

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: MYTH, IDENTITY AND CONFLICT: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
ROMANIAN AND SERBIAN TEXTBOOKS

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The study compares two cases of ethnically diverse societies sharing a substantial set of characteristics but where inter-group relations developed in two opposite directions. In Serbia the entire decade of the 1990s was witness to widespread violence, first in the wars of Yugoslav secession (1991-1996) and later in the conflict over the status of the Kosovo region (1998-1999). In Romania, despite one eruption of interethnic violence in March 1990, there have been no further clashes between Romanians and Hungarians, even if a latent suspicion continued to be verbally manifested between these two communities. By comparing these cases, the possibility opens to verify the impact of taught history on the representations of self and others and, from this premise, to examine its influence on the potential for peaceful or conflictual ethnic relations.

The questions asked are: Is myth, as identified in secondary literature in other areas (literature, media, and political discourse) present in the history textbooks of Romania and Serbia? If myths are to be found in history schoolbooks, are there differences in the ways these myths define the in-group and the relationship with the

Other between a country that experienced interethnic conflict and a country that did not?

The working hypothesis based upon the existing literature is simple: in multiethnic societies, history textbooks reflect the elite's, especially state elite's, interpretation of the past and outline the acceptable/ desirable representations of the dominant ethnic group and of the diverse Others with whom this group interacts. If the history and the self image of the dominant group are presented in a manner that highlights the differences and the uneven distribution of power between the dominant and the minority ethnic group(s), the possibility of domestic tensions increases and, if other conditions are present, there is even a rise in violent civil war along ethnic lines.

The study finds that myths are present in the post-communist history textbooks of Romania and Serbia, both in their visual content and in their text. Despite expectations to the contrary, however, the differences in the types of myth used in a conflict case (Serbia) and in a non-conflict case (Romania) are small, thus disputing the importance awarded to history education in preventing or alleviating conflicts.

MYTH, IDENTITY AND CONFLICT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
ROMANIAN AND SERBIAN TEXTBOOKS

By

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To my parents and grandparents
for their inspiration and support

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Writing is only in appearance a solitary pursuit. I argue in this dissertation about the embeddedness of political and intellectual actors into a larger cultural framework that partly conditions their choices. The more valid is the above statement for me: not only am I caught in the networks shaping my cultural milieu, but I am also embedded in the far more important networks of gratitude. I would not have finished this large and challenging project without the amazing support of numerous persons and institutions, so many that I feel terrified I might omit somebody. Apologies in advance, if such would be the case!

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Introduction

Somewhere in a Transylvanian village. Two men, a Romanian and a Hungarian, meet and greet. They part when, suddenly, the Romanian seems to have forgotten something, runs back and slaps the Hungarian in the face. – Ioane, what happened? What have I done to you? – Gyuri, this one is for Michael the Brave! It is *you* who killed him. – Michael the Brave? But he died 400 years ago! – Perhaps so, but I just found out about it today!

History as weapon, disarming history, wounds of memory – titles of academic works, yes, but also signals of the perception of history as potentially dangerous. History can make you and break you, at an individual level and even at state level. Of course, it is not history itself, in the sense of humanity's accumulated past, which brings man to the brink of peril; it is the collective memory of an event that may be interpreted and actualized in order to have an effect on present-day politics. This dissertation is a story about how history and politics became entangled in two countries of Southeastern Europe, Romania and Serbia.

The novelty of the present engagement with issues of identity, history and conflict is in its placement at the confluence of several strands of literature that have rarely met before in this combination: education, and in particular history education, myth, identity and conflict. This is not to say that they have never crossed lines before, but that they did so mostly in pairs: myth and identity; education and post-conflict reconstruction; identity and conflict. The attempt of this research is to integrate these various approaches, liberate them from a normative point of view, and provide a more complex and synthetic view over the role of textbooks in supporting or alleviating tensions that might develop into violence. The present study wants to question the established assumption of the power of

textbooks to alter conflict potentials, reflected in the predilection for educational reforms, including that of history textbooks, in areas recovering from domestic confrontations.

The comparison between these two cases seeks to rehabilitate the notion of myth which is, in the eyes of this author, a useful concept to capture the nuances of identity in flux without emptying it of meaning. In these pages political myth is understood to be a narrative about the past of a community, composed of highly selected (historically accurate or not) events, which has the capacity to mobilize emotions and generate or modify attitudes among the members of that community. Myth contributes to our understanding of the link between identity and conflict as it is a shaper of norms, and an expression of society's definition of right or wrong. Myths contribute to the diffusion of those rules that govern social behavior in line with a logic of appropriateness. The notion of myth has not been previously used in the analysis of textbooks, which has tended to be mostly descriptive and prescriptive. Therefore this research supports the idea of a pervasive presence of the myth even in those media with high claim to scientific status, school books.

The other contribution of this dissertation is in its empirical breadth. In addition to a comprehensive review of existing studies in the theoretical areas outlined above, the research includes a systematic, theoretically guided, account of the presence of myth in Romanian and Serbian history textbooks after 1991. While the comparison keeps the two cases in focus it also allows for cross-references to other situations where myth, identity and conflict come in contact. By drawing these comparisons, the Balkan region stands to gain a normalized treatment, on par with that reserved for other parts of the continent. The time has come to recouple the Balkans history, culture and politics with the larger European context.

Finally, methodologically the project brings into focus visual content analysis, a stepchild of the linguistic turn that brought about the primacy of text over image. In seeking out if and how political myths are reflected in the illustrations on the covers of history textbooks, the present research looks to enrich the depiction of national grand narratives by identifying their graphic cues and in so doing to increase the trustworthiness of its results.

The study opens with a presentation of the importance of education and textbooks when dealing with issues of conflict, then proceeds with a closer investigation of the theoretical underpinnings of identity, particularly ethnic identity, seen in its relationship with conflict on one hand and with collective memory, history and myth on the other. After pausing for an in-depth treatment of the definition, type and functions of the political myth, the text takes the reader through an overview of several politically relevant Serbian and Romanian myths, pointing out their points of intersection and of divergence. These myths are then examined both in their visual representation on the textbook covers and in their textual expression within the pages of 18 textbooks published during the 1990s and 2000s in both countries. The conclusion revisits the research question and offers a synthesis of the results of the project, while evaluating the possibilities for and direction of change in the representation of the self and Other in history textbooks in the Balkans and pointing out avenues of further investigation.

This is not a work of history, but its understanding relies upon some familiarity with historical events. To facilitate the placement of a given character or occurrence in its historical sequence the appendix includes a selective chronology of events for Romania and Serbia.

Research Question

Education has been treated as a tool in conflict resolution with millions being poured into reform programs such as the one supported by the World Bank, many of which included the creation of a new history curriculum and redesigned history textbooks. If education is a conflict resolution instrument, may it not then also be a tool in the production of conflict? The mechanisms that have the potential to bring people together and sow the seeds of values such as freedom, tolerance and cooperation may also be the same paths followed by states or political leaders who seek to benefit from inter-ethnic tensions, societal violence and discriminatory practices. If one admits that education can also be part of the problem, then reforming education, identifying the trouble areas, can be part of an initiative not only to correct the disastrous effects of conflicts but also to preempt them.

What the present paper proposes is to examine the political use of history (Karlsson and Zander, 2004) as it is reflected in the history textbooks of two Balkan countries, Romania and Serbia, and to seek what type of historical interpretation is promoted by the state through the textbook. The image of the self and the relationship proposed between the self and the various others can also be captured by analyzing textbooks, leading to the drawing of a mental map of the desired vision of the state, its placement in relationship to neighbors and its moral values. In addition, the mental map emerging from this analysis can then be used to evaluate the potential for tensions and conflicts between or among the various ethnic groups that compose the societies under discussion.

The working hypothesis based upon the existing literature is simple: in multiethnic societies, history textbooks reflect the elite's, especially state elite's, interpretation of the past and outline the acceptable/ desirable representations of the dominant ethnic group and of the diverse Others with whom this group interacts. If the history and the self image of the dominant group are presented in a manner that highlights the differences and the uneven distribution of power between the dominant and the minority ethnic group(s), the possibility of domestic tensions increases and, if other conditions are present, there is even a rise in violent civil war along ethnic lines.

Ethnic identity is shaped in part by its relationship to the collective past, as it is remembered. Membership in the ethnic group is transmitted, modified and contested by the socialization process and its numerous channels. Studying textbooks and analyzing how they communicate the definition of the group which underlies ethnic identity, places the level of analysis of this research on the elite plane. The lifecycle of a textbook is directly under the control of various elites: both academic/scientific elites (professional historians) and political elites collaborating in setting the standards, the requirements and the checks through which the textbooks must go or follow in order to reach their target population, the students. The reception of the textbook in the classroom, the way it is actually employed and interpreted by both teacher and pupils, is outside the realm of investigation here. This does not mean that the collective memory summed up between the covers of the textbooks is simply transmitted to a passive public. The process of collective remembering is a dynamic and continuous negotiation between the elite and the public, allowing for an “alternative way of understanding experience” (Radstone, 2000: 18). Nevertheless,

that section of the social remembering process studied here, the history textbook, lends itself more easily to an “invention of tradition” approach. While knowing all too well that “the past is highly resistant to efforts to make it over” (Schudson, 1989: 105), one must admit that education in general, and textbooks in particular, fall under the presentist approach to social remembering where the transmission of the past is largely from top down¹.

In graphic form the hypothesis of the present work would look like this:

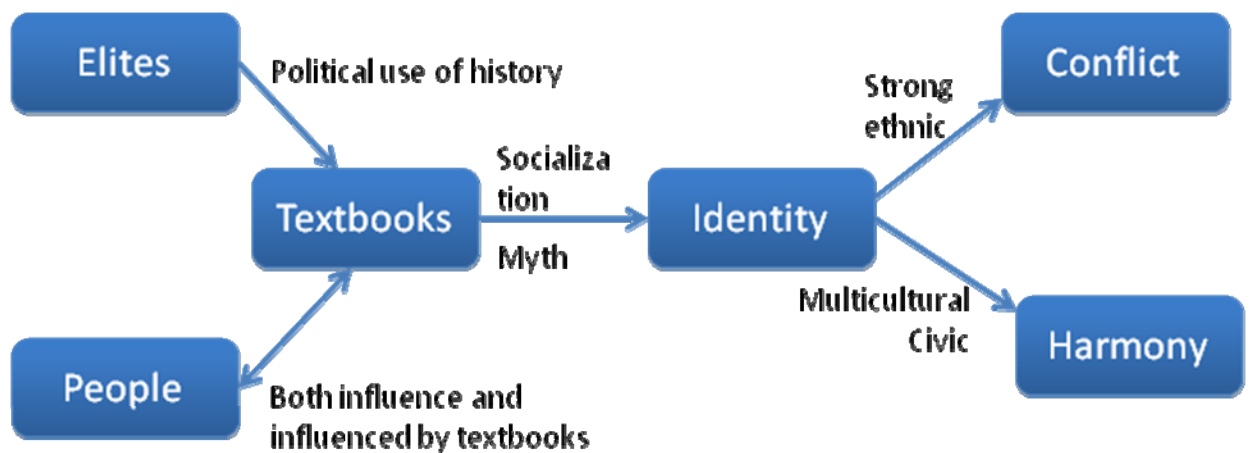


Figure 1: graphic hypothesis

One of the basic assumptions of this work is that identity is important for understanding politics. Political action, including conflict and, implicitly, conflict resolution, is partly influenced by identity. In other words, individuals and groups mobilize because of who they are, not just because there is a rational interest in so doing. Ethnic identity in particular seems to have a particularly salient position with regards to the potential for conflict and its deterioration into violence.

¹ Certainly, even elite actors are influenced by the larger culture in which they are embedded. Professional historians are the product of a system of education that inculcated them with a system of values and preferences which they tend to reproduce in their turn. Political actors may use the past instrumentally for immediate benefits but may equally be caught in a hegemonic narrative that governs their preferences. There is no simple uni-directional transmission of collective memory.

The other assumption here is that collective identities, sometimes codified in symbolic narratives about the group's common past (myths), are transmitted by state elites via textbooks. Since textbooks are a reflection of the society from which they emerge, its values and orientations, they are also tools for the political use of history that may lead either to increasing or decreasing social tensions between ethnic groups in plural societies. Textbooks affect ethnic conflict indirectly, by shaping identities to develop in either a civic or a strong ethnic direction, thus leading to more harmonious or more intolerant interethnic relations.

The study compares two cases of ethnically diverse societies sharing a substantial set of characteristics but where inter-group relations developed in two opposite directions. In Serbia the entire decade of the 1990s was witness to widespread violence, first in the wars of Yugoslav secession (1991-1996) and later in the conflict over the status of the Kosovo region (1998-1999). In Romania, despite one eruption of interethnic violence in March 1990, there have been no further clashes between Romanians and Hungarians, even if a latent suspicion continued to be verbally manifested between these two communities. By comparing these cases, the possibility opens to verify the impact of taught history on the representations of self and others and, from this premise, to examine its influence on the potential for peaceful or conflictual ethnic relations.

The questions asked are: Is myth, as identified in secondary literature in other areas (literature, media, and political discourse) present in the history textbooks of Romania and Serbia? If myths are to be found in history schoolbooks, are there differences in the ways these myths define the in-group and the relationship with the

Other between a country that experienced interethnic conflict and a country that did not?

Methods of textbook analysis

The sociological imagination [...] in considerable part consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and of its components. It is this imagination, of course, that sets off the social scientist from the mere technician. There is an unexpected quality about it, perhaps because its essence is the combination of ideas that no one expected were combinable [...] There is a playfulness of mind behind such combining as well as a truly fierce drive to make sense of the world, which the technician as such usually lacks. C. Wright Mills (1959, pp. 211-212)

The present paper builds on the ideas presented above and investigates the link between the representation of the self and of the Other on one hand, and the potential for radicalization and conflict on the other. The two cases studied are Romania and Serbia, both multi-ethnic Balkan societies emerging from a long period of undemocratic rule, and both with a nation-building process developing almost simultaneously. But they took different paths in dealing with the problem of ethnic diversity.

The question asked is not whether the self image or the image of the Other in each of the two countries *caused* a conflict, but rather whether the history textbook is part of the preconditions of radicalization that existed in the same proportion in both places and whether, on the basis of other factors (political organization, degree of ethnic cohesion, external support etc.), conflict was avoided or not. At the same time we can be alert to the changes occurring in these representations over time, as political regimes and interests waxed and waned.

In terms of research design, the project is structured as a two most similar cases comparison, following Mills's method of difference: considering most of the

fundamental features of the two countries studied are relatively similar, the self-image and the image of the Other is hypothesized to vary and thus, to be part of the complex mechanism that lies behind the explosion of violence in Serbia and the avoidance of open conflict in Romania. Certainly, the inclusion of Romania in the Balkan category may appear problematic, not in the least to the Romanians themselves, who have raised the question “to be or not to be Balkan” in their quest for self-definition (Gallagher, 1997), without clearly finding an answer. The ambiguity of Romania’s placement in the region is also evident in the treatment the Balkans has received in the academia. The focus fell on the Yugoslav case in its numerous permutations over time, and less often or less thoroughly on Albania, Bulgaria or Romania².

Nevertheless, it is argued that Serbia and Romania can be located together in the same region.

Romania and Serbia are similar due to their geographical proximity and analogous historical experience, a common social development and a related cultural value system. The area the two states share has several obvious common features: “a peasant nature, peripheral political economic position to a series of empires, the conflicting ethnic diversity of its populations, and, since World War II, the commonality of its socialist institutions” (Halpern, 1983: 379). One may add that the developments in the post-communist period have continued to follow a common curve, with a transitional period marked by economic, social and political unrest and dissatisfaction, and, in the case of Serbia, a series of ravaging wars that destabilized

² Needless to say, there are exceptions to this trend. There have been historians who adopted a more inclusive approach to the Balkans, like Mazower (2000), Hupchick (2002) or Lampe (2006).

the state³. After a rougher initial period both states entered a period of normalization of politics and, at a different pace, a consolidation of their political and economical systems.

As Przeworski and Teune (1970) originally discussed, this type of design is not without its flaws: an examination of shared characteristics in several areas may not be able to shed light on which differences are relevant for explanations in other areas (for example, do similar rural traditions and religious backgrounds explain the variation in the intensity of ethnic conflict between Romania and Serbia?). The way out of this conundrum is to rely upon the vast amount of research that has already investigated several of the “difference” variables and established some causal relationships between such factors as, for example, access to weapons, size of irredentist group, amount of persecution, suppression of rights, discrimination against an ethnic group, economic inequality, and a culture of masculine belligerence. The space left unexplained by these variables is the area where this research situates itself. It aims to complement the existing body of work on causes of ethnic conflict in general and as it applied to Southeastern Europe by closer examination the influence of history textbooks in transmitting through a set of myths an intolerant version of national identity.

The advantages of making comparisons have been outlined convincingly by Lichbach and Zuckerman (1997, 4-5): comparative politics casts a wide net around political realities, collects and interprets this diverse data with the ambition of making more general statements about the workings of the social world. These statements

³ Rupnik contrasts the paths to democracy in Central Europe and the Balkans, saying that the second suffered a “derailed transition” (2000: 15). In his example, the Balkan region includes both Romania and former Yugoslavia, so the two cases remain comparable.

may contribute knowledge to the ontological and epistemological questions that have always preoccupied thinkers focusing on man as a social being.

That this project hopes to draw from its interdisciplinarity is another advantage. By the very nature of its object of investigation and its theoretical purpose, this research reaches across several disciplines: political science, history, anthropology, pedagogy and didactics. The benefits of using several research traditions are numerous, the more obvious of which may be a validity check. Each discipline whose claims are backed up by the existence of similar conclusions outside its framework has a stronger position when asserting the generalizability of its theoretical statements (Sherif and Sherif, 1969: 5). The implicit gain obtained by engaging in interdisciplinary research is a boost in creativity: letting innovation loose and escaping the trappings of one's own training in a discipline (the very word sends us to Foucault and the image of ball-and-chain prisons). Imaginative hypotheses and solutions, better adaptation to the object of study that in many cases cannot be easily isolated in the space of one research tradition, flexibility, improved communication across disciplinary borders and therefore better flow of ideas, better validity and generalizability, and overall a contribution to the ideal of academic freedom are all reasons to, in the words of Nissani (1997), "cheer for interdisciplinarity".

Textbook research has developed into a field of investigation crossing several disciplines, reflecting its complex character its deep setting into a variety of cultural and political contexts. This is why the choice of looking at textbooks became so appealing: it was an easily accessible reflection of the state (and to some extent, society) projected image of the self and of the Other. To understand it or unpack it,

interdisciplinary approaches were most recommended. Also, the data for the two cases was available for at least two decades, so change in values and representations of self and Other could be traced over time.

The history textbooks examined cover a fifteen year period, ca. 1991 – 2006, and focus on national history for young pupils because the underlying stories and messages are easier to detect. The state provides a simple, easy to understand and effective way to communicate knowledge about the past at the same time as it attempts to turn the young pupils into model citizens. The structure of the primary education in Romania is such that children begin to study history in the 4th grade of the first circle in their primary education (at about ten years of age) and continue to have at least one history lesson per week throughout their pre-tertiary schooling. The teaching of history is not integrated, even though plans exist for making it more so, meaning that different school years are reserved for world history and national history, respectively. The focus of this research will be on those textbooks dealing with the national past at the compulsory primary education levels, meaning history textbooks for grades 4 and 8. Eight textbooks (four for the 4th grade and four for the 8th) will be analyzed in detail, and some three others will be included for occasional comparison. The selection criterion is popularity: these textbooks appear at the top of discussion forums for history teachers and have been selected as representative for the Romanian education by the Georg Eckiert Institute library, the largest collection of textbooks in Europe. However, no statistical information about the actual number of copies sold per year has been available from the Romanian Ministry of Education.

In Serbia, the first contact with history as a school subject takes place in the 5th grade of the compulsory primary education, and continues with at least one lesson per week until the 8th grade, with the possibility of taking a humanist specialization (including history) at the high school level. In principle, history teaching should be integrated, with national, regional and world history being taught side by side; in practice national history dominates undoubtedly the content of the schooltexts. With the exception of the 5th grade book, covering pre-history and antiquity, where there is no national focus, all the other levels draw about 70% of their content from the national past. Since this research is interested in the national aspect of history teaching, all chapters pertaining to national events are analyzed in history textbooks for the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Ten history textbooks are under scrutiny for the Serbian case (four textbooks for the 6th grade, two for the 7th and four for the 8th grade). As Serbia has not liberalized its textbook market, each grade per year has only one textbook, for whose printing and distribution the Publishing House of Textbooks and Other School Materials is solely responsible. The selection criterion here is chronological: in order to capture change over time, a minimum of one textbook from the Milosevic era and one textbook published after 2000 were included for comparison.

The post-communist period is divided into two main sections. In Romania, the distinctive borderline can be drawn in the year 1999. This year is not a major threshold politically, as it was not an election year, nor economically, but for the evolution of the textbook it certainly marked a watershed. In 1999 the government decided to liberalize the textbook market and to introduce free competition for the

publication of textbooks in all subjects. This opened the door for the major education reform in the direction suggested by European standards, thus beginning a new chapter in the relationship between the state and the school system. Because of the traditional importance awarded to this relationship, it can be seen as symptomatic of the entire political construction, thus becoming the harbinger of change in other power relations active in Romanian society.

In Serbia, the main threshold is marked by the power change in Belgrade following the demise of Slobodan Milosevic and the victory of the Democratic Opposition in the year 2000. During the Milosevic regime, the textbook policy was more in the continuation of, rather than in contrast to, the Yugoslav period. Certainly, ideological references to the giants of leftist thought were cut out, but overall the attitude towards the Yugoslav past or towards the Serbian identity reflected an ambiguous relationship with nostalgia and positive views of the past, but also included a pro-Serbia orientation when explaining the development of the historical Balkans. After Milosevic's departure from power, the split within Serbian history writing became more obvious with one side modernizing the textbooks with/employing a pro-European predisposition, suggesting a moderation of the nationalist message while the other side of traditionalist historians held on to or even became more radicalized in their support of the exclusivist Serbian vision of the past. This translated into a new law on education in 2003 and a number of additional reforms afterwards.

Even if the main focus of the thesis is on the post-communist period, it is very difficult to isolate and explain the evolution of the interpretation of history and the

different associations made with the self image and the image of the Other without some reference to the period before 1990. Therefore the communist historiography will be briefly introduced and used as an item of comparison throughout the paper.

From a philosophical point of view, the thesis attempts to use the tools of hermeneutics to interpret the textbooks in relationship to their political context. This implies leaning towards the “post-positivist” trend in social sciences, according to which the classical criteria of evaluation (like “validity”, “reliability” etc.) are not the scales against which the interpretive analysis should be measured. What is more, this paper does not seek a causal relationship between the objects of the study.

The interpretive method is interested in the complexity of human behavior, in discovering, understanding, and proposing a possible explanation for the world of meanings that human societies have built throughout time. At the same time, this method recognizes and accepts that these meanings are temporary, flexible, inconsistent, ambiguous, and that they have a life of their own, feeding into their cultural, social, and economic context.

Another feature of interpretive research *gestalt*, to use Schwartz-Shea’s (2004) expression, is its special attention to the form of data. Contrary to the quantitative or positivist approaches in political science, the interpretive approach is not interested in converting the data into numbers, but rather it wants to extract the meaning as it is, couched in its original form of expression. This meaning is taken primarily from word data, but also from sources such as images, sounds, markers of geographic landscape, and architectural monuments. Related to this interest, interpretive researchers display a serious amount of skepticism towards the possibility of universal theories and all-

inclusive explanations, and focus instead on the usefulness of specificity and of bounded (as opposed to universal) knowledge.

This is another reason why interpretive research should be judged according to a different set of criteria than those of quantitative projects. Expressed in simple terms this means that one should use the right yardstick for the right object, and not just borrow yardsticks or terminology (like validity, or generalizability) from the positivist tradition. When compared with the dominant, positivist, epistemic community in social sciences today, “the problem of quality in qualitative studies deserves attention on its *own* terms, not just as a justification device” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 277, emphasis in original). The interpretive criteria and their accompanying verification techniques vary tremendously from author to author and so far there has not emerged a consistent set of universally accepted quality criteria for qualitative research equivalent to those of its quantitative counterpart. In practice, there has been more convergence and agreement around the criteria determining good qualitative data collection (whose imperfections were to some extent the reason why positivist methods became so popular in political science) than for measurement of good data analysis. This is the case especially because interpretive data analyses imply and rely to a large measure on subjectivity on the part of the researcher(s), who often, especially when dealing with texts, draw inspiration from outside the social sciences, and tread upon the territory of linguists, literary theorists and semioticians.

There are four criteria that emerge from the practice of interpretive social scientists as the most used and thus most generally accepted: thick description, trustworthiness, reflexivity and triangulation (Schwartz-Shea, 2004: 23-24). Without

suggesting to the critical reader that the present work should be judged exclusively by these measures, these criteria have been constantly held in focus when proceeding with the data collection and interpretation required for this project.

Geertz coined the expression “thick description” in his ethnographic study of 1973, but the phrase has been adopted by others first in anthropology and sociology and increasingly in political science. In the present context, “thick description” is used when describing the source material (the textbooks) in detail, including extensive quotations that allow all the nuances to emerge unbiased by the researcher’s own view.

Trustworthiness is a criterion delineated by Lincoln and Guba in a special chapter of their 1985 *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Even if it is loosely defined, it certainly recalls the idea of validity and reliability from quantitative research, but here trustworthiness is placed into the interpretive framework, with a focus on human practices and relative instead of absolute truth. Thick description is of help when trustworthiness is put into question: serving a well documented portion of the data to one’s readers can allow them to draw their own conclusions and thus verify the statements made by the author. To some extent trustworthiness is connected to the expectation of being ‘audited’ by other scholars - one must map every step in the selection and analysis of data, so that the reader can retrace the procedures and check for errors.

Reflexivity accepts the author’s subjectivity as opposed to the objectivity claim of positivist social sciences. It accepts the fact that data is always filtered through the particular mind of a particular person, conditioned not only by her own

place in geography and history but also by her personal upbringing, interests and (unconscious) biases. Since subjectivity is unavoidable, reflexivity is a challenge for transparency and for awareness of the researcher's mental processes. It is an incitement to reflect on the role of the scholar as creator of new knowledge and the responsibility carried by this task. Reflexivity also has a built-in relationship to the auditing process: engaging oneself critically in one's own work may prevent errors from insinuating themselves, errors to be discovered by external examination. The writer, in this case, feels it is important, for example, to be open about her own ethnic (Romanian) and intellectual (critical cosmopolitan) background that place her in that delicate position of the insider/ outsider: both being a part of the group and looking at it from a distance. Being aware of subjectivity gives one the chance to see both sides of the study with the same academic eye. At the same time, one is also aware of one's own normative position, namely that nationalism and intolerance are negative aspects in any contemporary European society, and that an inclusive and tolerant telling of the past is to be preferred to the exclusive and nation-focused one. This position is to be defended in the name of values such as equality, respect, openness and acceptance. Since all discourse about the past is by nature subjective and morally biased, it is preferable to have such a presentation of history that is in agreement with the above values rather than a history grounded in expounding their opposite. However, constant efforts have been made to avoid a normative standpoint obstructing the choice and reflection on the textbooks. An attempt has been made to see the texts as they were, and a steadfast effort has been made not to look exclusively for confirmatory evidence for the working hypothesis.

Finally, triangulation means the use of multiple sources, methods and researchers as a check against reductionism and unwarranted selection. The diversity of data and approaches to it, paint a more complex and perhaps a more realistic picture and invites the scholar to further investigate those inconsistent, ill-fitting aspects that emerge from comparisons. This provides the opportunity for a richer social investigation. The present research uses textbooks as its primary data source, but complements it with interviews whenever possible, and with secondary information collected both from scholarly texts and from policy analyses. The secondary literature also allows for a plurality of researchers' voices, placing this study in the context of other people's work either with textbooks elsewhere or with the relationship history-nationalism-conflict in the Balkans.

Methodologically, the paper is based on an interpretive analysis of the texts included in the manuals, as well as an interpretation of the visual composition and the graphic elements that accompany the texts. The visual elements will be dealt with in their own right as well, in an introductory analysis of textbook covers. In order to make it clearer, the analysis will distinguish between two general categories of stories: those which focus on the self-image of the Romanians/ Serbs and those that describe the groups whom Romanians/ Serbs perceived as "significant others". Adopting a qualitative research method is also in line with the UNESCO handbook that suggests guidelines for textbook analysis aiming to "reveal underlying assumptions" (Pingel, 1999: 45). The same source is the inspiration for structuring the analysis around such issues as representation of group identity; continuity, legitimacy and exclusion; and history's protagonists (24-27).

Content analysis focuses on information such as “representations not of physical events but of texts, images and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted and acted on for their meanings” (Krippendorff, 2004: xiii) and as such is based on the implicit connection between ‘what’ is expressed and ‘who’ is expressing it: texts are studied in order to understand people or the institutions that people as a group/ society form. According to theorists like Bourdieu and Habermas, language seems to carry symbolic power, as it is the means of expression of social ideas and ideals. The pioneer works of content analysis as we have seen it develop in the social sciences have been authored by Berelson and Lazarsfeld (1948). In the beginning, the definition of content analysis was described as a “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952: 18). This research departs from the above characterization on most accounts: it is not quantitative, as it does not use frequency tables, which count the occurrences of words or phrases. It renounces claims to objectivity in a universal sense, replacing them with transparency and reflexivity as measures to check for authorial biases. Finally it does not accept that the content is attached to the form of the communication as an independent thing-in-itself. On the contrary, it is argued here that the meaning of content, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. What has the new understanding of content analysis metamorphosed into? In its designation here, content analysis is a technique of interpretation of text and visual messages that allows for the description of the message as it is placed in the context of its use. As a technique, content analysis must be reliable, valid and,

inasmuch as it is permitted by subjective factors, replicable. These criteria will be discussed in depth below.

Traditional textbook analysis has focused, both at the level of the structure and content (text and images) on identifying the prejudices and stereotypes of one country's neighbors or minority groups and on correcting this biased image of the Other. Moreover, textbooks have been analyzed as carriers of social norms and as a means of interpreting history, especially in its connection with politics. When comparing the history textbooks of two or more different countries, these differences in perceptions may at times come in opposition. The risk is to transfer one country's norms and version of the past to another, foreign, context. Each country has developed a shared sense of what is acceptable and what is not, what is positive and negative, in short, each national textbook tradition developed its own underlying assumptions, "unconscious pre-suppositions," "regarded as absolute and as it were 'natural'." Textbook research has endeavored also to bring these underlying perceptions into the open and to expose the differences, the conflicts even, between various national canons of teaching history. As Fritzsche notes, "[...] textbook research concentrates its criticism on those 'underlying assumptions' which are based on ignorance, ethnocentric or nationalistic perspectives or a repression of the past. Like prejudices and negative images, these forms of narrow-minded 'underlying assumptions' also have their function and are deeply rooted in our consciousness. They can only be altered very slowly – probably only as a result of new experiences. Even if revealing them does not render them totally ineffective, it does mean that their influence will be easier to predict." (Fritzsche, 1990: 58)

Besides the traditional content analysis, the present research project uses the idea of plurality of approaches in its methodology. This is reflected in the desire to complement the textual focus with visual elements. The enterprise of analyzing the visual content of the textbooks in its entirety is outside the ambitions of this work. Instead, the focus lies on the images chosen as illustrations for the textbook covers, which can be seen as concentrated versions of their content, or even more telling, as a selection of the most relevant personalities and episodes from the story told inside the book itself.

There is an increase in the use of images in history textbooks – the more modern the text, the more lavishly designed and decorated, the more numerous and colorful the drawings, paintings, maps, charts and tables it includes⁴. This attraction of the visual has not been paralleled with an increase in the analysis of visual elements in the social sciences, which are apparently still living the consequences of the “linguistic turn” of the 1960s and 70s when literature and the written word took precedence over other modalities of representation and communication. Wittgenstein and later Derrida, Baudrillard and Foucault challenged the essentialist/positivist traditionalism, seeing language as constitutive of the social.

There is room for the argument that, while the postmodern assumptions are still held to be accurate, language is not the only means of explaining and communicating reality, nor is this reality entirely understood as text, where meaning follows the rules of a social grammar. Language should be complemented by visual or even musical elements in order to approximate more closely to the complex nature

⁴ See for example the conference *Illustrations in Textbooks* organized by the International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Schoolbooks in 2008. Bayerisches Schulmuseum Ichenhausen, 25.09.–27.09.2008

of the social world. Language is only a part of the culture in which it is embedded together with material and cognitive factors. Particularly important for this project is that myth can be expressed both in language and in image. If, with Barthes, we accept myth to be “a system of communication, a message” (Barthes, 1957: 182), then images can carry myths and can be decoded by viewers according to the three meanings of the image: the informative content, the intended symbolic content (“le sens obvie”) and lastly the content situated at the level of intuition, that comes across unnoticed by the conscious (“le sens obtus”) (Barthes, 1982: 45).

Roland Barthes has been actively engaged with the semiotics of the image, being a pioneer in bringing to the surface the specific importance of visual elements in communication. Especially in cases where images are set into texts, either by captioning or by contiguous presentation in the same space (on a page for example), the message of text-image conglomerate contains several layers of meaning, coded differently. In order to decypher these messages readers/ viewers must make use of their prior knowledge, both general (the ability to read) and particular (based on cultural clues). Using the terminology of semiotics, the denotational and the connotational parts of the message are simultaneously “understood” by the brain. If we separate the text from the image, focusing on the latter, then the distinction between the signifier and the signified becomes relevant, where signifier could be defined as a symbol that gives meaning to the unspoken concept, the signified⁵ (Barthes, 1967: 33). If we apply this conceptual distinction to one textbook cover, the

⁵ Barthes uses this distinction in several circumstances, most famously in his analysis of commercials. In one of his examples, the combination of red tomatoes, green pepper and the packaging of pasta in red, white and green are all signifiers of the abstract idea, or signified, of Italianness (Barthes, 1967: 33-34).

image of a white horse at the city gates is a signifier for the victorious entry of a successful ruler into his city (as one Romanian textbook depicts Michael the Brave).

Visual features are on a par with the written or spoken word as elements of our knowledge and therefore can be interpreted as representing or even granting power to those who use them. Images have a dual effect as they both represent a thing, person or event, and they enact or perform it. According to Bolt, (2004), we recognize the image as being a symbol, an “instead of” the actual object (the portrait of a king stands in for the actual living person in flesh and blood) but it is also the object or the person itself (the king is present in the classroom where his portrait hangs). This capacity of enacting or performing reality is enabled by the ease with which humans understand images. Learning the language is a more complicated process than learning to decode images – however, both actions are steeped in a cultural baggage of references and meanings⁶. In the case of textbooks, text and image are placed in a relation of perceived relatedness, but the exact nature of this link rests with the reader: “a learner must possess the knowledge needed to extract from an illustration that which was intended by the illustrator” (Levin and Mayer, 1993: 108). The exact intentionality of the graphics designer can only be surmised however, this leaving open the possibility for mis- or at least pluri-interpretations, depending on who is doing the reading. This is the richness of the image, with its three layers of informative, symbolic and intuitional content. To make matters even more complex, all images are polysemic, hosting a multiplicity of possible meanings. This leads to a fear of psychological dissonance and to the constant attempt to “fix”

⁶ This is a caveat for the idea that images can be read across cultures more easily than words. Each culture provides its own specific understanding of what an image means based on its own values and references.

the meaning of the image. One of the techniques used in limiting the possible interpretations is to attach a linguistic message to the visual one (Barthes, 1967: 39). When image is left to speak for itself, as in the case of the analysis of textbook covers, the limits of polysemy are only those in the mind of the reader.

