brief general idea of the film-market in Romania before the First World War.

[123] For Demetriade's correspondence with his wife see Tudor Caranfil, *Vâstele peliculei. O istorie a filmului in capodopere. De la Stropitorul stropit la Crucişătorul Potemkin (1895-1925) [The Ages of the Reel. A History of Film from* l'Arroseur Arrosé *to Battleship Potemkin (1895-1925)]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1982), 93-101.
[124] IBIDEM, 93.
[125] Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 263.

On the 14th of May, 1912 the daily *Rampa* published the following note:

"On almost every street from the center of Bucharest we witness the construction of a cinema hall. It seems that the taste for entertainment (gustul de spectacole) of the public has convinced many to invest in such halls."[126]

Couple of days later, the same newspaper published yet another note in which the same author was able to number 24 cinema halls. Around 1910, Bucharest had a total population of 400,000 inhabitants. The newspapers of the time are full of articles that debate issues related to "the seventh art".[127] Moreover, it seems that cinema also caused social problems due to a lack in hygiene that surrounded the halls. So much so, that several journalists asked the public authorities to ban these representations.[128] Starting with June 1912 the newspaper *Seara* would host a weekly film chronicle. The movies brought from France, Germany and Denmark received attention in most of the press I have consulted. As early as 1912, a schoolmaster from the town of Botoşani by the name of C. Iordăchescu published *Cinematograful şi educa□ia* (Cinema and Education) arguably the first book about film in Romanian in which he pleaded in favour of making Romanian movies inspired by the national canon.[129] Cinema also had its critics, who perceived it as threatening the moral basis of society. However, even these critics admitted that films could prove useful for educational purposes under adequate censorship.[130] Lastly, a multitude of advertisements of foreign films can be found in virtually all the newspapers of the age.

In terms of direct competition, *RI* had to fight over its share of the audience with movies such as *The Last Days of Pompeii, Quo Vadis, Les Amours de la reine Élisabeth* (a French production featuring Sarah Bernhardt), an adaptation of Hugo's *Les Misérables*,

[126] *Rampa*, No. 311, 14th of May, 1912, 7.
[127] *Rampa*, No. 14, 11th of December, 1912, 3 and *Seara*, No. 249, 10th of September, 1912, 1.
[128] *Rampa*, No. 46, 2nd of November, 1911, 8.
[129] Ion Cantacuzino, *Momente din trecutul filmului românesc [Moments from the Past of Romanian Cinema]* (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1965), 16.
[130] George Olărașu, Constantin Rîule□, *Chiemarea Cinematografului [The Mission of Cinema]* (Bucureşti: s.l. 1915), 4-5.

Nôtre-Dame de Paris (directed by Albert Capellani with Stacia Napierkowska playing Esmeralda) and other, lesser known films.

On the 1st of September, 1912, the official screening takes place accompanied by a military brass band. It is known that the film was screened in Bucharest for three consecutive weeks at *Eforie* (the most prestigious cinema hall in town at that time) and then in several other places: Castelul cu flori, Gloria, Rahova, Blanduzia etc.[131]

On the 3rd of September, the movie was advertised in the newspaper *Diminea□a* under the following banner:

"Beginning with the 1st of September 1912 Cinema Palace hosts the screening of the renowned film *Rãsboiul Independen□ei României*, a great movie of patriotic bent (de senza□ie patrioticã)."[132]

On the same day the rival gazette *Adevãrul* would comment:

"Who would have dreamed in 1877 that after only 35 years the Romanians have the possibility to experience again (retrãi) the enthusiasm of the war that brought the independence and made them who they are today."[133]

Two weeks later, on the 15th of September, 1912 the newspaper *Gazeta ilustratã* expressed its amazement concerning the movie's popularity:

"We have witnessed something that is very rare in our cinema halls: dozens of spectators applauding and cheering a movie that depicted the bravery of our soldiers …"[134]

On the 19th of September, 1912 we find a similar judgment in the journal *Viitorul*:

"The movie *Romania's Independence* arouses emotions in the audience because it can see familiar characters turned into legends. The audience also has the opportunity to learn about the heroism and the virtues of the army…"[135]

The film's arrival in Transylvania was celebrated by Petra-Petrescu with the following words:

[131] For these details I relied on Tudor Caranfil, *Vâstele peliculei. O istorie a filmului in capodopere. De la Stropitorul stropit la Crucişãtorul Potemkin (1895-1925) [The Ages of the Reel. A History of Film from* l'Arroseur Arrosé *to Battleship Potemkin (1895-1925)]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1982), 71-86.
[132] *Diminea□a*, Vol IX, No. 3053, 3rd of September 1912, 6.
[133] IBIDEM, 128.
[134] IBIDEM.
[135] IBIDEM, 127.

