

THE ROMANIAN NATION IN TRANSYLVANIA: ITS HISTORY AND SOCIAL MEMORY*

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The organic conception of nationhood that came into question in the middle of the twentieth century has been further discredited by recent scholarly works on nation building and nationalism.¹ These works reject the essentialist or primordial notion of nationhood and describe how empowered groups

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¹ There were of course earlier challenges (e.g. Marxism) to the natural view of nationhood. Nevertheless, nationhood was not theoretically problematized until the post-World War II period. See Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966) and Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964) for example of works discrediting the essentialist view of nationhood. More recent scholarly literature includes: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identities* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); E. J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

pursuing their own interests constructed modern nations. The primary intention of these "constructionist" approaches is to contrast the conceptualization of nationhood with a population's sense of pre-modern identity and to demonstrate how and why elites instituted the concept of the nation throughout the world. They explain especially well the initial emergence of nationalist movements, but they largely ignore the agency of non-elites who are all too often regarded as disinterested, passive subjects.¹ By focusing on elites, scholars have been able to describe cultures and traditions as "retrospective inventions" without explaining how or why the masses came to accept "artificial creations" as part of their natural heritage.² Their arguments do not account for either the initial attractiveness or the persistence of the national paradigm for non-capitalist, non-elite communities, like rural nineteenth-century Transylvania. A better understanding of how the national paradigm in rural societies achieved widespread acceptance is gained from an investigation of the connections between living social memories and deliberate efforts to make the idea of the nation meaningful for the entire national community.³

¹ Notable exceptions include the important works of Keely Stauter-Halsted. See her "Patriotic Celebrations in Austrian Poland: The Kosciuszko Centennial and the Formation of Peasant Nationalism," *Austrian History Yearbook XXV* (1994): 79-95; *idem* "Moral Community and Peasant Nationalism," forthcoming in Judith Pallot, ed., *Agrarian Policy and the Construction of the Peasantry in Central Europe and Russia 1861-1930* (Macmillan); *idem* "Popular Culture and the Public Sphere"; and *idem* "The Peasant Vision of the Polish Nation," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Washington, D.C., 26-29 October 1995. For a better understanding of the agency of workers see Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities. The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867-1907* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

² See for example Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*. For references to "retrospective inventions" and "artificial creations" see pages 15 and 16. Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover and London: University of New England, 1993), 156, offers an insightful discussion on the problems of historical studies that reduce the past to the images representing it.

³ Often this is described as the adoption of a national mentality, sometimes described as the "discovery" of the nation.

Members of traditional societies like rural Transylvania experienced their surroundings through living social memory, a combination of unrecorded legal and social customs, rights and duties, in which the past was always present.¹ Romanian peasants lived in a religious milieu in which Orthodox Christianity provided the framework that gave meaning to their lives.² Orthodoxy was more than a religious rite. It “was a complex heritage of faith and religious practices intertwined with age-old folk customs that had been passed down from generation to generation.”³ Before Transylvanian Romanians could think of themselves as part of a modern national community, they had to be able to incorporate the idea of the nation into this framework. History played an important role in that process.

Patrick Hutton has described history as an art of memory in the modern age, because it adjudicates the relationship between the unconscious presence of the past and our conscious efforts to evoke the past. Originally writing was only an adjunct to oral devices such as rhetoric, but with the advent of print culture, knowledge gradually became separated from the operations of the mind in exteriorized texts. Study of this exteriorized knowledge led to clearer distinctions between the past and present and to an understanding of the particular nature of historical knowledge. It also prompted the search for an authentic self that changed and matured over time. Late-eighteenth-century autobiographers, for example, attempted to describe the concrete circumstances of an individual’s transformation from childhood into adulthood through investigations of their personal origins and the significant in-

¹ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 9.

² I do not mention the Greek Catholic faith here because generally speaking the establishment of the Greek Catholic Church at the beginning of the eighteenth century caused little change in traditional Romanian religious life, especially at the rural level. It “meant very little to the average priest and the mass of believers. For them, old faith remained intact.” Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered. Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation 1700/1848*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1999.

³ Keith Hitchins, *The Idea of Nation: The Romanians of Transylvania 1691-1848* (Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1988), 36.

fluences on their lives. Their analyses reflected the modern historical perspective of the past as a distinct reality removed from the present in time.¹ “In light of this conception of the past the interest of the historian shifted from an appreciation of the edifying lessons the past may teach to an understanding of the way in which we have come to be who we are in this present place and time.”² In the modern world, historical knowledge thus functioned as a form of collective self-knowledge.

The development of historical sensibilities and the search for a better understanding of the human condition coincided with a new understanding of the nation and its historical progression.³ In medieval Europe, the nation referred to a group of strangers, groups of university students, elite church councils, and certain aristocracies. Beginning in the eighteenth century, however, intellectuals imagined the nation as a group of sovereign people.⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, the group was often thought to be a naturally, internally homogeneous, and unique entity, defined by precise spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries; distinct historical origins; and an autonomous future.⁵ Many

¹ For more information on the differences between oral and print cultures see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982); and James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*.

² Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 156.

³ For influential arguments on the causes of this new understanding of the nation, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; and Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History From the Nation*. These works and several others are reviewed in Tanya Dunlap, “Nation-building and Nationalism. A Review Article,” in *Spiritualitate transilvană și istorie europeană*, eds., Iacob Mârza and Ana Dumitran (Alba Iulia, 1999), 519-34.

⁴ The verb “imagine” here means to think anew. The idea of a community being imagined does not imply that the community did not exist but that people began to think of the nation and their membership in it in new terms.