Heck and Schlag (2008) distinguish three separate effects of images: narrative, integrative and legitimizing. Briefly, the narrative effect refers to the capacity of images to narrate an event by presenting the main actors, their action and their physical context – in a performative sense, the image “appears to be the event and therefore makes it knowledgeable to the viewer” (8)⁷. The integrative effect is especially pertinent to symbols and other abstract images that can bring together disparate values and meanings: the symbol of a red cross combined with the symbol of a white flag and placed in the historical context of the Serbian revolt against Ottoman rule integrates the ideas of Christianity (cross), morality (white flag) and sacrifice (color red) that motivate the Serbian protesters. Finally, the legitimizing effect denotes the power of the image to transmit knowledge loaded with underlying values. The presence of an image makes it real, and thus important. Seen from a collective memory perspective inclusion of an image makes it part of the historical canon, one of the building blocks of the national past, worthy of remembrance, whereas excluding other images may imply their lack of importance or lack of legitimacy. For example, the image of Roman artifacts found on the territory of

⁷ Our capacity to understand the story told by the image is severely limited by the amount of background information we have about the context in which the event is situated. Isolated from its cultural and historical references the event is incomprehensible. It is simply a representation of an unknown person in an unknown place: the image of Michael the Brave entering Alba Iulia as a victorious prince of all Romanians is reduced for example to the image of a man riding a horse into a fortified structure while surrounded by other men on foot carrying weapons.

contemporary Romania on the cover of a textbook gives substance and therefore legitimizes the claim to the Latin descent of the Romanian people.

The visual elements of textbooks have been less investigated than their word content. Nevertheless, comprehensive research like that undertaken by Pingel (2000) at the commission of the Council of Europe uses a good blend between text and illustration. The most used research guide for the analysis of textbook illustrations remains Levin and Mayer (1993). Based on cognitive psychology experimental results, the authors confirm the power of the image over text, in terms of their being able to be remembered better and longer and therefore affirm that illustrations greatly improved the pedagogical quality of textbooks. Some of the attributes that allow graphical inserts and pictorial representations to improve learning are: concentrated and concise forms of transmission of information, giving concrete representation of narratives and thus stimulating both verbal and non-verbal memory processes that improve mnemonic performance (98-99). They are also giving more coherent and organized information that may compensate for poorly written texts (100). Especially in the case of abstract information and processes, illustrations may make the text more comprehensible, thus activating the interpretative function of images. Another function of visual elements is to integrate old knowledge with unfamiliar new elements, thus making illustrations a bridge between known and unknown information (100-101), thus helping complicated new terms and occurrences to be remembered via making them codable in visual associations.

Using the textbook cover illustrations is useful not only in providing a complementary source of mythical stories for the analysis of the text, it also serves

the purpose of filtering and rank-ordering those events considered most important for the national history of the two nations respectively. The cover illustrations become a selection guide for the content of the books: those episodes and historical characters deemed important by the textbook authors are going to be judged worthy of special attention and in-depth text analysis. The inclusion of graphical elements is a necessary complement to the textual analysis. Textbook illustrations are related to the word content, and are not simple decorations as are at times the covers of works of fiction.

Interdisciplinarity and triangulation are reflected in the choice of including text and images in the analysis of history textbooks. While the focus on the written word remains prevalent, a discussion of the visual images complements, checks the relevance of, and enriches the details of the stories told in the passages under examination.

A final note on language: all the translations from French, Romanian and Swedish into English are the author's, except when otherwise specified. For the rendition of texts from Serbian into English, the services of a translator have been used.

The History textbook in context

The perception that textbooks can be dangerous places for the diffusion of stereotypes already existed in the interwar period. The League of Nations and later the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation even produced a “manual on how to write manuals” in which neighboring countries were encouraged to communicate with one another and become aware of their mutual stereotypes— the

first step in writing more objective accounts of national history. Even after WWII, international cooperation continued under the auspices of UNESCO, the organization that took over the duties of the League of Nations in terms of intellectual collaboration. As early as 1949, UNESCO published a Handbook for the Improvement of the Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding. This guide tried to make textbook authors as well as governments aware of the pitfalls of negative stereotyping, of excessive simplification and of pro-national biases (Egan, 1989: 367).

Germany took the lead in coming to terms both with its problematic recent past and with the problematic relationships with its neighbors and thus created a special expert committee in charge of writing a mutually acceptable version of the common history of Germany and Poland, later to develop into the German-Polish Textbook Commission. As seen in the previous pages, Germany continues to be preoccupied by the influence of politics on (national) education to this day, as witness the common Franco-German history textbook of 2006 as well as the initiative to write a history textbook with European-wide circulation.

Romania and Serbia did not benefit from the type of political guidance initiated in (West) Germany; nor did the UNESCO Handbook have much of an impact in the aftermath of WWII. On the contrary, the communist period was marked in both countries by a strongly propagandistic use of history, which also had consequences for the post-Berlin Wall period. In both cases, the textbook situation inherited from the communist system exemplifies the view of education at the service of the state. Only one story was allowed to appear in the public space, the story

sanctioned by the Party, and the official version of history coincided with the moral discourse appearing in the pages of journals or in public speeches of the time. History legitimized the current rule, and citizens were exposed to the values and interpretations sanctioned by the communist elite. This was certainly problematic as at times individual memory and official versions would collide, but because of the monopoly of expression held by the state, and because of the fear of repression, the individual tended to voluntarily censor (at least in public) personal memories so as to fit the official framework.

In the years after the fall of communism however there has been a constant attempt at synchronization of Eastern and Western European pedagogical traditions by institutions such as the Council of Europe, which has specific initiatives for the reform of history teaching. Serbia and Romania are engaged in this synchronization, having now new political goals to be reflected in the way the past is remembered. The previous emphasis on writing the national history and the current desire to frame the national past in a larger regional context leads to tensions: “Textbooks have always been updated and rewritten to present the acceptable vision of the past, and although now, due to international pressures and national voices, textbooks are frequently the subject of external and domestic scrutiny, in many national narratives past events that could harm social cohesion and the authority of the state are still underplayed” (Misztal, 2003: 20).

Throughout the former communist bloc, education reform and in particular the reform of the history textbook had to face numerous challenges, some of which were state-specific, and some of which were common to most. These challenges included

dealing with the communist legacy, creating or reinforcing a national history canon, and, in the case of those countries coming out of a recent conflict, dealing with the consequences of civil war or secession. At the same time as these challenges had to be met, education reform had to take place in the context of a larger transition, both economic and political, which placed constraints on the pace and extent of the transformations within the area of modernization of the textbook. It has been noted that for the most part a successful transition at the macro level has been paired with a satisfactory level of liberalization, democratization and modernization in education, and, conversely, poor results in the general transition efforts translated also into lagging performance in terms of the education system. Finally, besides the immediate context of the postcommunist transformation, education reform had to take into account the circumstances dictated by the academic traditions and the historiography typical for each state. (Höpken, 2007: 166-167). When compared along these lines, it appears that Romania had an easier time than Serbia to negotiate the textbook reform, as it did not have to overcome the trauma of war, and underwent a more rapid, even if problematic, economic and political transformation.

History textbooks in Romania

As part of the process of creating a common national consciousness in the 19th century, the young Romanian state began taking stock of and taking control over the past in order to organize it and present it as a source of identity and unity. This process, taking place simultaneously across Europe, implied the communication of a grand national narrative and its diffusion into the masses. The first history textbooks appear in Walachia in 1830s but it is mostly in the 1860 – 1870 that they acquire their

role as guide posts for an education model that survived well into the next century. The first regulatory policy in matters of education dates from 1832 in Walachia and states clearly that teachers must inspire in their pupils “devotion to the holy, respect to the laws and the government, attachment to the good order and love to the homeland”. Some thirty years later, another governmental proclamation asks for pupils to become “good farmers and good citizens” (both quoted in Murgescu, 1995: 13). It was the primary purpose of the state to use education as a tool for social cohesion and for social order, to create, as the title of a book states, “good Christians and brave Romanians” (Murgescu, 1999).

As the national movement took off, in the 1870s and onward, the definition of a good Romanian became somewhat less connected with the respect of the Christian tradition and allegiance to the prince and increasingly defined in ethnic terms. The theme most closely followed both by history as science and by history textbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century, is national unity. Historical figures like Michael the Brave are praised for their efforts to achieve it, and even the degree of national belonging is measured by the fervor with which one desires it: “Only he is a good Romanian who wants this union and struggles with all his might to fulfill it” (a history textbook from 1873, quoted in Murgescu, 2000: 100).

After the birth of Greater Romania, at the end of the First World War, the idea of national unity continues to be present, complemented by other themes that, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, have remained a staple of the national historical canon. The ethnogenesis of the Romanians as a symbiosis between the Dacian and the Roman elements appears in a textbook from 1924, where chapters’ titles as well as

the overview of historical characters is structured in Dacian – Roman pairs (e.g. Decebalus and Trajan, Decebalus and Domitian, etc.). The Latinity of the language is also emphasized (Murgescu, 2000: 97). The focus of textbook writers from the interwar period remains the Romanian nationhood; their objective is to define it, and to enumerate its typical features: geographical, ethnographic, religious, linguistic, and institutional, at the same time as to point out less measurable or concrete traits, but perhaps the most important ones: “the traditional factor, i.e. the customs, habits and historical memories of the people; [...] the moral factor, i.e. the national conscience, without which all other factors are weak and insecure. This national conscience is the idea the people shapes about its value and historical calling. It gives life to all other constitutive factors” (history textbook from 1921, quoted in Murgescu, 2002: 271). This definition of the essential ingredients of a nation is later elaborated in such a way that the Romanians are the only focus. Despite the reality of a very ethnically diverse state, the textbooks of the time ignored diversity and the existence of the cultural and ethnic Others (Murgescu, 2002: 272).

Generally speaking, the interwar period inherits the main themes from the historiography of the 19th century: as we saw above, Latinity and the Dacian – Roman ethnogenesis, the national unity and its gallery of heroes, and also other perennial features like the perception of Romania as a besieged fortress, defending Christianity through bravery and self-sacrifice and demonstrating clear military skills, and, finally, the strong Christian dimension of the national definition.

These elements of the grand narrative of Romanian history were challenged at the beginning of the communist period by an interpretation of the past in line with the

Marxist theme of class struggle and the Leninist idea of the vanguard party. The communist regime controlled the history textbook as it did every other means of mass communication and socialization, and it employed the history textbook to transfer its ideological version of the past. The task of remaking Romanian historiography was given to Mihai Roller, who applied the Marxist doctrine to the interpretation of the past, using the Soviet Union model. Examples abound: the periodization of history was now made according to the criterion of ownership of the means of production; revolutions were carefully highlighted and discussed, with an emphasis on the mass elements; history was clearly presented in black and white terms, using contrasting classes of characters. Peasants, workers, the communists, and their leader were all depicted positively, whereas the aristocracy, landowners, bourgeois, and all historical parties were the enemy, the negative personas.

Roller also introduced a style of expression that was to remain intact throughout the communist time: from the obsessive repetition of certain phrases (like the emphasis on “history is teaching us ...”) to the qualifications awarded to the Communist leader (the “opener of new roads”, “the giant of revolutionary thinking” or “leader of genius”). Ideology dominates both form and content (Ciosan, 1995).

The thaw period that defined politics in the aftermath of Stalin’s death in 1953 was also reflected in the textbooks. Slowly, historians of Eastern Europe seemed to enjoy some degree of freedom from ideology and from censorship. However, there was a strict rapport of proportionality between political freedom and the ideologization of history teaching, so that countries like Poland or Hungary could be qualified as relatively open, whereas Romania and Bulgaria were situated at the

opposite pole, even during the 1980s (Mares, 1992). The three phases of the evolution of Romanian communism distinguished by Hitchins (1992) coincide with the three phases in Romanian historiography before 1989 which trace the itinerary from international communism through a short decade of détente (1960-1971) to Ceausescu's perfected national Stalinism.

Other countries from the socialist bloc managed to direct their critique of and resistance to the Moscow center by formulating a form of national communism, where the "national" element translated into a resistance to uniformity, dogmatism and the hegemonic doctrine emerging from the Soviet Union. National communism, exemplified by the regimes of Tito in Yugoslavia or Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, while remaining faithful to the ideological tenets of the doctrine also allowed for innovation, flexibility, and a degree of adaptation to the specific conditions of the area. On the other hand, national Stalinism, typical of countries without a solid home-grown tradition of radical left-wing activism, like Romania and Albania, forbade any doctrinaire departure from the ideology preached by the state. It was "reactionary, self-centered", "militaristic", "anachronistic", exclusivist, and autarkic (Tismaneanu, 2003: 32-33). Romania's variety of communism included a government with an iron-fist, dogmatic, and refusing adaptation and change at the cost of its own destruction. It used nationalism as a tool, but primarily focused on the preservation of the "original" statements of Leninism, like the rejection of private property, and the comprehensive and aggressive collectivization in agriculture (Tismaneanu, 2003: 35). This kind of ossified and obsolete desire for total control is reflected in the uses of history employed by the regime.

The contradiction between the internationalist tendency encouraged by Moscow and the desire to find legitimacy with the local people was resolved by the Romanian communists when they created the Romanian “socialist nation”, a combination of nationalism and Marxism. But nationalism remained under the strict control of the Party hierarchy and was never allowed to thrive and become an instrument of popular mobilization. It was maintained within the limits desired by the system, as an “instrument of political diversion” while the true manifestations of nationalist feelings, especially if they came from the minorities, were immediately and irrevocably repressed (Zub, 1993, p. 275).

Ceausescu’s personality cult reflected visibly in the form and content of the history textbooks, which in their turn were also mirrors of society at large. Using numerous forms of communication (for example, a totem-like sculpture from the 1980s with Ceausescu’s head at the top of a column of Romanian princes), the official propaganda created a dignified even if artificial genealogical line from the first king of the Dacians to the communist leadership of the day. Ceausescu was *Conducatorul* (The Leader) and as such he was also the guiding light for the writing of national history, “the greatest founder of all Romanian history” (Florescu quoted in Cioroianu, 2002). And it appears that Ceausescu was not alone in promoting a very national version of communism. The communist nomenklatura, the top echelons of the Party, were no strangers to the idea of the unitary and dominant Romanian nation. The communist elite backed a nationalist approach to leadership even before Ceausescu’s access to power (Petrescu and Petrescu, 2002: 968-969).

A study comparing history textbooks before and after 1989 notices the emphasis on the national aspects and concludes that the major changes produced up to 1996 are the eradication from the old text of references to the communist ideology and the disappearance of obligatory quotes from Nicolae Ceausescu. But when it comes to changes of substance and the manner in which the national culture or the meaning of history are portrayed, there is no “revolution” but a slow and sometimes imperceptible “evolution” (Ologeanu, 1997). Thus, the national element, so much at home in the historiography of the communist period, proved to be an insidious one and persisted to mark the post-1989 period as well.

But who wrote Romanian history during the Ceausescu period? As opposed to other countries of the East bloc, in Romania there could be no discussion about a dissident segment, which would be able to produce an alternative version to the one created and administered by the Party. Instead, there were divisions within the official historiographical apparatus. One was regional, with Bucharest trying to erase any attempts at regional history emerging from regional cultural centers. The other, perhaps even more distinct, separated the Party-controlled Institute for the history of the communist party and the Institute for military history, which were both in the hands of bureaucratic ideologized elements, from the history institutes that were under the authority of the education ministry and the Romanian Academy of Science (Verdery, 1991: 222). A further division was within universal and national history. For the Education Ministry of Socialist Romania, world history belonged to the

humanities but Romanian history to social sciences. This meant that national history purported to fulfill an active social role (Petre: 2005)⁸.

Even if these tensions persisted, they did not result in the appearance of a new type of history but were mostly internal competitions for power and prestige.

Romanian historiography, especially in the 1980s, became entirely subsumed to the task of obeying every whim of the dictator. Georgescu describes the production of a veritable “historical kitsch” (1991: 117-128), combining elements of the literary arts (poems, plays, songs) with historical elements selected so as to justify the ideas put forward by Ceausescu. One of the leader’s favorite themes, besides self-glorification, was to demonstrate the superiority of the Romanian nation and culture, thus doing a retake on some of the traditional themes of the 19th century national movement. As Boia says, “[t]rough the recuperation of the national mythology crystallized during the 19th century, communism benefited from more credibility and legitimacy, obtaining thus a certificate of ‘patriotism’” (1993-1994: 4-5).

After 1989, there was a change in content but not in the spirit of history writing. The same monolithic, intolerant vision of a single acceptable past dominated, only now it was the anti-communists who had the upper hand. At the beginning of the 1990s, a much-needed work of recuperation of the past commenced with the publication of both memoirs and historical studies of the crimes committed during and in the name of communism. But this counter history seems short lived; after 1992 particularly, the most common attitude seems to be the will to forget, perhaps in an

⁸ “During the 1970’s, in the organization of the Ministry of Education, world history was allotted to the Humanities department, whereas Romanian history belonged to the Social Science division. [...]; those who researched the wars between Trajan and Decebal [Dacian prince] practiced a humanist science, in contrast, those researching the wars between Decebal and Trajan, who, obviously, were specialists in Social Sciences”.

attempt to exorcise the past (Ferro, 1985: 50-67). It would be unfair to deny the existence of honest attempts to break with the past and to write a history free from ideological bounds. At the very beginning of the 1990s this was solved by translating several works written by foreign historians into Romanian. Later, Romanians themselves attempted to engage with their past in a more critical fashion, with various degrees of success. Probably most challenging was the effort to question not only the Communist version of the past but also the national canon developed from the 19th century onwards – even today there is a resistance to the demythification process initiated among others by Lucian Boia. Therefore one can speak more of continuity than change in the discourse and the practice of history, especially in its national aspects⁹.

The continuity across those two epochs was also supported by the maintenance of a rigid control over the writing and publishing of textbooks until 1999. In the first ten years of the post-revolutionary period, there was only one textbook allowed on the market, and that textbook was approved by a specialized committee residing at the Ministry of Education. There was also a single publishing house allowed to print the textbooks, so no competition or diversity made its way onto the school manuals market. This corresponds to the view that national history can only be unique, the true one, and that it is the job of experts to identify and write those facts of which it is composed. Once this story is written, there is no reason to alter its content, except perhaps to include the latest developments.

⁹ For a comprehensive overview of the post-communist trends in Romanian historiography, see Petrescu and Petrescu (2007).

Only in recent years (after 1999) did a true liberalization of the textbook market occur in Romania, with free and open competition among textbook authors and publishers but still with the state, represented by a commission approved by the Ministry of Education at the wheel. The liberalization started with a push from the European Union in Recommendation 1283 of 1996, which was at the basis of the education reform started in 1997 by the then minister of education Andrei Marga. The Council of Europe recommended a more inclusive and flexible approach to the teaching of history, a pluralist view which referred to the contribution of ethnic minorities and women: “the subject matter of history teaching should be very open. It should include all aspects of societies (social and cultural history as well as political). The role of women should be given proper recognition. Local and national (but not nationalist) history should be taught as well as the history of minorities. [...] Particular attention should be given to the problems in central and eastern Europe, which has suffered from the manipulation of history up to recent times and continues in certain cases to be subject to political censorship” (Council of Europe, 1996).

The reactions to the proposed changes, which would bring history teaching into line with the general European standard, illustrate the clash of two traditions in history teaching. When, in 1999, a team of younger historians wrote a history textbook in which the constructed nature of the Romanian (or any) nation was applied, the Romanian Parliament was convoked in an extraordinary plenary session and officially condemned the questioning of the Romanian identity (Pavel, 1999; Paraianu, 2005). Because it reverberated so much outside the small circle of

historians and directly into the political debate, the textbook debate deserves some extra attention.

It started with the appeal of an opposition (Social Democrat) politician to the education minister which criticized the absence from the new “alternative” textbooks of the classic figures of Romanian history. This was seen as tantamount to a “renunciation of national identity” (Interpellation no. 9441/06.10.1999 online at Chamber of Deputies cdep.ro). The same theme was then taken into the parliamentary debate when an independent deputy criticized the new textbooks which “deserved to be publicly burned”. Despite or perhaps because of the unhappy association with past practices of dictatorial regimes, the textbook question exploded into the mass media and became politicized. The Social-Democratic opposition, together with some radical right-wing parties, criticized the government (then a reformist liberal alliance) of being servile towards the EU, at the cost of the nation’s dignity and traditions. Some more extreme critiques saw a conspiracy led by Hungarian nationalists to take over Transylvania. One of the leaders of the opposition, Adrian Nastase, a future prime minister, stated that the Sorin Mitu textbook was written with the specific objective of obtaining “the autonomy of Transylvania and the dismemberment of the Romanian state”, as desired by both “Magyar revisionism and radical internationalism” (Nastase, Cotidianul, 18.10. 1999).

These statements were made in an atmosphere already sensitive to the smallest sign of attack on the nation, due to the proximity of the Kosovo conflict, so it is no surprise that the debate did not stop here, but culminated in the submission of a petition against the government signed by 64 members of parliament who

incriminated Andrei Marga, the education minister, for breaking the law stipulating that “education [...] contributes to the preservation of national identity” and “assures the cultivation of love for the country, for its historical past, and for Romanian traditions” (quoted in Paraianu, 2005: 4)

With such goals in mind, it is not surprising that reform of the history curriculum, textbooks and classroom activities took a long time. It is difficult to reconcile the logic of an engaged history, put to the service of the nation, with the contemporary perspective on a relativizing and relativised past, potentially reinterpretable and outside moral debate. Nevertheless, Romania had to update its way of dealing with history in the light of the requirements of EU membership.

Since 1995 and the new education law, history textbook production involves several phases, all controlled by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry nominates a commission of specialists who drafts a curriculum to be approved later at the ministerial level. A public competition is advertised, where publishing houses send in their textbooks which are then judged by the National Commission for the Schoolbook Approval according to several criteria: conformity with the curriculum (minimum 80%), quality of language and illustrations, didactical approach, originality of writing and presentation, and the typographical and paper standard. Based on the above evaluation measures plus a competitive price, the Commission selects three textbooks for the 5th to 8th grades and an unlimited amount for high school grades (9th – 12th). Then each school, based on teachers’ recommendations, chooses the appropriate books (for the elementary schools these books are free, and for the 5th grade forward are paid by the students) (Murgescu, 2002: 499-500). The Ministry of

Education does not exert any control over the publication and distribution of auxiliary teaching materials.

History education begins in the 4th grade of the compulsory primary school, and continues throughout the entire mandatory education period, until the 12th grade, the last level of secondary education. In the 4th, 8th and 12th grades pupils focus exclusively on national developments, whereas in the other grades national, regional and world history are intertwined, their presentation following either a chronological or a thematical organization. (Gasano, 2006: 56). The proposal for the generalization of an integrated history didactics that eliminates the exclusive national focus has been recently approved, and a new tender for textbooks has taken place for the school year 2007, but its effects are slow to manifest in the textbooks currently in use.

Today there is a plethora of publishing houses employing a number of history teachers turned textbook authors, who all must follow the ministry-approved curriculum for every level of education. In the current academic year (2008-2009), there are nine publishing houses editing ten history textbooks for the 4th grade; two of these publishing houses also produce the three different textbooks available for the 8th grade¹⁰. The manuals currently on the market gradually diversified especially in terms of their form which was the first aspect to change. Slowly the modern version of illustrated history, of textboxes and direct source quotations made its way into the typical Romanian history textbook.

¹⁰ The two publishing houses producing both 4th and 8th grade textbooks are: Humanitas Educational and Sigma. The remaining seven are Ana 2000, SC Aramis Print, CD Press, Corint (which has two textbooks on the 4th grade market), Corvin, Niculescu ABC, EDP (the Didactic and Pedagogic Publishers, formerly state-owned, and holder of the monopoly on the textbook market before liberalization) and Teora. This information is centralized by the Ministry of National Education.

In terms of content however, a general glance at the available alternatives suggests that most of the authors remain close to the suggestions of the curriculum and/or to the well-proved models of the past. There is little in terms of a radical break with tradition. Certainly this is nothing but a reflection of the general state of affairs in the Romanian historiography (B. Murgescu, 2003), in which the modern and particularly postmodern schools of thought are still perceived as heresies, even at the level of university teaching and research, admittedly with some exceptions. The textbook slowly democratizes and modernizes, with the inclusion of images, illustrations and direct quotations from historical sources presenting divergent points of view, thus contributing to better pedagogical strategies and to the acceptance of pluralism of interpretations (Gasano, 2006: 56).

Competition on the liberalized textbook market was sometimes plagued by suspicions of corruption or at least less than fair play. Besides undocumented rumors that certain textbook authors were particularly close to ministry staff and thus could easily get approval for their imperfect work, there is a proven negative effect that the economic calculations had on the promotion of well-written textbooks. If a textbook was cheaper (perhaps with fewer pages and fewer illustrations, or with lower quality print) it ended up being the most popular, because it was the one all schools could afford¹¹. A “race to the bottom” for the lowest price implied that there was little to gain for the authors: putting a lot of effort into a very good textbook did not

¹¹ Textbooks for compulsory education are paid for by the Ministry of Education and provided free of charge (on loan). Schools communicate their choices to the publishing houses who print the required number of textbooks for which they bill the government. In the future, it is intended that each school will receive a given amount of money per enrolled pupil. It will be the school who will decide which textbook will be used and who will pay the publisher directly (Gasano, 2006: 56). This may lead to an increased relevance of the costs per textbook, as schools will likely make low price a priority.

necessarily translate into winning the approval of history teachers everywhere and subsequent high sales (Manea, personal interview, 2005).

Outside the frame of history education, the efforts towards an education based on inclusion, diversity and de-stereotyping have borne fruit in Romania over the past years, with the inclusion of optional courses on the history of the Holocaust for high school students (Florian 2004) and a special textbook for a primary school course on multicultural education (Demian 2008). However these courses remain only optional. Even more than ten years after, it appears that Antohi's assessment of the practice of history writing and teaching in Romania appears to hold true and it is still split between the tradition of adherence to a nationalist canon and the challenge to include an alternative more liberal and pluralist discourse (Antohi, 1996: 19).

History textbooks in Serbia

History teaching in Serbia cannot be decoupled from history teaching in the former Yugoslavia, and Serbia has been recognized as the official inheritor of Yugoslavia. To some extent, one can assert that, as in many other respects, Serbia took over the Yugoslav view of the past, but gave it an exclusive, Serbian twist. It can be argued that the vision and interpretation of Yugoslav history, which in itself was partly influenced by Serbian points of view, continued to exist, transplanted into a new context. "The spirit of intolerance for another's opinion [and] the evaluation of every disagreement with national myth and national historic rights as a political crime" (Petrovich, 1978: 174) seemed to survive several regime changes unaltered.

But what characterized Yugoslav history teaching in the first Yugoslavian state? Was there something typical about the state education of all the southern Slavs?

The specific feature of the Yugoslav history teaching was to promote the ideology of Yugoslavism, defined as the desire of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, to create a new identity instead of the old national ones. As Charles Jelavich expresses it, “in time, *narodno jedinstvo* (national unity) would take precedence over national or tribal (*pleme*) identities and loyalties, that is, students would proudly call themselves Yugoslavs. The non-Slavs [...] were not part of the equation” (Jelavich, 2003: 95).

Direct observation and historical hindsight show us today that this goal was not realized during the lifetime of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and, many argue, not in the time of its successor, the Socialist Yugoslav Federation. One of the primary causes of this was the dominant force of local, (i.e. Serbian, Croatian and to some extent Slovenian) nationalisms. These competing national identity projects proved to be stronger and longer lasting and they had the ultimate sway over people’s loyalties.

In Croatia, which had had its own educational system since 1874, there was an attempt to include the most significant parts of Serbian history in official textbooks, in an attempt to win over the Serbian students. Thus, even Croatian pupils read, in the Cyrillic alphabet, about the main figures of Serbian history: Nemanja, Tsar Dusan, Karadjordje, and Vuk Karadzic. Although this seems to favor of the idea of a common destiny of Croats and Serbs, the real motivation behind the more inclusive approach of the Croat education was in fact preservation of the territorial integrity of the province, which would be threatened by the calls of unity of all Serbs launched from Belgrade. Ultimately, Croatian history teaching was mostly dedicated to promoting Croatian national ideas. (Jelavich, 2003: 97)

Slovenia, being a part of the Austrian monarchy, did not have the same freedom to decide what kind of history to be taught in its schools but had to follow the rules formulated in Vienna. As such, Slovenian children were exposed to the history of all the ethnic groups in the double monarchy, including the Serbs and Croats, who were portrayed as one people divided by religion. The greatest focus of the textbooks was, from an ideological standpoint, on the unity of all people of the monarchy around the figure of the emperor, and on the supremacy of the empire and its associated religion, Catholicism, above any national specificity. One can thus say that Slovenian education was equally lacking in respect to both nationalism and yugoslavism. (Jelavich 2003: 98)

If one thing can be said about Serbian textbooks, it is that they did not lack, like their Slovenian equivalents, nationalism. On the contrary, Serbian nationalism found its true expression in the education system established by Belgrade after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The proclaimed purpose of history teaching was to promote the creation of Greater Serbia, which would include all the lands where the Serbian dialect, stokavian, was spoken. Croats and Bosniaks were thus described as Serbs of different faith, and were encouraged to think of themselves as belonging to the Serbian nation. No group other than Serbian was included in the national history, which was written exclusively in Cyrillic.

These three distinct traditions were able to survive after the emergence in 1918 of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. While proposing a centralized education system, the new state allowed for the perpetuation of the individual traditions of its component ethnic groups, which resulted in the permanence of local

nationalism at the expense of Yugoslavism. Noting this contradiction, King Alexander Karadjordjevic, who took over the state in 1929 as a royal dictator, decided to enforce Yugoslavism at any cost. He promulgated 6 new education laws and eliminated regional teachers' associations in favor of a centralized, Yugoslav Teachers Society, whose members were emboldened by the minister of education at the time to "be the apostles of brotherly love for the young Yugoslav generations, the narrators of true unity, the teachers of a broad and healthy nationalism", to make the people of Yugoslavia "unite into a single soul, one muscle, and one heart" (Maksimovic, quoted in Jelavich, 2003: 106).

This speech was not without consequences. New history textbooks were put into circulation soon thereafter with the idea of Yugoslav unity in a primary position. A closer analysis however shows that this primacy was an illusion. For example, the strategy followed by one of the most famous pro-Yugoslavists of his time, the Serb historian Stanoje Stanojevic, was to create new history textbooks and to replace whenever necessary the word "Serbian" with either "Yugoslav" or "our". The remainder of the text was unchanged, sometimes with incongruous effects: "Belgrade became the cultural center of all the Serbian (changed after 1929 to say "our") people" (Jelavich, 2003: 112). Why should Croats and Slovenes believe that Belgrade would suddenly symbolize a true Yugoslav capital? Moreover, the Slovenes were never really seen as equal partners in the national unity project; in most interwar history textbooks much fewer pages were dedicated to the Slovenians than to Serbs or Croats, and the Slovenians were perceived as playing a very marginal role in the history of the region.

Moreover, the Serbs saw themselves as the real and only representatives of the South Slavs, the primordial Slavic tribe. As a textbook from 1904 explains, “All the Slavs at one time were called Serbs, and only from the sixth century after Christ did they begin to be called Slavs. At the beginning they were one people, who were composed of a number of tribes. Subsequently these tribes multiplied and then each was called by its own name” (quoted in Jelavich, 1983: 616). This, together with the argument put forward in geography textbooks, that the majority of the Yugoslav lands were originally Serbian, demonstrates the tendency of Serb historiography to serve the political goal of creating a Greater Serbian state. When the political tides changed, and the Yugoslav idea became more attractive, the tone of the textbooks changed accordingly. The same textbook writer who so strongly defended Serb supremacy in 1904 modified his position in a subsequent edition (1914) and stated “What the Slavs called themselves in ancient times is unknown” (Jelavich, 1983: 617).

These small concessions to the idea of Yugoslavism did not leave an enduring mark. The consequences of this failure to inculcate a common sense of purpose, or a common identity were clearly visible during the Second World War. At the first opportunity to affirm their local identities, Croats and Serbs, and also other nations of the Kingdom began a campaign for independence that led to the attempts to completely eliminate ethnic diversity. The most famous instances are perhaps the paramilitary organizations Chetniks (on the Serbian side) and Ustashe (on the Croatian side). The Chetniks directed their efforts of creating a unified and ethnically homogenous Serbia first at Muslims (e.g. during 1941 and 1943 14,000 Bosniaks were killed only in the village of Foca (Resic, 2006: 213)). The Ustashe conducted

openly anti-Serbian politics, which led to the deportation of 100,000 Serbs from the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska*, NDH), with 300,000 forced into exile. The Ustashe, inspired by the Arian ideology of Nazi Germany, also tried to “purify” the future Greater Croatia of other nationalities. The infamous concentration camp at Jasenovac was the cemetery of at least 17,000 Croatian and Bosnian Jews. Almost all the Roma, about 16,000 people, were also eliminated. (Resic, 2006: 216).

One of the direct effects of such murderous actions as the ones briefly mentioned above was the erosion of the Yugoslav idea. When so much blood was shed on all sides of the battle, the idea of working together for a common goal, prosperity, or cultural unity, became preposterous. Nevertheless, a new attempt to bring together the South Slavic people was made under the leadership of Josip Broz, aka Tito. The Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was born in November 1943 and had as official program a policy of inter-ethnic balance, well-known by the slogan “brotherhood and unity”. Behind this slogan however, the opposite forces of nationalism remained active and eventually, many argued, succeeded in destroying this second attempt at south Slavic unity once the unifying leader figure disappeared. Yugoslavism did not really manage to impose itself as a natural choice for a majority of the citizens, who remained under the sway of local nationalism. Suppan described how, during the entire period of communist rule, the Croats fought for more autonomy for Croatia, a fact reflected among others in a form of cultural revival known as “the Croatian Spring” in 1968. The Serbs, especially after the ascent to power of Milosevic, desired a South Slav state which would reflect a clear dominance

of Serb interests or even more explicitly a Greater Serbia. Yugoslavism did not manage to take root during the almost 50 years of socialist rule (Suppan, 2003: 129 – 135).

The socialist rule attempted to convert historical science into an ally and instrument of the regime, propagating conformity with the Party dogma. Especially sensitive to the political pressure was the contemporary era, and within in the period of World War II grew in significance as the historical fundament of the communist legitimacy. From the very beginning of the Socialist Yugoslavia, the strategy adopted by the communists was to downplay the nationalist infighting that took place during WWII (especially between the Croatian Ustashe and the Serbian Chetniks) and to promote the anti-fascist struggle of the Partizans as the unifying factor. This grand narrative of WWII remained in place until the death of Tito in the 1980s (Lampe, 2000: 236-237).

The idea of unity at the expense of national differences within the Yugoslav Federation was promoted also through the education system, which aimed to strike a balance between local autonomy and the diffusion of and socialization into the communist value system. From the very beginning, the Yugoslav education structure was flexible, allowing each republic to decide on its own curriculum, including in subjects like history or literature. This flexibility was obtained at the cost of total conformity with the communist ideological tenets, including the WWII narrative presented above. Nationalist manifestations in education were expressly forbidden as “un-Marxist, uncritical and unscientific appraisals of events and personalities in national history” (Petrovich, 1978: 161). An analysis of history textbooks published

in Yugoslavia in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War finds a complete match between the official state propaganda and the history lessons. History didactics about WWII is suffused with ideology: Tito's partisans are always heroes, and nowhere can there be found references to their abuses or crimes. Crimes and abuses are the reserved domain of the enemies, role in which both the Croatian Ustasha and the Serb Chetniks are equally placed. All ethnic references are very thin; the distinguishing factor between friend and foe is allegiance to the communist ideas (Sindbæk, 2008: 78-79).