"With this movie we accomplish for the people something that we could not do with ten volumes. It's a delirious performance!"[136]

On the 11th of May, 1913 one could read in *Gazeta Transilvaniei* the following note about the screening of the movie *Romania's Independence*:

"Once more, today's show attracted a large audience composed of Romanian peasants and pupils from the villages surrounding Braşov."[137]

The sheer amount of such descriptions is impressive. For example, the newspaper *Foaia Poporului* from Sibiu published the following lines:

"Each and every Romanian in search of a pleasant evening full of historical memories should not miss the rare occasion of seeing a movie that depicts how the bravery of the Romanian army won Romania's independence"[138].

All in all, the movie was shown in most of Transylvania's towns: Cluj, Braşov, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Hunedoara, Blaj, Deva, Orăştie, Făgăraş and Lugoj. It reached momentum on April, 19 when *Fügetlenség* - a newspaper printed in Arad - wrote: "this is the first film to head the bill for 4 consecutive days."[139]

The reception plainly illustrates that *RI* was immediately inscribed into the Romanian national culture of the time. However, there were two minor exceptions. The satirical magazine *Furnica* mockingly noticed that the military staff that took part in the movie (the generals and the soldiers) would be in the position to demand more money at their retirement since they fought the war twice.[140] At a more serious level, the magazine *Facla* openly accused the movie of perpetuating a nationalist myth about the "the glorious war of

[136] Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc. Privire Istoricã. Volumul IV [The Romanian Theatre. A Historical View. Volume IV]* (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1972), 505.
[137] Quoted in Olteea Vasilescu, „Filmul Independența României în oraşele transilvănene [The Movie RI in Transylvanian Towns]" *Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei. Seria teatru, muzicã, cinematografie*, Vol. 24, 1977, 158.
[138] IBIDEM.
[139] Quoted in Iosif Sîrbut „Cea mai veche clădire de teatru şi cinematograf din țarã [The Oldest Theatre and Cinema Hall in the Country]" *Caiet de documentare cinematograficã* Vol. 5, 1967, 102.
[140] *Furnica*, No. 32, 12th of April 1912, 3.

independence which, in fact, ended up leaving many soldiers crippled for life (infirmi pe via□ã)."[141]

In terms of profit, one has to rely on Brezeanu's confession. He claimed in an interview that the movie was making between 200 and 300 lei per day.[142] For lack of additional archival material, it will remain unclear whether this was a satisfactory return or a rather modest one. It is also impossible to known for how many weeks the movie was screened and whether there were other foreign distributors interested in buying it.

3.3 The Buying of

Jean Mihail (1896-1963) - a movie director - provided the only description of what it meant to see the movie. Born in the provincial town of Roman, Mihail used to pay weekly visits to a local cinema hall called *Brand*:

> "I remember having seen *Romania's Independence*, the most popular film of the 1912-3 season. Some of the scenes have stayed with me ever since: Peneş heading for battle, the death of Cobuz, the Russian colonel shaking hands with the Romanian sergeant… Behind the screen the town's military fanfare was singing. The hall was always filled in with some twenty soldiers or so brought on purpose from the local garrison. Each time the cavalry charged they would yell "Uraaa". And the rest of us would follow them instantly. This music and the whole ambience would fire up our patriotic feelings (sentimentul patriotic se încingea la maximum)!"[143]

On this basis, one can take the risk of generalizing. It would be hard to contest the popularity of the movie. However, it is equally true that one cannot assume - starting from a single successful movie - that something akin to a "national film culture" developed in Romania.[144]

In 1913 Leon Popescu wrote a memorandum to the Ministry of Public Instruction demanding the state's financial support. He made explicit the need for producing Romanian