⁵ Richard Handler, “Is ‘Identity’ a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 29. The idea of homogeneity plays an important role even for those nations who imagined themselves to have uniform respect for distinct rights or principles like liberty or equality. In the case of nationals believed to respect a principle, squabbles emerged when people tried to

modern historians reinforced this idea with accounts of the national past fashioned from the concept of a developing human self. Their investigations examined the nation's birth, maturation, and destiny in terms of linear progression. From a point of origin, historians followed the rise of the nation, explained its present-day circumstances, and outlined its future aspirations. Projections of the national community and its present concerns into the past as an object of historical becoming linked a distant past to the present and to a necessary future.¹ By inserting present-day circumstances into the temporal continuum, modern historians tried to bridge the temporal divide and to re-create a connection to the past.

Making connections to the past that resonated with the larger national community, however, was not a simple task. In large part it depended on the narrative's potential to provide meaning for the entire national group. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century historians organized social memories in logical, sequential order and supplemented them with historical details in an attempt to explain a group's collective experiences. Printed narratives had the effect of embedding those memories in more rigid, more complex, textual forms. The texts, serving as a deposit of quasi-official views for future generations, gradually provided detailed explanations of historical causality that ascribed social significance to specific events, people, and places.² These explanations shaped living memories but were also restricted by them. The degree to which a society accepts a standard version of its past depends in large part on how closely it parallels the living memory. In important ways, the production of authoritative representations of groups through historical narratives or commemorative practices

define the principle. Perceptions of liberty or equality were rarely as alike as imagined.

¹ For more detailed descriptions of how groups form and regenerate through narration see Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" in *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

² Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 1-10. For an argument on the fundamental collapse of memory and its subsequent embodiment in sites of memory see Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25.

receives guiding impetus from, and can in turn give significant shape to, the living memory of social groups.¹ Hence, the more closely the texts and practices correspond to social memories that may have evolved over centuries the more acceptable the official version will be for the respective community.

In Transylvania, aristocrats and clergy first acknowledged the historicity of the Romanian nation and the historical significance of specific events, people, and places for the modern national community in the eighteenth century. Seventeenth-century chroniclers gave Romanian speakers a secular history but they did not refer to the nation as a group of people, who, regardless of social status, were entitled to political autonomy.² The clearest and earliest expression that corresponded to the modern idea of the nation as a group of sovereign people came from the Greek Catholic Bishop Inochentie Micu Klein who, in 1735, petitioned the Habsburg court to grant privileges to the Romanians in southern Transylvania on the basis of historic rights. He argued that the Romanians had inhabited the region since the founding of the Roman province Dacia under Emperor Trajan and deserved the same status as other privileged groups who settled in the area much later.³ Successive generations of intellectuals and clergy of what became known as the Transylvanian School, who were primarily of the Greek Catholic faith and had access to higher education abroad, built on Klein's historical arguments in favor of political emancipation for all Romanians. For these late-eighteenth-century intellectuals, the focus on the history of the nation was not merely a political strategy. It helped redefine who

¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

² Pompiliu Teodor, *Evoluția gândirii istorice românești* (Cluj: Dacia, 1970), and Mihai Pop, ed., *Istoria literaturii române* (București, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1970) vol. 1

³ David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* (București: Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1984); Augustin Bunea, *Din istoria Românilor: Episcopul Ioan Inocențiu Klein (1728-1751)* (Blaj, 1900); and Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered* (București: Editura Enciclopedia, 1999).

Romanians were and charted a course for the impending cultural and socio-political progress of the entire national community.¹

In their historical works, authors of the Transylvanian School created a vision of the nation that emphasized the importance of ethnicity and language over religion, contributing to the nineteenth-century conception of the Romanian nation as an autonomous ethnic group. The authors produced detailed accounts of the Romanian ethnogenesis in Trajan's Dacia, continuity from Dacia to the present, and Romanian linguistic development. According to these descriptions, Roman forces defeated the barbarian Dacians in the second century AD and established the Roman province of Dacia in present-day Transylvania. Colonists from the Roman empire settled in the region and remained there, the authors argued, even after Roman forces evacuated the province in the third century. The colonists managed to survive numerous barbarian invasions and elected their own rulers. In the ninth century, when the Magyars migrated to the region, the authors argued that the independent former colonists, the Romanians, voluntarily united with them. By documenting Romanian descendency from the Roman "masters of the world," The Transylvanian School authors legitimized the nation's birth and development.² Through associations of Romanian lineage with Rome, the historical accounts linked the present Romanian com-

¹ Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*; Teodor, *Evoluția gândirii*; Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered*. Representative examples of works of the Transylvanian School include Samuil Micu-Klein, *Scurta Cunoștință Istoriei Românilor în Despre Vechimea și Continuitatea Românilor*, ed. Anatol Ghermanschi, (București: Militara, 1989); Gheorghe Șincai, *Hronica Românilor*, in *Școala Ardeleană*, vol. II, ed. Florea Fugariu, (București: Albatros, 1988); and Petru Maior, *Istoria pentru Începutul Românilor în Dacia*, ed. Floria Fugariu, (București: Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982).

² Vlad Georgescu, *Political Ideas and the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities*, trans. Matei Călinescu, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 171-72. The preoccupation with the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people demonstrates Pierre Nora's notion of a cult of continuity. Nora explains that the confident assumption of knowing to whom and to what a people owes its existence gives meaning and a sense of the sacred to a society engaged in a process of secularization. The greater the origins, the more they magnify the nation's greatness. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," 16.

munity to a distant secular past and claimed a noble heritage similar to that of the Habsburg rulers, which, they argued, was worthy of official, political recognition. The information contained in the texts gradually became relevant to a wider national audience because they related to the living social memories of the broader community. The detailed descriptions of the secular origins and maturation of the community explained the basis of the Orthodox community's Latin language and ascribed social significance to the religious milieu in which the Romanian-speaking community lived. The narratives gave new meaning to the social memories – the customs, habits, social values, and common ideals – of Orthodox Romanians, attributing them to a common Roman heritage. By supplementing the living social memories with historical scholarship, the texts effectively redefined the religious nature of the community's social memory with secular components.