The entire communist period is marked by the tensions between nationalism and communism, and between autonomy of the republics versus centralized federal control. The regime allowed individual republics some degree of freedom in terms of deciding upon school curricula, but despite this local autonomy the school texts were very similar across the entire Yugoslavia. In all the federal units, history textbooks dedicated to contemporary history dedicated more pages to the events of WWII and to the activities and role of the Partizans in a disproportionate fashion (Höpken, 1996: 105). The promotion of the Partizan cult went hand in hand with the glorification of everything Marxist and with the condemnation of ethnic differences. Even when ethnicity is mentioned, it is done only in passing, as a detail. For example, when discussing the crimes of the Ustasha against Serb villages, the ethnicity of the victims is made known, but the explanation of the crimes committed is placed at the ideological level. The Ustasha were the enemies because they collaborated with the fascists, not because they were in majority Croatian (Sindbaek, 2008: 142). Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the occupying forces that Croats and Serbs had

to face one another in battle; Nazi Germany used the “divide and conquer” strategy to sow distrust among the various peoples of Yugoslavia and therefore to weaken their resistance. It is understood that left to their own devices, Croats and Serbs would not have engaged into acts of violence against each other.

During the mid-1960s, Yugoslav historiography became more professionalized, even as the Party imposed its control over a new generation of historians. Specialized research institutes directly under the authority of the Party’s historical commissions were created both in Belgrade and in the regional capitals, dedicated to the study of “workers’ movement”. Since the Tito regime encouraged the creation of universities and academic institutes in each of the federal units, at the end of the 1960s there was a slow diversification of the historical discourse, with the national perspectives gaining more room for expression, being able even to contradict the federal point of view, steeped in the idea of yugoslavism. This does not imply that one can generalize and claim that the elite at the level of the republics was intrinsically pro-autonomy. Yugoslavism enjoyed a firm support basis among the republic leadership, whose interests were connected to the survival of the federation and its ideology, and the issue of higher degree of local governance was seldom put in terms of demands for secession. It was very slowly, and especially from the 1980s onward, that this support for the federal idea started to dwindle.

The relativization of history taking place in academic circles from the 1960s onwards, including the debates around the founding role of the Partizans in creating the new socialist Yugoslavia, did not however reflect into the content of the textbooks, which remained part of the mechanism of transmission of “patriotic

values” (Höpken, 1999: 199). These values combined Marxism-Leninism and the class struggle with traditional ideals, like masculinity and a culture of honor and revenge, a “knightly culture” promoting boldness and fighting spirit (Pesic, 1994: 55). Another traditional approach reflected in the textbooks was the emphasis on the community, prioritized at the expense of the individual, who was expected to give up personal freedom in the name of the freedom and well-being of the group.

Even when, after Tito’s death, decentralization processes left their mark on education policies, there was no clear domination of either nationalism or yugoslavism. There was a constant opposition between “nationalism, unitarism and federalism” and “the right to diversity” (Suppan, 2003: 134). The coexistence of two such contradictory tendencies is partly explained because “the firmly established ideological framework—socialist democracy—minimized the manipulation of education by nationalists” (Bozic, 2006: 324). To this day however, the educational system is still in need of decentralization, lacking the relaxation of state control over teachers’ activity. The Serbian state has inherited these control tendencies from the Yugoslav period and has been reluctant to release its grip over education, the only initiatives coming from the civil society, with numerous NGOs actively engaged in civic or peace education via alternative channels such as summer schools, teachers’ training workshops, etc (Kovac-Cerovic, 2000: 10).

In Serbia, history is taught today in textbooks completely under the influence of the Ministry of Education who authorizes the publishing and distribution of schoolbooks through the Publishing House of Textbooks and Other School Materials (Stojanovic, 2002: 502). Upon the recommendation of a board of reviewers based on

unclear “scientific criteria,” the Ministry approves only one textbook for every level of history education. Teachers are disempowered as they “do not have the right to choose among different editions or to use alternative materials” (Gasnabo, 2006: 31). History education begins in the 5th grade of the compulsory primary education; focusing on the historical periods of prehistory and antiquity, where regional and world history are presented side by side. Medieval period follows in the 6th grade, with an exclusive focus on Serbia’s development. The modern and contemporary eras are covered in the 7th and 8th grades respectively, combining lessons on regional and world history with those centered on the national events, with an emphasis on the latter.

The influence of international organizations, such as the Council of Europe, The Open Society Institute and the World Bank, in reforming the education system has been significant in both Serbia and Romania, even though Serbia started restructuring its history curriculum later than Romania (only after the departure of Slobodan Milosevic). There is a great degree of borrowing from one textbook to another, with some identical paragraphs appearing in textbooks authored by different people and published at different times joined by a high level of constancy: texts remain unchanged for periods of 10 years or more, despite changes in the book formatting and appearance. Like in the Romanian case, during the 1990s and even in the early 2000s, the history is placed in a national framework in contrast with the ideological perspective imposed during socialism. The constant element was the pedagogical style: “communist didactic principles were authoritative, requiring teachers to direct the minds of the young according to the correct principles. The

current texts are similarly closed: all history is seen through a narrow nationalist lens” (Janjetovic, 2001: 222).

In 2000, coinciding with Milosevic’s departure from power, an educational reform was initiated with the aim to make the Serbian system more compatible with the European one. Among the most relevant changes from the point of view of this research was the modification of the law on textbooks which in theory allowed for the publication of alternative textbooks and other learning materials. This was never implemented. In 2001, a new history curriculum was supposed to be elaborated by historians from the History Department at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (Djurovic, 2005: 318). Like both previous and subsequent attempts in 1996 and 2005, the desired change in curriculum did not take place, despite critical evaluations from professional historians and from the students themselves, who were disgruntled by both the poor form and the lacking content of history books. Reforms followed the one step forward – one step back movement, with a new Law on the Foundations of the Education System being voted in 2003 with the explicit goals of “decentralising, democratising and professionalizing” the pre-university education. However, the change in the government of 2004 led to the introduction of several amendments to the 2003 law which “reinstalled solutions from the 1990s and 1980s, adding a further conservative influence of the clergy, and derogated the sub legal acts developed during 2001-2003” (Kovac Cerovic, 2006: 488).

In 2001/2002 a new history textbook was published in Serbia, in which the authors explicitly distanced themselves from ideologies and prejudices, and use modern pedagogical strategies, such as inclusion of original sources and rich color

illustrations. However the book, written in the shortest time span available between the fall of Milosevic and the democratization attempts begun in 2000-2001, has received criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. The modernizers were dissatisfied with the exclusion of Milosevic's regime from the textbooks and the lack of critical evaluation of its legacy. On the other hand, those of nationalist persuasion deplored the servility with which the NATO attacks of 1999 or the wars of secession during the 1990s are presented. The authors betray their nation and are lackeys of the international community, uncritically accepting a version of events leading to a false interpretation of Serbia's past (Suica, 2002: 322-325).

Even though such attempts at the de-ideologization of Serbian history textbooks were made, they were feeble in comparison with the opposite trend, visible especially after 2004, of using the textbook as an ideological precursor. A recent study found for example that events of World War II were presented in such a way as to favor an anti-communist stance (denigration of Tito, called "a notorious agent of the Comintern") and a positive description of the nationalist militia of the Chetniks whose links with Nazi occupiers of Yugoslavia, and anti-Semitic actions were brushed under the carpet. Today "history textbooks seem to have become guideposts to policymaking in Serbia" (Stojanovic, 2007: 4). A plural, open textbook market is of itself no guarantee of the openness and tolerance of the content of history school texts, if the dominant social perspective is not receptive to critical versions of history.

Once the Milosevic regime fell in 2000, the reform of the education system accelerated, particularly when it received special attention from international forums. For example the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe provided the framework for

large-scale programs, all over the Balkan region, aimed at replacing the old schoolbooks with a new generation of texts more in line with the newest trends in history pedagogy and textbook writing. The Georg Eckiert Institute in Braunschweig, Germany was tasked with concretizing the goals of the Stability Pact in 2001 and this institute proceeded to organize teachers workshops and to popularize a new style of textbook writing among relevant authors and official institutions. These efforts notwithstanding, the change in the content of textbooks has been lagging behind the transformations in at the political level, and to this day Serbia has one of the least liberalized textbook production systems among the Eastern European states (Höpken, 2007: 164).

To conclude, in both Romania and Serbia textbooks have historically been places of national construction. The narratives told have focused on the merits or the victim status of the in-group, in the tradition of 19th century nationalism present all over Europe. After the Second World War, history was filtered through the lens of the communist ideology but the nationalist tones survived and appeared with increasing clarity in the last decade before the fall of the Iron Curtain. However, as other (Western) European states slowly detached from the firm national grip of historical canons, this practice continued in Romania and Serbia during the communist period to this day, even if perhaps in a more moderate form.

Education, conflict, and ethnic identity – overview of existing scholarship

[...] The children read
Their books or make pretence of concentration,
Each bowed head seems bent in supplication
Or resignation to the fate that waits
In the unmapped forests of the future. [...]

In each diminutive breast a human heart
Pumps out the necessary blood: desires,
Pains and ecstasies surf-ride each singing wave
Which breaks in darkness on the mental shores.
Each child is disciplined; absorbed and still
At his small desk. Yet lift the lid and see,
Amidst frayed books and pencils, other shapes:
Vicious rope, glaring blade, the gun cocked to kill.
- Vernon Scannell, *Schoolroom on a Wet Afternoon*

“The befuddlement and fear demonstrated by Western leaders during the Bosnian and Kosovo crises were a direct reflection of an ignorance of Balkan history. But the leaders merely mirrored the more widespread ignorance of their respective constituencies. [...] Perhaps the unfamiliarity with Balkan history displayed by English speakers can be blamed partly on a certain lack of general education dealing with a region. [...] This “Balkan gap” in recent English language education can be attributed in some measure to the continuing vestiges of Western European cultural antipathy toward the Orthodox European and Islamic civilizations that have held historical sway in the region...” (Hupchik, 2002: viii).

The above quotation illustrates two things: first, that education in matters of regional and world history seems to have an effect on large-scale political decisions (like going to war or not); and second that the Balkan area remains one of the places

where the relevance of history has been displayed most recently in a most direct way in the Bosnian and Kosovo wars. It also says something about the negative stereotype predominant in the West for the Balkans and indicates the necessity of research that would un-demonize this part of the world.

Education

The role of education as a key reflection of state politics has been highlighted in numerous studies. In addition, education has the capacity to mirror the functions or dysfunctions of other state institutions. In other words, in states where political institutions are weak, undemocratic and unstable, the education system will also be underperforming and may even contribute to the worsening of the situation:

“Education systems are inextricably linked to the states and societies they serve” (Burde et al., 2004: 5). Education has been defined as a key element in solving conflicts and rebuilding post-conflict societies. Some authors argue that education should be part of the priority list with essentials such as clean water and access to food (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998; Johannessen, 2001; Save the Children Alliance, 1996; Sinclair, 2002). International organizations interested in conflict resolution work have invested funds in programs meant to draw the guidelines for delivering education services in conflict and post-conflict societies (see for example, Pigozzi, 1999). The risk incurred by inaction, by allowing a new generation to grow up either in ignorance, or worse, under the influence of ideas espousing militaristic, aggressive behavior, is too high. The masses of uneducated, unemployed youths are excellent recruiting grounds for politicians ready to exploit their credulity and their desire to

belong: “There they are, potential armies ready for the first demagogue who will give them identity and self-respect by enrolling them in a party, in an army” (Lessing, 2006: 167).

Education is important especially because it helps in the process of legitimation, defined as an individual’s perception of correspondence between social reality and expected moral goals, or between “what is” and “what can/ought to be”. Legitimacy is achieved at the end of a long process that combines socialization and internalization, which in their turn happen via two parallel mechanisms: familiarization, where the very existence of a person in a cultural, normative and institutional environment contributes to the internalization of norms and values; and inculcation, in which the state or other agents that have power actively promote their institutions, values etc.

Education occupies an important place in the mechanism of internalization because of several advantages. States exert their influence over the new generation at a very young and impressionable age. Children sometimes spend more time, or at least more effective active time, at school than at home with family. And finally, the school supplies the motivation to conform: successful careers and social prestige are most often conditional upon success in school (Theiler, 1999: 312-313).

Prolonged exposure, common environment, impressionable minds and good incentives make education a ready apparatus for moulding social behavior. In its turn, education uses various strategies and instruments to attain its purposes, one of which remains to create good citizens, individuals willing to comply with the rules of the game. Besides symbols and rituals (such as displaying the flag or singing the

anthem), the textbook is part of the transmission mechanism of social norms which determine collective identities.

Separation from the Other, within the existing education system, may at times be a mirror of the critical relations between different social categories. The struggle of ethnic minorities in both Romania and Serbia to obtain education in their mother tongue and the refusal of the central authorities to grant them these rights, especially at the level of tertiary education, is a reflection of the general tensions at the level of the society between these ethnic communities. One of the first initiatives of the Hungarian minority in Romania was to propose a new education law that would allow for instruction in the mother tongue of all Romanian citizens at all levels, including the founding of a state university in Hungarian (Andreescu, 2001b: 189). This request has not been approved by any postcommunist government in Romania, so far. The creation of a parallel education system in Kosovo once the provincial autonomy was revoked in 1989 was not only another way to make a claim for the cultural rights of the Albanians, it was part of a far reaching strategy to create a “shadow state”, the “embodiment of their strategy of passive resistance” (Kostovicova, 2005: 4) against a nationalizing Serbian state. In other words, education policies and education claims cannot be relegated to a second rank type of politics. They are reflections of the mutual relationship between the state and its citizenry, and are circumscribed by the same ideas, values and norms that set the framework for classical first tier politics, like finance, trade and external relations.

The literature on the connections between education and conflict has been growing in the past ten years at an unprecedented pace, already putting forward

established commonly held beliefs in the academic community as well as in policy environments. Davies and Talbot state: “During the past decade, there has been a growing global recognition of the vital role played by the provision of high-quality education in conflict, emergencies, and early reconstruction” (2008: 509). Academics, international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, as well as states are active agents in the formulation of proposals meant to alleviate various problems in troubled societies through educational reform.

Examples of these abound. International organizations become sponsors for projects targeting education as a means of conflict avoidance. Two of the most prominent organizations involved are the World Bank, with its program “Respect for Diversity through Education” and UNESCO, which emphasizes the importance of education with these words: “Good quality textbooks and learning materials teach concepts and skills that promote peace, human rights and sustainable development” (UNESCO Education website). Other initiatives combine the efforts of activist groups and established institutions, like the UNICEF and Save the Children Alliance, who signed in 2007 an agreement on providing humanitarian aid also in the area of education via a specially designed Education Cluster. This cluster, co-lead by the two organizations, is the first instance of joint leadership between an international organization and a non-state actor. Its budget comes from UNICEF, with special support from the Netherlands and the UK, as well as from government donors (Denmark, Ireland, Norway and Sweden). (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009).

Non-state international actors are increasingly active in the area of reconstruction through education, and the primary transnational network of professionals of both emergency assistance and education is the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The INEE brought together the UNICEF – Save the Children co-lead cluster, and functions both as center of information production/ diffusion and as an advocacy agent. In its former capacity, it formulated the currently most used document about education in emergency societies, *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction* (2004), used to raise awareness for the necessity of providing schooling to young people from disaster areas, refugee camps and in countries recently coming out of wars.

The effects of war on societies that have just witnessed large scale violent clashes opposing various internal groups are not only a matter of security or even of education, but a matter of public health. The psychological trauma of the survivors adds to the direct physical damage caused by fighting and translates into various stress-related diseases. Combined with the demonstrated negative effect that deteriorated social relationships have on mortality, the need to reconstruct the post-conflict societies is even more acute. Since one of the biggest obstacles in the process of rebuilding the broken social ties is the definition of the Other in dehumanizing terms, one of the tasks of policies is the promotion of empathy and thus the recasting of this former enemy in a more positive light (Halpern and Weinstein, 2004: 562). This corresponds to Putnam’s idea of “bridging social capital”, namely the capacity of individuals to create interdependent bonds across social groups, and here the role

of education can be of primary importance. With the school system, a more positive image of the Other can be diffused into society, both at the level of the school organization (either mixed schools or mixed classrooms, for example) and at the level of curricular content. This in turn may have a double effect: at the individual level, as supported by social psychology research and the contact theory, negative stereotypes and prejudices¹² will become fewer, thus promoting better relations between the members of various communities. At the collective level, education that does not use difference as threat but as additional value stands the chance to redefine the larger context in which choices, including the choice for conflict as a solution to societal problems, are set in.

The European Union also showed an interest in the role of education as promoter of democratic stability. The Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe includes a special “Task Force on Education” (Stability Pact home page). Some argue that the reason for including such a task force on the EU priority list was nothing other than the interpretation of the Kosovo myth: “The clear relation between the Kosovo War in 1999 and the miss [sic] use of events from the Serbian far past, made the public opinion suddenly aware of this difficult relationship between history/ school history and (national) politics. It was certainly due to this public awareness that the Stability Pact Task Force in 2000 targeted on history and history teaching as one of its fields of action” (van der Leeuw-Roord, 2007: 1).

The Balkans is at risk of repeating some of its history of violence, argues Johan Galtung of the Oslo Peace and Conflict Resolution Institute, because the recent

¹² Stereotypes are understood as biased generalizations about a group or category of people, that are unfavorable, exaggerated or oversimplified whereas prejudices are based on stereotypes and imply preconceived opinion or bias about a person or a group (Colman, 2006).

trauma has not been worked through. The victims cannot forget their tragedy, whereas the perpetrators would rather make a clean slate of the past and leave it all behind. These two categories have never had a chance to meet in open dialogue and their problematic issues, instead of being brought into the light, are swept under the carpet. An example of this is the WWII conflict between the Croat militia, the Ustashe, and the Serbian militia, the Chetniks, who fought each other to the bitter end leaving deep scars in the collective memory of the two societies. This conflict was cloaked in silence during the period of Socialist Yugoslavia and, Galtung argues, it was one of the reasons for mobilization during the wars of the 1990s. The wounds never healed, and the slightest irritation opened them up again, just as bloody and painful as they were in the 1940s (Galtung, 2007).

The solution should be some form of reconciliation with the past, but the way to obtain such an appeasement is not clear. Social reconciliation is a very complex process, since it involves the reconstruction of the moral order of society and it takes a very long time to observe and measure the degree of success of various institutional solutions. One of the potential solutions could be the path taken by Germany after WWII, namely first admitting that the crimes were indeed committed, then describing them and finally asking what can be done to improve the situation. This acceptance of the past lead to the possibility to recover from it, and this strategy is supported by Germany even today. It is Germany who proposed the writing of a common history textbook for Europe as a whole and this proposal was embraced by the EU Ministers of Education in 2007 (during the German presidency of the EU). Germany also lead the way in promoting history teaching as a way to solve conflicts with neighboring

countries, for example by publishing in 2006 a common French – German textbook covering modern history after 1945 (*Histoire/ Geschichte, Europa und die Welt seit 1945*).

If textbooks are elements in the identification process, they can play a role in conflict-ridden societies. They can either radicalize the stand-points of the various groups involved, or paint an image where tolerance is not only desirable but also possible. Their role in conflict resolution has been acknowledged by international organizations such as the World Bank¹³: who invest in the reshaping of curricula and teaching manuals in order to promote pacifism and tolerance. “Can textbooks and education help to promote tolerance, to appease ethnic tensions or even to foster peace and reconciliation, once a conflict or a war has ended? [...] Yes [...] wherever and whenever a conflict has been terminated, education and textbooks usually are seen as major instruments to restabilize the society, to reconcile former enemies and to foster peace. International agencies today distribute a lot of their resources to the improvement of education and textbooks in post-conflict areas, in the Balkans as well as in the Caucasus, in the Middle East or in African countries” (Höpken, 2003: 2).

Indeed, a considerable amount of money and logistics are and have been dedicated in recent years to what can be called educational reconstruction of post-conflict societies. Education has been officially included in humanitarian help packages, and UN documents consider it essential for meeting the Millennium Development Goals of stability and economic growth. The fact that, for example, the “back to school” campaign initiated by the UNICEF in Afghanistan disposed of about

¹³ For example, the World Bank invested in Iraq during the period 2003-2006 USD 40 million specifically for textbooks, with USD 60 million for building schools (Investors in Iraq Forum, quoted in Paulson and Rappleye, 2007: 340)

USD 50 million is significant and illustrates the growing importance of education in the democratization and stabilization of war-torn societies. Unfortunately, the same project illustrates the dark side of this large-scale international process, namely the lack of preparation, and the insufficient knowledge of local circumstances on the part of the international donors. An example is the republication, at a cost of USD 200,000, of Islamic education textbooks from the 1980s and early 1990s, full of religious calls for violence and hatred, where images of weapons and landmines were used as “learning to count” tools. The reprinted textbooks were destroyed as soon as the error was apparent (Paulson and Rappleye, 2007: 340-41).

Education has an impact both on the type of ethnic affiliation of children and on their attitudes towards diversity. It has been demonstrated that pupils displaying intolerant, prejudiced attitudes are likely to be less secure, more suspicious, and see the world in black and white (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 13). Admittedly, the school system is not the only responsible party. Society at large, peer groups, media and especially the family all contribute to the socialization process, but there is a clear rapport between type of education and possibility of conflict. In a report published in October 2004, the World Bank investigates the link between education and conflict through an overview of the existing literature, a statistical analysis of 52 indicators, and several empirical cases, including Cambodia and East Timor. The report points out not only that education contributes to the reconstruction effort but also that in the absence of reform, education may “run the danger of reproducing the factors that contributed to the conflict in the first place” (Buckland, 2004: 25). This is the same warning signal made by Lynn Davies when she cautions against mere reform of the

education system after the conflict and asks for “new ways of living and learning” which do not “reproduce the same causes of conflict” (Davies, 2004: 182).

Most of the research on education and conflict has taken place at the intersection of academia and policy worlds. Many projects have been the initiative of international and national institutions involved in post-conflict reconstruction. Generalizing, the numerous studies undertaken across a wide variety of cases can be described as policy-oriented action plans or strategies that are a posteriori reflections on how educational systems can be redesigned as institutions of peace. The research is deeply normative, explicitly aiming at the promotion of certain educational arrangements judged to be more effective than others in producing policy results; it is assumed that it “can heal the psychosocial wounds of war, solve youth unemployment, deliver decentralisation and democracy, build peace and promote economic and social development” plus contribute to the development of civil society (Buckland, 2006: 7). History education has been particularly highlighted as relevant for the reconciliation process, as it can set straight the record of past injustice and prepare the ground for a new societal agreement, conducive to peace (Koulouri, 2002; Cole and Barsalou 2006; Cole 2007).

It would be beneficial to test empirically how education assistance performs, but so far there is little proof and agreement as to the degree of success of such assertions, partly because large scale initiatives in the domain of education in emergency areas or in post-conflict regions have been very recent. Research has posited that education may exacerbate those conditions propitious to hostility, especially because of its contribution to the legitimization of an “ethos of conflict” (Bar-

Tal et al., 2009) thus making it an important variable in the puzzle of interethnic violence.

Textbooks

As part of the education toolbox to be used in re-shaping the collective memory of societies exposed to conflict, textbooks have received attention chiefly in reconstructive situations. There are however other circumstances where education and textbooks have surfaced in the political debates and in the media. Perhaps the wider public is aware of the controversy surrounding textbooks from other parts of the world. Most famous is probably the debate around the Japanese history textbooks and their portrayal of the battle of Nanjing in 1937, which generated headlines because of the political reluctance on the Japanese side to apologize for the behavior of their troops during WWII. The debate circles around this dilemma: “Was there a ‘massacre’ that cost hundreds of thousands of civilian lives, as all Chinese schoolchildren learn [...]? Or merely an ‘incident’ in which Japan’s troops took reasonable steps to bring ‘order’ back to the city?” (Wasserstrom, 2006: 80-81). These questions generated quite a large political mobilization in both China and Korea, who demanded a formal apology from Japan. Even when this apology came in 2005 on the very day of the battle, made by the former Japanese prime minister Koizumi, it was perceived as insufficient, a courtesy bow to international pressure and not a heartfelt admission of guilt. This view was supported not only by the attitude of the prime-minister (he continued to visit the shrine dedicated to the memory of all Japanese soldiers, including those involved in war crimes) but also by the publication of a new textbook in which the Japanese war actions were glorified

instead of criticized. This twisted the knife in the wound of the barely appeased Chinese and Korean governments and tensions rose again in the region.

A more recent addition to the hall of fame of historical textbook controversies is the 2006 change in Russian history textbooks in which the image of the former Soviet leader Josef Stalin is depicted in milder, friendlier tones than in the first generation of post-Soviet history textbooks. The history taught at the beginning of the postcommunist period in secondary schools had to refocus attention from the ideology of Marxism and the Soviet identity, to the introduction of democratic principles and a description of Russian identity. This was done by highlighting the “greatness of the Russian State; in the 1990s [...] the old figures of heroes were presented in a multifaceted manner” (Zajda and Zajda, 2003: 380).

At the present time, however, there is a less ambiguous presentation of the past. Then President Putin declared that even if the former communist regime has been guilty of crimes, it nevertheless played a very important role in forming today’s Russian society and history teachers should focus on imbuing their pupils with pride in their motherland. Certainly, this new type of discourse did not remain without response – a public debate ensued, hosted among others by a Moscow radio station under the title “History lessons: is it myths or the truth that shape the citizen?” (SR Konflikt, 22.09.2007). Overall, however, the public reaction has been slight. It seems that Russians are tired of looking back to their Soviet past and are ready to accept the pride-infused interpretation offered by the regime (Semyonov, 2007), as an opinion poll from 2008 reveals. According to this investigation, even though 92 % of those interviewed had information about Stalin’s repressive policies, and 63 % place the

number of casualties of the totalitarian regime between ten and fifty million, an overwhelming majority, 80 %, agree with the statement that "Russians have every right to be proud of their history," and place Stalin in the top three most likable leaders of all time. This can diagnose the post-Soviet Russian society as "seriously ill with a partial amnesia" (Khapaeva, 2008: 1081) and underscores the little relevance historical facts have when compared to the interpretive power in the hands of the state, who creates and diffuses the grand narratives of the national past without much respect for historical professionalism.

But the attempt of the state power to capture the hearts and minds of their young citizens is not restricted to undemocratic regimes or to epochs in the distant past. As recently as 2005, the French government tried to pass a law "honoring the national contribution of the French citizens returned home" in which a controversial article (article 4) stipulated that history teachers should strive to emphasize the positive role of the French colonial empire¹⁴ (Dupuy, 2005). Although voted on in February 2005, the law did not explode onto the public platform until later in the fall, when the teachers returning to their posts after the summer break were confronted with the new text that obliged them to change attitude. A large public debate ensued, in which the most prestigious voices of French historiography pronounced themselves clearly against the new law¹⁵.

¹⁴ Article 4 stipulates "School curricula particularly recognize the positive role of the French presence overseas, notably in Northern Africa, and give to the history and sacrifice of the French Army combatants originally from these territories the eminent place to which they are entitled" (*Liberation, "Histoire. A Savoir", 17.10. 2005*)

¹⁵ The law seemed even to have a reverse effect, with the critical re-evaluation of the role the Algerian colonial soldiers had in supporting the French troops in WWII. A film that came to the notice of President Chirac, led to pensions for the former Algerian soldiers, previously excluded from the pension plan.

Textbook research, developed under the methodological guidance of UNESCO (Pingel, 1999), has been applied to numerous situations where societies are split along ethnic lines. History, geography, literature, and civic education as subjects taught in school have been described in various contexts, outside Europe in Japan (Wasserstrom, 1996; Ienaga 1993-94); Iran (Ram, 2000), Rwanda (Freedman et al., 2008), and especially Israel (Bar-Tal, 1998; Podeh, 2002; Al-Haj, 2005). In Europe, textbooks and conflict have been studied together in cases such as Northern Ireland (Smith, 2001), Cyprus (Papadakis, 2008), Greece (Hamilakis, 2003), Greece and Turkey (Antoniou and Soysal, 2005). The last publication appears in an edited volume where several other cases are compared, including France and Germany, both as individual cases and in comparison with each other (Schissler and Soysal, 2005).

In the Balkan context, recent textbook research has focused on the Bosnian case (Baranovic, 2001; Kolouh-Westin, 2004; Torsti, 2007; Hromadzic, 2008), reflecting the attention given to Bosnia and Herzegovina by the international donor community (International Monetary Fund, United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and by individual states (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the United States). Romanian and Serbian schoolbooks have been previously analyzed as well, but they captured the attention of only a small number of scholars. In fact, it would not be far-fetched to argue that two authors have produced most of the knowledge about history textbooks in the two cases: Romanian historical narratives have been authored by Mirela -Luminita Murgescu (Murgescu, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004) and Serbian ones by Dubravka Stojanovic (Stojanovic, 1994; 2002; 2007). Both these authors are historians and use the tools of

their academic discipline to describe several aspects in the historiography and the history didactics of their respective areas of specialization. Moreover, both Murgescu and Stojanovic have been directly engaged in the process of reforming, modernizing, and democratizing their respective educational systems.

Why does the textbook warrant so much attention? A superficial look at the English language may help highlight the place it occupies in the public mind by its immediate connections made in common parlance. Expressions as “this is a textbook case”, “doing it by the textbook” or “it was a textbook operation” reveal the spread perception that once a procedure or an activity has been codified into a manual it has reached a high standard. Rules codified in textbooks are expected to reflect best practice, most updated information, and clearest explanation.

In the case of history school textbooks, the ideas of quality, of codified, accepted and widespread understandings, and of verified information combine to provide the “sanctioned version of human knowledge and culture” (De Castell, 1989: 78). History textbooks are places of contention where several actors compete to promote their definition of collective memory designed to fit and further specify goals and imperatives. Such actors are the scientific communities, the state with its relevant institutions, the civil society represented by activists of various colorations, and even the students themselves. Textbook design reveals how politics and culture broadly understood interplay, creating an area where the various actors are “challenging, remapping and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities and an objective representation of reality” (Giroux, 1992: 26). Ultimately, textbooks reveal a competition over knowledge, since control

over knowledge also gives control over the entire social construction, thus revealing the power relations within the society (Foucault, 1982: 11-12).

The textbook is a socialization tool. From it, school children learn the limits of social acceptance and rejection, the rules of the game and the moral values at the core of their political and social organization. The textbook also presents and tries to inculcate a certain ideal of citizenship, a desired social mould for the future members of the polis, and in this sense it is a true “institution of memory” (Misztal, 2003: 20). The example of societies where national identity is not crystallized is demonstrative: their canon oscillates between two major narratives that reflect the indecision of the leadership and of the people as to where they belong. In this respect, the Republic of Moldova may serve as a good example of oscillation between a pro-Soviet and pro-Romanian narrative, with history textbooks switching between these narratives depending on which political actors are in power (Solonari, 2002).

What better tool than the history textbook to transmit the official state view of the history of the nation? As part of the education process, the textbook offers a direct way to communicate the state version of the past to the young, whose knowledge about the events which took place hundreds or thousands of years ago comes initially almost exclusively from the classroom. The textbook structures and communicates the national canon, defined as “a historical grand narrative, consisting of selected figures, events, story lines, ideas and values, colligated by definite plots, perspectives and explanations” (Grever and Stuurman, 2007: 3).

Certainly the grand narrative of national history is also diffused into society by other means, including public holidays and commemorations, monuments, and the

media. Education is, however, one of the most pervasive instruments in the hands of the state, as it reaches a great majority of the population through its school system. The influence school exerts over children is among the most long lasting and multifaceted, as it uses multiple channels to transmit the norms of acceptable behavior to the future citizens of the state. Something as innocent as the architecture and interior design of the school building may carry underlying messages about the social identities of different social groups, and the assigned desired qualities expected from the group. For example, class identities are reinforced by the distinction between cold, unfriendly and cheaply constructed public schools versus homey, smaller sized, architect-designed private schools for the better-off; gender identities are made visible not only in the separation into boys' and girls' classes or even schools, but also in the different ways their playgrounds are organized, with boys' spaces being wider and the girls' smaller and fewer (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008).

Various research on the learning patterns and knowledge acquisition of pupils have indicated the necessity of a complementary approach between the information in the textbooks and the presentation and interpretation of that data by the teacher: “because textbooks sometimes focus primarily on facts and details and neglect organizing principles, creating a knowledge-centered classroom will often require that a teacher go beyond the textbook to help students see a structure [...]” (Donovan and Bransford, 2005: 16). The teacher offers the guiding line through the labyrinth of information provided by the manual but the ultimate information about what happened when comes from the textbook. Moreover, even if the textbooks are not generally loaded with theoretical problematizations (and this at times is required so as

to leave some creative room to the instructor), the same textbook provides a structure on how history is organized, which periods are studied in which sequence and so on: “Both historical reports (from the beginning of the century) and more recent research indicate that from 75% to 90% of classroom instructional time is structured by textbook programs” (Woodward, 1988: 7). Ultimately, the power of the textbook comes from its authority, stemming from both a scientific and a political source. The schooltext bears the seal of approval of an expert community (say, the history professionals) and, most often, of a governmental institution (say, Ministry of Education).

The history textbook, in particular, can be an instrument for controlled remembering and forgetting. History is a vast reservoir of information, out of which only the most significant episodes are picked up and highlighted, sometimes reassembled as to fit the version of the past acceptable to society and its leaders. The history textbook is a simple and efficient conservation tool, the bearer of the collective memory sanctioned by the state. If we accept that we can “remember together”, that institutions have memories just like individuals (Halbwachs, 1950), then the institution of the school, partly through textbooks, suggests to each member of society the fragments of the past worth remembering. The French historian and historiographer Henri Moniot also qualifies the interest in the textbook as justified since it is “the effect, the sign, the vehicle or the instrument of values, opinions, ideologies” (1984: 7). The textbook offers the interpretation not only of the past but also of the present at the particular moment it was written and, in authoritarian societies, the textbook reflects almost exclusively the state perspective over the

collective past, whereas in pluralist states the manual can be described as emerging from society itself, as being “profoundly inscribed in our tradition, in our culture” (Laville, 1984: 78).

The democratization processes that took place in East European societies continued the politicization of the history textbook, simply taking it in a different direction or with a different ideological bias. If the nationalist historiography used the textbook to draw borders between coexisting groups, the current European trend is to use the same manual to erase those borders, to create a sense of community based on a reinterpreted past, and even to present it as a tool for the reconstruction of post-conflict societies (Murgescu, 2002a: 90). In this sense, the textbook today shows its interrelated functions: it is a reflection of the collective memory of the people, as well as a tool that influences it. Thus it is both the mirror and the reflection.

Focusing on history textbook analysis provides a useful and practical thermometer of the condition of a society, because textbooks reflect the official values of the state in a simplified crystallized form. Textbooks “offer a simplified, but clear and desirable notion of one’s own nation, its ‘historical fate’, its historical place and identity” (Stojanovic, 1996: 143), and, when studied over time, present the researcher with a graphic curve of the ways in which political priorities evolve. This shows whether present concerns require a reconsideration of the nation’s history, identity and relations with others.

The identity-shaping function of the textbook belongs firmly to the presentist view of history, so clearly described by Nora (1984) in its three manifestations: memory, commemoration and national patrimony. The textbook crosses the line

between the first two as it is, or could be, both a mnemonic tool and a celebratory device in the hands of the state.

Textbooks research is a well-developed field of study that covers empirically the entire globe. Theoretically however, like education research, the field of textbook research and in particular those projects interested in history didactics, has been approached for the most part from a normative and policy-oriented perspective. Research has focused on the role of the textbook in promoting a certain kind of learning process and, to some extent, a certain kind of student: well-informed, tolerant and politically aware citizen¹⁶.