[141] *Facla*, No. 29, 5th of May 1912, 229.
[142] *Rampa*, No. 454, 13th of April, 1913, 5.
[143] Jean Mihail, *Filmul românesc de altãdatã. Însemnãri [The old Romanian Cinema. Jottings]*, (Bucureşti: Editura Meridiane, 1967), 10-11.
[144] Joseph Garncarz, "The Emergence of Nationally Specific Film Cultures in Europe, 1911-1914" in Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King (eds.) *Early Cinema and the 'National'* (New Barnet, U.K.: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2008), 185. Garncarz argued that a "national film culture" develops on the basis of long-term popularity of nationally produced movies.

movies in a country like Romania with "a large number of uneducated people."[145] However, this second time he did not receive any kind of financial support. Popescu continued to make movies up until the First World War. He hired directors and cameramen from Paris and managed to release no less than ten films. Even though some of these movies had a similar historical theme, none of them reached the success of *RI*. To explain this failure would make a topic in itself.[146]

Nonetheless, in what sense can one claim that *RI* reached a "national audience"? Paul Willemen has argued that "a nationally specific cultural formation need not necessarily be characterized by a preoccupation with national identity."[147] In other words, a cinema that speaks about the nation is not necessarily a nationalist cinema. This is surely not the case with *RI*. However, Willemen touched a soft spot. Let me delve on it and tentatively propose a conclusion for this chapter.

Buying a ticket in order to enjoy a culturally bounded play or film provides a sense of sameness. "People attend public performances at least partly for the sense of a relationship with other people in the audience. In appearing in a play or at a political meeting, performers are trading not only on a direct relationship *between* themselves and each audience member, but also on the relationship *between* audience members."[148] On this view, "Romanianness" is experienced in the practice of coming together as particularly limited audiences, as consumers of strictly Romanian cultural commodities.

Connectedness is what melds all these parochial audiences into the larger whole I call "national audience". Therefore, a "national audience" is less about imagining yourself in

[145] Quoted in Isabela Cioniş „Vechi publicaţii româneşti de film (Inedite Leon Popescu) [Old Romanian Film Papers (Leon Popescu's Archive)] *Caiet de documentare cinematograficã*, Vol. 5, 1967, 74.
[146] For some remarks on this failure see Ion Cantacuzino, "Produc□iile Societã□ii 'Filmul de artã Leon Popescu' 1913-1914" [The Prduction of the Company 'Leon Popescu Art Film'], *Studii şi cercetãri de istoria artei. Seria teatru, muzicã, cinematografie*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 107-9.
[147] Paul Willemen, "The National Revisited" in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (eds.) *Theorising National Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), 31.
[148] Nicholas Abercrombie, Brian Longhurst, *Audiences. A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*, (London: Sage, 1998): 66.

contact with your national peers and less about developing a sense of identity with geographically distant people of shared culture. Connectedness is revealed in the social life a particular commodity embarks upon. It is enough for a multiplicity of anonymous consumers to regularly engage in consumption to instantly relate to each other, for it is the commodity itself that binds them.

The case of the making of *Romania's Independence* was exceptional by any standards. However, this uniqueness itself stands for a wonderful example of how various individuals, with divergent backgrounds and conflicting interests make use of their national culture: by coming up with a project, writing it down, turning it into a finite movie-commodity, investing in its popularization, commenting upon and advertising it and finally digesting it in the midst of a mass of similarly minded consumers. Under the guidance of the "hidden hand", the total sum of all these actions finally contributes to the reproduction of the national culture.

4. Flesh and Bone, Paper and Screen

With this final chapter I close the circle opened in the second one. Thus far I have been arguing two points. Firstly, I have claimed that Romanians found themselves willing to interpret and remember the war of 1877 in a distinctive way. The uniqueness of this interpretation was centered on a handful of undisputable references: "the war of independence" and the "national king". Furthermore, these references ended up creating the legitimate framework within which the story about the event could be told. On this basis, I concluded that a national culture slowly emerged at the end on the nineteenth century. Secondly, I have contented that among the many possibilities for this national culture to be diffused in society (the school, the army and the various public ceremonies) one ought to take into consideration cinema as well. Consequently, the making of a movie entitled *Romania's Independence* offered the opportunity for a bunch of individuals (actors, screenwriters, sponsors, members of the public) to live or experience the national culture first hand. The assumption here was the following: the standard narrative about the war of 1877 was introduced, by means of commoditization, in a process of production, exchange and consumption. Finally, the legitimate story of the "war of independence" got to be circulated in society.