The texts of the Transylvanian School became sites of official national memory to which future generations of scholars referred. Literati who succeeded Transylvanian School intellectuals used the early works to formulate their own arguments about the past in light of the needs of their present situation. Because the Latinist arguments of the Transylvanian School associated Romanian heritage with the Habsburgs (who in their view had inherited the dignity of Rome) and because the Habsburgs had compromised with the Magyars in 1867 abandoning the Romanian national cause, late-nineteenth-century Romanian intellectuals who sought greater national autonomy began to downplay the purity of the Romanians' Latin origins and emphasize the Romanization of the Dacians in order to describe the unique make up of the Romanian people. Romanians, they argued, were not merely Orthodox Romans. They had an indigenous, noble past deserving of the same political recognition as the other peoples of Transylvania.¹ As a result of these historical debates carried out over the course of the nineteenth century, most

¹ For insight into the international dimensions of these historical arguments, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 27-54.

Transylvanian elites adopted the new, modern conception of the Romanian nation.

Translating the modern idea of the Romanian nation from the intellectuals to the broader national community, however, was not an easy task. Romanians in Transylvania first had to become conscious of themselves as a national community. Then they had to demonstrate a collective desire and willingness to organize and live together as a nation.¹ Although there is ample evidence of elite members of the ruling and nascent professional classes in Transylvania imagining the people, average rural Romanians, as constituent members of the Romanian nation in the first half of the nineteenth century and, most importantly, during the revolution of 1848-49, Romanian villagers in Transylvania did not immediately think of themselves as part of a modern national community.² Nineteenth-century Transylvanian villagers realized at some level that they were Romanian and that their Latin language differentiated them from other Slavic Orthodox peoples, but they were more prone to define their community by religious faith rather than ethnic or linguistic characteristics. Popular national consciousness, thus, had to be raised. It was not a natural sensibility. For Romanian nationalists, the problem was compounded by the fact that different groups making up the nation had different social memories.³ In order to create the sense of a larger national self, nationalists had to appeal to memories that were relevant to a wide and varied audience.

¹ Nicolae Bocșan, *Ideea de națiune la românii din Transilvania și Banat. Secolul al XIX-lea* (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1998). Bocșan argues that Romanian ideas of the nation evolved over the course of the eighteenth century as a synthesis of European ideas of popular sovereignty and cultural homogeneity applied to Romanian realities. Essentially he is arguing that Romanian nationalism is a synthesis of liberal, or civic, nationalism generally associated with French and Anglo historical experiences and with nationalism dependent on ethnic definitions of a nation.

² Bocșan, 89-140. See also George Em. Marica "Repere ale sociologiei națiunii la scriptoria romani din Secolul al XIX-lea," in *Națiunea Română* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 446-76.

³ This is a typical problem for nation builders, see Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 87-143.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Romanian elites in Transylvania struggled to transmit their ideas of the nation to Romanian villagers through cultural organizations. The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (Astra) was the most prominent of such Romanian cultural societies. Romanian Intellectuals founded Astra in 1861 to promote the production of scholarly literature, enlightened instruction, and cultural activities because they believed that culture and education could raise the Romanian people to the status of modern European nationhood.¹ Denied recognition as a political nation for lack of noble heritage, Romanians had been excluded from meaningful participation in the political life of the region.² One of Astra's major goals was to secure this recognition – but outside the political arena. Initially the Association was set up as a nascent Romanian Academy because Astra members believed that the promotion of scientific and literary studies was the most effective way to lay a solid foundation upon which to build a Romanian nation worthy of self governance. Thus in its original form, Astra largely catered to the needs and scholarly interests of its intellectual and middle-classes.³ Active members were forced to reevaluate the Association's primary mission after the establishment of a Romanian Academy in Bucuresti in 1879, but they never abandoned their academic focus. They continued publishing the Association's journal

¹In light of debates on culture initiated in the discipline of anthropology, I use the term here as Romanians in Transylvania did; to imply literature, song, dance, dress, etc.

²Since the fifteenth century three privileged nations of noble Hungarians (Magyars), Szeklers (Hungarian speaking peoples who settled in Eastern Transylvania) and Saxons ruled Transylvania. Peasants, by definition, were excluded from the nations. Since a large majority of the Romanian community's members were peasants, the community itself was effectively exempt from privileged status. See David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* (Bucuresti: Stiintifica si Enciclopedia, 1984) and Keith Hitchins, *The Idea of Nation: The Romanians of Transylvania 1691-1848* (Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifică si Enciclopedică, 1988).

³ Pamfil Matei, *Astra Asociațiunea transilvană pentru literatura română și cultura poporului român 1861-1950* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1986), 29.

Transilvania and other scholarly works, hosting academic conferences, and funding advanced study. The few attempts to sponsor activities for Romanian villagers were successful, but the enthusiasm generated from singular events was not sustained and these efforts consequently bore little fruit.¹ Likewise, the system of regional chapters (*despartaminte*) established in 1869 to facilitate the Association's contact with rural populations was largely neglected by *Astra* leaders and did not achieve its intended effect before the end of the century.² The change came during the 1880s when *Astra* modified its academic orientation in conjunction with revised conceptions of the national community and its political importance. Throughout the nineteenth century the Romanian elite in Transylvania discussed the popular content of the nation but they did not initially think of the peasants as active citizens. They started to do so only in the later decades of the nineteenth century when debates on the appropriate form and direction of the Romanian society in the Austro-Hungarian empire prompted them to reconsider their attitudes toward the popular masses, whose integration into active political life they began to consider a priority. By the late 1880s the national problem in Austro-Hungary became a question of integrating all Romanians into a national community worthy of state recognition and political emancipation.³ In accordance with its aim of transforming the intellectuals' national movement into a mass movement, *Astra*

¹ In 1862 and 1881 the Association organized Romanian ethnographic, agricultural, and home industrial exhibits in Braşov and Sibiu. These events were important because they provided opportunities for Romanian villagers to represent themselves through the display of their wares and way of life. The exhibits are reported to have generated much excitement at the time and effectively portrayed the peasant communities as integral parts of the national community, but they were not part of the sustained attempt to cultivate the masses that is evident in later decades.