This normative, policy-oriented focus, although necessary, even imperative at times, limits the field of investigation and precludes the possibility of making broader comparisons. Moreover, it displaces emphasis from an inquiry into the origins of the conflict situation, the role of structure and agency in creating the terrain propitious for conflict and the general conditions that are responsible for its perpetuation.

Conflict

In small places you don't know
Of, yet big for having no
Chance to scream or say goodbye,
People die.
Too far off to practice love
For thy neighbor/brother Slav
Where your cherubs dread to fly,

¹⁶ The European Parliament and Council adopted in 2006 a list of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning that citizens are thought to require for their “personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in our knowledge-based society” (European Parliament, 2006).

People die.

While the statues disagree

Cain's version, history

For its fuel tends to buy

Those who die.

- Joseph Brodsky, *Bosnia Tune*, 1992 (p. 490)

Conflict is a vague term that has been known to cover everything from competition and disagreement to war. In the context of this paper, conflict is understood as going beyond the mere cultural dispute over meanings and referring to a more direct and concrete struggle in which the parties are actively seeking to take over, to neutralize and dominate, sometimes even to physically eliminate, one another. A specific variant is violent conflict, which is seen as a distinct subcategory (Horowitz, 1985; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998).

Conflict, and in particular ethnic conflict defined as a struggle over cultural goods mobilizing ethnic actors, is possible especially in “multiethnic societies governed by centralized but weak and repressive states that fail to provide voice or autonomy to aggrieved ethnic and regional dissidents. Thus, strongly-bound and relatively large ethnies seek control in political systems that do not favor compromise and power-sharing” (Williams, 2001: 4809). Both Romania and Serbia at the beginning of 1990s fulfill the criteria mentioned above. They were multiethnic societies ruled by undemocratic regimes which excluded minority groups from public office and increasingly imposed persecutions of both an economic and especially a cultural nature over the minority group. The minorities studied in this paper, the Hungarians of Romania and the Albanians of Serbia, were both ethnically and

geographically compact groups that had a distinct ethnic identity and a high degree of awareness of their differences with the majority groups. They were also what Brubaker labels “national minorities” in the sense that they had a nation-state which supported their claims, a position more likely than others to lead to war: “dyads where a majority group in one state is a minority in another tend to be particularly conflict prone” (Gartzke and Gleditsch, 2006: 4). The interesting question to ask is why Serbia and Romania’s ethnic conflict potential developed so differently and if history education had something to do with these separate paths upon which the countries engaged.

To include here a description of the fall of Yugoslavia and of the Kosovo conflict would require a separate volume. In a brutally simplified presentation, the disintegration of the Socialist Federation occurred in a sequence of events stretching roughly from the declaration of independence of Croatia and Slovenia of June 1991, through the resistance of the Serbs living on the territories of the newly independent Croatia and Bosnia who received military support from Belgrade, to the Dayton Agreement of 1995 between Yugoslavia (reduced to Serbia plus Montenegro) and Bosnia and the formal cease fire between Croatia and Yugoslavia of 1996. The Kosovo conflict had been simmering in the background for a long time, and boiled over repeatedly (1945, 1968, 1981) only to be superficially contained. The last upsurge in Albanian resentment was also the most serious, reflected in the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army, a guerilla faction fighting against what they defined as Serbian occupation. In 1998, Yugoslav army troops penetrated deep into Kosovo to quell the rebellion using very rough tactics. In response, NATO

launched a humanitarian intervention in March 1999 that involved air strikes against Serbian objectives, including bombing the capital city, Belgrade. In June of the same year the NATO campaign ended, leaving Kosovo as a province under UN mandate. In February 2008 Kosovo proclaimed unilaterally its independence with the encouragement of the United States, but its current international status is uncertain, with countries like Russia firmly opposed to its recognition.

The Yugoslav conflict and its prolongation in the early 1990s and the Kosovo conflict of 1998 - 1999, have received numerous explanations; the media, structural failings in the Yugoslav state, including its military, the conservatism of political leaders, the indifference of the international community, economic failure of socialism and its effects, and the irresponsibility and shortsightedness of local leaders have all been put to blame¹⁷. In their most simplified form, the explanations can be divided in three categories (Crocker, 1999: 616-7), even though some books attempt to cover most of the aspects simultaneously (Udovicki and Ridgeway, 2000): historically determined “ancient hatreds” (Kaplan, 1993); economic competition over limited resources available in the region (Woodward, 1995); and the ambitions of local leaders to increase their power and control by playing the nationalist card (Silber and Little, 1996; Gagnon, 2004). Some scholars have highlighted the role of the international context and of great power politics in allowing the tensions to explode (Glenny, 2000) and numerous others have pinpointed the alleged special

¹⁷ For a critical overview of the early literature on the causes of Yugoslav war, see Stokes et al. (1996). The amount of books covering the topic grew exponentially in the 1990s and 2000s. A search in the European Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies for the subject Yugoslav War - 1991 gave 1107 listed articles and books. A similar search for Kosovo gave 768 results at the beginning of 2009. A useful navigation guide in this ocean of information is Ramet (2005), which gives a critical overview of over 130 books covering all Balkan conflicts post-1990: the fall of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian war and the Kosovo conflict. Ramet’s selection and interpretation of these 130 works has been criticized in its turn as biased (Djilas, 2007).

relationship between myth, religion and the Balkan wars (Mojzes, 1994; Malcolm, 1994, 1998; Mertus, 1999; Anzulovic, 1999; Judah, 2000; Pavkovic, 2000; Perica, 2002).

The Romanian – Hungarian tensions in Transylvania are less well-known, and very much smaller in size compared to the tragedy of former Yugoslavia. They have fluctuated greatly over the past 200 years, peaking during Ceausescu’s national Stalinism with its outright violations of human rights. These apprehensive relations began at the domestic level, but the neighboring states of Romania and Hungary, two “historical antagonists” (Linden, 2000: 121), were expected not to see eye to eye and even perhaps to take the conflict onto an international plane. Explanations for the domestic tensions between the Romanians and Hungarians have focused on the role of the external national homeland, here Hungary (Brubaker, 1996; Kulcsar and Bradatan, 2007; Saideman and Ayres, 2008), and the power of the elites to use the nationalist discourse in conditions of delayed benefits from democratization or the market economy (Verdery, 1993; Andreescu and Molnar, 1999; Gallagher 2005), and many of the analyses focused on the success of conflict prevention strategies both at the domestic and bilateral level¹⁸. What was most interesting was that “despite the presence of multiple factors theoretically conducive to violence such as cohesive ethnic groups, the existence of a kin state, biased interpretations of the past, a history of reciprocal discriminations, a period of problematic transition from communism, the emergence of ethnic parties, nationalist rhetoric and extremist leaders” (Mihailescu, 2005: 26), the conflict between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority

¹⁸ An extensive bibliographical list of works dealing with the Romanian-Hungarian relationship in the context of Transylvania (English, German, Hungarian and Romanian sources) can be found at the European Center for Minority Issues, “Bibliography Romania”.

did not become violent, with the exception of the events in march 1990, discussed below. It is precisely this absence of violence which is of interest and it will be investigated if this can be related to the construction of national identity and identity of the other in history textbooks.

The most explosive and violent part of an otherwise latent conflict took place at the beginning of 1990, in the city of Targu-Mures, where the population is evenly divided between the Romanian and Hungarian groups. Against the backdrop of celebrations organized by the Hungarians in honor of the national day of the Hungarian state (March 15), accusations of nationalism and separatism began to be heard from the Romanian side. On March 16, heavily intoxicated Romanians began attacking stores known to be owned by ethnic Hungarians in the city of Targu-Mures, students came out on the streets chanting anti-Hungarian songs and some of the protesters entered and pillaged a Hungarian Protestant church. Throughout the week the level of aggression of the protests escalated, both in the type of accusations and in actual attacks against people and property, culminating on March 20, 1990 when Romanian villagers, apparently dispatched by bus and train to Targu Mures, violently attacked the headquarters of the political party representing the Magyar minority, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania. The Romanian villagers were met by violence on the part of Hungarians who came to the city from the near-by localities, ready to defend their cause. At the end of the day, the center of Targu-Mures looked like the scene of a gory battle –street fighting left six fatal casualties and about three hundred wounded (Kürti, 2001: 172). This incident is the largest and bloodiest in the post-communist history of inter-ethnic relations in Transylvania. Its causes have not

been entirely elucidated, but suspicions about the involvement of Bucharest in the orchestration and stimulation of ethnic violence are not completely unfounded (Andreescu, 2001a: 12; Gallagher, 2005: 88). Certainly the media inflated the gravity of the tensions and contributed by its inflammatory discourse to the worsening of the situation. The parliamentary report about the events in Targu-Mures published in 1991 confirmed that the media reported falsely about the heavy influx of Hungarian citizens coming from across the Tisa River to help their co-nationals in their fight for a separate Transylvania¹⁹.

Only one month after the fall of Ceausescu, the street violence in Targu-Mures and the attempts by the new leadership of the country to provoke anti-Hungarian reactions through incitements about “separatist trends which cause tensions between citizens of Romanian and Hungarian nationality” (Iliescu quoted in Gallagher, 2005: 82) were used in an effort to manufacture ethnic conflict. Although this was not a reflection of any deeply rooted incompatibility between the two groups, the relations between the two ethnic groups, as well as the foreign affairs of Romania and Hungary, suffered in the aftermath of these tensions.

Only very gradually and at the pressure of international or regional organizations did the two states normalize their bilateral rapports²⁰. Even if this explosion of violence was a one-time event, the latent tension continued to exist throughout the 1990s, despite rapprochement at the bilateral level between Hungary and Romania, including their common membership into the European Union, despite

¹⁹ Raportul parlamentar asupra evenimentelor de la Targu Mures, 1991.

²⁰ For a critique of the role of European Union in moderating (or not) the nationalist discourse in Hungary, see Dutceac (2004). On the effects of European Union conditionality on Romania’s policies including those towards its ethnic minorities, see Pridham (2005).

civil society reconciliation initiatives²¹, and despite the almost uninterrupted presence of the party of the Hungarians in Romania, UDMR; in the national government²².

In cases such as the one described above, identity and conflict are relatively easily linked; but here, as in most other situations, it is not easy to identify the nature of the link between the two. The variation in theorizing about this connection is just as great as the variation of definitions given to such key concepts as identity. Probably the concept provoking most discussion is the “identity as civilization” description, made popular at the beginning of the 1990s by Samuel Huntington with his theory of an imminent clash between various cultural units. His idea that civilizations, the largest cultural entities short of humanity as a whole, are different and that they tend to come into direct opposition in contact areas, was at the origin of numerous debates in the literature about security and conflict. Although he has been criticized on numerous accounts, perhaps mostly for his definition of civilization as a static and closed-down variable, Huntington has the merit of bringing to the forefront the role of difference in fomenting conflict. Other scholars engaged upon the same line of thought and tried to explain why and under which circumstances identity and difference can be at the root of wars of various kinds: difference causes psychological distance and the depiction of the stranger as enemy (Connor, 1994; Horowitz 1985; and of course Huntington himself 1993); difference creates barriers in communication across group boundaries hence increasing the potential for misunderstanding (Cederman, 2001); on the other hand, identity creates incentives for collective action under the security dilemma (Barth, 1969; Hardin, 1995; Wendt 1992).

²¹ For more on these initiatives see Andreescu (2001a) and Romocea (2004), especially pp. 169-172

²² UDMR is not part of the government formed after the elections of November 2008, for the first time in 12 years, but they still maintain a political hold at the local level.

Since ethnicity draws one of the most common separation lines between groups, many scholars have investigated the link between ethnic identity and conflict and have arrived at a wide range of conclusions. It has even been postulated they are not connected at all. Both Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2003) discuss domestic violent conflicts as a function of the existence of opportunities for organized rebellion or insurgency. Considerations like giving the highest ranking to one's own private gain (greed for Collier and Hoeffler) or low state capacity combined with access to appropriate "technology of insurgency" (e.g. funding from interested groups, presence of a particular type of geographical landscape for Fearon and Laitin) replace identity as motivating factors in leading to violent rebellion and domestic conflict. King (2001) discusses the economic benefits resulting from conflicts, with both warring sides finding economic gains from the free, or rather untaxed, trade and production in the borderlands of frozen conflicts and finds that besides private business, the war has produced interest groups (politicians, nationalist poets and journalists, etc.) who would have something to lose in material and social prestige terms if the conflict status would be terminated.

Despite the criticism by the rational choice school of thought about the importance of symbolic politics, there are scholars who emphasize the importance of non-rational considerations: "the critical causes of extreme ethnic violence are group myths that justify hostility, fears of group extinction, and a symbolic politics of chauvinist mobilization. The hostile myths, in this view, produce emotion-laden symbols that make mass hostility easy for chauvinist elites to provoke and make extremist policies popular" (Kaufman, 2006: 47). Other scholars include ethnic

identity as a factor in the escalation of violence connected to domestic conflict, but there are different degrees of relevance, from those who focus on the emotional aspect of ethnicity (Petersen, 2002) to those who see ethnicity as “nothing more than a convenient mechanism to organize and mobilize people into homogenous groups willing to fight each other for resources that are at best indirectly linked to their ethnic identity” (Wolff, 2007: 64-65).

According to numerous studies, the major elements playing a role in violent ethnic conflict are salience of ethnic identity/ ethnocentrism and relative deprivation (Brewer, 1996; Gellner, 1994; Gurr, 1994: 123-138). If this is the case, how important can a textbook be when we discuss decisions about conflict, about military strategies and objectives? Is there not some more important element that explains the Balkan wars? Certainly, the present argument does not want to exclude the importance of factors such as dissatisfaction with the political system, ambitions of leaders, poverty, economic interests and competition, access to weaponry, or international/ regional geopolitics. Instead, it is proposed that behind the possibility of a war among neighbors there must be a certain disregard of the other, a relative dehumanization, or at least a sentiment of superiority towards the other. If this common image of the neighbor as enemy and as inferior being is widespread, then the receptivity of the public to extreme messages emanating from ethnic entrepreneurs is increased, opening the door for political mobilization for the nationalist cause. When ethnic identity (or related factors such as language or religion) is threatened, resistance from the minority group is to be expected (Gurr and Harff, 1994).

In a multicultural society, the type of collective identity valid at the level of the state can be characterized in three major categories: ethnic, multicultural and civic. According to the ethnic definition of national identity, the majority group expects the minority one to conform and embrace the norms and values of the majority, which forms an ethnic core. Multicultural definitions of national identity allow for the equal expression of different ethnic groups present in society. Mutual respect and tolerance are key words for the policy of the state towards minority groups, who may be allowed a degree of autonomy, both cultural, but also to some extent, administrative and political. The majority perceive the ethnic minorities as non-threatening members of the national community, endowed with rights to preserve their culture via, for example, education in their mother tongue. From this multicultural perspective, cultural differences are still relevant and their borders significant but not in a negative way. On the contrary these differences are perceived to enrich the nation. Finally, the civic conception of national identity defines membership in the national community outside ethnicity and based exclusively on political and legal rights included in a social contract between the citizens and the state. The nation is composed of individuals, all equal and ethnically neutral in the eye of the law. There is no majority or minority defined in ethnic terms. The three definitions of the nation have a direct impact on the general policies of the state, as illustrated for example in the case of immigration rules implemented by different countries (Münch, 2001). It is therefore more likely that the definition of the nation will directly affect the type of policies that govern minority – majority balance and these policies have the potential to either lead to conflict, or to compromise inter-

ethnic relations. In this case the textbooks may provide an ideal terrain to examine the type of national identity at work in the two cases studied here.

Ethnic conflict – causes and explanations

But what is ethnic about ethnic conflict? Even though the term is often encountered both in the mass media and in academic publications of various disciplines, there is little clarity as to what precisely the term ‘ethnic conflict’ really covers. There are two ways to define a conflict as ethnic: one looks at the actors involved, the other at the reasons, the stakes, the motivations of the parties. “An ‘ethnic conflict’ can mean that two or more distinctive ethnies are fighting to control scarce resources (oil, gold, timber, diamonds, water, land, fishing grounds). The contenders are ethnic but stakes are not. But in other cases, the objects of rivalry or violent conflict are themselves ethnic: language use, religious practices, marriage customs, domestic law, ceremonies and holidays, and so on. [...] Many so-called ethnic conflicts are struggles over non-ethnic goods, but genuine ‘conflicts of identity’ are those in which boundaries are rigid and salient and the objects of contention are cultural” (Williams, 2001: 4806). The true ethnic conflict therefore is a conflict in which both actors and stakes are defined by ethnicity. However, no conflict defined as ethnic ever involves all the members of ethnic groups; it tends to be small fractions of “violent entrepreneurs” (King, 2007: 71) who actually engage in belligerent actions, with the remaining population remaining generally passive, in an accepting way.

The primordialist or essentialist argument posits two general theses: firstly that there are intrinsic differences among religions, cultures, or races, differences

present in each and every member of the ethnic group; and secondly that these unique features composing ethnicity are always an important and active part of human identity, connected to our emotional side. When making decisions about inter-group relations, ethnicity and the feelings associated with it will take precedence over rational calculations. This argument has been made popular in the Balkan war context by journalists such as Robert Kaplan in his famous book *Balkan Ghosts* (1993) who argued that the disintegration of Yugoslavia was inevitable because of the historical animosities that were inherent among the ethnic groups of the federation. Kaplan's book is rumoured to have been popular with President Bill Clinton, who was influenced by its ideas in making his decision about the US policy towards the Balkan wars. Other policy makers of the time, like Francois Mitterand in France, or John Major in Britain, applied the same essentialist argument to the region, defined as "tribal Europe" (Mitterand quoted in Gallagher, 1997: 64).

The instrumental explanation of ethnic conflict dwells upon the role of economic interests and rational self-interested calculations in explaining why ethnicity and not any other facet of human identity is mobilized in a particular context. Instrumentalism in this sense sees ethnicity as being equivalent to any other defining feature of the community. Economic gain, or in general, material interest, is the motivation for starting a war against one's neighbor. But does this not imply that ethnicity has greater capacity to stir up the members of the community than other political messages? Is this not a return to the essentialist argument that ethnicity is in our blood, and dominates our political identification?

The same functionalist/ instrumentalist reasoning can be applied to non-material gains. For example, from an elite point of view, ethnicity can offer the mobilizing power necessary to start a war with a neighboring party, which may lead to a concentration or consolidation of power in the hands of that elite. Political leaders define ethnicity as the dominant identity for the social group, and depict the existence of a threat against this identity from a rival neighboring community. By doing so, the ruling elites can “fend off domestic challengers who seek to mobilize the population against the status quo, and can better position themselves to deal with future challenges” (Gagnon, 1994/95: 132). Again, this begs the question, why choose ethnicity? If ethnicity is not intrinsically more important than other characteristics, why play the nationalist card?

In order for ethnicity to work as a mobilizing factor, for a myth to be effective, it has to address some deep-seated issue in the public mind. The people must be receptive to the message of the politicians in order for it to mobilize and stir emotions. But this does not mean that one is born into an ethnicity. According to the constructivist view, all identities, including the ethnic one, are constructed by a “knowledge-elite” and promoted by centers of power into society (Varshney, 2001: 4812). From the plurality of narratives active at any given point in time within a group, the elite picks a particular version that best suits its needs and ideological inclination and tries to transform it into a master narrative that will gain unchallengeable, almost hegemonic status. There is an art in choosing an appropriate narrative, one that resonates well with the already existing popular belief but that can

be interpreted in a way suitable to the elite, and this process is not always risk-free; as Schöpflin put it, there are politicians who “picked the wrong myth” (1997: 24).

There is a major difference between the instrumentalist and the constructivist view of ethnicity and its potential for creating conflict. For instrumentalists, ethnicity is a catch phrase, a spin effect, without any weight in itself. It is a façade behind which the real interests (economic, political) are hidden. If interests change, the façade will change accordingly. The constructivist view, on the other hand, even if it also sees ethnicity as “invented”, contends that once elevated to the rank of public or even master narrative, it cannot be easily modified. This paper embraces the constructivist assertion that ethnicity and myth have a life of their own, outside the immediate control of elites, even of those elites who originally put them in place. In Serbia, the nationalist ethos certainly precedes the Milosevic era and is not directly connected to any particular political leader in contemporary politics (Sardamov, 1996: 31). The same can be argued about Romania, where the national project has occupied the minds and activities of the intellectual and political elite since the middle of the 19th century.

Regardless of where the origins of ethnic identity lie, it is a facilitator for collective action, and research in social psychology supports the common intuition that there is a constant preference for the in-group as compared to the out-group. This preference seems to be the consequence of evolutionary psychological development (Barkow, Cosmides and Tooby, 1992). Social contact theory applies these assumptions to a number of experiments which demonstrate the tendency of cooperation to occur mostly within the group, no matter how small, rather than across

group boundaries (Tajfel, Billig, and Bundy, 1971). Phinney (1990), in an overview of existing data, points out that those who display a strong sense of belonging to an ethnic group are also likely to seek more disagreements with persons from other ethnic groups who are perceived schematically and placed in stereotypical categories. Especially in markedly divided societies, like South Africa, strong identification with one's own racial and ethnic group strengthened the need for in-group solidarity while the out-group was perceived as a threat leading to intolerance in intergroup contacts (Gibson and Gouwa, 1998).

Ethnocentrism, defined as giving one's own ethnic group primary loyalty and placing those belonging to other ethnic groups in an inferior position relative to one's own group, leads to the portrayal of the other in stereotypical fashion, usually negatively, which is also likely to be conducive to increased suspicion and a biased view of mutual relations (Booth, 1979). Ethnocentrism can be explained in part by a rationalist argument, saying that interaction within the group is less costly than that with other groups because of the existence of factors such as a common language, common cultural codes, shared norms etc. which facilitate communication (Bates, 1983). These common features serve as a measure to determine membership in the group and therefore exclusion or inclusion (Chandra, 2004). In the case of politicized ethnicities, inclusion in the majority or dominant group may also, for example, lead to a preferential allocation of resources from the state (Bates, 1974).

In the framework of the project Minorities at Risk, both social psychological and rational explanations have been evaluated and integrated in a model of minority – majority relations with respect to the potential of violent conflict. Initiated by Ted

Robert Gurr, the MAR project took stock of the situation of over 250 minority groups worldwide and attempted to predict the chances for conflict or harmony in their respective states. According to Gurr and Harff, there are two basic conditions for the mobilization of minorities, ethnic or other, against the state majority: 1. Systematic political/ economic discrimination partially derived from cultural differences and 2. Degree of political organization and mobilization of the group.

In his explanation of ethnic conflict, Gurr combines primordialist and instrumentalist views on nationalism arguing that both relative deprivation (or people's feeling of being mistreated) and group mobilization (leaders' interests and desire for increased political power) play a role in generating conditions for ethnic conflict: "If people's grievances and group identity are both weak, there is little chance that they can be mobilized by any political entrepreneurs in response to any external threat or opportunity. On the other hand, the conjunction of shared grievances with a strong sense of group identity and common interest [...] provides highly combustible material that fuels spontaneous action" (Gurr, 1993: 124).

One must make the distinction, however, between underlying and proximate causes for conflict. Underlying causes are necessary but not sufficient to provoke an outbreak of tension or violence between groups: structural (weak states, geopolitical placement in the region, presence of internal separatist groups), political (politics divided along ethnic lines, discrimination or even exclusion of some ethnic groups from politics), economic and social (economic discrimination, labor market restrictions, preferential modernization) and cultural and perceptual (destruction of cultural and historical monuments and artifacts of some groups, imposition of only

one state language and exclusion of the mother tongue of some groups from public administration and teaching, a long history of violence or memory of past wrongdoings). Without the activation effect of immediate causes however, there would be no direct conflict situation. Immediate causes vary from case to case and are largely context-bound, but they can nevertheless be categorized along the elite-mass level and internal-external axes. Bad leaders (internal) and bad neighbors (external) are both elite level factors; serious disturbances in the internal workings of the state and/or society and the geopolitical placement in regions defined by severe political and military unrest are immediate causes at the mass level (Brown, 2001: 15).

Either as an underlying cause when ethnicity serves as a border-drawing criterion for discrimination, or for the organization of political life, or as a proximate cause when it is the motivation offered by leaders to proceed with aggressive action against a competitor, ethnicity appears to be unavoidably a factor in explaining internal conflict.

To bring together the argument, ethnic identity is one of the most important factors in group mobilization. Strong group identity is connected to the tendency of negative stereotyping of non-group members. With socialization mechanisms and myths, elites use textbooks to influence national identity to become more tolerant (multicultural or civic) or more exclusivist (ethnic). This is not to say that purely instrumentalist views have primacy. People are influenced by textbooks but at the same time these manuals are also a reflection of the accepted norms and values of society. Elites can modify these shared norms only gradually and to some extent. Moreover a strong ethnic identity can be mobilized politically only in the presence of

other facilitating conditions such as discrimination, resource scarcity, and perception of threat.

Political uses of history and nationalism

“History is not only a science. It is at once the Gospel of the present and the future of the Motherland”

Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, quoted in Clogg (1988)

History is an essential component of human identity, many argue. As Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher expressed it: “history exists before me and precedes my reflection. I belong to history before I belong to myself” (1988: 111). We create history by our actions, then by remembering them and consigning them to posterity, just as we are created by history, conditioned by our past and the collective past to which we assume we belong. The possibility to place oneself along some temporal coordinates requires some form of historical consciousness, which can be understood as an awareness of our “being in time”. In its turn, the presence of a historical consciousness is conditioned by narration. Through the act of recounting, past events are transferred into the present and interpreted by the contemporary public who has the opportunity to endow the story of the past with meaning. Ricoeur finds the link between history and collective memory in the process of recounting, when older people tell the younger generation a story about their past: “in this way a bridge is constructed between the historical past and memory by the ancestral narrative that serves as a relay station for memory directed to the historical past. [...] If we proceed along this chain of memories, history tends to become a we-relationship [...] (Ricoeur, 1988: 114).

Agnes Heller discusses the psychological means employed in this signifying process: as private users of history we build new concepts by assigning an unknown event to a known category. We compare past events with present ones and find commonalities, analogies, or differences. We look for symbols and narrative shortcuts to help us simplify and understand history; and during our attempts to understand it, we seek causalities, explanations why an event took place and had the described consequences, even if we as individuals are not equipped with scientific tools to assign correlations and causalities (1982: 64-71).

But history is used not only by private persons, it is also employed by people in their social capacity. The Swedish historian Klas-Goran Karlsson (2004: 56) developed a systematic typology of the uses of history according to the various categories of users and their respective interests.

The existential use of history is located at the private level and is most salient for members of those social groups who have experienced a historical trauma and who must come to terms with it in order to find a more secure future. The moral use comes under the category “history as a lesson” – looking at the errors of the past, the present is exhorted to correct them. Moral users are also attempting to assign responsibility, and clean the slate, so to speak, in preparation for a better future. The scientific use, although straightforward, can also be queried, especially as described below, from a postmodern perspective, regarding the possibility of history as a true science. The commercial use of history is obvious in such enterprises as historical theme parks and even museums (but also in best-selling films based on historical events), in which history is recreated in a digested format that is palatable to a public

who sees history through an existential lens. The last three uses have as main actors the intellectual and political elites who aim to legitimize the present and future by a selective choice of events from the past which are interpreted to suit their needs. The selection implies automatic exclusion of unwanted, unfitting occurrences, and thus the non use of history. These elites can also be interested in building ideologies and theoretical constructions that attempt to give universal explanations and solutions, on the basis of the past, by downplaying errors and inconsistencies and by invoking the laws or inevitability of history. Both communism and nationalism fit well into this category.

The political – pedagogical users see history as relevant in contemporary political debates, and employ direct comparisons with past experience in order to either show the way out of current problems or to bring immediate political gain (Karlsson, 2004: 62). History plays the role of legitimizer: historical events are gathered and rearranged to fit into the puzzle created by the nationalist leadership. The selection and interpretation of historical facts and sources are dedicated to the present cause which is to rally the people around a flag which, they have been told, has been theirs since time immemorial. Rituals, symbols and an inflammatory rhetoric play a role in the mobilization of the people (Mach, 1993), but their receptivity to this message cannot be explained in the absence of information about what they know about their own past and how deep this information goes.

What should be the moral responsibility of the historian who is aware of the potential for political and ideological use of the past? Does the historian have a mission, and if so, what? If objectivity and positivist truth cannot be attained, how

can one deal with the subjective, presentist interpretations of the past? It appears that one solution embraced by leading voices in the study of history and culture generally support an approach based on the respect for diversity. The participants at a UNESCO workshop about “disarming history” in Southeastern Europe call for a history with an emancipating mission, defining our image in terms of how we should be. It is worth quoting from the declaration of the participants, as it makes key points about the duties of the historian which are currently perceived as desirable:

“The duty of the historian would be to define the causes of conflicts and their effects, and to promote at the same time a climate of solidarity in difference, to establish a dialogue to recognize the other and to see ourselves in the other. [...] The role of the historian is not limited however to the identification of facts and tracing the big lines of historical evolution. It is his task to present them in such manner as to find support for contributions to the promotion of the progress of humanity. [...] It is unfair to deprive a people of the knowledge of its past but it is just as absurd that historical facts are distorted and put at the service of an ideology of hate, exclusion and aggression. History must be suspicious of ideological manipulations and partisan mythologies. [...] The task of the historian consists precisely in considering the reality of facts and drawing the consequences to the benefit of democratic and humanist principles” (UNESCO, 1999: 8-9).

We see here an implicit belief in the reality of historical facts, something challenged by a postmodernist view of history, and an articulation of moral criteria sanctioning good behavior: against aggressive nationalism and for democracy and

humanism. The objective search for truthful facts must be combined with an interpretation of these facts from a morally acceptable point of view. The declaration proclaims the existence of a moral and, at the same time, ideological use of history and raises it to the status of official doctrine (as long as the ideology fits with the master narrative of the Western world). History unavoidably shapes identities – the task of professionals of this discipline is therefore to outline them in a way compatible with the ideals of society. The underlying assumption is that the age of nationalism is over; national identities that have been served by history textbooks in the past must now be replaced with more inclusive, tolerant definitions of the community. The risk is that an inward-looking national canon will become less and less convincing. In the end, it might make history “simply irrelevant” in the eyes of citizens of a globalized world (Grever and Stuurman, 2007: 3). The problem may be that this global citizen who needs a new non-national history may live elsewhere but not in Southeastern Europe, where national identities are still central, and therefore the call for change in the national focus of history teaching may not be welcomed by the local society.

Scholars unveiled the presence of ideology in textbooks a long time ago. Schools are places where the process of cultural reproduction is actively taking place (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1996), and where political struggles occur continuously (Giroux, 1981). Writing about the class society, Althusser identifies the role of the school as one of the channels of this reproduction of the norms at the foundation of the system: “many of these contrasting Virtues (modesty, resignation, submissiveness on the one hand, cynicism, contempt, arrogance, confidence, self-importance, even

smooth talk and cunning on the other) are also taught in the Family, in the Church, in the Army, in Good Books, in films and even in the football stadium. But no other ideological State apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven” (Althusser, [1971] 2001: 105). This is the power of the education system, to have easy and prolonged access to the minds of impressionable young citizens at the hands of a state that has always tried to make its public more disciplined.

As Michael W. Apples expresses it, textbooks “signify through their content *and* form – particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge. They [...] embody someone’s selection, someone’s vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one’s group’s cultural capital disenfranchises another’s” (1991: 4). This “someone” is the state, and the more authoritarian and less transparent the regime, the tighter the grip it holds over the knowledge it allows to spread into society.

And it seems that of all ideologies, nationalism has found in history its closest ally. As the American historian Henry Steele Commager remarks, “There is one bias, one prejudice, one obsession so pervasive that it deserves special consideration: nationalism. History, which should be the most cosmopolitan of studies, most catholic in its sympathies, most ecumenical in its interests, has in the past century and a half become an instrument of nationalism. Nationalism is, no doubt, the most powerful force in modern history, and it is hardly surprising that it should have captured

historiography and enslaved historians” (quoted in Berghahn and Schissler, 1987: 121).

Nationalism has been analyzed in so many ways and by so many scholars that any review of the literature with modest ambitions would have to cover some hundred pages, and not even then would it do justice to the topic. There will be no attempt here at an overview; instead there will be a short pause to look at the perception of nationalism in the Eastern part of Europe. Many authors who also make the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism identify a typically East European subspecies of this phenomenon²³. The idea has a long intellectual tradition (perhaps even connected to Orientalist tendencies) that may be traced to Kohn’s study of 1948: “Nationalism in the West arose in an effort to build a nation in the political reality and struggle of the present without too much sentimental regard for the past; nationalists in Central and Eastern Europe created, often out of myths of the past and the dreams of the future, an ideal fatherland, closely linked with the past, devoid of any immediate connection with the present, and expected to become sometime a political reality” (Kohn cited in Sugar and Lederer, 1994: 9-10). In other words, nationalism is civic in the West and ethnic in the East. And since the civic version is considered to be superior to the ethnic one, West emerges as the more advanced model, with the East as the poor younger brother, with some room to develop.

Ethnic nationalism of the Eastern European persuasion is “pessimistic” and has a tendency to remember the failures rather than the victories (Sugar and Lederer, 1994: 417) and is grounded heavily in myths, which cannot be the case in the rational West. There are reasons to disagree with this point of view: every nation has its use

²³ For a thorough critique of the thesis of the special Balkan nationalism see Todorova (2005).

for myths, as myth fulfills special functions in the process of taking stock of a complex reality and helps with the cohesion of the community. Myths may appear more or less relevant depending on the circumstances. They are used more in times of trouble, but they do not disappear without trace, never to return. Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe, do not have a privileged relationship with myth: the myth of heavenly Serbia, or the myth of Latin origins of Romania cannot be placed in a category differentiating them from the myth of Rome for Italy or the Masada myth for Israel. Even such pragmatic bureaucracies as the European Union may have, or wish to obtain, a founding myth of their own²⁴.

Moreover, Eastern European and Western nationalism are both, in equal measure, the product of intellectuals, those thinkers preoccupied with finding a yardstick for themselves, always in search of their identity²⁵ (Suny and Kennedy, 2001, esp. pp. 1-51). Hitchins writes about the Romanian intellectual leaders of eighteenth century Transylvania, but he could just as well be referring to processes taking place throughout the region, when he explains that nationalism was “built on a sense of community that was already strong in 1700: the memory of shared experiences in the past, the folk customs and myths, the language, the Eastern Orthodox religious tradition, and the social and political exclusion that drew the community together. The generation of 1848 then used these foundations as the moral and legal justification for political autonomy” (Hitchins, 2002: 105). The same spirit governs the argument of Jasna Dragovic-Soso, who uncovers the mechanisms behind

²⁴ For such attempts at a myth of Europe see Puntcher Riekmann (1997), or Passerini (ed.) (2003).

²⁵ Intellectuals and nations are reciprocally influenced, in the sense that the elite “articulates” the nation at the same time as the nation “produces” these elites, through, inter alia, the education system. The intellectuals may give coherence to an unarticulated or diffused self-definition of the community, or, at times, “invent” them altogether.

the support given by Serbian intellectuals to the nationalist discourse, grounded in an ethos of “national dignity” (2002: 2).

The Southeastern European region has been even more prone to be perceived as the most propitious terrain for the birth of the mythical monsters of nationalism. Several authors, both from outside and from within the region have argued for the propensity of the Balkan people to behave differently than their counterparts in the West: more irrationally, more passionately, and more violently. Some accuse this bias to be perpetuated in academic circles at universities from the West (Djilas, 2007), while others respond by framing the issue not in terms of West versus Balkans but in terms of different moral narratives of academia in general, which may influence the type of explanations proposed to various historical or contemporary Balkan issues (Lampe, 2008). This research is aware of the temptation of applying a normative twist to the selection and interpretation of the information examined. Inasmuch as the authorial subjectivity can be constrained, it attempts to stay away from moral bias by including several versions of the same story, told by several voices and by placing Romania and Serbia in a more general context, thus playing down the idea of Balkan exceptionalism.