In this chapter I bring yet another example in support of the above mentioned hypothesis. The Romanian national culture that resulted from the Russian-Turkish War was haunted, and still is to this day, by a certain character: *Peneş Curcanul* (henceforward *PC*). *PC* is taken to be a national hero, that is to say somebody that fought the Turks and won the independence. However, his ontological status is anything but certain. Let me make clear what I mean by this.

In 1970, the military historian Gavrilã Sãcãdat published a biography with a bizarre title page: on it one can read a nickname (Peneş Curcanul) in capitals and a proper name (Constantin urcanu) beneath it, within brackets and in lowercase letters. The first lines of the book read as follows:

> "We know and love him from our first days of primary school, the legendary Peneş Curcanul, the hero who has received, due to Alecsandri's lyrics, the glory of eternity. We loved him because we were able to see in him all the virtues of the Romanian soldier: the boundless love for the country and the willingness to sacrifice his life in defence of our ancient land."[149]

The question that demands answer here is quite obvious: whose biography is this? Is it the biography of a literary character - Peneş Curcanul - invented by a poet (Alecsandri) or is it the biography of a certain peasant - Constantin urcanu - a sergeant that took part on the Romanian side in the Russian-Turkish War of 1877?

4.1 The Biological Life

Suppose we would try to ferret out the traces Constantin urcanu left behind in the archives. In practice, this method would allow us to reconstruct the identity of this particular individual as it was articulated at the moment when his biological life intersected with the power of the state: urcanu's life is fossilized in the papers produces by the state just like the body of a Neolithic insect is entrapped in a piece of amber.

urcanu was born on 1st March 1854 in Vaslui, a town in the southern part of Moldavia to a peasant family. An only child, he was fortunate enough to spend five years in primary school which made him able to read and write. In April 1877, he was conscripted in the second battalion of the thirteenth regiment and sent to fight the Turks south of the Danube. Due to his writing and reading abilities he was made a sergeant, and put in command over a group of soldiers. During one of the battles he got wounded. Consequently, he was sent to a military hospital near the town of Turnu Mãgurele. After the war ended he received the medal

[149] Gavrilã Sãcãdat, *Pene Curcanul. Sergentul Constantin urcanu* (Bucharest: Editura militarã, 1970), 2.

of honour and returned to his town. In 1882, he got married to a certain Rari□a, the daughter of Gavrilã Zaharia, a shoemaker form the town of Huşi. Aged 62, □urcanu volunteered in the First World War. In 1922, he began to receive a monthly payment from the state. On the 14th of November, 1932 he died.

□urcanu's existence has nothing exceptional about it. Most of the peasants that were conscripted to fight the War of 1877 were wounded and quite a lot of them got decorated.[150] Most of them returned to their native villages or towns and continued their anonymous existence working the land.[151] Those who did not have a wife got married and started a family. Moreover, those who lived long enough to witness the beginning of the First World War enrolled willingly and even proved helpful. And without a shadow of doubt most of them eventually died.

What made *PC* special? It should be noted that in one of Demetriade's versions of the screenplay, *PC* was supposed to tragically die in battle, like a proper war hero.

4.2 The Textual Life

The textual life of "Peneş Curcanul" begins in the summer of 1877. This is the time when Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890), one of Romania most distinguished poets, visited the hospital from Turnu Mãgurele in order to show compassion for the injured soldiers. On the 1st January 1878 the literary magazine *Convorbiri literare*, perhaps the most influential journal of its kind, published a poem of his with the title "Peneş Curcanul".[152] This was an obvious play on words. In Romanian, Peneş comes from "panã" (feather) while "curcan" is turkey - the

[150] Gheorghe Calmu□chi, *Episoade din Campania rãzboiului 1877-78. Dupã amintirile şi povestirile mai multor eroi aflãtori în via□ã [Happenings from the War of 1877-78 Based on the Memories and Stories of Several Still Alive Heroes]*, (Iaşi: Via□a românească S.A., 1927) mentions a number of similar examples though, to be honest to the facts, most of the wounded were officers.