² In 1869 the Association decided to found regional chapters in Braşov, Făgăraş, Sibiu, Sebeş, Haţeg, Deva, Abrud, Belgrad (Alba Iulia), Baia de Criş, Cluj, Şimleu Silvaniei, Dej, Gherla, Somcuta Mare, Năsăud, Bistriţa, Reghinul Sases, Turda, Muraş-Oşorheiu, Blaj, Sighişoara and Mediaş. Out of these 22 chapters, 18 were actually established but only a portion of them were active.

³ Bocşan, 193-95.

pushed to extend its influence into rural areas and to raise the national consciousness of all Romanians with images of the nation as an autonomous ethnic community.

The leaders of the Association consequently diversified Astra's scholarly focus in order to increase the interest and involvement of townspeople and rural villagers. They began to discuss revising the statutes in 1892. According to paragraph 2 of the original statutes, Astra was supposed to promote Romanian culture and literature through the study, elaboration, and editing of books and through prizes and stipends for different specialties in the arts and sciences.¹ In 1895 Astra received official approval for a new set of statutes.² In addition to continued support for scientific and literary studies, the new statutes emphasized the importance of publishing popular books; founding provincial libraries, museums, and other collections; hosting public exhibitions and conferences; eventual assistance in planting schools; the expansion and reorganization of the Association's scientific and literary sections; and any other legal means that could contribute to Romanian literary, cultural, spiritual, and economic prosperity.³ The emphasis on popular culture marked a departure from Astra's early academic focus and signified the Association's desires to transform its elite academic image in order to claim a more influential role in rural Romanian communities.

Because the rural population did not identify with Astra's image of the nation as an enlightened community of scholars,

¹*Statutele Asociațiunei Transilvane pentru Literatura română și Cultura poporului român* (Sibiu, 1862), 1.

² In order to receive final approval, the Association had to change its name and drop the word Transylvanian. They retained however the acronym Astra (*tr* standing for Transilvana) for colloquial use, although in newspapers Astra was known as "the Association."

³ *Statutele Asociațiunei pentru literatura română și cultura poporului român* (Sibiu: Tiparul tipografiei archidieceșane, 1897), 1. In 1880 a school section was added to the philology, history, and natural-physical science sections established in 1862. In 1900, after a much needed reorganization of dormant sections, the association also created an economic section devoted to the study of commerce and agriculture for the resolution of the material plight of many Romanian villagers.

Astra leaders projected an alternative vision of the nation as a community of literate, rational farmers. In the 1890s Astra's members worked hard to promote that vision and broaden the association's objectives so as to increase the interest and involvement of townspeople and rural villagers in its national movement. The leadership strengthened the network of local chapters throughout the region; increased the circulation of newspapers, brochures, and calendars deemed appropriate for rural readers; held annual festivals with theater, dance, and exhibits commemorating the peasant-based nation; built museums to display peasant contributions to the national community; and delivered lectures to rural members of local chapters explaining their part in the Romanian national community of Transylvania.

As a result of their work it became possible to think of the rural population as the basis of the historic Romanian nation.¹ One of the booklets Astra published and distributed, for example, explained the central place of the peasantry in the Romanian national community. In 1911, Dr. Ioan Lupaș authored a popular historical work because he believed the historical account of the origins and evolution of the Romanian people would give readers a better idea of what was, in order to know what will be.² Implicit in his statement was a confident assumption that the past would provide clear guidance for the future. In this case, he tried to show his readers that they were an integral part of a unified Romanian nation that needed to reclaim its past autonomy. Lupaș built on the historical works made available by nineteenth-century historians. He described the ethnogenesis of the contemporary Romanian community with stories of Roman conquerors who defeated the native Dacians and settled among them, eventually establishing friendships and then intermarrying to bring forth a new people, Romanians. From the Romans, the Romanians received a Latin language. Their customs and ways of life were inherited from the

¹ For details of this process see Tanya Dunlap "Autonomy and Power: Romanian Nation Building under ASTRA in late-nineteenth-century Transylvania," Ph.D. Dissertation, forthcoming, Rice University, Houston, TX, USA.

² Ioan Lupaș, "De demult povestire istorică," *Biblioteca populară a asociațiunii*, vol. 1, nr. 1. (Sibiu, 1911).

Dacians. Early Romanians, Lupaş argued, lived autonomously in the very region inhabited by present-day Romanians whose common residency, language, customs, and history, he concluded, united them. Lupaş's story ascribed social significance to the rural lifestyles of his village readers in many of the same ways the works of the amateur historians influenced Romanian intellectuals. Not only did the readers speak Romanian, but they also valued the same customs and traditions believed to have been inherited from the Dacians and incorporated into their religious practices. The historical narratives gave national meaning to the customs and traditions that provided the basis of the social memories of Romanian villagers. But the narratives also distinguished the rural population from urban elites. For unlike the professional and intellectual urban residents, Romanian peasants still lived according to village customs and traditions. Moreover, unlike their urban counterparts, rural readers lived off the same land and worked the same mines as the early Romanians depicted in the narrative. According to Lupaş' book, the peasantry embodied the real nation in its historic and present forms.