By focusing on the myths and identity-making processes in two countries of Southeastern Europe, this thesis does not assume that this region is a *sui generis* case of interethnic tensions, nor does it postulate that history, myth, or religion play a different or more important role than in other parts of the world. On the contrary, by focusing on instances of both presence and absence of conflict, in conditions of similar identity-making strategies, and similar uses of history, including a relatively

high presence of mythical accounts, this research wants to relativize the potential for what came to be known as “balkanization”: a violent splintering of states along ethnic lines. The interest of looking at identity, myths, and their reflection in history textbooks is theoretical. Instead of posing these phenomena as exceptional and regionally-bound, the present work would rather claim that these are common occurrences at work *also* in this region.

The link between education and national identity was obvious even to the early nationalist thinkers. In a discourse to the German nation written in 1807, Fichte clearly argues for the effective use of education in the creation of loyal citizens of the nation state. He argues that instead of using what today would be called hard power, the military for example, to coerce citizens into defending their land, the state “which introduced universally the national education proposed by us, from the moment that a new generation of youths had passed through it, would need no special army at all, but would have in them an army such as no age has seen” (Fichte, 1978: 178). Soft power, the power of ideas propagated widely through education, would lead to better results at a fraction of the cost and would eliminate opposition, rebellion and resistance to projects initiated by the state in either defensive (preserve the nation) or offensive (give the nation what it deserves) purposes.

In addition to the role that the official and impersonal institution of the school carries into the larger group, it is important to emphasize the role of the teacher as educator and instiller of national values. Traditionally in Balkan societies, the teachers, together with the priests, formed the elite at the level of small and medium-sized communities. Their authority and control over the written word allowed them in

the late 19th and early 20th century to actively shape the values transmitted via the school system, among which nationalism was dominant. As Jelavich argues about the early 20th century situation, teachers “almost unanimously favored national unification objectives. They did so not only because they were civil servants, expected to be loyal and patriotic, but also because they personally believed in the cause they supported” (Jelavich, 1990: 58). Being a source of knowledge and a moral authority placed teachers in a privileged position maintained even today, despite the relative decline in their social standing.

Several authors, among them many historians themselves, have highlighted in recent years the relationship between the historian and their subject, the duality of both looking at the past from the point of view of an outsider and at the same time making history by offering new clues and interpretations of this recorded past. Historians, together with other intellectuals, were “inventors of tradition” to paraphrase a book title. At the same time, especially in the Southeast of Europe, the historian perceived his duty to be not only scholarly in nature but also linked to a political responsibility. Here we have “historians as nation-builders” (Deletant and Hannak, 1988) in the most concrete sense. It is not surprising then to find that, at the peak of the national formation process in the Balkans, both Serbia and Romania had leading political figures who were at the same time very respected professional historians: Mihail Kogalniceanu and Nicolae Iorga in Romania and Stojan Novakovic in Serbia were authors of pioneering research in their nation’s past as well as very respected and powerful diplomats and holders of public office, including that of

prime-minister²⁶. Knowledge of the nation's past imposed an obligation for its future, in the eyes of these personalities who strove to understand the lessons of history and how they could be applied in every day politics.

Collective memory

Somebody, broom in hand
Still recalls how it was.
Someone whose head was not
Torn away listens nodding.
But nearby already
Begin to bustle
Those who'll need persuasion
Those who knew
What this was all about
Must yield to those
Who know little
Or less than little
Essentially nothing.

-Wyslawa Szymborska, End and Beginning 1993

Myth, because of its narrative structure, and its claim to tell something about the origin of the world or its components, often touches upon history. For the most part, the myth /history pair has been portrayed in an antithetical manner, with myth standing for the unreal, the untrue, the unverified, and history for the factual, scientific recuperation of the past. According to this traditional view, it is possible to reconstruct events of the past “as they were”, using rational, positivist methods and

²⁶ For more on the careers of these three historian-politicians see for example the contributions of Dimitrije Djordjevic, Barbara Jelavich, and Maurice Pearton in Deletant and Hannak (1988).

relying upon the discovered artefacts of bygone eras. Historians are thus in charge of the process of gathering the factual fragments which, once put together with the glue of logic, provide the basis for scientific conjecture. The ultimate goal of such a reconstructive task would be to retell the entire story of the human past from its beginning to the present and with as much detail as possible in all its complexity. To some extent, it can be argued that the logical conclusion of the Rankeian history is a reproduction of the world's collective memory.

On the other hand, recent developments within history as an academic discipline are beginning to problematize the ability of historians to accurately and objectively repaint a portrait of the past eras, without altering in nuance and tone their reproduction with colors nonexistent at the time of the events. Authors' subjectivity and the almost inevitable risk of "presentism", of looking at the past through the looking glass of the present, have been highlighted and brought into question. The most radical questioning of history as a science comes from the postmodern perspective (with Hayden White as the primary reference), for which the border between history and myth is completely blurred. McNeill admits only the existence of a mythistory (1986). History IS myth, inasmuch as they both are fragmentary renderings of the past carrying a meaning superimposed on the facts, which in their turn are bound to be approximations and not precisely known quantities, the border between myth and history is increasingly blurred (Collins 2003: 360). The association of myth with falsehood and of history with truth is pernicious. History's claim to tell it all about the past cannot stand critical examination, whereas myths, to the extent that they are believed, contain their own version of truth. As Aristotle argued, the

mythical truth lies not in accuracy but in myths' capacity to tell a "truth about life in general" (Finley 1965: 283). The tension between truth and untruth, between science and knowledge, to use the Foucaultian dichotomy, does not find room in the critical discourse of history. To some extent, no truth can be considered ultimate: "Scientific truth is exact, but it is incomplete and penultimate and of necessity embedded in another, ultimate, though inexact truth which I see no objection to calling a myth. "Scientific truth floats in a medium of mythology" (Ortega y Gasset quoted in Todorova, 1990: 30). Mythology as *savoir* provides the context in which the concrete propositions of *connaissance* or scientific knowledge can be enunciated (Foucault 1972: 184).

Many contemporary historians question even the existence of a collective memory, since they cannot accept the idea that a group can recollect episodes to which they were not direct witness, for them memory is not transferable. This contrasts Halbwachs understanding of the term, namely that collective memory exists beyond the individuals, and resides in the common institutions of the group. It is these institutions that, through the repetition of practices and the common definition of objectives, make the link between the past and the present. Halbwachs' approach to social memory is illustrated in this quote: "There are no recollections which can be said to be purely interior, that is, which can be preserved only within individual memory. Indeed from the moment that a recollection reproduces a collective perception, it can itself only be collective" (1950: 169) or "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society (38)". Thus, it would be possible for a collective memory of the community's essential past to be carried on, despite

the physical disappearance of the people who either made or observed the events. Jan Assman reinterprets Halbwachs's heritage and avoids using the term "collective" when discussing the social dimension of memory. Instead he distinguishes between cultural and communicative memories; the former is established and transmitted via officially approved rituals and publicly sanctioned monuments; the latter is much more short-term, in the order of a human lifespan, and is created by interpersonal communication (Assman, 2006).

Neither the original nor the reinterpreted version of the collective memory is acceptable for the new historians; objects, monuments, commemorations and rituals carry knowledge, not recollection: "They may well store or transmit information about the past, or act as social-psychological triggers for often very powerful images or emotions – just visualize a picture of a slave ship – but they do not embody memory, for we were not there." (Bell, 2003: 73) Social aspects do influence what different individuals actually recollect, but the basic criterion for their memory to exist in the first place is their participation at or observation of the respective events.

Another issue in discussing collective memory is the supposition of a single body representing a group's collective memory and this ignores the power relations inevitably active in claiming group representativity. It is more acceptable to imagine a plurality of memories, depending for example on which side of a conflict or a social barrier a memory stood, competing for the right to be told and become adopted as representing the entire community. Since collective memory is such a loaded concept, the preferred term is "remembrance" (Paul Connerton, 1989), with its emphasis on

process and agency located at the grassroots level, awarding it a minimal legitimacy for speaking in the name of the collective.

Collective memory is more powerful than history in terms of making the past a *casus belli*. It is not the remote events in the medieval past of a group that mobilizes nationalist resentment, “it is usually the more immediate history of interethnic relations that is critical—the history that has been recently experienced and can be remembered by the current generation of political leaders and their constituents” (King, 2007: 71). However, it can be argued that even the more distant history can become relevant for the salience of ethnicity in conflict situations, if the distance between then and now is erased through the use of myths.

Collective memory is mythical; a governing myth resembles to some extent an ideology or a hegemonic idea²⁷, without being identical to it. Myths are founded upon history or historical events that make them plausible and credible. Because they do not need to be certified by logos, a demonstrable truth, they can carry a special power regarding the collective memory of a community: myths carry the clues to which this memory attaches itself.

Collective identity and ethnicity

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,

²⁷ Halpern discusses the differences between myth and ideology arguing that they are distinct but not separate; “myth is, in a sense, more elementary than ideology, and ideology, in a way, implies some of the processes proper to myth” (Halpern, 1961: 136). The philosophical complexities of the relationship between ideology, in its various guises, and political myth are discussed in Bottici (2007), chapter III, especially pp. 185-196. To summarize, ideology understood as a system of ideas that claim to explain and justify the ends and means of collective action lacks some of the required elements of myth: the narrative form (the plot), which must produce meaning and, most importantly, raise emotions.

Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;

-Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

These mnemonic clues help in the formation of the collective identity of the nation, which is understood here according to the definition given by Smith, as “a named²⁸ human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (1991: 14). The nation has its foundations in a common, even if at times imagined, past and in a common legal system. Perhaps even more importantly though, the nation exists because its members so desire; this is what Connor (1978) described as the “sense of belonging”, the desire of the individuals who compose the national group to see themselves as a unit. In the absence of this emotional bond, no other measurable identity component such as a common history, language or religion can play a role. Collective identity, including the national one, is created both by individuals, each with their own set of beliefs and interests, and by institutions.

The process of social remembering has been interpreted as being of several varieties: top-down (the presentist approach), bottom-up (the popular memory approach), or as a continuous interaction between the elites and their public (the dynamics of memory approach) (Misztal, 2003: 50-74). No matter at which level the

²⁸ “Named” refers here to the importance of language in creating identity; by naming something we bring it into existence (Bourdieu, 1991: 236).

investigation is situated, the struggle for the right to remember and be remembered reveals the importance of memory for group identity.

Once created, this shared identity tends to impose normative limits on the behavior of social actors, as it “determines the way individuals feel about themselves and about society” (Sztompka, 2004: 483). What is deemed worthy of remembering defines the national history canon, what is left out are the dark areas the nation avoids discussing in the public sphere. Dealing with a problematic past by bringing it into the light is however a necessary step in moving forward: “an authentic democratic community cannot be built on the denial of past crimes, abuses and atrocities. The past is not another country. It cannot be wished away – the more that is attempted, the more we witness the return of repressed memories” (Tismaneanu 2008, 171-2).

Ethnicity is another example of a collective identity. Ethnicity also builds upon the distinctions between in- and out-groups, but whereas the nation includes at least the aspiration for an overlapping of the borders of the group with the borders of the state, ethnicity remains anchored in the area of cultural distinctiveness: “ethnicity is the subjective, symbolic, or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups” (Brass, 1991: 19). Ethnicity and nation do share several characteristics, including a common etymology (ethnicity comes from the Greek “ethnos” connected to “lineage” whereas nation derives from the Latin “nasci”, “be born”) (Conversi, 2004: 817). Thus by linguistic origin and by contemporary understanding, both terms have to do with collective identities of groups whose binding mortar is the belief in a common descent.

Different theories of identity assigned it either an instrumental, ethnic/cultural, or civic foundation (Ruiz Jimenez, 2004: 2-4). Collective identities emerge in a double movement: the building of bonds (the solidarity around a common WE) and of borders which separate from the Others. As we create moral connections with the members of our group, based on trust, solidarity, reciprocity and empathy, we draw the separation line from the non-members, arranged on a scale of otherness. This process is inevitable and in that sense it is to be expected. The question remains however where and how we place the Others along the exclusion scale: in what is generally defined as consolidated, stable democracies (Linz and Stepan, 1996), alterity is accepted and even admired, thus leading to a positive tolerance. In other societies, and for a variety of reasons, the Other is cast in a negative light, as menacing, dangerous or undesirable and inferior. The negative tolerance can even be taken one step further and grow into outright intolerance, when the Others are perceived as the “enemy”, as evil to be eliminated, or destroyed.

No matter how it is perceived, the other is an essential element of the definition of the self, and this has always been accepted as an important part of the theory of nationalism and ethnicity. The founding fathers of nationalism theory discussed the importance of difference in the process of formation of nations. For example, Kedourie argues that nationalism is the doctrine most focused on the particular, the specific, an elevation of particularism to the degree of universal norm. The duty of the nationalist, and later by extension of every member of the community, is to identify and preserve, if not to increase, the differences between groups and find what makes “us” special and unique: “There is a duty laid upon us to

cultivate our own peculiar qualities and not mix or merge them with others' (1992: 51).

If we accept that the nation is not an isolated entity but a relational one, that its existence and extent are created by a process of differentiation, then it becomes clear that studying the representation of alterity is of prime importance as it can highlight features of the nation itself. The “significant other” is defined by its threatening potential as “another nation or ethnic group that is territorially close to, or indeed within, the national community and threatens, or rather is perceived to threaten, its ethnic and/or cultural purity and/or its independence” (Triandafyllidou, 1998: 600). The threat can come from outside (a neighboring nation, a dominant state) or from inside (a minority group). In this study, the focus is placed on the internal significant other, the minority group that by its presence endangers national distinctiveness. This is not a purely intellectual endeavor, but has practical implications since images and representations “are instrumentalized in politics, while, at the same time, being shaped by it” (Todorova, 1999: 170).

Sometimes the so-called objective differences between the majority and minority groups need not be large. On the contrary, it is often the case that groups that otherwise might be considered almost as members of the same family, with a single major difference (be that dialect, religion, historical tradition) find each other on opposite sides of the borderline. The fact that differences are so small may lead to the perception that group uniqueness, group particularity is about to disappear, melted as it were in another, bigger unit. Freud refers to this pattern as the “narcissism of minor

differences”²⁹, and more often than not “it is precisely communities with adjoining territories and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and in ridiculing each other”(Freud, 1930: 114). The theory that states that are most similar in cultural features are also most likely to engage in war-like activities against each other is supported by contemporary data, such as the quantitative analysis of Gartzke and Gleditsch (2006) demonstrate.

Freud gives the example of the English fighting the Scots, but another appropriate contemporary case in point may come from the former Yugoslav space, where Serbs and Croats objectively share many common features among which not the least is language. The threat of being dissolved into a single, say Yugoslav, identity and of losing Serbianness or Croatianness in the process, transformed the otherwise very similar neighbor into a significant other. It is not the differences in themselves that generate the conflict, but, under the influence of demographic and ecological particularities, the political mobilization of these differences are the cause (Blok, 1998: 49). The reasons why some minority groups are perceived as threats and others are not, lie not in their “hard” qualities but in the perceptions active in the society. These perceptions, in their turn, can appear and become salient in conditions of insecurity and in the hands of political leaders who foresee political gain from their exploitation.

When discussing conflictual situations, the tendency of groups themselves and of those who study them is to essentialize and make them permanent. Even though group unity is certainly necessary for it to function, especially when under perceived

²⁹ For a review of the most relevant contemporary interpretations of the Freudian statement, see Kostø (2007).

threat, one must remember that no group is everlasting. Group identity, just like any other, is in constant flux and negotiation both with internal and external factors defining its borders. What is constructed as a difference today may have been perceived as similarity in a not so distant past. Wachtel argues this was the case with the identities in the former Yugoslavia: “No matter how similar a group of people appears to be on the surface, there is sure to be some level at which differences appear [...] Conversely, no matter how heterogeneous a group of people might appear to an observer, there is a level at which its members could choose to see each other as belonging to one nation.” (Wachtel, 1998: 2)

Myth

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked

William Butler Yeats, *A Coat* (1950: 142)

The construction process of collective identities by assigning threat potential to significant others is partly supported by myth. Defined in anthropological terms as stories that allow mankind to bring order to their reality, to give meaning and thus at least the illusion of understanding the world (Levi Strauss), myths are understood as a *narrative* that illustrates the belief of a community about itself (Hosking and Schopflin, 1997). The idea of narrative merits a brief overview as it has made a breakthrough in social sciences, from its restricted domain of literary criticism. In light of the ideas of Roland Barthes, it has become increasingly accepted that we as social beings need narrative to structure our lives. In this sense, “narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*” [emphasis in original] because “people construct identities (no matter how multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; [...] people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way

integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; [...] people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives” (Somers, 1994: 614).

The most important and distinguishing feature of a narrative is the presence of a plot. Plot is valuable from a social point of view as it underlines its meaning-making capacity. The presence of a plot and of a series of characters brings structure and therefore significance to the events that the narrative relates; for example, a series of apparently unconnected events are put together in a coherent story and thus are explained (Ricoeur, 1984). From a social science perspective, the most interesting narratives are the public ones, those who are located in the institutional space or in the intersubjective networks that go beyond the personal level and integrate the existential story of the individual into larger webs of significance, to use Geertz’s expression. It is certainly also significant from a social science perspective to examine the most general level, that of “meta” or “master” narratives, those which have the power to shape the entire framework of the public debate and which have gained hegemonical status in different historical epochs (e.g. Progress, Civilization, Democracy, and especially relevant for us here, Nationalism)³⁰. Both public and master narratives have a surprisingly strong capacity to survive once they have been established. The narrator’s power to alter the content of the story is reduced in direct proportion to the narrative’s degree of acceptance and diffusion in society (Olick, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996).

³⁰ For more on master narratives see, for example, Lyotard (1984) or Foucault (1972).

Myth is a narrative because it follows a story telling structure. It places occurrences in a temporal, even if fantastic, time frame and in an interconnected relationship that serves as the meaningful part of the story. Myth belongs to the public narrative repertoire and is both archetypal, in the sense that its composing elements recur in different epochs and places, and specific, describing events that pertain to a specific group in a specific period. We can therefore identify the grand typologies of myth (the foundation, the golden age, the conspiracy, etc) with their plethora of characters (the hero, the villain, the wise man, the ingénue, the victim) in almost all societies.

While myth is a type of narrative, not all narratives are myths. There are folktales, and legends, and stories that might have been once myths but have lost their mythical impact. The category of myth is not perfectly synonymous with any of the above mentioned examples. (Bottici, 2007: 5).

Textbooks can thus be studied as loci of identity-making, as they can provide the group with the particular narrative that would explain the present and the past, would serve as moral guidance and as justification for the tragedies of history. The (hi)stories that textbooks tell sometimes include the kernel of the mythical structures mentioned above, and some of the historical figures presented can take on an archetypal aura, especially in those cases where education priorities do not include the extensive problematization of history but rather the simplified and linear presentation of the group's past.

The post-communist space experienced a break with the past that, no matter how desirable and desired by the entire political body, led to the need to find new

landmarks and adjust the way of thinking to a new set of values and types of behavior. Since change of such dimensions can be traumatic, and since myths thrive in conditions of uncertainty and social distress, Eastern Europe proved to be a fertile ground for myth making³¹. As they serve both an explanatory and an identity-building function, myths carry a special force in societies in transition, or for communities that have suffered a recent trauma: “The post-communist landscape is propitious soil for collective passions, fears, illusions, and disappointments (...) Political myths are responses to the sentiments of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the overall confusion of the post-communist stage and they provide quick and satisfactory answers to excruciating dilemmas” (Tismaneanu 1998: 5). George Schöpflin remarked that “myth is also a way of delimiting the cognitive field and thus simplifying complexity” (Schopflin and Hoskings, 1997: 28). Myth simplifies reality or at least the perception thereof, a very useful function in societies in transformation where the new norms have not yet been fully established and where the chaos of the new needs to be tamed even by appealing to the emotions.

Since the concept of myth is a crucial one for this paper, it is deemed advisable to spend time trying to define and explain its role in the context of a study on history textbooks. The term “myth” has been inherited by modern English from Greek, where “mythos” stood in opposition to the “logos”, in the post-Aristotelian Hellenic world, to signify the irrational, emotional, impulses of human behavior, the poetic side of the mind. As the importance of the oral tradition decreased, and with it

³¹ And not only for myths, but for conflict in general. Empirically, it has been observed that regime change and the transitional period that follows it carry higher risk for violence than stable political arrangements. Theoretically this has been elaborated for example in Snyder (2000), and Mansfield and Snyder (2005).

the role of such legends as the ones relayed to us from Homer, the myth was considered to be a sign of an undeveloped, unsophisticated, primitive thinking, the antonym of clear, rational arguments glorified both by Plato and by Aristotle (Vernant, 1990: 203). This had not been always the case: in the Homeric culture the word “muthos” was in fact synonymous with “logos” and it meant simply “word” (Bottici, 2007: 10).

The modern use of the term myth, if we refer to the Oxford dictionary, starts around the middle of the 19th century and appears in the context of writings on Greek legends. In this sense there is a clear connection not only with the form but also the meaning of the ancient Greek muthos and the contemporary myth. For the modern user, the term myth signifies either an untruthful story or a fabulation typical of children’s literature or of so-called primitive peoples:

“1a. A purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural and historical phenomena; 1b. in generalized use, also an untrue or popular tale, a rumour. 2. A fictitious or imaginary person or object”
(Simpson and Weiner, 1989; vol. X: 177).

The social sciences have taken an interest in the myth especially with the development of anthropological studies at the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the first discussions around the meaning of this concept emerge at the convergence of religious studies and anthropology. Malinowski and Levi Strauss in anthropology, and Eliade, in history of religion, were among the first to elaborate on the term “myth”. For Malinowski it was an instrument of social cohesion, for Levi Strauss

myth revealed a way of thinking in which universal structures were present and Eliade assigned myth to the ideal sacred time, thus making it sacred and moral, explanatory and enjoining. All of them attempt to redeem myth from its negative connotations and present it as a superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding, serving a variety of roles both for the societies that create it and for the researchers who endeavor to study it.

And there have been many researchers indeed. In one of the most complete overviews of the various theories built around myths, Doty (1986) counts up to fifty individual definitions of the concept. This high number in itself means that there is no generally accepted understanding of what a myth really stands for, which illustrates the illusive nature of myth, both in its religious and its political understandings. An analysis that wishes to do justice to the concept of myth cannot attempt to decompose it, to classify its constitutive parts, and assign them numbers and rankings. This analytical plurality opens the door for the flexibility of the individual researcher in mixing and choosing those composing elements that are most suitable for the particular project at hand.

The ingredients of these individualized definitions nevertheless emerge from the work of some undoubtedly dominant scholarly voices. One of them is Mircea Eliade, historian of religions who focused on the sacral aspects of the mythical narrative. In the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), which he edited, myth is defined in the section 'religion and myth' as a "word for a story concerning gods and supernatural beings. A myth is an expression of the sacred in words" (261). In the same encyclopedia, Paul Ricoeur looks at the relationship between myth and history

and defines them both as “narratives, that is to say, arrangements of events into unified stories, which can then be recounted. But myth is a narrative of origin, taking place in a primordial time, a time other than that of everyday reality; history is a narrative of recent events that are further in the past but that are, nonetheless, situated in human time” (273). This is the feature recognized by Törnquist-Plewa as transhistoricity, the capacity of myth to “function as a timeless model”, which “deprives historical phenomena of their specificity and transforms them to [sic] omnipotent patterns” (1992:14). George Sorel bridges the time gap by defining myth as “a vision of the future which makes crude but practical sense of the present” (1990:19).

Following this line of thought, one can distinguish between the general cosmologic myths usually studied by anthropologists and the political myths, focusing on the birth and development of the community or nation (Smith, 1991). For Henry Tudor, the political nature of myth is most obvious in its constructivity, in the fact that it is invented by political entrepreneurs: “A myth, I suggest, is an interpretation of what the myth-maker (rightly or wrongly) takes to be hard fact... It remains only to add that there is, from a formal point of view, nothing distinctive about a political myth... What marks a myth as being political is its subject matter” (1972: 17). Tudor’s approach highlights the functionality of myth in the context of politics. The myth is a tool in the hands of able politicians who use it in order to gain political advantage. The same instrumental approach is reflected in the classical work of Friedrich and Brzezinski, who define myth as “typically a tale concerned with past events, giving them a special meaning and significance for the present and thereby

reinforcing the authority of those who are wielding power in a particular community” (1961: 99).

These definitions highlight the political agency behind the use of myth. Narratives, including myths, cannot act at the collective level by themselves. They need the agency of political, intellectual, religious or other groups in order to affect the choices of a community by placing them in a different frame³² than the one offered by material interests alone. This does not necessarily mean that myths must be created at the top and then distributed through organized channels. Most likely, traditional cosmogonies and ancestor myths emerged at the grassroots level and circulated by oral transmission, without a specific political use. However, in modern days, the political potential of myths has been tapped by agents with a specific agenda, who thought to capture the popular narratives diffused at the societal level, eventually retell or reinterpret them, and then employ them in order to bolster their own interests. This mechanism may escape the control of its original designers and myths may take a life of their own: the Kosovo Battle myth appears to be the work of interests connected to the survival in power of the royal family of Lazar (Judah, 2000: 32), but its subsequent interpretations gave the myth a new meaning, completely divorced from the intent of its first articulators. Moreover, the myth may be used for purposes directly in opposition to the intended function: the myth of masculinity and military valor of the Serbs has been used by Western power to portray the entire Balkans as a bloodthirsty, unruly place where no external intervention can do any

³² The term ‘frame’/ ‘framework’ appears first in Goffman (1974), and was later developed by Snow et al (1986) in the context of social movements. Frame is understood as a structure that influences interpretation. Thus, actors are able “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large. By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al. 1986: 464).

good³³, thus justifying the international community's lack of involvement (Todorova, 1997: 3-7, 130-8). This fluid quality of myth has been captured in the concept of "work on myth", according to which every myth is permanently reworked, on the basis of its core content, which may be "reappropriated" by different interests (Blumenberg in Bottici, 2007: 7).

To some extent, the authors above describe any myth as having political potential, if the relevant context and interests are present. However, it would appear that the supernatural, fantastic elements of myth must be downplayed in its contemporary political use in order to endow particular stories with credibility. In that sense, not all myths are political, but a myth stripped of its sacred aspects, a myth that does not only rationalize and explain the world but also claims at the level of its rhetoric to be a rational, factual account of the past is indeed political. This does not imply accuracy or truth. Historical events reproduced in mythical form do not need to have happened; but the narrative must claim so, in order to be believed. The place of the sacred in the European politics of today has diminished significantly, and the mythical narrative, while still mobilizing emotions with an intensive use of symbols, rituals³⁴, and references, can hardly do so by openly invoking religious powers, even though there are cases where religion and national politics are not divorced even today, as the presence of a miracle myth in Poland demonstrates (Tornquist-Plewa, 1992).

³³ An example of the Western use of the military bravery myth as stigma comes from one media account of the wars of secession of 1991: „If you take all guns out of Yugoslavia, they would kill themselves with knives. Then they would with their teeth [...]” (Boston Globe, October 28, 1991 quoted in Perica, 2002: i).

³⁴ Rituals and symbols work together with myth but are not to be confounded with it (Tudor, 1972: 30). There are myths which lack rituals (the myth of Latin origins of Romanians) and there are rituals entirely divorced from myths (award or inauguration ceremonies). Rituals are effective if they remain unchanged over time, whereas myths must evolve and adapt in order to survive.

An alternative phenomenon has been that the traditional religious discourse and its values has been replaced by something close to a civil religion, a new form of political religiosity with a new pantheon of values: Justice, Liberty, Solidarity, faith in human Progress and in a new social order based on the principles of Reason (Girardet, 1986:189). Even if religion seems to have been relegated to a back seat, the idea of purely rational politics remains nothing more than an ideal. The affective side of politics is alive and well, it would seem, and one of its forms of expression is myth. The emotional basis (Tornquist-Plewa, 1992: 13) of the myth awards it its special power and makes it a special tool in the political game.

The distinction between magical and rational thinking, between mythos and logos, in antithetic not balancing terms, leads to fear of the myth. The emotional power of myth is also dangerous. Motivated by Hitler's rise to power and his use of symbols and myths to promote a political message of intolerance, Ernst Cassirer wrote about myth as menace: in times of social and economic unrest, the forces of the rational (intellectual, artistic, ethical) are overpowered by "mythical monsters" who bring with them "chaos" ([1946] 1974: 298). The modern, political myth is different from the myth of what he calls "primitive societies" in that it is not the spontaneous product of people's fantasy but the conscious artefact of "skilful and cunning artisans" (282). There is a will behind political myth, and this is the will to lead at any cost, and as long as the persons in charge appear to embody the "collective wish" (280) there will be little resistance from the masses.

In order to convince the people, the artisans of modern myth use two strategies of persuasion: a new language and new rituals. This "new speak" replaces

the modern semantic function of the language with a magic use, which “stirs up emotions, [...] feelings and violent passions” (283). New meanings and even completely new words are coined, which cannot be understood with a rational discourse analysis, as they do not communicate a clear message, they communicate a state of mind, “an emotional atmosphere” which envelops the audience.

The new rituals called forth by myth entrepreneurs also play on the emotions. Although one must admit the existence and necessity of ritualized behavior in all societies of all eras, there is an overuse of ceremonially sanctioned, pre-learned actions in troubled societies governed by mythos and not by logos. Repetitive and omnipresent, the rites accompanying political myths have dire consequences for the active mind because “nothing is more likely to lull asleep all our active forces, our power of judgement and critical discernment, and to take away our feeling of personality and individual responsibility than the steady, uniform, and monotonous performance of the same rites” (284-285).

According to Cassirer, the result of political propaganda that carries the myth to its audience is a community devoid of critical faculties, an atomized society where individuality is replaced by isolation and by a diffuse sense of collective responsibility. This type of society is easy to lead as the power of reason and of individual action of its members is turned off.

The Cassirer theory of political myth can be criticized from several points of view: it is mechanistic and instrumental in its presentation of myth as simple tool without a life of its own, a plastic instrument. It is also deeply disparaging of people’s capacity to identify and beware of the pernicious effects of propaganda; the masses

are easily fooled, and the inventors of tradition have free reign over the social imaginary³⁵ presented as a tabula rasa. How can one then explain that some myths are more successful than others, given the same conditions of social and political instability?

At a more profound level, the clear-cut separation line between reason and magic and the positive valorization of the first at the expense of the other reflects a perspective of human nature and behavior that lacks nuances. Man has both reason and magic. Both logos and mythos have an equal right of existence and fulfill complementary roles in providing mankind with an understanding of our complex world. Denying myth its truthfulness is like claiming to see better with one eye closed – it leads to a distorted, one-sided view of the world.

Nevertheless, the analysis made by the German philosopher has its merits: it highlights the emotional appeal of the myth and the channels of its transmission. While simplifying the myth-making mechanism and overemphasizing the role of the elites, there is still much to say in favor of the power of political entrepreneurs to articulate what lies unformed in society. By giving myths a coherent form and placing them in an understandable narrative i.e. to some extent, introducing logos into the mythos, these artisans allow myth to have a political effect. One of the qualities of myth, which justifies its quasi-universal appeal, is the vagueness of its content and its focus on symbols and rituals. Instead of substance, the mythmakers concentrate on form: “the crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and

³⁵ The concept of social imaginary was first developed in the sense used here by Castoriadis (1975), who means that all acts in the society must exist within a symbolic network. The institution of imaginary significations precedes the institution of the society, because society cannot function outside the frame of meaning offered by the social imaginary. This, like myth, is a fluid concept that must be continuously updated and recreated with the help of the imagination.

symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 11).

The political aspect of the myth lies not with its content or degree of accuracy but with its use. The difference between any narrative and a political myth is that the latter has the capacity to bestow meaning to the common political experience and activities of the members of any given group. A good definition of a political myth can therefore be assembled: **myth is a narrative about the past of a community, composed of highly selected (historically accurate or not) events, which has the capacity to mobilize emotions and generate or modify attitudes among the members of that community.**

Functions of myth

In its relationship with collective memory we can identify one of the primary functions of myth: sustaining the group’s cultural reproduction. Törnquist-Plewa distinguishes three general functions of the political myth: the integrative, the cognitive and the communicative (1991:6). Being both a tool for cultural reproduction and a carrier of the higher moral values upon which the norms of group behavior are established, myth becomes an instrument of self definition for the community (Schöpflin, 1997: 22), bringing together the members of the group, strengthening their inner bonds (unity around the common “we”), balanced by the drawing of boundaries with the outside, the non-group – the others (Stråth, 2002). The integrative function is then followed by the role of myth as a boundary-drawing mechanism: mythical explanations reinforce or replace the existence of “objective” factors of

differentiation between communities that otherwise may be hard to distinguish from one another (Kolstø, 2005: 3).

The effectiveness of myths comes especially from their cognitive functions, their ability to provide a concentrated, simplified and standardized view of reality. Mythical thinking is an instrument of chaos control, of introducing some regularity into the seeming randomness of the visible universe. The unrest of the human mind in face of the uncontrollable and arbitrary stream of life is assuaged by myths, stories that make life, and one's place in it, meaningful. In this sense, myths provide not only a sense of belonging to a group of people, but being a part of a larger whole, the world as such. As mentioned above, knowing the world through myth does not imply living in a fantasy world. The truth of the myth, its reality, is in no way qualitatively inferior to the scientific truth. It is just another way to see and understand the world.

What makes myth unique among the various other narratives of origin (of the cosmos, of a specific phenomenon or group) is its capacity to communicate emotions. Thiesse argues that the sentiment of patriotic attachment is best learned in school, where the expression of love as well the appropriation of the body of the country is taught: "It is through the nation that the legitimate expression of the sentiment of love is taught, since the child is constantly confronted during his school years with inflamed declarations to the motherland, always infinitely beautiful" (1999: 241-42). Inspired by Sorel, Tismaneanu says that myths "mobilize, energize, and even instigate large groups into action" (1998: 9) by appealing to the "infrarational segments of political behaviour" (15). Myths do not need to be accurate, they need to be believed. And once believed, they emanate a sizable emotional attraction – an irresistible force

which does not go unperceived by political agents who seek to channel it in their direction. Their emotional charge translates into political action, and even into political power: “The myths of a nation are its vital truths. They might not coincide with the *truth*; this is of no importance. The supreme sincerity of a nation towards itself is manifested in the rejection of self-criticism, in vitalisation through its own illusions. And, does a nation seek the truth? A nation seeks *power*” (Cioran, 1990: 29, author’s italics).

Types of myth

Many types of myths have been distinguished in the literature and to give here a full account would be too ambitious an endeavor for the purposes of this paper. One basic distinction looks at the direction of the time arrow proposed by myth. There are past-oriented *foundational* myths, which focus on the origins of the community and which give explanations of how things used to be. The functions of such foundational myths are primarily to communicate a system of values and norms, an accepted morality, as well as to provide comfort in times of trouble by referring to former Golden Ages, periods of glory which demonstrate the qualities of the community despite present drawbacks. When the time arrow points out toward the future, we are dealing with *eschatological* myths, which propose a vision of the future, a way to escape the present morass and to found a new Golden Age (Verdery, 1991; Schöpflin, 2002). The two types are clearly interdependent, with the foundational myths providing the description of the ideal situation held in sight by the eschatological narratives. Most political mobilization happens around the second type of myths,

because they are future- and action-oriented, and can give a more concrete purpose, or even an action plan, to the mobilized citizenry.

The previous two general categories of myth can be further distinguished by the different uses they find in the hands of the elites. Tismaneanu discusses four separate types of political myths active in the Eastern European context: Salvationist, messianic, vengeful and redemptive, reactionary and restorative.