[151] Emanoil Pârâianu, *Suflete din popor [Souls from the People]*, (Târgu-Jiu: Tipografia şi legãtoria de cãr□i 'Fra□ii Alexandru şi Traian Niculescu', 1914) portrays the return to the ordinary life of some of the peasant soldiers.

[152] The poem was reprinted so many times that it is nearly impossible to give a full bibliography. However, for a cheap, popular version see Vasile Alecsandri, *Ostaşii noştri. Poesii [Our Soldiers. Poems]*, (Bucureşti: Institutul de Arte Grafice C. Sfetea, 1912), 1-2 and 63-66.

domestic bird (*Meleagris gallopavo*). All rank-and-file soldiers wore turkey quills attached to their army caps and were generally refereed to half-mockingly as "curcani" (turkeys). The name itself gained instant popularity among the various writers that took upon themselves the task of describing the war.[153]

What Alecsandri did was to invent a nickname for the sergeant, which would later serve him in other poems as well. Peneş Curcanul the poem makes no reference to a proper name. It simply trumpets the virtues of the Romanian soldiers fighting the Turks while telling the story of a group of nine peasants (plus the sergeant) who left Vaslui to go to battle.

However, "Peneş Curcanul" the nickname (the title of the poem to be more precise) was taken over by a bunch of writers and made into literary character in its own right. The typical example here is the work of George Coşbuc (1866-1918), a rather modest poet and journalist of patriotic bent. Coşbuc authored two books about the Russian-Turkish war - *Povestea unei coroane de o□el* (The Story of the Steel Crown: 1899) and *Razboiul pentru neatârnare povestit pe în□elesul tuturor* (roughly: The War of Independence Explained for a Wide Audience: 189?).[154] These are works that combine some historical lore and a lot of speculation. In both of them Peneş is a main character. Coşbuc takes infinite pleasure in depicting his bravery and even in drawing the contours of his appearance. In 1903 two distinguished dramatists - V. Leonescu and T. Du□escu-Du□u published a play titled "Peneş Curcanul". In it Peneş is no longer a sergeant but a mere soldier.[155] However, he is as brave as Coşbuc wanted him to be and he proves the leadership qualities Alecsandri assigned him in the first place.

[153] A. I. Odobescu, *Mo□ii şi curcanii* (Bucureşti: Socecŭ, Sander & Teclu, 1878) and Th. D. Speran□ia, *Curcanii. Comedie patrioticã într'un act [The Turkeys. Patriotic Comedy in One Act]*, (Bucureşti: Editura 'Librãriei şcoalelor' C. Sfetea, 1905).

[154] George Coşbuc, *Povestea unei coroane de o□el [The Story of the Steel Crown], ((Bucureşti: Cartea românească, 1940)* and George Coşbuc, *Rãzboiul nostru pentru Neatârnare povestit pe în□elesul tuturor [Our War of Independence Explained for a Wide Audience]*, (Bucureşti: Institutul de Arte Grafice C. Sfetea, 1907)

[155] V. Leonescu and T. Du□escu-Du□u, *Peneş Curcanul. Drama resboinica în patru acte [Peneş Curcanul: War Drama in Four Acts]*, (Bucureşti: Carol Göbl, 1903).

4.3 The Screen Life

In 1911 Peneş makes his debut on screen. He is now one of the main characters of the movie *Romania's Independence*, the only peasant-soldier in the whole movie who in repeatedly shot in a close-up frame. There are two possible yet divergent explanations for *PC* election as one of the main characters of the movie.

The first one would have to rely on the obvious: the screenwriters picked up the figure of *PC* because it stands for the whole army (pars pro toto). On this view, *PC* is the eminent bearer (the embodiment in point of fact) of a gamut of virtues that characterised the army as a whole: bravery, the propensity for self-sacrifice, modesty etc. What matters here is that all these traits are brought together under a single name. This would not be an exaggerated interpretation. Even before Peneş became a name on everybody's lips, the glory of the Romanian army that fought the Turks was praised by way of a similar literary technique. To take one example, as early as 1878 the writer Alessandru Pelimon payed tribute to the "war of independence" with a short story in which the main characters were three anonymous sergeants.[156] However, the traps of this interpretation are immediately self-evident. One is always tempted to read too much in a certain image (moving images in this case). The great German romantic Schlegel, for instance, used to believe that the figures present in Durer's paintings encapsulate "the German national character."[157]