To make the same kind of message available to semi-literate or illiterate villagers, *Astra* set up a series of popular lectures, festivals, and exhibits. It was important to central committee members that all of these activities pertained to village life. Otherwise, they cautioned, people would not attend. The activities were supposed to generate rural interest in *Astra* activities but, like the booklets, they also had the effect of creating a powerful peasant image of the nation. The exhibits and festivals offer the best examples of this creative process.

In the early 1890s the Association stressed the importance of attracting rural attention and recommended organizing exhibits of household industry and agricultural production at the general and regional (*despartaminte*) annual assemblies. In the 1891 general report, the central committee suggested that these venues should not be organized for mere village amusement; regional and local leaders were supposed to consult Romanian villagers about

the display of items that would portray their way of life.¹ In this way villagers could be more active in the Association. Generally speaking however, Romanian villagers did not provide much organizational support for the exhibits. The local Romanian women's society (Reuniunea femeilor romane) or a small committee of local elites assumed the responsibility of going from house to house to inspect and request items deemed representative of rural Romanian life.² In addition to agricultural produce, these objects usually consisted of woven and embroidered cloths, either decorative pieces, items of clothing, or household linens. At the time of the exhibit, prize committees examined the entries and presented small monetary prizes to the women whose handiwork they considered the most beautiful or original examples of Romanian culture or whose garden produce best represented their expectations of agricultural prosperity.³ In some cases, an awards ceremony was held to honor the contestants publicly. In other cases, along with cash prizes for outstanding entries, regional chapters gave all participants a diploma recognizing their individual contribution.⁴ Romanian villagers also received attention and prizes at festivals exhibiting popular dances and dress. Usually these festivals were held at the regional or general annual assembly, but sometimes local communities hosted them in order to raise money for specific projects. At these events, Romanian villagers gathered to display their traditional costumes and local dances as examples of the national dance repertoire and variety of national folk costumes. Like the exhibits described above, the local elite organized these performances and also awarded the prizes for the most beautiful and original costumes. The formal presentations were often followed by a popular party for which many villagers donned traditional dress in order to

¹ *Transilvania*, 1892, 302.

² Muzeul național de istorie a Transilvaniei, Cluj-Napoca, Fondul Iuliu Boilă, nr. inv. M749.

³ Occasionally exhibits also included the wares of men and also awarded them cash prizes, but most often recipients were women.

⁴ Muzeul național de istorie a Transilvaniei, Cluj-Napoca, Fondul Iuliu Boilă, nr. inv. M642.

receive free admission.¹ Regardless of how or why Romanian villagers participated in the exhibits and festivals, they did actively participate as authentic members of the national community and were publicly recognized and honored as such. Astra's popular programs were successful at integrating members of rural communities into the national community (getting them to attend popular events and represent themselves as nationals) not only because of their celebratory style, but also because the Association's commemorative practices ascribed broader, national importance to the living social memories of rural Romanians. Romanian villagers could relate to idea of the nation because the Association affirmed that the local community, with its way of life, customs, and traditions, was an essential part of the national community. Astra did not try to get the peasantry to adopt new traditions or use formal discourse to persuade them that they were part of the nation. Such practices had failed in the past. Instead the Association used certain aspects of rural life to build a broader sense of community.

The new, sustained emphasis on popular activities initiated a dual program within the Association. The scholarly agenda which Astra had always valued remained intact. For the intellectuals and professionals, the Association offered a scholarly vision of the nation through contacts with other academic societies, a relatively large library, a forum for highbrow conferences, and support for academic publications. Because both the style and content of this program bored members of rural communities, Astra tried hard to engage Romanian villagers through an alternative peasant-based vision of the nation. The Association sponsored popular festivals, helped establish small, provincial libraries; funded and organized local, public lectures; and published and distributed popular reading materials. Association leaders designed all the activities to serve the same goal, to promote a unified culture of the Romanian people, but their dual emphases effectively differentiated Romanian high, or academic, literature and culture, from its low, or popular, variant. Conse-

¹ "Asociațiunea la Sibiu," *Tribuna*, 27 May/9 June 1901, 390.

quently Astra's two different representations of the national community used to appeal to the different social memories of the intellectuals and the peasantry made it possible to think of the nation as a homogeneous group and dispute its "true" character.

At the crux of the relationship between the idea of the nation, national representations, and social memory are acts of conceptualization and representation of a collective self. The acts however function in a circular pattern. First the collective self is conceived and represented through images, commemorative practices, or historical descriptions of national becoming. Then, in light of its representation, the national self is re-conceived either by rejecting the representation or working it into the living social memories of the national community. Additional representations require further reconceptualization in such a way that the cycle continuously updates social memories of the national collective. During this process a paradox emerges. It becomes possible to conceive of something as a coherent, free-standing entity whose very existence is, in fact, continually fashioned by the subject representing or conceptualizing that entity.¹ Because of this paradox, nationalists can simultaneously assert the coherence of the nation and contest it. Even though different representations of the nation are incompatible, their very existence makes it possible to assume that the nation has a true nature and dispute exactly what it is.

In Astra, the two different representations of the same national community created a divide between educated Romanian elites and the masses which rural leaders used to their own advantage. Astra's educated elite publicly recognized peasant contributions to Romanian national culture in an attempt to help villagers recognize their place in the national community and realize their future in the nation, but they did not identify with the peasant characterizations of the nation formulated by Astra. The elite considered themselves above village life. Considering

¹ Virginia R. Dominguez, *People as Subject, People as Object. Selfhood and Peoplehood in Contemporary Israel* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 21-41.

themselves educated and refined, they envisioned themselves as the rightful leaders of the national community responsible for bridging the divide by transforming the rural backwardness that they despised with rational education and enlightened culture. The very emphasis Astra placed on education in both its academic and popular programs accorded the intellectuals and professionals a leading social role in the national community. They were, after all, the most educated members of the nation. Their (in some instances self-imposed) distance from peasant culture and the backwardness of rural life, however, forced them to rely on rural leaders for the success of the Association's popular programs. These rural leaders they regarded as their natural subordinates who would be integrated into the Association hierarchically below the regional and central leaders. The leaders of Astra's local chapters (*agenturi*), however, did not accept a subordinate role and consequently, the Association's elites could not maintain as secure a hold over the national movement as they had expected.