The Salvationist myths are closely connected to the authoritarian heritage present in the East European culture. These myths can be used to justify the use of exemption from the democratic rules in the name of order and security and have been a commonly used tool to bring legitimacy to the elite. An example of such a myth is the need of a strong leader able to save the situation and lift the country out of its current dire straits³⁶. The popularity of such a mythical figure as the providential saviour speaks volumes about the mentality of the citizens. As Simone de Beauvoir commented on the subject of de Gaulle's come-back to power and the support he received from the French people, "[t]he heart of the matter is that *they* [the people] *don't want to be governed by their equals*; they have too low an opinion of them, because they have too low an opinion of themselves and of their next-door neighbors. It's 'human' to like money and watch out for one's own interests. But if one is human like everybody else, then one is not capable of governing everyone else. So people demand the non human, the superhuman, the Great Man who will be 'honest' because he's 'above that sort of thing'" ([1963] 1992: 171).

³⁶ Of course this is not restricted to Eastern Europe; see for example the return of general de Gaulle in France during the Algerian war.

Messianic myths are typical of nationalist politics. They portray the nation as having a special mission, being endowed with particular characteristics that place it above other nations and thus in a privileged leader position. Messianic varieties of myth are often complemented by demonizing narratives, according to which the enemies of the given community are described in exclusively negative colors, with the most radical versions robbing the other even of human qualities and relegating it either to the category of “pure evil” or the inferior standing of subhuman or animal.

Vengeful mythologies assign guilt and responsibility outside the group and seek compensation for past deeds in the name of moral superiority and need to pay off the accumulated suffering. This can be particularly problematic in the case of conflict-ridden societies where the sense of objective justice may be effaced by the presence of strong emotions, and the bias inherited in the public consciousness.

Finally, reactionary mythologies are directed against the radical changes brought about by revolutions. They are past-oriented, conservative and disbelieve in transformation. “it used to be better before” is a typical expression found among proponents of such narratives, who try to discredit the results achieved by revolutionary actions. In the East European context, the tension between the advocates of change and the old guard reflects the two alternative proposals for the future: the future-oriented and the one holding on to the values of a bygone era.

Girardet and Schöpflin draw dividing lines based on the various narrative contents and the archetypes therein. The traditional archetypes of the mythical gallery are the Conspiracy, the Saviour, the Golden Age and the Unity myths. Girardet

(1986) has studied them in the context of France, but his analysis is based on a wider field of investigation inasmuch as these archetypes can be found in almost every society. The conspiracy myth offers an explanation of otherwise less fathomable events by placing responsibility not inside but outside the main group, most often in the hands of the group's enemies. Secret agreements, manipulations, and a classical black and white depiction of reality are to be traced in such myths. The Saviour myth, loaded as it is with Judeo-Christian connotations, escapes the realm of the purely religious by assigning a leading role to special personalities, visionaries of the political world, whose call is to serve as models and provide inspiration for the new and better tomorrow. Providential leaders offer an exit from the difficulties of the day into a promised land or epoch. The Golden Age is the purest expression of nostalgic thinking, as it places into an *illo tempore* the idyllic existence of the community, before its tragic fall. This time is a reference, a landmark, a repository of ideal morals and norms, and thus can be interpreted both as a foundation and as an eschatological myth, depending on the context. Finally, the unity myth is probably one of the most common national myths, pervasive in all modern states. Under slogans sounding like "this grand and noble unity of the homeland" (Girardet 1986: 154), politicians call for internal divisions to be forgotten or overcome, in the name of a national ideal, a common good for all the members of the community.

A more in-depth analysis of the content of myths allows George Schöpflin to come up with even more types of myth employed for political purposes (1997, 28-35). The most essential and most common myth is the foundation one, as every human group seems to have the need to award a special status to its origins. Within

this category we can distinguish myths of territory, where land and people appear to be connected in a mystical fashion. Metaphors like “the cradle of civilization” or “promised land” are abundant in such narratives, where land and its representative symbols such as flags and maps are inextricably linked to the fate of its inhabitants. Primacy of arrival and inhabitation awards legitimacy to claims over land, and it is the task of the nationalist entrepreneur to tell a story that places the group in a very long relationship to a particular bit of land: “Nationalism, by deriving legitimacy from the past, entails an ethic of territorial claims according to which primacy of claims results from priority of occupation. The first ones there have the best claims” (Halliday, 2000: 157).

Another foundation myth is the myth of kinship and shared descent, which sees the community, even the modern nation, as an extended family, with all its members linked by bloodlines. This vision of the nation as clan, popular especially among ethnic nationalists, implies very strong in-group cohesion, and a high degree of solidarity. A final example of foundation myth is the myth of ethnogenesis and antiquity. The older the group and more noble its founders, the more superior it is in comparison with others. Especially when connected to myths of territory, the idea of historical primacy (“we were here first”) can constitute a powerful argument in the discussion about authority over a given piece of land (e.g. the Kosovo example).

Eschatological myths propose political projects that would improve the standing of the community, especially in relationship to others. Examples are numerous: myths of redemption and suffering, where the Christian legacy is used to draw a picture of a bright future guaranteed by the expiation of sins; myths of unjust

treatment, in which conspiracy can play a role, sometimes taking a fatalist note by assigning responsibility to objective and inescapable forces like the laws of history or assigning blame to other, enemy, groups; myths of election, according to which the group is endowed by nature or by divine right with special qualities, thus placing itself in a leadership position in comparison to other groups; myths of military valor, where the male values of courage, honor and generosity are promoted to national value status; and finally, myths of rebirth and renewal, where a dark period of decline is to be followed by a new cycle of prosperity and glory for the community.

If myths play a more important role in transitional societies, such as the Balkans, it is to be expected that we would recognize them in the public realm, perhaps in media (see for example Car, 2009) as well as in the education curriculum. The democratization process in the former communist bloc brought with it a desire to rejuvenate education, to cleanse it of ideological influences, to build it on the basis of critical thinking and political correctness. However, this is an ideal that does not necessarily come from within the societies themselves but it rather takes its inspiration from similar models in the West. Education in southeastern Europe, especially from the second half of 19th century onwards, has been put to the service of the nation.

For the two nations under scrutiny here, there is a long repertoire of the concrete manifestations of various myths, which could be placed in one or several of the typologies briefly outlined above. In presenting the Romanian and Serbian national mythologies, this study will rely on the work of two scholars, Lucian Boia and Ivan Colovic, who closely surveyed the symbolic arsenal of the national

imaginary in each of the two cases and described an inventory of the most active narratives of identity. The panoply of available myths is overwhelmingly varied. The myths included in this research project are but a selection, but nevertheless a significant one, of the available mythological variety. The reasons why these and not other myths have been deemed of interest are related to the frequency with which they appear in the public discourse, their political character and their impact and importance recognized by other social scientists.

Romanian national myths

Latinity

If identity in general is defined as “any social category in which an individual is eligible to be a member” (Chandra, 2006: 4), the necessary criterion for membership in an ethnic group is the perception of a common descent, a fact underlined by the near consensus of those writing about ethnicity (Horowitz, 1995; Smith, 1996; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Petersen 2002; Varshney, 2002). Even if there are several ways in which common descent can be conceptualized, the significance of at least one of the following definitions must be present: common ancestry, or in most cases the myth of a common ancestor, common territory of origin, the family

“descent rule”, a common culture or a common history³⁷. In the case of the Romanian nation, the myth of a common ancestry is articulated in the Latinity myth.

As a myth of origins for the citizens of today³⁸, the Romanians hold dear the story of Trajan and Dochia, a symbol of the symbiosis between the Roman and the Dacian elements. The story of Trajan and Dochia embraces equally the Roman and Dacian contributions to the essence of Romanianness and has been found to be one of the most representative narratives in the national literature (Calinescu 1982: 56).

There are numerous legends involving the character Dochia, a name deriving from the Latin word Dacia. In some cases it is about a woman turned into stone - her body becomes the Mountain Dochia, located on the border between Transylvania and Moldova. Another version of the legend has Dochia as the daughter of the Dacian king Decebalus, leading an army towards the fortress where her father was besieged. Her army was defeated by the Roman legions and she had to seek refuge in the mountains, where the god Zamolxe took mercy on her and transformed her into an old shepherd woman surrounded by several sheep. When Trajan, who was in love with the courageous princess, came by searching for her and asked if she had not seen Dochia and her soldiers, the old woman pointed towards the West. The Emperor went away and Dochia remained to govern over the area, and Trajan is perhaps still living

³⁷ For a more detailed explanation of the various types of common descent, see Chandra (2006), pp. 7-16. It is important to note that even though a combination of common descent perceptions is almost always at work, there are always ethnic groups that lack one characteristic: for example, the Serbs do not have an articulated myth of a common ancestor, equivalent to the Latinity myth for the Romanians, but have a much more rooted story about their military valor.

³⁸ Interesting to note again that while the need for a mythical origin remains constant, the definition of the original moment can vary substantially and depends on the political and cultural circumstances of the time. In the 18th century, bishop Chesarie writes that the Wallachian people developed in four phases: the Roman invasion of Emperor Trajan, the building of monasteries under Radu Negru, the translation of the holy texts from old Slavonic into vernacular and finally the cultural development during Alexandru Ipsilanti, the Phanariot Prince under whose patronage the bishop wrote his book (cf. Boia, 1997: 86).

today (this version was collected by Vulcanescu: 115). Calinescu considered the myth of Trajan and Dochia, popularized extensively by 19th century poets and writers of nationalist persuasion, as the essence of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians. Their meeting, symbolizing the meeting of the two peoples, is represented pictorially in the great fresco of the Atheneum in Bucharest, which attempts to synthesize the most important moments in the history of the nation.

The story summarized above seems to give primacy to the Dacian element, with the emperor riding away, westwards, and leaving Dochia master of the land. For Calinescu and for other interpreters of the narrative, however, the emphasis is on the attraction between the two, elaborated more in the folklore version, and the desire of the Roman ruler to remain and form a new dynasty with the local royal descendant, Princess Dochia.

The idea of the original Daco-Roman mix has not always been accepted without contestation. Intellectuals from the 17th to the 19th centuries vied to demonstrate the purity of the Romanian blood either as exclusive children of the Roman conquerors who killed every survivor of the local population or descendants of the Dacians who managed miraculously to survive all other influences³⁹. The Dacian origins myth survived, in a more refined form, even in the 1930s and 1940s, in the writing of such famous Romanian intellectuals as Mircea Eliade, who sought to underscore the role of the autochthonous element as a precious and distinguishing feature of the Romanians in comparison with other Latin people (Eliade 1992: 12).

³⁹ This is not a tendency unique to the Romanians. Petrovic (2004) also distinguishes two types of stories in dealing with the mingling of the invaders with the local population in the case of the Serbs occupying a space from Montenegro to Herzegovina: stories which tell of the superiority of the newcomers (the Slavs) over the existing element and those which mention their blending into a new people (pp. 35 – 38).

The reason for this refocus on the local, less prestigious, element is a typical feature of modernity, centered as it is on the values of democracy and national independence. As the distinction between worthy and less worthy peoples becomes politically incorrect “indigenous masses now count for more than conquering elites, while present day national territory is projected back into a distant past” (Boia, 2001: 38).

However, the idea of Roman descent had its greatest support among historians in the national emancipation era. Historians from Transylvania, where the Romanians did not have political representation, were among the first to see how the link between Rome and Romanians could be used to obtain an improvement of the position of their ethnic group using the Latin argument: since Romanians spoke a language very similar to the one still used by the official administration of the Monarchy. In addition, this proved their noble pedigree therefore they could no longer be marginalized with impunity. The influence of the Transylvanian School of history writing was to leave a deep imprint on the vision of the common past of all Romanians. Most clearly articulated perhaps by Maior (1812), their argument emphasized the purely Latin origin of the current inhabitants of the three provinces and their task was somehow to demonstrate the disappearance of the Dacians. Maior postulates that most, if not all, of the local population was: 1. Mostly killed by the Romans 2. Those who survived preferred to kill themselves rather than face the horrifying legions of Trajan 3. Those who still survived, women, and children fled leaving no one behind (quoted in Boia, 1997: 87).

The Latinity of the Romanian people was later to be proven by scientific investigations. In the 17th century Ion Inocentiu Micu – Klein, an 18th century bishop

of the Uniate Church and activist for the national awakening of Romanians in Transylvania, reportedly suddenly became aware of the Latin origins of his people while visiting Rome and noticing the similarity between the hats worn by the Dacians on Trajan's Column and the hats of Romanian peasants⁴⁰. This led him and other Transylvanian intellectuals to further investigate the ethnic origin of the nation by linguistic means which revealed the descent of the Romanian language from a version of spoken Latin in use during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D (Hitchins, 2002. 94-95).

The intellectual consequences of the equivalence between Romanians and Romans were, according to some, the need to return to a purity of the culture that migrant populations adulterated over time. It was the fault of these so-called newcomers that the Roman nature of the inhabitants north of Danube was not visible earlier. Now that it was revealed, the task of the intellectuals was to carve away the impure elements so that it would display its full splendor.

Nowhere was this attempt more penetrating than in the area of the language. Language has been long identified as a strong identity marker⁴¹. Especially since the proof of Latin origins lay mostly in the lexical density of Latin words in spoken Romanian, the desire to fine tune this instrument of communication and this identity indicator had a certain urgency for the national-minded linguist. The most notable result of these efforts was the new *Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, published in two volumes at the beginning of the 1870s (Boia, 1997: 88). The artificial language created in the pages of the dictionary never took root, but the project of making

⁴⁰ This argument is currently used in history textbooks without reference to its author, presented simply as a commonsense fact, as shall be illustrated in subsequent chapters.

⁴¹ For a good overview of the particular uses of language in European national movements see Barbour and Carmichael (2000)

Romanian more obviously Latin did not die. On the initiative of Ion Eliade Radulescu, author and public personality of the 19th century Old Kingdom, a simplification of the alphabet and an Italianization of the vocabulary were proposed. Even if the exaggerated use of neologisms from French and Italian was to be ridiculed⁴², the impact of the ideas of Eliade Radulescu lasted long enough to see the Romanian language abandoning the Cyrillic alphabet in 1862, during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and cleansing, especially the Slavic influences, by the beginning of the 20th century.

The establishment of the philological link between Latin and Romanian led to the excesses of the Latinist school, which proposed a pure Roman origin of folk and language. The moderate version of the Latin origin myth was considered more truthful and became the norm. The language connection implied, for the majority of the intellectuals involved in the creation of a national Romanian identity, that “the Romanians actually were the indigenous inhabitants of Transylvania and the Romanian Principalities, directly descended from the Romanized Dacians” (Hupchick, 2002: 203-4).

Depending on the political ideologies in vogue at any given time, the balance of power in the contribution to the Romanian ethnicity changed in favor of either Dacians or Romans. When the Romanian state was nothing but an idea, and when the Latin connection could bring the strongest arguments in favor of granting Romanians political rights or autonomy, the descent was purely Latin. Romania was thus in the direct bloodline of Rome, with all the merits that implied. But what this strategy gave

⁴² The plays of Vasile Alecsandri are a good illustration of the critique against the overuse of foreign imports.

in inclusion in mainstream Europe, it took away in originality. Therefore, once the national state was established and recognized by the international community, the need to demonstrate the unique qualities of the people came to the fore. The nationalist intellectuals of the interwar period, whose work was used to support the claims of the radical right, pushed the balance more in favor of the autochthonous element, the Thracians, and diminished the role of the Romans in the chemistry of the ethnogenesis. The work of scholars like Parvan or Densusianu, active before World War I, was reinstated and reinterpreted by amateur historians during the interwar time so as to demonstrate, for example, that the Dacians were more numerous than the Romans (this runs counter to the theory that all the Dacians were either killed or forced into exile), and that the peasants of today reflect in their customs and traditions the beliefs of their Dacian forefathers.⁴³

The penchant for Dacism, if such an –ism can be used here, spread to the literary and philosophical spheres. Blaga, a philosopher and poet of great sensibility, wrote a play in the honor of the assumed god of the Dacians, entitled *Zamolxe* (1921), where he emphasized the acts of resistance of the local population in the face of the Roman attack. Probably one of the most famous Romanian-born personalities of the century, Mircea Eliade, did not escape the Dacian trend. He also places himself “under the sign of *Zamolxe*” (the title of the first chapter in his short historical piece about the Romanians written in 1946), and from the perspective of the history of religions tries to demonstrate the “thin” Romanization of the local population. “The Dacian learned Latin, but kept his customs, ways of life, its ancestral virtues. In the

⁴³ Densusianu’s Dacian purism was expressed in his *Prehistoric Dacia* (1913), later the core of the argument of such nationalist interpretations as the one offered by a former military, General Portocala, in his *From the Prehistory of Dacia and of Other Ancient Civilizations* (1932).

new cities the gods of the Empire were worshipped, but in the villages and in the mountains the cult of Zamolxis was perpetuated, and this continued to happen even later, when he changed his name”⁴⁴ (Eliade, [1946] 1992: 12).

Even the communists embraced, at times, the Dacian origins theory, not within the professional historian corps, but using the more amateur voices of the History Institute of the Communist Party, where ideas blatantly in contradiction with whatever could be claimed from archeological finds and other historical sources could be enounced. Among them, for example, the theory that the original language of the Dacians was “preromanic”, which meant that when they met, the local peasants and the Roman legionnaires were able to converse fluently with each other c.f. the depiction on Trajan’s Column of Dacian peasants talking directly, without interpreters, to the Roman emperor (Boia, 1997: 111).

These pro-Dacian excesses were rather the exception than the norm. The official Party line favored equally the Roman and Dacian contribution to the birth of the nation. The moderation of the Latinity claim and the acceptance of the Dacian – Roman mixture gave more credibility to the foundation myth and allowed for the continuous pursuit of evidence to verify it. The motivation for this research was still to confer upon the present the merits of the past. The Thracian population conferred a deep rootedness to the Romanians in the soil of the homeland, with their inextricable and continuous presence on this territory, while the Romans carried with them civilization, demonstrated in their legal and political system and in their refined cultural products.

⁴⁴ This name change refers to the theory that Zamolxis became Jesus, another explanation for the birth of Romanians as a naturally or spontaneously Christian nation.

National Unity

The establishment of Greater Romania, the state which gathered most of the Romanian-speaking population under the same political authority, was a long historical process. Its success as a national program was not spontaneous or natural, but the result of a propitious international and regional context at the end of the First World War, when the multinational empires (the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, Czarist Russia) were dismantled to make room for smaller states, based on the self-determination principle stipulated in Woodrow Wilson's 14 points. Besides the external circumstances, the creation of Greater Romania was also the result of an assiduous bargaining process between and among the elites in the various units that went into the union.

One should not forget that the new Romanian state was a conglomerate of very different administrative, political, social, economical, and cultural units. Wallachia and Moldova, united since 1859, had the experience of suzerainty under the dominance of the Ottomans. Transylvania, being a part of the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy, carried the imprint of centuries of Magyar rule. Bukovina was a former province of the other part of the Habsburg Empire, the Austrian one. Bessarabia came to the union after almost a hundred years of control by the Russian Empire; and Dobrudja, the region bordering the Black Sea, part of the Old Kingdom of Romania since 1878, had been for centuries under direct Ottoman control.

The new state, with an area of ca. 295 km², became the tenth largest in Europe and the third largest in the Eastern part of the continent, after USSR and

Poland. In 1918, its population was 14.7 million inhabitants, the eighth highest on the continent (Iacob, 2006: 534). Of these, 71.9% were ethnic Romanian, 7.9% Hungarian, 4.4% German, 4% Jewish, 3.2% Ruthenian and Ukrainian, 2.3% Russian, 2% Bulgarian, 1.5% Roma. Populations under 1% of Gagauz, Czech and Slovak, Polish, Turk and Tatar, Greek, Albanian, and Armenian people were also registered. Minority populations were concentrated in Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina. In 1930, for example, the population in Transylvania included 24.4% Hungarians and 9.85 % Germans (Salagean, 2006: 583).

Besides the increased ethnic diversity, Romanian society after 1918 also had to confront other social cleavages. Among them the most significant was probably the urban versus rural split. In conditions of accelerated modernization, which implied urbanization, by 1930 the number of city dwellers was about 20% of the entire population, with Transylvania holding the highest number of cities. Only the capital, Bucharest, had a population over half a million (631 million in 1930). The population distribution according to employment reflects a similar picture: for example 72.3% of the Romanians earned a living in the agricultural sector, 9.4% worked in industry, and 4.8% were employees in the public sector (Georgescu, 1992: 204).

In order to create a single homogenous and democratic state out of these disparate traditions and legacies, the elites had to endeavor to establish a coherent and just administration, and a judicial and political system, supported by a common culture and identity⁴⁵. Part of their task was to put into practice what Brubaker has called “nationalizing nationalism” (1996: 4-5) i.e. redefine the state according to the

⁴⁵ The entire process of using culture to build ties across the various splits in the new Romanian society is described in Livezeanu (1995).

terms of the ethnic majority. The role of the historian became to promote the cultural unity model by giving it historical legitimacy: “In order to defend the Romanians’ legitimate right to independent statehood into a unified state, Romanian historians have generally written their work from the perspective of the nation-building center, and presupposed a historical teleology, which necessarily led to the creation of Greater Romania” (Iordachi, 2004: 13).

But this is not a simple presentist interpretation of the past. There is a long tradition in the Romanian historiography of emphasizing the traits held in common by Romanian speakers in all the historical provinces. Arguably the founder of this tradition is the 17th century Moldavian chronicler Grigore Ureche, who famously stated that “we all come from Rome”, thus expressing the basis of the Latinity myth and the unity myth in one turn of phrase (Andea, 2006: 387). It would be, however, a backward projection of ideas born centuries later, to see this statement as the substantiation of a common political project for Moldova, Wallachia and Transylvania. Thinking in national terms would not have crossed the mind of a 17th century intellectual boyar like Ureche, schooled in Polish Catholic colleges, fluent in several languages and comfortable in educated and aristocratic milieus all over the continent.

The mythical archetype of unity is another manifestation of the power of myth to put order in an otherwise incoherent and incomprehensible reality. Myth is a “way of delimiting the cognitive field and thus simplifying complexity” (Schöpflin, 1997: 23). The idea of national unity is one of the most recent incarnations of this desire or longing for order, convergence and coherence. The community of the empire, or that

of Christianity, was just as significant for the inhabitants of Europe before the age of nations. According to one interpretation of the Christian world view, diversity means division which leads to cacophony and conflict c.f. the Tower of Babel and the punishment of linguistic pluralism. This interpretation of national unity comes from Joseph de Maistre, French intellectual of the 18th century, who writes that both universe and man himself have a desire for unity: “everything that was once divided, now aspires for a union” (De Maistre quoted in Girardet, 1986: 140). Christianity, with the promise of unity in Christ the Savior, is one solution to the problem of the crisscrossing cuts separating human from human and human from God.

If the world could not achieve unity under the guidance of spiritual powers, like the Pope, perhaps it was the turn of earthly leaders to attempt it. This is how the nation enters the scene, and historians seem to be its proud servants. In France, a country with which Romania claims close family links, Jules Michelet, one of the most renowned intellectuals of the 19th century and author of a multivolume History of France, writes about the existence of a “grand and noble unity of the homeland” and sees Paris as a center of gravity that attracts the regions of France like a magnet. Differences disappear or if they survive form a puzzle where all the pieces fit perfectly with each other, forming a unit, a form of geometrical perfection (the hexagon) (Girardet, 1986: 155-156).

How could Romanian intellectuals escape the temptation of speaking of their nation in unitary terms if they were in the company of such commandeering spirits as the architects of national unity canons in the West? Educated in Paris, or in Vienna, young boyars of the 1848 generation take the fact, obvious to chroniclers like Ureche,

that people living in the three Danubian provinces speak a language intelligible to each other and make it the cornerstone of their construction of a national community.

Reading the teleological interpretation of history emanating from nationally-oriented scholars, one tends to forget that at the time this explanation was proposed, the Romanian unitary state was only one of the alternatives on the discussion table. Besides trying to leave aside instances when the provinces were at war with each other (Moldavia's ruler Vasile Lupu went to war against Wallachia's Matthew Basarab in order to obtain the throne for his son – and this is but one of the many examples of struggle among the Romanian “brothers”), such historians also forget that the aim of many of the Transylvanian patriots in the 18th and 19th centuries was not a union with Wallachia or Moldova but a degree of autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. South of the Carpathians, the revolutionaries of 1848 envisaged a “Danubian confederation”, temporarily a reality during the time of the Old Kingdom (1866 – 1918), and even a reverse integration: the Danubian region as part of a federal “Greater Austria” (Boia, 1997: 147). The temptation to read history backwards should be avoided if one wants to capture the process of creating the unitary state, with all its intricacies. To perceive it in a linear fashion, following a path-dependent necessity argument would be to ignore the reality of historical events.

The current historiographical grand narrative that sees the unity of all Romanians as a perennial goal of all their leaders throughout time is inherited from the communist period and ignores other trends in history writing that, anchored in their own geopolitical and strategic circumstances, interpreted the past differently. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the fear of Russia was greater than the desire of

unity with Transylvania, historians from the Old Kingdom denied that the heroic figure of Michael the Brave had any unification mission whatever. A.D. Xenopol writes in 1890 that “so little cared Michael for the union of Romanians, that he could not conceive [...] the administrative merger of the Romanian lands, but only their government by submissive rulers obedient to him, according to the feudal system [...]” (quoted in Boia, 1997: 150). Other great names in the pantheon of national history writing, like Nicolae Iorga or C.G. Giurescu, refuse to award a national impetus to the actions of Prince Michael and remain skeptical of the popularity among all Romanians of the unification under one ruler during the Middle Ages.

The nationalist reorientation of history writing during the late communist period can be encapsulated and understood by looking again at the interpretation of Michael the Brave. Although previous historians, even if motivated by a patriotic sentiment, refused to endow his action with a national purpose, communist historiography replaces Prince Michael in the same context as the 1848 revolutionaries. In the 1970s and 1980s the change is perceived even at the semantic level: instead of the “conquest” of Moldavia and Transylvania by the troops of the Wallach ruler, there is talk about the “unification” of the above mentioned provinces. Other princely figures, like Stephen the Great, obtained the title of “Lord over all Romanians”, which Boia calls a “pure fabulation”, since he never ruled provinces other than Moldova, where he is still perceived as someone close to a local patriot (since his relationship with Wallachia was not always friendly) (Pop, 2006: 269).

Among many other fabrications, renaming strategies and omissions encouraged by the ideologically controlled history machine during the Ceausescu

period, one also encounters the idea of a “united front” of anti-Ottoman resistance of all three historical provinces. The argument was that the anti-Turkish alliance was based not on practical interests but on the common national consciousness and the shared goal of independence of the rulers in Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania. This very argument, demonstrating the survival of historical discourse into post-communism, appears for example in Grigore et. al., 1998, under the heading “Attention!”: “The great Romanian princes of the 14th and 15th centuries built a common front in the anti-ottoman struggle” (35). In a short but convincing article (Cristea, 1998: 153), this argument is not only dismissed as anachronistic, projecting national ideas in the 16th or 17th centuries when they were yet to be born, but also historically unfounded. The existence of a joint action against the Porte is a fiction; Wallachian rulers did not support the anti-Ottoman campaign of Stephen the Great, since they were too risky and cost territorial losses and political instability. They preferred to withdraw from a losing coalition and to attend to their own interests.

Another inherited practice in the history discourse that survived the communist regime and seems to be perpetuated in its political use to this day is the image of a unanimous voice of the people, speaking always in favor of national unity. Both elites and masses were and are presented as enthusiastically in favor of risky actions in the name of maintaining territorial integrity. The entry into the First World War is often summarily described as the automatic pronouncement of a common front of experts and politicians. This is quite far from an accurate description of the course of events. In the debates of the time one can read about the hesitation and, at times, outright opposition to the participation of Romania in the war on the side of the

Central Powers, coming from leading politicians, like Constantin Stere, and Titu Maiorescu, and leading historians, like Nicolae Iorga or Vasile Parvan⁴⁶. To strip the decision-making process down to its result, excluding the existence of alternatives that looked viable at the time, is to argue like a historical determinist: because it happened so, it could only have happened so. Moreover, to justify such a complex decision as going to war with only a single reason, the territorial expansion of the state so that it coincided with the nation, is to simplify it beyond plausibility. In doing so, the positive impact and bravery of individuals and organizations is diminished since they are deprived of their choice of doing anything but fighting for the nation. Instead of a hard-fought decision which is proof of their intelligence or dedication, we see marionettes moved by a sense of national destiny. Defining the state interest in only one fashion leads to the promotion of anti-democratic and anti-pluralist values because alternative routes of action are denied existence.

As we have seen above, myths have been playing a part in the Romanian historic discourse, as well as public discourse more generally defined, for a long time. The communist period not only did not dispel the power of symbolic narratives, but perpetuated their use, thus establishing Latinity as the most common Romanian ethnogenesis myth and the national unity as the most used grand narrative.

Serbian national myths

⁴⁶ For a more detailed description of Romania's decisions regarding its participation in World War I, see Iacob (2006, pp. 517- 525).

Masculinity and the myth of military valor

The image Serbs have of themselves as a nation is often correlated with a strong masculinity. It can be argued, as several have done⁴⁷, that a certain male bias is frequently encountered all over the Balkan cultural area, but it also appears that the Serbs themselves claim a special right to a more manly behavior and perhaps therefore a more valiant one, than the rest of their neighbors. There is a strong tradition of defining the Serbian self as carrying masculine qualities, as the writer Danilo Kis ironically puts it in 1979: “Testicles are a national symbol, a trademark of the race; other people have luck, tradition, erudition, history, reason – but we alone have balls”; the leading nationalist intellectual Dobrica Cosic makes the equation between manliness and national identity even more explicit: “a Serb is man who is not a man unless he is also a Serb” (both quoted in Bracewell, 2000: 570, 577). Besides being a dictum that would make Donald Rumsfeld’s known unknowns appear crystal clear, the point with Cosic’s message is that masculinity must be inextricably linked with ethnic identity, just as one cannot be a Pole or a Croat without being a catholic, so one cannot be a Serbian male without being a patriot, a defender of the nation.

There is even an explicit reference to machismo in Latin American style, as reflected in an early study conducted by Simic in the whole of Yugoslavia, but finding significant results especially in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1969). Simic finds parallels in the behavior and values describing male and female roles in

⁴⁷ See for example Simic below.

South American and Yugoslav society, noting that, like the macho man of Mexico, a Yugoslav man would tend towards “public demonstrations of his strength, generosity and pride” (91). Besides other typical practices, like drinking or boasting of sexual exploits, Simic also discusses a certain “heroic tradition” dating at least from the 14th and 15th centuries that is transmitted to today via legendary tales of heroes and bandits. It appears that “daring and aggressiveness together with the ability to carry out bold and dangerous tasks and endure great suffering” are features to which (Southern) Yugoslav men aspire (97). The principles of “patrilineality, patrilocality, and male dominance” are described as the foundation of Yugoslav society in general with women achieving power in the family framework, as mothers, and grandmothers – it is unsurprising then that the culture upon which this family structure is built is defined as “overtly machistic and male-oriented” (Simic, 1983).

If these statements run the risk of being dated, another analysis that focuses on the discourse and practice of gender in the former communist space emphasizes the differences but in particular the enduring quality of power relations between men and women and of the traditional self-image of the strong and dominant male (Klingman, 2000: 3-14). The importance of masculinity in defining Serbian nationalism and in allowing for the type of violent breakdown that brought the break-up of Yugoslavia is discussed also in Bracewell (2000). She argues that the acts of rape committed by Albanians against Serbian men and women in Kosovo in the 1980s were perceived not as sexual aggressions but as acts of violence against the Serbian nation⁴⁸. The emphasis on rape served the interests of nationalist politicians in Belgrade to present

⁴⁸ Even though these acts of rape were not more numerous or more brutal than elsewhere in Yugoslavia at the time, as noted in Horvat (1988), cited in Bracewell (2000: 565).

the situation of Serbs as victims of the barbaric acts of the Albanians and thus to encourage the reaction of public opinion demanding compensation and revenge, potentially one of the conditions for the Yugoslav wars. Most relevant for the myth of military valor and the masculine values of the Serbian nation is the fact that “this version of Serbian nationalism both required and reinforced a particular masculine ideal (tough, dominant, heterosexual)”, in which the “fusion of national assertion and manliness” became most appealing in times of social and economic decay (Bracewell, 2000: 569-570).

The predominance of the warrior image in the national definition of the Serbs does not imply that there were no dissenting voices. Both feminists and anti-war activists challenged the nationalist definition of Serbia and the implications it held for the relationship with the other Balkan neighbors. They saw the risks of conflict that an aggressive and threatened masculinity posed, especially in the case of Kosovo, but also throughout the wars leading to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Women, explicitly feminist or not, were among the most vocal in organizing pro-peace protests and in founding NGOs aimed at mediating the conflicting parties. Women in Black, inspired by Israeli peace activists, Mothers’ Protest, and the Centre for Anti-War Action were all projects started by women (Hughes et al., 1995: 512). Despite their involvement, the macho nationalism emanating from the political leadership of Milosevic and his allies continued to prevail both in official public discourse and in the media. As we shall see, it also continued to appear in the pages of history textbooks.

For the Serbs, “war is a way of life” and to be a warrior is a vocation (Popov, 2000: 81). However, even if the explicit virility of the Serbs is made into a military quality, there is a deeper hidden ambiguity in the image of the national warrior. On one hand, the soldier must display courage and physical strength, at the same time that he has a tender side, a “heroic timidity” especially vis-à-vis the opposite sex. The “body of a man, the soul of a girl” seems to be the most accurate description of the Serbian armies (Colovic, 2002: 51). The feminine element does not imply, however, moral or psychological weakness but a degree of innocence, of virginity – there is a conscious attempt to desexualize the hero so as to award him a higher moral purpose⁴⁹.

Another, perhaps unexpected, association is between the mythical warrior and death. The main goal of the soldier appears to be less victory and more self-sacrifice (Colovic, 2002: 54). The loss of life in the name of the defense of the homeland is the most honorable of deaths, and a path to immortality. The hero of classical mythologies survives his own death and is semi-divine. There is a tradition of worshipping the remains of his body and his weapons, which take on a reliquary nature. The surviving members of the nation must preserve the connection with their holy dead by honoring their earthly remains, or even the place of their death and/or burial. In this sense, we can really speak of a political life of the dead body of the hero, to paraphrase the title of a well-known book (Verdery, 1999). The relics of the heroes, sanctified by their sacrifice, ennoble the very ground they are laid in – this is

⁴⁹ One cannot help make the association with some of the stories relating the preparation for military action by Muslim fundamentalists, who would observe a ritual of purification including the avoidance of sexual contact before a major fight. Both the Muslim extremist and the national soldier must be transformed into holy warriors.

one of the metaphors of the holiness of Kosovo in the eyes of the Serbs. Not only is it the cultural and spiritual center of the early Serbian state, but also and perhaps more importantly the repository of the most glorious of the national heroes, whose bodies cannot be left in the hands of the Other, the barbarian, infidel, brutal Albanian: “[...] leaving the land would mean defiling the ancestors, and recall those Bosnian Serbs who took their ancestors with them.” Milosevic could articulate the “Serb national sentiment through references to kinship rooted in particular soils” (Verdery, 1999: 105). The vision of the nation as a living organism, planted in the earth and supported by strong and deep roots dominates the imaginary of the Serb discourse. One is perhaps here looking at the presence of a death cult, where the roots of the nation, which are also its tombs, are more precious than its stem and leaves, the living.