However, there is some truth in the iconological method. Erwin Panofsky distinguished three levels of interpretation of an image. The first one simply points to the "natural meaning" of the object interpreted. Its role is to describe and identify whatever the viewer is contemplating: human beings, animals, buildings etc. The second level of interpretation deals with the "conventional meaning": a certain building is recognized to be

[156] Alessandru Pelimon, *Trei sergen□i. Campania românilor în Bulgaria [Three Sergeants. Romanian Military Campaign in Bulgaria]* ((Bucureşti: C.N. Rãdulescu, 1879).
[157] Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* trans. Scott Kleager (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), 45.

not only a cathedral but the Notre-Dame, a certain palace not only that but le château de Versailles. The third and most important level is supposed to grasp "those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion."[158] The devil here lies in too much interpretative skill and verve.

The second possible interpretation of the presence of PC in the movie would have to put emphasis on the prestige of the character. It should be quite clear that Alecsandri was not the only poet to have produced an enormous corpus of patriotic writings about the event of 1877.[159] Equally, it should also be plain that Peneş was not the only war hero to emerge from the "war of independence". However, unlike Stan-Florea-doroban□ul for instance, PC fully enjoyed the cultural capital endowed with by Vasile Alecsandri. This is all to say that Peneş was, from the very beginning, part of the legitimate narrative repeatedly told about the Russian-Turkish war.

I find it useful to end this chapter on a general note about the inner coherence of the Romanian national culture. The gist of my argument has been the following: in the aftermath of the event of 1877 the main lines of a distinctive national culture slowly came into being. I have taken culture to mean both i. a set of rules, values and habits that authorize and organize the space of experience (*Erfahrungsraum*) and ii. the master narrative that legitimizes all these constraints imposed on behaviour. In a nutshell, I have assumed that a national culture regulates the way in which the past is remembered.[160] However, I do not want to suggest that the Romanian national culture of the time was a homogenous collection of stories about the war. There is no doubt that critics have existed. One final example: Emil Gârleanu - a modest writer - refused to glorify the war:

[158] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: the Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 37. I rely here entirely on Burke's summary of Panofsky's understanding of iconology.
[159] Ion Sãndulescu, *Poezia liricã din timpul rãzboiului pentru neatârnare, 1877-1878 [The Poetry from the Time of the War of Independence, 1877-1878]*, (Bucureşti: Editura 'Librãriei şcoalelor' C. Sfetea, 1908) for a sample of patriotic war poetry.
[160] For this understanding of experience see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated with an introduction by Keith Tribe, (New York: Columbia University Press 2004), 257.

"The reader will find in these stories neither patriotism nor nationalism - two passing emotions. The narrator does not believe that the soldiers were some brave dummies (momîi) or popular heroes worthy of our praise. Both of these beliefs - praising the age old "Romanian" for his ancestral heroism or paying lip service to the commons (slãvirea opincii) are nothing but political attitudes that ought to remain foreign to the true artist."[161]

Gârleanu was not alone in voicing such opinions. In the preface of the second edition of a booklet about the war, Gheorghe Silvan tells the following story. After publishing the book - in which he seems to have maintained a neutral position towards the event - Silvan started to receive letters from his readers complaining that the author "did not put enough courage into the hearts of the heroes."[162] Moreover, a reviewer expressed the following protest:

"Under the fake title "for Independence", which had to imply a common effort and sacrifice on the part of the nation, the author depicts the war in terms of cowardice and horror."[163]

This state of affairs is evidence that a loyalty to a certain way of remembering the past (i.e. to a certain framework that organized experience) was the rule of thumb in turn of the century Romania.

[161] Em. Gârleanu, *1877. Schi□e din rãzboi [1877. Sketches from the War]* (Bucureşti: Editura librãriei SOCEC & Co, 1908), VII.
[162] Gh. Silvan, *Pentru Neatârnare, 1877-8 [For the Independence, 1877-8]*, (Bucureşti: Insitutul de arte grafice 'Progresul', 1906), I.
[163] IBIDEM, II.

Conclusion

Let me now briefly restate my argument and point to its broader resonance for students of nationalism.