The leaders at the local *agenturi* level have not received scholarly attention corresponding to their importance, for these men were responsible for taking Astra's message to the masses. Despartaminte leaders may have had contact with Romanian villagers in the regional center, but they were often somewhat removed from village life. In the outlying districts however, the leader of an *agentura* was part of the rural population, making the best possible use of his resources and property as did his neighbors. Although the scarcity of precise information makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive view of the *agenturi* leaders, it is safe to say that the majority of these leaders were either priests or teachers. Even for regional chapters situated in relatively prosperous commercial centers, like the Brasov despartamant with 26 *agenturi* in 1913, the known local Astra officials were church representatives. Out of 24 known *agenturi* leaders in the Brasov chapter, 22 were local priests and 2 were teachers.¹ The

¹ Given that Braşov regional chapter leaders were generally careful to record activity at the local level and document when an *agentura* was reorganized or established, and that the records leave no indication of regular committee

information on other *agenturi* officials in the Brasov *despartamant* – the vice-presidents, secretaries, treasurers, or librarians – is incomplete, but available documents record that professionals were elected to an *agentura* committee only in two cases.¹ The remaining officials were teachers or villagers (*economi*). Records concerning local leadership for other regional chapters are difficult to locate, but when *Astra* *despartaminte* leaders began to focus their attention on establishing *agenturi*, they generally sent letters or circulars to priests and “other local leaders” (*alți fruntași*) asking them to take responsibility for organizing a communal chapter and reporting back to the *despartamant*.²

That *Astra* succeeded in drawing support from many priests was due in large part to the emphasis church hierarchies placed on service to the Christian community. Although they guarded against sacrificing church autonomy or turning a religious institution into a political organization, church authorities

changes, it appears that *agenturi* committees did not serve three-year terms like the *despartaminte* and central committees, but rather served as long as they were willing and accepted. Thus, when a president of an local chapter was elected in 1900, for example, it is likely that that person remained until the *agentura* was reorganized. Priests led *agenturi* in Brașov-vechiu and Maerus (ANS 333-1989); Satulung (ANS 726-1900 and 528-1910); Vlădeni and Tantari (ANS 874-1900); Presmer, Cristian, and Darste (ANS 81-1900); Râșnov (ANS 607-1903); Helciu (ANS 588-1904); Bod (ANS 666-1904); Vulcan (ANS 770-1905); Tarlungeni (ANS 1310-1906); Rotbav, Tocile, and Harman (ANS 625-1907); Ghimbav (ANS 112-1907); Arpatac (943-1908); Stupini (164-1909); Turches and Elopatak (ANS 1184-1911); and Bacifalu (ANS 1117-1912). Teachers led the *agenturi* in Codlea (ANS 666-1904) and Feldioara (ANS 317-1906). No information is available on the heads of the *agenturi* in Purcăreni and Sânpetru.

¹ ANS 874-1900. In Vlădeni, *agentura* members elected the local notary to the post of secretary and the mayor to the position of *agentura* treasurer.

² When this did not prove effective, members of the regional chapter committee communicated personally with the local leaders (generally priests) and often traveled to the local commune to hold a founding meeting at which local notables gathered to meet the regional representative; organize an *agentura*; listen to a popular lecture, sometimes illustrated with overhead projections; receive free books; and attend local exhibits or musical performances. After the meeting, the *despartamant* representatives returned to the district center and the local *Astra* authorities resumed their leadership of the *agentura*. See for example ANS 9-1890, 70-1891, 645-1906, and 257-1908.

considered the fate of the church and the clergy closely linked to that of the people and encouraged clergymen to concern themselves with the everyday economic and social affairs of their communities. In the face of widespread poverty and illiteracy, religious officials, like the lay intellectuals, blamed social ills on a lack of education. They considered clergymen the natural leaders of the Romanian people who they hoped would, in time, with the assistance of the church, be capable of assuming their place among the advanced European nations. If the clergy would just lead the rural population and provide proper education, it was argued, national progress was certain to follow.¹ The problem, however, was finding time and energy to do everything required. In addition to tilling his own fields, continuing his own education, leading religious services, supervising school instruction, maintaining and making improvements on church property, reporting to the regional archpriest, and caring for the sick and hungry, the village priest was also asked to establish social organizations to combat alcoholism and smoking; direct choirs; set up reading societies, cultural groups, and agricultural associations; hold literacy classes and agronomy courses; give popular lectures; provide public libraries; and arrange industrial and agricultural exhibits at which prizes would be awarded.