A strong and steadfast hero, able with weapons, aggressive and courageous – this is the ideal mythical Serbian soldier. At the same time, this portrait must be more nuanced, with traces of other myths, like the one of victimhood, and of the suffering that ennobles. The irony is that the propaganda of the aggressive nationalists calls for patriotic Serbs to *give up* their life in order to *enjoy* life (perhaps eternal). Here we have a clear instance of the classical legend of the Heavenly Serbia, according to which death on the battlefield is only temporary, as is the earthly kingdom of men. The righteous should not hesitate to sacrifice this ephemeral life in order to gain access to the heavenly kingdom, the eternal place in the sky reserved for the heroes⁵⁰.

The hope of eternal life achieved by dying the death of a hero links the Serbs to their land. By seeping through the soil of the motherland, the blood of those who

⁵⁰ This metaphor of the kingdom of the hereafter was used to encourage the Serbs fighting in Bosnia in 1993, where the hope in victory was supported by the Biblical argument that there is no resurrection without death (Colovic, 1997: 179).

lost their life in the defense of their nation ensures both their permanent place in the pantheon of the valiant and the survival of their nation. This process of ethnic reproduction, with the earth of the homeland soaked in blood, is a ritual of magical or sacrificial fecundation (Colovic, 1997: 179). Those who die are presented as innocent, and their blood is pure. They are all sinless as “children”, or “sons” of the Motherland, a word carrying a heavy symbolic weight since, in Serbian, land and country are called the same thing, *zemlja*.

Both hero-soldiers and all the blameless victims enoble the land in which their bones found a final rest. The sacrifice of an innocent life in the name of the stability and survival of a superior construction is a theme common to Serbian and Romanian mythology. One of the fundamental Romanian myths, *Master Manole*, tells the story of a famous builder who is cursed to see his most ambitious and unique project, a church, crumbling to the ground every evening no matter how hard he and his team work during the day. In a vision, Master Manole is told that the only way to keep the walls of the church growing is to sacrifice the life of a pure person, who turns out to be his own young and dedicated wife, Ana, who is buried alive in the walls of the magnificent construction. This saga can be reinterpreted to fit the Serbian narrative, with the sacrifice of the innocent soldiers needed for the perpetuity in eternity of their most precious and magnificent construction, the nation.

The individual people give breath and soul to the land that claims their life in exchange for a bigger, greater and more worthy cause. This is the foundation of national solidarity: the sacrifice of one’s own blood cannot be compromised. As it takes on a sacred connotation, it prevents negotiation over territory, which is not seen

in its material form but as a spiritual manifestation of the spirit of the people and a warrant of the link between the ancestors and the present inhabitants. The indestructibility of the connection between territory and nation and the sacred nature of the nation's soil make the change of borders both a necessity (when they are to be expanded to embrace the entire nation) and a tragedy (when they move backwards under the pressure of other groups). This makes Kosovo an intractable dilemma.

Kosovo as myth of election

In contrast with Romanian national mythology, the Serbs do not exhibit a strong connection with their ancestral origins, either in term of place, epoch or person, even though Kosovo has certainly acquired the legendary aura of the birthplace of the Serbian civilization. Arguably, the special status of Kosovo is not a cause but an effect of the stories about the Kosovo Battle of 1389 which were widely spread by nationalist intellectuals at the end of the 19th century in order to inspire feelings of confidence in the fate of the nation and the victory of the national cause.

The Kosovo myth has numerous versions and it is difficult to synthesize them all in a single narrative. This is partly due to the way in which it has been transmitted orally through the recitation of poems in public places by professional storytellers. These storytellers were a perennial feature of the folklore in Serbia. Equipped with a *gusle*, a one-string lute that became emblematic of the national spirit⁵¹, the storyteller would recount, with admirable accuracy, legends and sagas from the past, combining

⁵¹ The revival of this tradition took place in the late 1980s at the same time as the nationalist flame burned increasingly higher. One telling example is discussed by Colovic (2002a) who presents the separatist leader Radovan Karadzic, president of the Republika Srpska, as a *gusle* singer.

real and fantastic characters and events in a gripping tale of heroism and sacrifice. Because of the oral transmission of the story, many of its elements suffered modifications in tune with the feelings of the individual guslar and with political and social circumstances. This is also part of the reason why the story survived: it was kept alive and updated as it could be adapted to suit a wide range of situations.

As illustrated below, the Kosovo story can be interpreted in multiple ways: as a myth of military valor, as a myth of victimhood, even as a myth of salvation. The most plausible and consistent interpretation, however, appears to be the myth of election. Myths of election talk about the existence of a chosen people, usually endowed with special qualities originating from some divine source. The most typical example of a chosen people comes from the Old Testament of the Judeo-Christian religious heritage, where the Jewish people are designated as God's own chosen people, but other groups like the Mayflower pilgrims landing in the New World also qualify (not to mention the vision the United States has of its place as the leader of the world promoting peace and democracy).

Myths of election imply the possession of special attributes and this in turn may justify both positive and negative historical experiences. One of the lines of argument states that those with special attributes are in a superior position vis-à-vis other groups and thus have the right to attempt to rule over these others, showing them the right way. This *mission civilisatrice* is morally justified, as the European colonial discourse exemplifies, and allows for the oppression of the more primitive, or less enlightened people (Cauthen, 2004). In our case, the Serbs are a chosen people and therefore have not only the right but also the duty of leadership. They are

naturally at the forefront of the anti-Ottoman struggle, assuming the costs of holding the reins of the attacks against the infidels but expecting in return, from the other Balkan peoples, some form of gratitude, respect and recognition of their primacy in the region.

The interpretation of the myth of election lends credibility to the less glorious pages of history by portraying the others as motivated by envy and wishing the fall of the chosen ones from their prime position. This explanation emphasizes the responsibilities of leadership and the sacrifice that must at times ensue. Because of their special attributes, the elected few are called to action without self-interest, and they are willing to pave the way to victory with their bodies. They are envied and attacked by others, but remain undeterred from the greater goals shown to them by divine authorities because they alone are aware of the existence of a higher realm reserved for those who live up to the expectations. In this sense, their sacrifice is only temporary, the certificate of martyrdom that opens the Pearly Gates. This second argument fits very well with the “heavenly Serbia” narrative embedded in the Kosovo myth (Anzulovic, 1999) and supports bravery in battle, heroism and self-sacrifice.

The theme of election carries with it strong religious connotations and this reinforces the connection between religious and national identity in the case of the Serbs. It is usually the case that the sentiment of belonging to a selected group has its origins in a religious belief (from the castes in Hinduism to the Biblical tradition). The shift between religious and secular aspects of election can be traced etymologically in the English language, where the first time the term nationalism was used (as late as 1836) it stood for a doctrine positing that some nations were divinely

elected (Smith, 2001: 5). The Kosovo myth goes beyond the simple religious aspect. It has been transformed or reinterpreted to carry more political weight and, instead of projecting the Serb mission as a religious conversion, it allowed for the growth of the great Serbian national idea, as reflected in Vuk Karadzic's claim that Croats and Bosniaks are in fact Serbs who simply changed religion (Judah, 2000: 61).

Certainly, the power of the Kosovo myth lies less in its factual content, as thin as it may be, but more in its use in the hands of various nationalist entrepreneurs and in the emotional response it generates among the Serbs. Perhaps this myth is an instance of Cassirer's "new speak", where words of everyday usage take on a special, more poignant meaning. In any case, it is certainly an example of mythical politics that would not seem very strange to the German philosopher. Some authors go as far as to argue that "in all European history it is impossible to find any comparison with the effect of Kosovo on the Serbian national psyche" (Judah, 2000: 30) This echoes the words of Ivo Zanic, describing the Battle of Kosovo as having become "the central event of Serbian national history", so pervasive in the culture, politics and imaginary of the Serbs as to be "unparalleled in recent European history" (Zanic, 1999: 157). And even if this hyperbolic characterization can be criticized by comparing it with other examples (e.g. the Trianon treaty for Hungarians), it is undeniable that the myth offers one of the richest scale of interpretations: from being "democratic, anti-feudal, with a love for justice and social equality" (Emmert, 1990: 141) to "an instrument of fascist policy of violence and expansion" (Laurer, 1995: 145, quoted in Bieber, 2002: 97). Because of its large number of versions, and because of the large cast of characters it displays, the Kosovo myth has been used to

demonstrate the qualities of the Serbian soldiers, Serbian leaders and Serbian people as a whole (duty, courage, dedication, self-sacrifice, deep faith in God). It has also been used to argue for the territorial rights of the Serbs over the Kosovo province or to promote the righteous message of this or that politician (and here, most famously, shines the figure of Slobodan Milosevic). The story contains the seeds of another recurrent theme in Serbian mythology, namely the betrayal and victimhood motif, also often used in politics.

But in order to identify these different interpretations, it is time to recount the content of the myth in synthetic form. The version circulated in literary circles has its origins in the epic poem “The Mountain Wreath” (1847), written by the poet-cum prince-cum bishop of Montenegro, Peter Petrovic-Njegos. His lyrical account draws inspiration from much earlier texts, circulated directly in the aftermath of the death of Prince Lazar on the battlefield of Kosovo Polje in 1389. Political circumstances made it necessary for the figure of Lazar to become idealized, a job taken in earnest by monks who spun a tale of heroism and sacrifice imbued with Christian symbolism. When Njegos reinterpreted the message of the story so as to suit a modern national ethos, the religious elements formed only one side of the tale, the other side being the national virtues of the Serbs.

The legend goes that on the eve of the battle opposing the Christian armies and the Ottoman forces, Prince Lazar of Serbia saw a talking bird who proved to be a sacred emissary from God. This harbinger of divine messages placed Lazar before the dilemma of choice: either a victory in the battle of tomorrow, but a temporary one, or a loss on the battlefield but a victory in heaven, the everlasting one. The righteous

Lazar did not hesitate in choosing the spiritual kingdom for himself and his people, and when he met his death on the Plain of the Blackbird he died as a Christian martyr. At the same time, the legend tells the story of other Serbian and Christian soldiers, the story of Obilic, the Serbian knight who killed Sultan Bayezid in his tent, later to lose his life at the hands of the janissaries; or the traitor Vuk Brankovic, Prince of Bosnia, who is described as guilty of the loss of the Christian armies because of a separate deal with the Ottomans. Another theme in the legend is the relationship between Serbs and those Slavs who converted to Islam, as well as the relationship with the Turks. Especially under the pen of Prince Njegos, the future of these infidels looks dark: either forced conversion to Christianity⁵² or physical elimination⁵³.

These stories, embedded into each other, play a role inasmuch as they made their way into the public discourse of the Serbs and became internalized as hegemonic and therefore unquestionable narratives. One way to capture a glimpse of this hegemony is to observe how often references to the Kosovo myth occur in the political discourse as well as in the everyday life of Serbs. The most obvious example of the political use of the myth is Milosevic's speech on the 600 anniversary of the Kosovo Polje battle, where references to the myth are employed to justify the continuous Serbian presence in the region and suggest the future anti-Albanian policies.

⁵² "Have done with minarets and mosques!/Let flare the Serbian Christmas-log;/Paint gaily too the eggs for Easter-tide;/.../ If ye take not the counsel that I give/ Why, then, I swear by name of Obilitch.../ That both our faiths – they both shall swim in blood" (Njegos quoted in Judah, 2000: 76).

⁵³ "Through broad enough Cetinje's Plain/No single eye, no tongue of Turk,/ Escap'd to tell his tale another day!/ We put them all unto the sword/.../ We put fire to Turkish houses,/ That there might be nor stick nor trace/ Of these true servants of the Devil!" (Njegos quoted in Judah, 2000: 77).

“First I want to tell you, comrades, that you should stay here. This is your country, these are your houses, your fields and gardens, your memories. [...] It has never been a characteristic of Serbian and Montenegrin people to retreat in the face of obstacles, to demobilize when they should fight, to become demoralized when things are difficult. You should stay here, both for your ancestors and your descendants. Otherwise you would shame your ancestors and disappoint your descendants. [...] Yugoslavia and Serbia are not going to give up Kosovo!” (Milosevic quoted in Judah, 2000: 29).

Memories, ancestors and the right over Kosovo are all arguments that come forward very clearly in this impromptu speech which clearly recalls the words allegedly spoken by Prince Lazar before the fatal battle of 1389: “It is better to die in battle than to live in shame. Better it is for us to accept death from the sword in battle than to offer our shoulders to the enemy” (Emmert, 1991: 24).

The Milosevic speech was effective not only because it made good use of the principles of rhetoric and because it delivered what his audience, a crowd of disgruntled Serbs, wanted to hear. It was also successful because it generated emotion in its public, and this was possible because of the strong recognition factor the Kosovo story has among the Serbs. As will be demonstrated, the myth figures highly in the grand canonical narrative taught in schools and figures prominently in history textbooks. Moreover, the folklore tradition mentioned above, as well as the diffusion of various paintings evoking the battle, make it part of the collective memory of the nation. The “Maiden of Kosovo” is a painting of a young woman giving succor to a fallen hero on the battlefield of Kosovo Polje, which is often reproduced in

schoolbooks and it often hangs on the walls of official institutions and even in private people's homes (Kifner, 1994). The “Great Exodus” is another tableau of the romantic nationalist era that appears often in the public space as well as in textbooks, with patriarch Arsenjic III leading a convoy of refugees. The two paintings are iconic and make a direct reference to the Bible, the former relating to the descent of Christ from the cross, the second of Moses leading the chosen people out of Egypt⁵⁴.

The power of the discourse on Kosovo and the degree of its internalization can be seen also in the reaction of private people and soldiers. As early as the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, one of the participants recalls the intensity of his emotion as Serbian troops entered this myth-laden place: “The spirits of Lazar, Milos, and all the Kosovo martyrs gaze on us. We feel strong and proud, for we are the generation which will realize the centuries-old dream of the whole-nation: that we with the sword will regain the freedom that was lost with the sword” (Judah, 2000: 72). The same spirit seems to possess the protesters against the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999⁵⁵ who hold an icon of Saint Mary with baby Jesus and a slogan written in English: “Kosovo Is the Heart of Serbia” (Rex/ Ray Tang). It is remarkable how similar are the Romanian and the Serbian discourses: both refer to a lost territory endowed with symbolic meaning, and see the reintegration of this lost land into the body of the state as a “century-old dream”. The national ambition is justified by an invocation of history and the figures of ancestors.

⁵⁴ A more detailed examination of the role of art in myth production, including the impact of the paintings mentioned above on the contemporary representations of conflict (for example by drawing the parallel between the Great Exodus of 1690 depicted by Jovanovic and the Serbian expulsion from Krajina in 1995) in Terzic (2005).

⁵⁵ For the three strategies of protest (victims, underdogs and rebels) adopted by the Serbs during the late 1990s, see Jansen (2000).

Common myths to Serbia and Romania

Victimhood

Both Romania and Serbia have a tradition of placing themselves in an inferior position vis-à-vis their more powerful neighbors and thus justify the historical lack of power or dominance by placing the blame elsewhere. The position of victim offers moral high ground from whence to pass judgment on the world, one's neighbors, or one's critics; so while it appears to be a position of weakness, it confers, in fact, a certain merit.

This duality is reflected, for example, in the Serbian position towards Europe, which is much more ambiguous than the Romanian one. The Romanians today see the coronation of their hundred- year-old effort to be recognized as full members of the European club, with their entry into the European Union in 2007. Acquiring EU membership must have elected a sigh of relief from the elite anxious to secure an official link with the “right crowd”, confirming the observation that “perhaps no country in Europe has been so assiduous in searching for foreign role models” (Gallagher, 1997: 64). The Romanian intellectuals have gone to great lengths to demonstrate the origins and the links between the Danubian civilization and Europe, seen mostly in terms of the Occident. This does not mean that Romania is extracted from the Orientalist zone or that it does not use Orientalist references. It still places itself in a subordinate position to the West, which remains an ideal to emulate, as it has done down through history: for example Bucharest used to be called Little Paris, because its architects and city planners attempted to copy (in a significantly smaller

scale) the French style with its pomp and glamour. In fact, as early as the middle of the 19th century, French architects were employed to redesign the plan of the city in order to make it more hygienic and more beautiful (Yerolympos, 1993: 238-239), and the process continued well into the 20th century. Being called Little Paris was taken as a compliment not an insult: in the local mind, the emphasis was placed on “Paris”, with its connotation of grandeur and cultural effervescence, rather than on “little”, the diminutive, not quite like the original, attribute.

This is what Sorin Antohi calls “geocultural bovarism”, a tendency to perceive oneself in a better position than reality awards, a sort of illusion of grandeur. In its social imaginary, Romania is closer to France than to Bulgaria – Antohi cites Nicolae Iorga, one of the key figures in the national historiography of the interwar period, as saying in 1940 “A country does not belong to the space where it stands, but to the target it looks at” (Antohi, 2002: 15). Clearly, Romania sees itself transported from its current marginal location all the way to the center of the European civilization, France, with whom it claims it has a cousin-like relationship⁵⁶. The West, or France in this case, accepts this kind of worship and emulation, because from its point of view, Romania, the East, represents its “Ego-Ideal: the point from which the West sees itself in a likeable, idealized form, as worthy of love” (Zizek, 1990: 1).

Even if the voices in favor of a “return to Europe”, the natural home of Romanians from which only the forceful intervention of the Red Army could separate them, were the most audible in the early post-communist debates, there were also

⁵⁶ This is, needless to say, a perception not shared by the French, or by other “Latin cousins” like the Italians or the Spaniards. There are nevertheless some authors who are able to identify certain commonalities between Romania and France in the field of the symbolic imagination, where some shared cultural perceptions exist (cf. Wunenburger, 2004).

those for whom European integration was just as utopian as Communism. Both perspectives were national, but they defined the nation in different ways: either as part and parcel of a larger, prestigious civilization, Europe, or independent of any other cultural units, standing proudly on its own (Verdery, 1999b: 302).

Romania's ambition to belong to a European center and its frustration at not being recognized as such by the established members of this closed circle is a case in point of the duality of perceptions of victimhood. Romania sees itself on one hand as a valuable contributor to the European civilization, and on the other as a junior member who still has to learn the rules and adapt to the big game – the rejection it receives from the examples it learned to admire creates both sentiments of inferiority (yet again we are not good enough) and of revolt (we have been victims of the Great Powers again, who used us for their benefit only). The dominant attitude is conformism and not rebellion.

In Serbia the relationship to Europe (seen as representative of the West) has been much more confrontational, with Serbia placing itself in a position of the offended one, placing the blame on Europe. Is this an Orientalist reaction, with the Balkans reacting against the corner where the West placed them? Serbs are showing off their wounds in a “proud, virile, bellicose” manner saying to the West: this may happen to you too, there may be a contagion effect where instead of the Westernization of the Balkans you might have the Balkanization of the West, in some form of “revenge of the stigmatized” (Antohe 2000: 75-76).

There have been voices categorically in favor of synchronicity with the regional political and cultural processes, like Alexander Despic, the president of the

Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, who in 1995 firmly placed Serbia where he thought it belonged: “We were Europe, we are Europe today, and we will be Europe” (quoted in Emmert, 2003: 161). The last part of this phrase may be interpreted not as a harmonization of Serbia with the Western norms and values but perhaps an attempt to make this (Western) Europe closer to Serbia. Serbian intellectuals and, in general, the country’s elite have been split between a Western model and something close to ethnic tribalism, rooted in the pagan–heroic ethos originating in the Kosovo myth (Anzulovic, 1999: 69). This suggests that, just as in Romania, the idea of Europe is ambiguous, but whereas in Romania the pro-integration discourse gained the upper hand, in Serbia for a very long time it seemed that the nationalists occupied the center stage.

From a conservative Serbian point of view, Europe, or the West as a whole, is not worthy of emulation. It is decadent, degenerate, rotten, materialistic, and Earth-bound. Serbia does not want to belong to this degraded culture⁵⁷. A Serb is a Non-European, as Bishop Amfilohije Radovic noted in 1991: “Europe is not against us because we are not and do not wish to be Europe”. Europe and Serbia are antagonistic and the Metropolitan’s position becomes more openly aggressive in another speech, where Europe may not be against Serbia, but Serbia is against Europe “The West is preoccupied and besieged by the Earth. That is why it does not think of Heaven. And that is why it is such an enemy to us today” (both quotes in Colovic, 2002: 40, 39).

In a reference to one of the most frequently encountered grand narratives in the Serbian canon, the Heavenly Serbia myth, Bishop Amfilohije assigns the high

⁵⁷ This attitude is well-spread in the entire former Eastern bloc, where the critique the European institutions often delivers in regards to economic or political performance is interpreted through a “complex of the unwanted child” (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002).

moral ground to Serbia. Because they are more spiritual, more Christian in their values and attitude, the Serbs are more European than the European themselves, as they preserve the traditional ethic of the early church, uncorrupted by material interests. Again, Bishop Amfilohije: “not through our own deserts, but by the gift of God, we are the bearers and guardians of the genuine Jerusalem – Mediterranean Europeanness” (Colovic, 2002: 40). This is not an innovation: the Zenithists, a group of artists contemporary with and inspired by the Surrealists, who deplored the weakness of the “flabby West” and contrasted it with their genuinely Balkan hero, the “barbarogenius”, gifted with an “elemental purity and raw indomitable virility” (Zanic, 2007: 410-411). So they are not spiritual enough or not material enough: the Europeans do not seem make it either way in the eyes of the Serbs. In a reference to one of the most spread grand narratives in the Serbian canon, the Heavenly Serbia myth, Metropolitan Amfilohije assigns to Serbia the high moral ground: because they are more spiritual, more Christian in their values and attitude, the Serbs are more European than the European themselves, as they preserve the traditional ethic of the early church, uncorrupted by material interests. Again, Metropolitan Amfilohije: “not through our own deserts, but by the gift of God, we are the bearers and guardians of the genuine Jerusalem – Mediterranean Europeanness” (Colovic, 2002: 40). This conviction about the holiness of the nation stems from the myth of election grounded in the Kosovo narrative, itself modeled after the Bible: “it is Christian and evangelic, and therefore universally human. But it is also deeply national. Kosovo is the New Jerusalem, but a Jerusalem in the Balkans, in Serbia” (Petrov, quoted in Anzulovic, 1999: 5).

The call for moral purity, the awareness of the special mission the Serbs are endowed with and the pride associated with it recall the classical story of Russian messianism, Moscow as the Third Rome⁵⁸, which also became concretized as Moscow, the New Jerusalem (Lotman and Uspenskii, 1984). Like the Muscovites in the Middle Ages, and like many European nations in the 19th century, the Serbs discover their self-esteem in a history of persecutions, defeat and despondency. But suffering ennobles and therefore it is willingly endured. Serbia, or Kosovo per se, as the New and genuine Jerusalem replaces and challenges Europe's claim to a superior normativity based on the principles of human rights and democracy in the name of traditional Christian values.

This Balkanism turned on its head may not stand so much for the self-assuredness of the Serbs as for the lack of confidence in their own identity. Aggression against Europe can be likened to a revolt of a younger member of the family against the chief of the clan. The old, decayed, disoriented chieftain is challenged in his authority but remains nevertheless the reference point for the young clansman's definition of the self. Because the Serbs could not compete with Europe in terms of material well-being, economic performance or military might, the only ground left to aspire to was the moral one. Because they felt themselves lacking on the points enumerated above, the Serbs had an aggressive reaction of self-defense against what they perceived as a European critique.

⁵⁸ In the 15th century, the Russian monk Philoteus addressed a letter to the Tsar Vassily III, enumerating the Tsar's merits and claiming for Moscow the succession of the title of capital of Christianity after Rome fell under the heretical interpretations of the Holy Scripture (Catholicism) and Constantinople had been toppled by the foreign invaders. For more on this myth of election and Russian messianism in general see Duncan (2000).

In this sense Romanian bovarism, even if apparently signaling a weaker, subservient position towards Europe, may in fact mean the opposite, that the Romanians are more prepared to become part of European civilization because they are less afraid to lose their national essence. On the other hand, the Serbs reject European membership because they perceive it as not being offered on terms of equality. Serbs may be more insecure about their self-definition, and therefore less inclined to become just one piece of the larger puzzle, risking diluting their own identity, which they are ready to defend at the slightest sign of potential threat.

The passive-aggressive attitude of the Serbs is reflected in some of the most commonly heard theories of Serb victimhood: there is a conspiracy of all, but especially of other Southern Slavs, Catholics (including the Vatican) and former Nazi states (Germany, Austria), against the Serbs (Goldstein, 2000). The Serbs feel that the West, as represented by the Catholic and Habsburg tradition, persecutes and excludes them and implicitly favors the Croats. Slovenes (already members of the European Union) and Croats are even perceived in official circles as more European and are already tipped as the next future members of the European Union whereas the Serbs (evidently of their own will and by their own circumstances) are further from European cooperation than their much smaller and poorer neighbor, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Especially during the NATO campaign of 1999, which was meant to stop the ethnic cleansing of the Albanians from Kosovo, the Serbs felt they were unjustly treated and that their suffering was minimized in comparison with that of the Albanians. Comparisons between Hitler and Milosevic, and between Nazi Germany and Serbia published in the Western media did not help

dispel this impression: Europe and America believed that the Serbs were about to “perpetrate and tolerate” a violence unseen since the Holocaust (Emmert, 2003: 161). The Serbs took the Holocaust comparison and turned it on its head: it is not them and their leaders who behave like Hitler’s supporters, it is the NATO troops who, on the anniversary of the Nazi bombing, very heavily bombed Belgrade into pieces, destroying the lives of civilians, and turning schools and hospitals into rubble (Damjanov quoted in Antic, 2005: 199).

Romanians are no strangers either to the idea of conspiracy either and more often than not their justification for historical failures stems from a perception of being “perpetually wronged, deserted, forgotten and betrayed” (Mitu, 2001: 26). With its origins in medieval history writing, the theme of victimhood and betrayal took the front stage during the 19th century national movement. Especially powerful in Transylvania, the theme of being at the mercy of other, more powerful but also unjust forces, legitimized various petitions made in the name of increased cultural and political rights by various Transylvanian intellectuals at the court in Vienna as well as the entire program of the 1848 revolution. Most meritorious but also least recognized and most persecuted: this understanding of the self is transparent in Romanian historical documents from the 19th century, like this letter to the Austrian General Jelacic from 1849, where the Romanians find themselves the winners in the competition of victimhood and sacrifice: “Among the oppressed people [...] the Romanians are the first who most urgently need the powerful shield of your Excellency. They are the ones who in times of yore gave true support and have been to this day the ones who bleed the most”. The same idea is underlined in a letter of

1850 to the Habsburg emperor Franz Joseph: “neither the Croats nor the Saxons nor the Serbs ever brought greater sacrifice for the sake of Your Majesty” (both quoted in Mitu, 2001: 28).

This perception of perpetual injustice is explained by a conspiracy theory. As Girardet (1986: 25-62) observes, the conspiracy myth is one of the most common narrative structures, following some general plot lines: the secret organization, the malevolent enemy, and the goal of absolute control and domination. The Romanians described this conspiracy as having two general features: it was universal, involving actors from around the world, and it was extremely secret, accessible only to the sharpest minds. Everyone was against this small and peaceful nation, and that implied that the conspirators may be found everywhere, that the home turf was surrounded by ill-willing forces, and that some of these forces could be hiding and working undercover, the perfect picture of the enemy within. The writings of Moise Nicoara, a Transylvanian intellectual active towards the end of the 1800s, are full of such scenarios, in which the Jesuits, freemasons, Jews as well as the chancellery in Vienna and its secret police, and the Hungarian administration in Transylvania combined their forces to wage a total war against the Romanian nation (Mitu, 2001: 31). Foreigners (defined either in ethnic or religious terms) were to be seen with suspicion and even to be feared.

World War II is another historical period that fomented explanations based on perceptions of victimhood on both Romania and Serbia. In Romania, the Communist historiography worked diligently to eliminate at least from the public discourse the memory of the participation of the country on the side of the Nazi Germany until the

last year of the conflagration. Instead for assuming the responsibility for choosing the Axis side, the historians working under the supervision of the Party nomenklatura endeavored to present the entire war and its consequences as the creation of a single actor, Hitler. Romania was nothing more than a victim of German aggressive Eastern expansion, part of the German imperialism. This explains also the participation of the Romanian military in the campaigns on the Eastern Front in alliance with Axis troops: it was not because Romanians wanted it, but because they were forced to (Chioveanu, 2001). The same can be argued in regards to the Romanian occupation of Bessarabia (currently the largest part of the Republic of Moldova) and to the acts against the Jewish and Roma populations there. As Cioflanca argues, until very recently, the Romanian historical canon created by Communist historians survived intact, arguing that Romania was no perpetrator of crimes against minorities but a victim of German policies (Cioflanca, 2004).

The challenge of World War II was even higher in the context of Serbia. During the Yugoslav era, historians proposed an ideological interpretation of the period, with the Communists (represented by the Partizans, who later became the Yugoslav Army) opposing the fascists (both foreigners and collaborators from within). This simplified story was hard to defend because in the collective memory of the event WWII was not just a struggle against the invading armies of the Axis, but also a civil war, in which the ethnic groups faced each other. The Tito regime erased the ethnic aspects of the conflict, in order to legitimize its promotion of “brotherhood and unity” and allowed WWII to be celebrated as an instance of resistance, of solidarity against the foreign aggressor and as a success story of the communists, the

anti-fascists par excellence (Höpken, 1999). All Yugoslav peoples were victims of the fascists, with no ethnic group more disfavored than the others.

As the legitimacy of the communist regime faded away in the 1980s, the Serb intellectual elite began to reinterpret the events of WWII in the light of victimization. According to this discourse, Serbs have been persecuted by all, and their elimination as a nation was part of the goal of both the occupying Nazi forces and of their collaborators, especially the Croatia-based Ustasha (Dragovic-Soso, 2002: 100-114). This claim was supported by the official publication in the 1980s of statistical data about the number of victims registered during WWII. Based on these statistics, still accepted today, the total number of casualties registered during WWII was about one million, out of a total population of 17 million people. Proportionally, most victims, about 500.000, were registered on the territory of the Croatian fascist state, NDH. Even though numbers may not be accurate, it appears that Serbs living on lands under Croatian control were the most affected, with 15% casualty rate. Overall, 7-8% of the Serbs perished, in comparison with about 5% of the Croats. This is a pale number in comparison with the loss registered by the Jewish and Roma groups, who were decimated: about 75% of the Jews and 33% of the Roma died during WWII in the whole of Yugoslavia (Sindbaek, 2008: 34). The Serb stories of victimhood ignored the comparison with the non-Slav victims and proclaimed themselves to be suffering the most.

The discredit of the communist narrative and the emergence of nationalizing collective memories brought into the public arena voices silenced by the Tito regime, more often than not ethnic voices who claimed recognition and even compensation.

Croats talked about the “Bleiburg massacre”, when the border conflict between Partizans and Ustasha forces and their allies led to the death of tens of thousands. On their part, Serbs used the example of Jasenovac, the Ustasha concentration camp where as many as 50.000 Serbs may have lost their lives (Sindbaek, 2008: 32). During the wars of Yugoslav secession, this trend towards Serbian victimhood amplified further, with WWII being used by Serb media as a historical reference and warning for what might happen again if Croats, the archenemies, were to be on the winning side. The same argument was heard on the Croatian side as well, thus leading to a competition of victimhoods and the claim to several Balkan Holocausts (MacDonald, 2002).

Both Romanians and Serbs feel they have played the role of last line of defense against the plundering attacks initiated by the Ottomans not only against the Balkans but against the entire civilization of the West. Echoes of this defensive myth permeate the academic and political discourse in Serbia, where some have argued that the motivation behind the sacrifice of the Serbian soldiers during the Kosovo Battle was not self-centered but altruistic: to defend Christianity itself. Even the US policy towards Yugoslavia in the 1980s and the recent NATO campaigns of 1999 have been interpreted through the prism of the antemurale version of history. In this new version of the myth, the infidels of old are replaced by the Americans, and the Yugoslav heroic defense puts a stop to the process of world domination initiated and conducted by the USA. (Antic, 2005: 198-199). The Kosovo narrative is then a story of election for a life of sacrifice, for the protection of a Europe that later proved to be ungrateful.

The Kosovo myth is also the catalyst for a legion of victimizing stories, alive in the 1980s, when Dobrica Cosic uttered the famous phrase “Serbs are winners in war, but losers in peace” in his acceptance speech as a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. The same Academy is the author of the *Memorandum* of 1986, which is, for some, nothing but a long list of complaints uttered by the leading nationalist voices in Serbia at the time, in true conspiratorial fashion: for example, the entire Yugoslav Federation idea was, quite simply, a plot in the hands of a half-Croat (Tito) and a Slovene (Kardelj), who planned all along to have the Serbs divided by several internal borders and live spread across several federal units. Moreover, the “Serbian historic lands” (Kosovo, Vojvodina) were taken away from the authority of Belgrade and awarded autonomy, in an attempt at “organized genocide” (Milosavljevic, 2000: 279). This heightened sense of persecution contributed to the positive reception of the aggressive rhetoric of Milosevic, who rose to power in a climate of acute mistrust and perception of injustice among the Serbs⁵⁹.

In a collection of his speeches published in 1989, Milosevic articulates his solution to avoid this “genocide”: a more central role for Serbia within the framework of the Yugoslav Federation, a solution to the issue of Kosovo (where Albanians had begun to rebel against the authority of Belgrade and to demand more cultural and political rights), and a stop to the “largest exodus on the territory of Europe”, that of the Serbs out of Kosovo (Milosevic, in Milosavljevic, 2000: 65). The word “exodus” evokes immediately for those exposed even slightly to Serbian history, the historical

⁵⁹ For a good account of the inspirational role the Memorandum had for both Slovene nationalists and for their Serbian counterparts, see Olivera Milosavljevic’s chapter “Yugoslavia as a Mistake” in Popov (ed.) (2000), esp. pp. 52-64.

events of the 17th century, when the “Great Exodus” took the Serbs out of Kosovo and into Vojvodina, then part of Habsburg.

Certainly, the self-perception of victimhood is not the exclusive attribute of the intellectual or political elite but has penetrated the collective memory of Serbs, in particular those living in Kosovo but also of those based elsewhere. Because they have been constantly exposed to this narrative of victimhood, people have internalized a certain ritual of remembering the national tragedy that transformed it from a remote historical event into a vivid, present and powerful trauma. Personal recollection, collective memory and collective discourse reinforce each other and prevent a more nuanced understanding of the Other, now seen only as perpetrator, thus forgetting that both victim and perpetrator are not pure categories but conjectural self-descriptors. By forcing this dyad upon the reality of interethnic relations in Kosovo, the Serbs and the Albanians have become one another’s definitive and irreconcilable enemies, simultaneously rendering each other indispensable. Being an Albanian means not being a Serb and vice-versa⁶⁰.

Kosovo is the stage upon which an acerbic competition of victimhood narratives unfolds. The Albanian inhabitants of the province have embraced the official Kosovo Albanian⁶¹ discourse which directly challenges the Serbian version of

⁶⁰ The complexities of Albanian identity-making process, both in Kosovo and in Albania proper, have been thoroughly investigated in the edited volume *Albanian Identities: Myth and History* (Schwander-Sievers and Fischer, 2002).

⁶¹ Especially during the communist period, there was a distinction between the Albanian state version of the past and the one created in the spaces inhabited by an Albanian population outside the territory of Albania per se. Some have even argued that the dream of a Greater Albania emerged outside the control of Tirana: "if Albanian nationalism ever existed, it was rooted more outside Albania's borders than within" (Kola, 2003: 394).

history⁶². According to their interpretation of the past, it is the Albanians who have always been persecuted by incoming invaders, by an unjust fate, despite the long period during which they have inhabited the area and despite their moral merits. The voice of one Kosovo Albanian speaks for all: “The Albanians have always been humiliated, oppressed, victimized and discriminated against. [...] Our history teaches us that, too. The Serbs have always been our enemies. They are aggressive, and you cannot trust them. They always, throughout the centuries, they always hated us. [...] Don’t believe anything they say, because Serbian history is a big lie” (quoted in Zdravkovic, 2005: 97).