The question to which I tried to give a tentative solution is the following: *how is national culture transmitted from one generation to the next?* I claimed, in opposition to a whole strain of thought, that such question begs a sociological argument. Bluntly put, the emphasis should fall on those social mechanisms that allow (or make possible for) individuals to experience culture first hand. Instead on focusing, as it has been customarily done, on the state apparatuses (the school, the army, the political parties and the various ceremonies that aim at policing a public memory) I decided to look at the market as a site of cultural transmission. It was in this particular context that I took the making, selling and buying of a movie-commodity to be a relevant example of how people live with their culture on a daily basis. The gravamen of my argument was that culture does not simply float in the air and is thus carried forward by virtue of it being national (i.e. dear to a given community) but is supported by a wide variety of social mechanisms. And it is precisely these mechanisms that create commonality and foster connectedness between anonymous people. Finally, I took cinema to be part of the market system - an instance when people come together as consumers - and hence an ideal starting point to build up an answer to my research question.

I was equally concerned to answer an auxiliary question: *how is a national culture created?* I argued that in order to trace back the components of a national culture one ought to make his unit of analysis an event. I defined event as that which radically alters a given culture. I further defined culture as **1.** an abiding body of rules and regulations, of values and habits that organize experience and **2.** the narrative against which these constraints are deemed legitimate. I then explored the transformative consequences of the Russian-Turkish War of 1877 on the composition of a distinctive and unique Romanian culture. Reduced to its

essence my argument took the following form: the reception of the war as a "war of independence" that helped nationalize a foreign king structured the way in which people have felt it appropriate to relate to the event of 1877. A double censorship, at the same time official and informal, worked to build up a framework within which all experience was deemed legitimate. One could not simply speak or write about the war without paying homage to King Carol I and without mentioning the independence. Or one could do that and then suffer some form of (most likely mild) public opprobrium. I am far from suggesting that the Romanian culture of the time was repressive, I am simply claiming that it was dominant. It was dominant because it went unchallenged - which is yet another way of saying that it was legitimate.

Savvy critics might ask two serious questions: **1.** what is the relevance of my case-study for the overall argument of the paper? **2.** why make such a fuss over a movie that enjoyed some popularity, but was nevertheless a solitary achievement for the period discussed?

My answer to the first question is the following: *Romania's Independence* is not simply a movie in the naïve sense we have come to regard movies today. It is above all a *commodity*: something made to enter a circuit and bring profit. To treat a movie as a commodity is to see it as a collective project in which an aggregate of individuals labour to its production: actors, screenwriters, sponsors, journalists, critics and finally the members of the audience. All these social actors have a relatively fixed place in the circuit of production, exchange and consumption: some of them make the movie, others advertise it and yet others consume it. This does not mean that the same person cannot find itself in each of these roles. It simply means that the making, the selling and the buying of the movie-commodity offers the possibility for quite a large number of people to experience the national culture. Consequently, to trace the social biography of the movie is to jump from one sphere to

another, from one set of actors to another. It also means to examine how all these individuals live with or make use of the national culture in terms of beliefs, reasons, interests and emotions.

My answer to the second question is the following: *Romania's Independence* might well be an isolated example as far as Romania is concerned, but it is certainly not a singular case for its epoch. There were many contemporary efforts that capitalized on the opportunity to use a new technology in order to make available a given culture. And this seems to be a nearly universal phenomenon. To take but two examples: in 1911, the Russians Vasily Goncharov and Aleksandr Khazhonkov made a movie entitled *Defence of Sevastopol* to commemorate the Crimean War (it premiered on the 26th of October that year). The same goes for Italy as well. According to Maria Wyke, "the many grand historical films set in ancient Rome which were produced in the period leading up to the First World War - and which obtained enormous critical acclaim and box-office success both in Italy and abroad - held a crucial role in the formation, interrogation, and dissemination of the rhetoric of *romanità*."[164]

Therefore, in all modesty, my paper ought to be seen as a first step towards a comparative investigation of all these cases, which might be of some worth for those interested in the connections between capitalism, technological innovation and cultural hegemony. Should that culture prove in the end to be national in one way or another, so much the worse!

[164] Maria Wyke, "Projecting Ancient Rome", in Marcia Landy (ed.) *The Historical Film. History and Memory in Media* (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 127.

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