Although some village priests came close to meeting official expectations, in general the tasks prescribed to transform the countryside overwhelmed rural resources, already stretched quite thin at the beginning of the twentieth century. Burdened by overpopulation, lack of credit, inefficient cultivation methods, and insufficient plots of land, Romanian villagers simply did not have the resources available to transform the economy from the bottom-up. Rural clergy complained about these burdens in their conference reports. Augustin Chetian, the local priest in the village of Bobohalma, for example, described the pastoral dilemma well at the Tarnava priestly conference in 1899. He argued that priests could not fulfill their calling when distracted by agricultural labor

¹ Arhiva Mitropoliei Ortodoxe (AMO), Sibiu, III-429-1900, III-126-1903, III-624-1904, III-541-1905, III-253-1907, III-367-1908, III-474-1911.

and additional occupations but could not exist without them. Not likely to receive donations from the local congregation, the village cleric had no choice but to find outside employment to make ends meet.¹ The seriousness of the problem was compounded by the absence of any real proposal to resolve the situation. Chetian merely suggested that church representatives describe their plight to the rural population and request their material and financial support. The situation did not improve much before the First World War. In 1911, when rural clergymen gathered in Bistrita, the protopop (regional archpriest) who supervised the annual conference lamented that while everyone expected everything from the priest, no one was concerned with his well-being. Almost the only remaining natural leader of the people, the priest was counted on to combat social evils and provide the population with modern, almost universal culture as well as education that corresponded to present-day needs. At the same time, however, the priest was expected to perform his duties virtually gratuitously. Consequently the clergy had reached a point of desperation that should be addressed, the archpriest concluded, by the next pastoral conference.² Critiques of the priests' accountability balanced the discussions of the priests' problems. Regional directors (archpriests) complained that very few priests submitted acceptable reports on their activities and interpreted the poor performance as further indication of extensive pastoral apathy and negligence.³ More likely, the noncompliance reflected the difficulties of village life and the desperation that ordinary priests continually faced.

The inability of the church to address the predicament of village priests forced some pastors to look for outside sources of help. Astra was one such source. The Association provided, for example, free books and newspapers so that the local pastor could set up a community library. Throughout the early 1900s numerous rural priests wrote directly to Astra's central committee, bypassing despartaminte officials, to request reading materials. The Asso-

¹ AMO, III-514-1899, Târnava.

² AMO, III-474-1911, Bistrița.

³ AMO, III-602-1912.

ciation made the materials available on the condition that the local pastor established an agentura in his commune.¹ In this way, parochial initiative spurred on the growth of local Astra chapters. Village priests also enjoyed the professional distinction that secular intellectuals lent to Astra's educational and cultural pursuits. Because Romanian scholarship was becoming increasingly specialized at the end of the nineteenth century, the average cleric could not claim the competence of a specialist. He had neither the time nor the means at his disposal. But Astra permitted him to join a network of scholars who gave him access to new ideas and academic works. Astra also provided opportunities for impoverished clergy to earn a little more money. The Association awarded small cash prizes to those who provided evidence that they improved local literacy rates or successfully encouraged villagers to use rational agricultural methods. In some cases the Association even allocated stipends to rural priests and educators willing to attend special agricultural schools for the purpose of sharing their new knowledge with their communities. These publicized awards and educational opportunities boosted the clergy's social standing and provided modest incentives for overburdened priests to focus on the social activism encouraged by church authorities.²

In spite of these advantages, clerical support for Astra was not uniform, even though it was vital if Astra was to carry its message to the countryside. The Association, in practice, relied heavily on the priesthood because the clergy uniquely straddled the divide between the intellectuals and the peasantry. The rural priest was considered both an intellectual and a rural leader. Since he was typically the most educated person in the village and was also intimately involved in the lives of many parishioners, he had

¹ Astra Central Committee Minutes (*Procese Verbale*) are full of such requests. See *Transilvania, Partea oficială* or *Analele* or the original committee minutes at the National Archives in Sibiu, especially from 1908-1914.

² Amounts generally ranged from 10-50 crowns and were budgeted by the central committee or the local chapter. In many cases before (and even after) these prizes were institutionalized in the 1890s, better-off members of a local chapter voluntarily financed a specific competition.

considerable moral, educational, and even political influence in the community. Astra tried to take advantage of this privileged position and incorporate the village priest into the Association as a means to cultivate the masses.¹ Astra also needed the infrastructure of the organized religions. Without a Romanian national state or other political institution capable of organizing the various isolated communities in Austro-Hungary, the Association had no means of assembling people or conveying its messages to the Romanian population, the overwhelming majority of whom lived in rural communities. Village priests became the spokesmen for the Association at the rural level. The local places of worship and education not only housed Astra's rural meetings and events, as they were the only suitable accommodations available in most Transylvanian villages, but they also became Astra's province-wide communication network within which Romanians who gathered for church services or school learned of the Association and its activities.

Because the support that the village clergy and educators gave to the Association was exceedingly important to the success of Astra's cultural and educational efforts at the local level, rural church representatives were able to undermine the Association's urban leadership by promoting themselves as the true heroes of the national movement. Some priests went so far as to call themselves the apostles of the Romanian people, apostles of Romanianism, or servants at the national altar.² By and large clerics espoused the Association's educational and economic goals and worked to create a sense of national unity, but they also rejected urban materialism and projected a strong moral vision of the Romanian nation with a deep religious base. As representatives of religious

¹ Astrists often used the verb "to cultivate" when speaking about the masses. In Romanian, the verb has several connotations, including working the land, trying to gain the friendship or good will of someone, or looking to assimilate knowledge in different fields. In any case, the use of this word illustrates that whereas intellectuals tried to diversify the Association's goals to suit the needs and interest of Romanian villagers, they always considered themselves the leaders of the national community.

² AMO, III-514/3326-1899.

institutions, many of them never wholly shared the secular outlook of lay intellectuals and continued to uphold the church as an important moral and autonomous national institution. Their campaigns against luxury exemplify this contestation for leadership over the Romanian national community.

In their attempts to identify and resolve some of the root causes of Romanian poverty in their parishes, priests clearly identified extravagant spending and acquisition of luxury goods as problems.¹ In particular rural clergy criticized those who had abandoned traditional peasant dress as engaging in some form of “intercultural breeding” that would lead to a compromised national character.² These concerns were directed at the urban populations who had exchanged traditional Romanian dress for fashionable European attire and were creating social pressures on the poorer classes to spend their meager incomes on synthetic clothing. At the same time priests indicted the urban residents for transgressing national traditions and compromising their own national character, they indicated that the peasants were the real Romanians and that they were the nation’s true leaders.³ The arguments bolstered clerical claims to national authority, for the clergy, like the peasants, had retained the nation’s traditions and preserved the authenticity of Romanian life.

The intellectuals could deny neither the charges against them nor the importance of traditional peasant dress for they had used folk costumes as symbols of the authentic peasant character of the national community but no longer wore them. They managed, however, to avoid confronting their own responsibilities for the sins of luxury because when priests did specify who was to blame for these ills, they almost always identified Romanian women. In their pastoral conferences, rural priests were not likely to single out Romanian women as the only national transgressors. They generally discussed the problem of luxury as a problem of the middle and, to a lesser extent, lower classes in the same way

¹ AMO, III-424-1909.

² AMO, III-514/3326-1899.

³ AMO, III-514/1408-1899.

that they complained about indifference to the church.¹ When priestly works on luxury were published by Astra, however, they often portrayed the problem of luxury as a woman problem. In an article printed in Transilvania for example, B. Baiulescu, the archpriest for the Brasov tract, tried to show the national importance of Romanian women and their clothing. He argued that Romanians had avoided being assimilated with other peoples in Transylvania over the centuries because the women's loyal adherence to their ancestors' religion and traditions safeguarded the essence of the Romanian nationality. He noted thought that many rural women no longer valued national folk costumes and encouraged them to weave their own cloth with warnings about the negative consequences of expensive manufactured clothes for village prosperity and the future of the national community. He did not council urban women to watch their budgets, but he did demand that they renounce luxury goods and wear the national peasant costume for all celebrations. Otherwise, he implied, the security of the Romanian nation could no longer be guaranteed.² Using similar arguments on the importance of maintaining the purity of the national costumes, urban men sidestepped the implications that they too, having shunned traditional peasant dress, had forsaken the national community and placed the burden of national preservation squarely on women's shoulders. In 1894, Pareniu Cosma, a prominent member of the Association, gave a talk in the relatively wealthy town of Saliste on the national duty women had to make their own clothes. He cautioned that if Romanian women from Saliste neglected their weaving, members of nearby communities would be forced to buy clothing from the German merchants in Sibiu. This not only would force people to spend money they don't have, but it would also provide the merchants opportunities to introduce foreign traits to the Romanian community. Only clothing made by Romanian hands,

¹ AMO, III-514-1899, III-126-1903.

² B. Băiulescu, "Femeea română din Transilvania," *Transilvania*, 1895, 2-12.

he argued, would guard against foreign influences and preserve the valued simplicity and elegance of the original costumes.¹

In spite of the fact that urban men successfully averted most implications of their own luxurious living, they still risked challenges to their own authority over the Romanian national movement under Astra, for the issue of folk costumes was more than a concern for the purity of the national community. At heart, the debate was over proper national leadership. Urban men recognized the national importance of the rural priesthood at the local level but they claimed for themselves leadership of the nation. The priests countered that the rural population constituted the real nation, and thus, that they, true to time-honored traditions, were the real leaders. The issue made out of peasant dress was used to prove loyalty to the national community. Urban intellectuals could not serve as national leaders and be married to women who betrayed the nation in their attire. They needed to prove their ties with the national peasant base. As a result, organizers of Astra events began to request that the cultured women (*damele*) wear national costumes to some venues.²

The tensions between the clergy and lay intellectuals expressed in concerns about the disappearance of homemade Romanian folk costumes was possible because Astra's elite had helped make peasant dress a symbol of the pure Romanian nation. Romanian intellectuals who incorporated rural leaders into Astra at the end of the nineteenth century in an attempt to expand the Association's influence over the countryside and bring enlightenment to the villages could not effectively control the expansion. With the additional rural leadership and attention to village concerns, the nation took on a peasant character that opposed the urban lifestyles of Romanian intellectuals. This allowed rural leaders engaged in Astra's nation-building campaign to question the importance of the urban elite and establish a

¹ Partenie Cosma, "Saliste Despartamint" *Transilvania*, 1894, 127-30.

² "Asociațiunea la Sibiu," *Tribuna*, 27 May/9 June 1901, 390; ANS 275-1911. When referring to peasant women, Romanian authors generally used the word *țărance*. *Doamna* sau *damele* referred to female residents of towns and cities. Occasionally the wives of priests were also called *dame*.

broader community of which they were potentially leading members and in which their interests were addressed.¹

The issue made out of peasant dress demonstrates that nation building is a contentious process out of which emerges not a homogeneous national community but a modern, factious, heterogeneous one. Elites in Transylvania led the national movement but they did not manipulate the construction of the nation at will because they had to represent the national community in ways in which villagers could identify. The Romanian national images in Transylvanian were not built from scratch and their construction was never under any one group's control. They were also not homogeneous. The concept of the national self was intrinsically shifting with characteristics used to describe the nation dependent on the concept's situated use. The intellectuals envisioned the future of the nation vested in an enlightened community of scholars. To the peasants, however, they presented the authentic nation as a community of literate, self-sufficient farmers. The nation was understood to be a coherent national community but since it could be described in two distinct ways, nationalists vying for leadership over the nation could both claim the nation was unified while at the same time contesting and shaping its form. In this case nation building should be seen as a recurrent activity, renewed periodically according to the needs of its various members. This conclusion is not unique to the Romanian historical experience in Transylvania. Rather it reflects the difficulties involved in any effort to build a unified national community out of a heterogeneous collection of groups and individuals.

¹ For a alternative view of how this happened in Poland, see Keely Stauter-Halsted, "Patriotic Celebrations in Austrian Poland: The Kosciuszko Centennial and the Formation of Peasant Nationalism," *Austrian History Yearbook XXV* (1994): 79-95; and *idem* "Popular Culture and the Public Sphere," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, 14-17 November, 1996.