The entire picture is reversed if one listens to the story told by a Kosovo Serb. An almost identical sequence of events, but in which the roles are inverted, with Serbs cast as eternal victims and the Albanians as bearing the responsibility for brutality and maltreatment. “[...] it has always been this way. During [sic] the Turks, they [Albanians] killed our men and raped our women, then the same thing happened when the Germans and Italians came, in both world wars, and even during Tito, there were so many incidents of kidnapping, killing and raping, just like today. [...] You know, they always hated the Serbs. Always wanted just to kill us all” (quoted in Zdravkovic, 2005: 100).

Also in the more nationalist media like the military journal *Vojska* [Army], the Albanians are painted in the darkest colors. They belong to a brutal and violent culture, and are complete strangers to European notions such as political tolerance.

⁶² For some Albanian perspectives of the history of Kosovo and the place of the Albanians in the Balkans, see Bajraktari (1996), Berisha (1993) and Rugova (1994). The Albanian perspective is also introduced in Mertus (1999), Duijzings (2000), Schwadner-Sievers and Fischer (eds.) (2002). The contrast between the Serb and the Albanian claims over Kosovo is the theme of Duijzings, Janjic and Maliqi (1997).

Partly because of their Muslim faith, they are strangers to Europe and to its civilization, outsiders and a threat to the basic Christian values of the West⁶³. Serbs are therefore at the forefront of a defensive line which should be that of the entire continent, against the vandalism of churches and abuse of other objects belonging to the most ancient cultural heritage in the Balkans – the monasteries of Pec, for example. The Serbs know their enemy and how treacherous they can be, but the UN and KFOR missions do not – they are bound to discover, however, that there is no way to introduce democracy, rule of law, judicial fairness and so on to Kosovo, where Albanians will inevitably sabotage the best intentions of the West. Finally, the Serbs feel betrayed by a Europe with whom they traditionally have had the closest ties, and do not understand why everyone else fails to see Albanians' true colors (Antic, 2005: 200).

Zdravkovic's series of in-depth interviews conducted in 2002 with ordinary inhabitants of the province from both ethnic groups, as well as the earlier work done by Mertus (1999), display an acute divergence of opinions between the two communities who at the same time exhibit a very similar choice of vocabulary and references. Both groups maintain the same discursive form: victimization of the self, accusation of aggression cast upon the other with the help of arguments inspired by the national history canon and by folklore. It is only the assignment of the roles that is diametrically opposed in the otherwise symmetrical dichotomy of innocence and guilt. The myths of victimhood are powerful in the description of the Other, and this

⁶³ This discourse that defines the West and Europe in particular in terms of its Christian heritage would be easily recognized by conservatives in Poland (see Nowak, 2007).

image makes its way into the history textbook pages, as demonstrated in a later chapter.

Victimhood myths serve a well-defined function: like all myths, they help define the community by drawing the borderline between self and other. But the special strategy involved in assuming an apparently inferior or discriminated position allows the positive categorization of the in-group, as a morally superior body. This contradiction is possible, because sacrifice, “concentrated suffering”, has been, in the history of mankind, one of the primary ways of communicating with the divine (Amato, 1990: 1). Victimhood, sacrifice, martyrdom, they all serve to justify negative periods in the history of the groups, to place the guilt outside the group (a victim is automatically innocent) and by the same move assign the weight of culpability on the shoulders of the Other. From his moral pedestal, the victim incriminates the perpetrator and implicitly or explicitly asks for their punishment. Finally, victimhood allows for the legitimacy of revengeful policies that compensate for the past suffering. Those who have endured pain have an ethical entitlement to see their enemies repent, apologize, and compensate victims for the injustices committed.

Between the Serbian and the Romanian versions of the victimhood stories, the difference is not so much of substance but of intensity of tone. Both discourses present great internal cohesion and demonstrate the deep penetration of the official canon into the strata of collective ethos. The version of the past presented by the elites of both groups is largely uncontested but taken as justification for the less than smooth historical trajectory the group had to engage upon. The Romanians’ distress appears more tempered than that of the Serbs (or for that matter the Albanians), who

are prepared to focus more exclusively on historical tragedy, trauma, and loneliness in the face of dangers. Romanians compensate for the presence of betrayal, exploitation, historical injustices and so forth by an accrued sense of self importance and by creating a link of solidarity with other “Latin” people of Europe, and in particular the French.

Serbia: Christianity as myth of election

As briefly discussed above, Serbian identity is closely linked with Orthodox Christianity. In their critique of Western civilization many Serbian leaders of opinion, some of them high office- holders in the religious hierarchy, use a rhetorical line in the same vein as Russia’s “Third Rome” or Poland’s idea of decadence of the West. The argument claims that the West lost its glory once it became increasingly secularized. The essence of occidental civilization, its Christian faith, is now best preserved in Serbia (or Russia, or Poland), alone or in alliance with other like-minded nations.

During the time of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, the identity of the Serbs was preserved by the church. This was possible because of the administrative organization of the empire, the millet, which recognized the autonomy of religions and awarded certain rights to the “people of the book”, the Jews and the Christians, while reserving the primary position of authority for Muslims (Judah, Hupchick). The religious tolerance of the Porte implied that the church was allowed to preserve the language, rituals and symbolic calendar of the faithful, becoming thus the primary demarcation between in- and out-group.

On the basis of religious identification, the national identity of the Serbs, as well as that of other Balkan people like the Greeks, for example, slowly developed according to the Western model of the modern nation.⁶⁴ The focal period of nation-making can be located between 1830 and 1880, when the national intelligentsia attempted to redeploy symbolic Orthodox tools to invent traditions compatible to a secular nation, with special emphasis on the idea of redeeming some territories of the Ottoman Empire in the name of Serb (and Greek) nations (Roudometof, 2001: 101).

The role of the church in the survival of the nation is embedded with the Kosovo Battle myth, which makes that territory even more of a sacred land. Not only was Kosovo Polje a milestone in the collective imaginary of the Serbs, but it was also the spiritual source of the nation, as it was the birthplace of the patriarchate, founded in Pec, in Kosovo, by Stephen Dusan in 1346. The king established in the same move not only the seat of spiritual power but also the foundations of the temporal organization of the Serbian state – from the beginning the spiritual and the temporal were closely knit together. The Pec patriarchate took charge of temporal affairs after the disappearance of the Serbian state and its inclusion in the Ottoman Empire in 1557. The Patriarchate had the authority to collect taxes, to make judicial decisions and even to conduct the foreign affairs of the orthodox Christians under its rule. The Patriarch was a leader not only in the domain of the sacred but also in political matters. It was a patriarch who led the Great Serb Migration of 1690, when the Serbs were forced to leave Kosovo for a safe haven under the Habsburg authority. Symbolically and in practice, Pec was the headquarters of whatever Serbian authority

⁶⁴ Not only Balkan nations, but also Western European ones used religion to consolidate their national belonging, as Greenfield shows in the case of England (1992: 27-88).

remained, marking the continuous existence of the Serbs even during foreign rule (Perica, 2002: 9).

The national revival came wearing the religious garb allowed by the Porte, with the approval by the Sultan in 1830 of an internally autonomous Serbian church and the raising of the Serbian Patriarch from the 12th to the 2nd rank in the Orthodox Church hierarchy in 1833. Milos Obrenovic, the Serbian despot at the time, promoted other measures that nationalized religious practice, most notably the introduction of the Old Church Slavonic as liturgical language instead of the traditional Greek. Later, as the Serbian state acquired autonomy, Orthodoxy became the official religion and impregnated all the official celebrations and commemorations with its ritual, a tradition that continues to this day (Ramet, 2002: 233).

The rise in national awareness also coincided with the rebirth of the Serb printing press in the late 1700s, not in Belgrade, as perhaps one would expect, but in those territories inhabited by the Serbs after the great migration of 1690 and found under Habsburg authority. In accordance with the theories of Benedict Anderson linking the printed word with the rise of national movements, the Serbian printing press of Vojvodina permitted the spread of the ideas promoted by the cultural organization Matica Srpska in its journal *Ljetopis*, where the major national myth of the Serbs, the Kosovo myth, was formulated and diffused (Roudometof, 2001: 116). Despite this connection between language, press, and the diffusion of the national idea, and even though there were intellectuals who wanted national identity to be grounded, as in other Eastern European states (e.g. Romania), on a common idiom, it

was membership of the Orthodox Church that became the basis of Serbian self-definition (Duijzings, 2000: 177).

The institution of the Church and more concretely that of the Serbian Patriarchate brought faith to the people. The Patriarchate was in charge of all the Orthodox believers in all the other Yugoslav administrative divisions during the first and the second Yugoslavia, and the link nation-faith was strengthened by the sanctification of national leaders and personalities. The practice of canonizing kings and other notable rulers begins with Saint Sava but does not stop there: until the present day, there are about 76 national saints celebrated by the Serbian Orthodox church (Perica, 2002: 10). The figure of the warrior-saint is present on the frescoes inside medieval churches, and is also part of the folklore, where the Kosovo Battle hero Milos Obilic or the legendary figure Prince Marko are sometimes portrayed as saints, even though their behavior might be not entirely saintly (Anzulovic, 1999: 13-17).

Hobsbawm identifies this practice as more typical of the Serbs by arguing that the memory of the nation was refreshed during the “daily liturgy of the Serbian church which had canonized most of its kings” (1992: 76) but the Romanians also employed the church as a vehicle for the collective attachment to the nation⁶⁵. It is true however that the practice of canonizing Romanian saints is not as ancient nor as widespread as in Serbia, even though one noticeable parallel can be drawn between

⁶⁵ The practice of canonizing medieval kings is not restricted to the Serbs. The French were among the first to canonize their King Louis. Both French and English kings from the 11th to the 17th centuries were thought to possess special divine power which allowed them to cure diseases by a single touch. It is reported, for example, that the French king François I touched about 1731 sick people in the year 1530 alone! The practice disappeared only with the advent of the Enlightenment in the 18th century. For more on this tradition see Bloch ([1924] 1983).

the beatification of medieval princes in Serbia and the sanctification of the Moldovan prince Stephen the Great. Saint Stephen the Great and Holy, as he is now called, was included in the Romanian Orthodox calendar only after the fall of communism, in 1992 (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 51).

Romania: Christianity as myth of origins

Romanians also have a tight link between Orthodoxy and national sentiment. Historically, and especially in Transylvania, the church preserved the traditions and collective memory of their ethnic group and allowed the difference in relation to the other nations of the Hungarian and later Austro-Hungarian monarchy to become a point of pride.

In the post-communist period the church has seen a revival in both prestige (opinion polls show Romanians trust the Church more than any other institution) and in the number of active churchgoers⁶⁶. This may come as a shock to those who thought the institution of official Orthodoxy would be discredited by their collaboration, or at least tacit acceptance, of the communist regime, even though the Church itself suffered tough persecution and many individual priests perished in the Romanian Gulag (Dutu, 1995: 147-148). In fact, the church managed to survive the transition to democracy well; individual high priests, whose collaboration with the regime or with the regime's secret police was demonstrated beyond doubt, were retired, but the subject of the communist state–church relations is still not addressed,

⁶⁶ According to a recent opinion poll (September 2008), 74% of those interviewed have high or very high confidence in the Orthodox Church (MMT, 2008). However, most Romanians (34%) go to church only twice a year, for Easter and Christmas, even though 22% attend service once a week (Insomar, 2006).

perhaps because a large proportion of the Church hierarchy maintained the same position before and after 1989 (Gillet quoted in Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 42).

The extent of the collaboration of several high prelates of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) with the communist authorities has been analyzed in the Tismaneanu Report (Tismaneanu, Dobrinu and Vasile, 2007) and awoke very strong reactions in the Church hierarchy. Most of these reactions were critical of the report, which was accused of having fragmentary descriptions, incomplete data and bias in the analysis (Romanian Orthodox Church, 2007). The disagreement about the conclusions of the report led to the creation of an internal commission of priests in charge of a more objective examination of the communist past of the Romanian priestly elite. The research will prove to be difficult, as the secret police files of several top priests have been destroyed, according to the Romanian Service for Information, the main intelligence agency who inherited the dossiers of the old Securitate. Regardless of the conclusions of this report, so far not accessible to the public in its entirety, the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church is firmly established and has been buttressed by the governmental approval of a new status in 2008, the equivalent of an ecclesiastical constitution. In this document, the ROC is named “national and dominant, because of its apostolical age, its tradition, the number of its faithful and its special contribution to the life and culture of the Romanian people. The Romanian Orthodox Church is the Church of the Romanian nation” (quoted in Corlatan, 2008). This assertion of a *primus inter pares* position makes explicit a nationalist focus within the Church, and leads to accusation of discrimination or marginalization of Romanians of other confessions.

Both Serbs and Romanians define themselves in terms of their faith, and Orthodoxy has incontestably played a role in the preservation of group identity when other forms (like political representation for example) were prohibited. Orthodoxy in its traditional form implied the organization of the life of the individual around the life of the Church, which formed its “inner core, the outlook of Balkan Christians” (Kitromilides, 1996: 184) The question has been raised of a potentially negative impact of Eastern Christianity on the development of a harmonious relationship between Church and State, damaging the chances for genuine political pluralism. Do the troubles the Balkan states have experienced with consolidating their democracy, eliminating corruption and establishing harmonious interethnic relations stem from the Balkans’ deep-rooted connections with the Orthodox faith? On the contrary, argues Alexandru Dutu, the Orthodox Church imbues the everyday life of the faithful with the presence of the divine, and incites the respect of the moral values inscribed in the ecclesiastical precepts. An authentic and applied Orthodoxy would lead to the elimination of dishonesty and to the manifestation of the principle of Christian love. All the wrong-doings attributed to preserving the traditional values of the Church are in fact the responsibility of the secular power, which exploits the impact of religion on the people (Dutu, 1995: 151).

Religion can become a demarcation line between various ethnic groups that otherwise would have so much in common as to be indistinguishable (for example in cases where language and a common history may be shared). Conversely, converting to different religions may be a strategy to strengthen an incipient differentiation process. Joining a larger and more prestigious church may have a positive effect on

group self-definition, as the community obtains confirmation of its status and importance (Hobsbawm, 1992: 68-69). The choice of one of these strategies in regards to religion is largely dictated by the circumstances on the ground. Both Serbs and Romanians identify themselves strongly with the Orthodox Church, but their notions of belonging within the church's embrace are different in both intensity and content.

For the Romanians, the thesis of popular Christianity, that the Romanian people did not convert but were born Christians, is used as a sign of pride and primacy over other inhabitants of the region. Romanians claim historical rights not for a territory but a religious practice and therefore affect a closer relationship to the sacred. Their Orthodoxy is used in a typical *antemurale* discourse, where Romanians are the last line of defense against the Muslim menace. Resistance and heroism, purity of mind and self-sacrifice are all values connected to Eastern Christianity.

The same values appear to figure primarily among the self-description of the Serbs, for whom the Orthodox Church has played the same role as for the Romanians (especially in Transylvania): to preserve the culture and tradition of the people when threatened by external powers. The degree to which Orthodoxy and Serbdom have been conflated is stronger than in the Romanian case, even though an overwhelming majority of Romanians (close to 90%) claim membership of the national orthodox congregation. One potential explanation of the tighter connection of religion and nation in Serbia may be due to the degree of threat or repression Serbs were exposed to historically, with their "fear of vanishing" (Anzulovic, 1999: 109). The Ottoman rule was more absolute in Serbia than north of the Danube, where the principalities

enjoyed more autonomy in the relationship with the Porte. Another possible reason may be connected to the need to create a distance between otherwise similar people. In order to not be confused with the Catholic Croats, the Serbs preferred to emphasize their connection to the Byzantine heritage thus creating a stronger border between these two groups with a similar language and a similar historical trajectory. For some, the separation in two churches of two ethnic groups very close to one another in terms of other identity features, like the Serbs and the Croats, led to religion becoming a source of conflict and more concretely this separation of churches was the reason for the failure of political cooperation between the South Slavs, first in royal and then later in socialist Yugoslavia (Ekmečić quoted in Perica, 2002: ix).

That was not the case in Romania, where the major delineation was drawn not by religion but by language. The Romanian perception of difference from the neighboring Other was based on their specific Latin dialect, which led to the myth of Latin origins dominating the popular ethos. Since they were already so distinct from the Slavs and the Hungarians around them, the added value of difference brought by Orthodoxy was useful only in the relations with the Western neighbors, and then only if applied with flexibility. Often, during the Middle Ages, but also later, Wallachian and Moldavian princes would enter into alliances with Catholic rulers on the basis of their common faith in Christ and put behind them the theological disputes separating the Roman and the Greek traditions.

The national project is an ode to particularism, to uniqueness even. Every nation attempts to describe itself as an exceptional combination of characteristics, hand-picked to define the true soul of the community. Even if some elements tend to

recur in this description, it is their special dosage, the proportion and harmony of these ingredients that create the distinctive national blend. Religion is one such ingredient for both Romanian and Serb nations, but more potent for the Serbs, and less so for the Romanians, who compensated by a claim to linguistic uniqueness. This does not imply that language plays no role in Serbian nationalism. In the 19th century, Vuk Karadzic wanted language and not religion to be the bond of South Slav unity. His argument resurged unchanged in 1998, when a group of academics and writers composed a report where they claimed that all speakers of the same Slavic dialect of stokavica are Serbs, regardless of their religious group and therefore all the culture produced in the Serbian language (stokavica) belongs to the Serbs (Bojic et al, 1998). This attempt to go against the grain of the identification processes, already at work for some hundreds of years, raised only the indignation of Croats and Bosnian Muslims, who perceived it as nostalgia for a Greater Serbia and accused the authors of assimilationist tendencies.

Since the language cannot work as a unifier, the Serbs had to embrace Orthodoxy as a marker of difference in conditions of greater similarity with their surrounding groups and under more persistent threat of collective elimination, at least in cultural terms if not always physically, by the Ottomans. This heightened perception of threat may also explain the increased frequency, in comparison with Romania, of veneration of warriors and military leaders as well as kings who defended the nation. In Romania language acted from the beginning as an obvious dissimilarity with respect to the groups living in the vicinity and became the primary

marker for group identity. Religion, as in Serbia, was more acutely perceived as important for self-definition under times of duress and persecution.

Just as for myths, one must be careful in claiming causality when discussing the role of religion in conflicts. Even though many analysts, especially in the light of recent developments in world politics, emphasize the violent potential of religion⁶⁷, a causal relationship between strong religious attachment and conflict cannot be assumed a priori. As Dutu pointed out, religion, including Orthodox Christianity, contains the seeds for a spiritual, tolerant and peaceful relationship with mankind and nature. It is usually the political kidnapping of the religion and the intolerant interpretations of religious texts and practices that lead to the aggravation of social tensions between different religious communities.

In the above chapter some of the most frequent and most powerful myths in the imagery of the Romanian and the Serb public discourse have been identified and described. Romania and Serbia have in common a strong attachment to Christianity and a perception of victimhood that leads to feelings of unjust treatment. Conspiracies abound, lead by various enemies, both from outside – the Great Powers – and from within – the neighbors or the national minorities. Whereas Romanians place emphasis on their double heritage (Dacian and Roman, local and universal) and are very keen on finding traces of national unity throughout their past, Serbs tend to describe themselves in masculine terms, accentuating their military prowess, courage and spirit of heroism, sometimes leading to self-sacrifice. Based on this, they claim moral superiority, and special status as a chosen people.

⁶⁷ See among others Esposito and Watson (2000), Juergensmeyer (2003); on the Yugoslav case (especially Bosnia) see Velikonja (2003), Mojzes (1994, 1998).

The differences presented above should be seen in exclusive terms. Romanian narratives include numerous references to heroism, and to military values. Serbs are also keen to point out the cultural unity of their own ethnic group, and are even willing to extend membership into the community of other South-Slavs who speak the same language. The brush that painted these general descriptions of national mythologies was wide and outlined only the most significant contours.

Analysis

The analysis of Romanian and Serbian history textbooks will begin at the outer layer, by looking at the front and back covers of books from several periods. The visual impact of the cover illustrations can be a good predictor not only of the content and its focus but also of the symbols expected to awaken a reaction from the pupils. The visual level complements and/ or contradicts the textual content, as image and word collaborate to convey the intention of the authors as well as a more or less hidden curriculum, the message unchecked by conscious purpose. The next level of analysis deals with the actual text. Once the general setup of the textbook has been scrutinized, the trends highlighted at the previous two levels can be tested by an in-depth examination of the actual descriptions which historical periods or characters are accorded. By looking closely at the text one can identify the dominant myths and test the fit between the visual and the literal messages transmitted via the textbooks.

A legitimate question may be: why structure the analysis according to these myths? Can there be other myths laying under the surface of image and text, ignored because of a particular selection bias? The process of selection of these particular myths and not others has been guided by theory and by the existing research in the

field. As the previous chapters explored into detail the field of political myth, several general typologies have been categorized (foundations, victimhood, heroes and villains etc.). Subsequently, these ideal types have been identified in the secondary literature about Romania's and Serbia's historical canon, as well as in literary sources, folklore and political discourse. The last stage is therefore to see if myths, as they appear in the types of material enumerated above, can also be found in the pages of history textbooks. Are they articulated in the same way? How do they change over time, and is that synchronic with transformations on the social and political planes?

Visual content of Romanian textbooks

Ceci n'est pas une pipe [This is not a pipe]

Caption under the drawing of a pipe by René Magritte, 1926

The invitation into the bifocal world of image and word is probably best introduced by the above quotation, which has been interpreted to criticize the assumed connection in the Western mind between the meaning of the graphical representation and the meaning of the words that accompany it. The tradition of visual arts in Europe since the Renaissance has been to aspire to the minimization of the distance between text and image, so much so as to become one. As Foucault commented in his essay on Magritte, text and image are usually perceived to be in a subordinate relationship: either text to the image (like when the paintings include a book or an inscription) or image to text (like in books where the illustrations explain or repeat the message of the words) (Foucault, 1983: 39-40). By provocatively writing under the reproduction of a pipe the words that tell the viewers not to believe

their eyes, Magritte challenged this assumed natural rapport and freed the word and the visual elements from each other.

The same vision is proposed in this analysis where text and image are seen not as conditioned by each other but as complementary to each other. Neither of them simply repeats the meaning of the other. On the contrary, images may take their cue from words but they add on to the message carried on textually, enriching and complementing it, or maybe even belying it. Images say something more than words alone. In the following we will compare the front covers of history textbooks for the 4th grade of primary school in a chronological sequence from 1998 to 2007.

According to the history curriculum, during the fourth grade pupils are to study the history of Romania (or of the Romanians, depending on the year and textbook) from the origins to the change of regime in 1989.

On the cover of a textbook published in 1998 (Grigore et al), before the education reform initiated by Andrei Marga discussed previously, we find a painting which illustrates the entry of prince Michael of Wallachia into the city of Alba-Iulia. The prince is wearing his characteristic hat, the mark which makes him easily recognizable in the pantheon of national figures in Romanian history, and his hand is slightly bent so that it rests on his waist. Michael is riding a white horse, the typical pose of a winner entering the newly conquered territory, and his cape is also light in color, so that the center of the painting is entirely illuminated. Around the prince there are several other people, none of whom is presented full-length but only truncated. We see behind him the heads of two riders of his court, and in the lower right corner there is a foot soldier wearing a helmet and just the hand of someone else beating a

large drum. Behind Michael's horse one can see the standing figure of another soldier, wearing armor as if coming directly from the battlefield, and even further in the background there are lines of lowered flags and spears, bowing before the entrance of the conquering royalty. It does not appear that there are any enemies in sight, the prince is surrounded only by his supporters, and the general impression communicated by the gay colors and the forward movement of the horse is a festive one. In its iconography and choice of historical episode, the cover illustration does not deviate in the slightest from the standard representation of Michael the Brave; on the contrary, this painting (which is not sourced therefore can be assumed to be a drawing made by the designer of the textbook) reproduces almost slavishly the image of Michael entering Alba Iulia from the fresco of the Atheneum concert hall, painted between 1933 and 1938.

The Atheneum fresco is one of the most frequently occurring and therefore very easily recognizable illustrations of Romanian history; arguably, the fresco offers a concentrated version of those events selected by the intellectual and political elite at the beginning of the 20th century to represent the uniqueness of the Romanian spirit. At least this was the ambition of its author, the painter Costin Petrescu, who said: "On a surface 75 meters long and 3 meters wide I had to concentrate the stormy history of my country. [...] I decided then to pick the highlights of this history and to give the fresco the aspect of an uninterrupted flow to symbolize, like a poem, beginning with Emperor Trajan, the glorious story of my people. [...] Here lies the entire splendor and drama of painting, which must transform the dynamism of life into a series of static moments" (Petrescu quoted in Ionescu, 2008). In a series of 25 episodes, the

fresco depicts the entire history of the Romanian people from its beginnings (always situated at the meeting between the Roman and the Dacian people at the time of the Trajan conquest of Dacia) to the first Great Romanian state (1918). Among the episodes included in this pantheon of national history one finds the moment of Prince Michael's entry into the city of Alba Iulia, considered to be significant because it was under his rule that the first union of the three provinces which later became Romania took place.

The cover of this textbook also refers to other myths, the figure of the Hero, the conqueror, is presented in no unequivocal terms. Prince Michael dominates the center of the illustration both visually and symbolically and belongs to the gallery of national symbols of valiance and success. But above all Michael is the symbol of national unity⁶⁸, as his other alias is Michael the Unifier, so his position on the cover of the book can be interpreted as giving precedence to the idea of national unity as the most noteworthy. On the back of the textbook there is a colored picture of the Atheneum in Bucharest, which only reinforces the connection between the illustration on the front cover and the Atheneum fresco. Michael dominates as a historical figure in the imagination of the Romanians, as he figures at number four from the top of the greatest Romanians in a TV show run by the national television channel in 2006 after the original BBC model where ordinary citizens could vote for those Romanians who most represent them or influenced their lives. In the final phase of the contest, the public was invited to vote using several criteria: bravery, genius, grandeur, leadership

⁶⁸ Ioan Aurel Pop says „Michael the Brave became a true national symbol of the Romanians because of the two major accomplishments of his short reign [1593-1601] -saving the state from the Ottoman expansion and achieving the unity of the three Romanian principalities” (Pop and Bolovan, 2006: 305). Interesting use of the word „became” an impersonal variant that does not question how the historical figure of Prince Michael turned into a symbol.

skills, and spiritual heritage. Michael the Brave was considered to be an icon of grandeur⁶⁹ (Mari Romani web site).

A year later, another textbook for the 4th grade (Burlec et al) contrasts with the gaiety and exuberance of the previous example by displaying on its cover a medieval fortress, more specifically a round crenellated tower, photographed in drab colors. It does not seem that the design is made to evoke a specific place or event, since the tower is not easily identifiable as a lieu de mémoire; it only gives a general historical feeling, recalling the “olden days” or an ill-defined Middle Ages. The construction appears to be in good and solid condition and does not display marks of erosion or consequences of military attacks, which could be a sign of the solidity of the defense and the permanence of the continued presence of Romanians over a lengthy period. If one consults the inside pages of the textbook more information can be retrieved about the position of this medieval construction: it is the Chindia tower, guarding over the first capital of the Wallachian principality, Targoviste, built at the height of the power of a legendary figure in the national pantheon, Mircea the Old (15th century). The connection between this architectural monument and Mircea’s reign is not obvious and it would certainly be missed by an uninformed viewer.

All the dynamic movements and vivid colors are transferred from a primary position on the front to the back cover. In opposition with the static and almost grey color scale that meets the eye when opening the book, the last page of the manual has a battle scene at its center. Another tower, this time drawn in the manner of medieval

⁶⁹ In the video explaining the merits of the great Romanian nominated for the top 100 position it is said that the most important of all the qualities displayed by Prince Michael was his ability to think in military strategic terms and his extraordinary strength (Mari Romani Website). In general the contest was quite popular, with 363,846 votes being registered by telephone, SMS and internet.

miniatures, is populated with soldiers who aim arrows at the unseen enemy below. The sky is full of flying objects, probably projectiles, and one sees at the very bottom of the page a cannon being prepared for firing. It appears also that this battle is not just between two conflicting human parties. From the convoluted clouds appear some heads that cannot be but those of angels. The style of the illustration is Western medieval rather than Byzantine and, although there is no source cited, the fragment appears to belong to a medieval chronicle.

This textbook breaks the unofficial rule of marketing whereby a product should stand out from the mass by appealing to the eye of the reader and places an anonymous picture on the front cover whereas the dynamic movement and the strong reds and blues are all located where they are least likely to be seen by a prospective buyer. Leaving aside the economic considerations, and perhaps also the esthetic ones, one possible interpretation of the design is to focus on the stability, normality and solidity of the nation (the title, *The History of the Romanians*, in bright yellow, begs attention immediately). The wars are a matter of the past, nothing to be specially noticed. It seems that the defenders portrayed on the back cover are winning their battle, and that the angels support their fight, so they could be a representation of heroism in wars. It is striking however that neither of the two pictures carry a really strong Romanian mark. The battle scene on the back, in particular, is almost entirely foreign to the autochthonous tradition of painting during the Middle Ages. This is only curious because it comes in contrast with the content of the textbook which is dedicated to the national history of the Romanians.

The visual quality of textbook design does not seem to significantly evolve over time, nor do the main attention hooks differ in the period before and after the education reform. This can be observed by looking at the cover of a textbook from 2003 (Ochescu and Oane). On an eye-catching bright red background, the front cover displays the drawings of four significant personalities from the past. The first two figures appearing at the top of the illustration are the “founding fathers” of the Romanian people, Decebalus and Trajan, the Dacian and Roman leaders, respectively. They are drawn in a two-tone brown scale, and both are presented in profile, reminiscent of the images beaten on the faces of coins. Decebalus is easily recognized because of his long beard and especially because of his hat, the pileus, part of the folk costume of the local tribes of Dacia and familiar to the Romanian eye from reproductions of bas-reliefs from Trajan’s Column. The Column was erected in Rome in the customary fashion of leaders who wanted to celebrate their victories in expanding the frontiers of the Roman Empire and is one of the primary sources of graphic information about the Dacians. In the national historiography, Trajan’s monument has served as some form of proof of the Latinity of the Romanians and has been celebrated as symbolic of the connection between the Dacians and the Romans. A copy of the column welcomes today’s visitor at the National History Museum in Bucharest. Scenes from the reliefs spiraling along the trunk of the pillar were and still are reproduced widely in textbooks and as postcards. The Column figures clearly in both illustrations as it constitutes the vertical axis of the drawings and gives them mirror symmetry. Trajan is clean shaven and looks sternly in the direction of Decebalus, who in his turn seems to look straight back at his opponent. Would it be

stretching the metaphor of the coin one step further to see Trajan as the shaved civilized Roman who is perfect counterpoise to the bearded Decebal, rough power of nature? Perhaps the opposition nature – culture is not specifically sought as a motif here, but because of its recurrence in the national iconography it may be implicit in the representation of the myth of the origins of the Romanian people.

The profiles of the two leaders are surrounded by two teams of riders, again symmetrically arranged. The Dacians wave their effigy, the head of the wolf with tails fluttering in the wind; the Romans have the insignia of their legions appearing above the crowds of armored horsemen and the Roman eagle is also clearly visible on the left side of the drawing. The images have a sculptural quality that makes one feel they have directly descended from Trajan's Column, but because of the perspective employed they seem to be propelled forward by an internal movement. The soldiers on horseback seem to be charging towards each other at full speed but they do not carry any weapons – they ride fast towards each other perhaps not to destruction but to merge and create a new people. This would be the interpretation most in line with the myth of the double descent of the Romanians.

The two other figures placed on the second level of the cover illustration are Prince Vlad Tepes of Dracula fame and King Ferdinand. One can again only speculate as to the reason for this particular selection of personalities. Perhaps Vlad has been chosen on the grounds of the publicity around his potential vampire tendencies which made him famous mostly abroad but also at home. In any case, wrapped in a blue mantle he sits on a horse and is about to pull his long sword from its sheath with a decided gesture. His long black hair covering his shoulders and his

long moustache, together with his red hat edged with pearls and decorated with a fancy feather, are the well-known emblematic signs of the Wallachian prince. From his gaze and firm grip of the sword, emanate an unyielding stand-strong impression, underlined by the lack of movement of the horse. Vlad appears to be the steadfast defender of the nation.

Instead of a sword, King Ferdinand I carries a scroll of paper in his right hand while with the other hand he supports himself on a white wall fragment upon which rests his crown. Because in history Ferdinand is mostly remembered as the first king of all Romanians, it is likely that the paper he holds is the declaration made on December 1st, 1918 in Alba Iulia which proclaimed the existence of Great Romania, the unified state grouping all historical provinces populated in majority by ethnic Romanians. Ferdinand's chest is covered in medals and he wears a red diagonal escarp over his military uniform. He is wearing a thick military overcoat loosely over his shoulders as if he was entering the picture directly from the battle field. The medals, the uniform, the overcoat, and equally Vlad Tepes's blade, are references to the military valor of these kings, highlighting their masculinity and their skills as soldiers. Neither Vlad nor Ferdinand I are moving, and there is no explicit enemy threat to be fought; they are heroes at rest but nevertheless ready to intervene if need be. No aggression but strong determination seems to be the value emerging from the two depictions at the bottom of the cover.

If we are to read the four sections in sequence, the story that emerges is the simplified life of the nation, from its conception at the confluence of two opposite powers, the Dacians and the Romans, to its grand accomplishment, the national unity,

achieved under the rule of Ferdinand I. The middle part of the story does not lend itself as easily to interpretation, but it could be surmised that the history between birth and attainment of national aspirations has been under the sign of the sword.

On the back cover the design carries a collage of national symbols and portraits whose main theme is the idea of national unity. On the same bright red background as the front we see a generic sky crossed transversally by a winding ribbon in the colors of the national flag. At the center of the collage is the coat of arms of Romania, the Eagle carrying a cross in its beak, a sword and a scepter in each of its clawed feet. Around this emblem are placed other images: melting into the background a crowd of people waving flags, taken from a photo of the national assembly in Blaj in December 1918, celebrating the Great Union, then in the lower central position the three-gated entry into Alba Iulia, the city of national unity. Floating weightlessly on the left side of the sky we see again the head of Decebalus, in close proximity to a medieval portrait of Prince Michael the Brave, Ferdinand's precursor in entering Alba Iulia as unifier. On the right side of the collage the crowned profile of King Ferdinand I, again, and the portrait of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the prince who for the first time brought Moldova and Wallachia under the authority of the same ruler, thus paving the way for complete national unity established under Ferdinand. At the top of the picture there are faded copies of documents bearing heavy wax seals, disappearing into the sky.

In order to observe if there is a change over time in the representation of symbolic events from national history, we will take a look at two very recent textbooks, printed in 2006 but still available in bookstores as of 2008. By now the

effects of the education reform should be well established, and the time lapse since the communist period should give perspective to the myths rooted in the Ceausescu era.

The first impression that meets the eye when looking at the 4th grade textbook coordinated by Cleopatra Mihailescu (Mihailescu et al, 2006) is that the graphic component of the front and back covers is slight. Between half and a third of the surface is left white, which is a lot of empty space especially on the back cover where there is no title heading. On the front there is a photographic collage of images placed against a dark red background, with a certain ancient times theme. Of the five images, four are dated in late antiquity. The myth of national unity takes precedence here as well, perhaps in less obvious forms than elsewhere so far. The balance between the Roman and the Dacian part is closely observed at the representational level: two of the objects dating from antiquity are Roman and two are from Dacia. At least in the Dacian part, the design eschews the obvious (Decebal's portrait, the wolf emblem) and instead displays two archeological finds from the kingdom of the Dacians, a beautifully decorated ceremonial gold helmet, and a very large ceramic urn. Both these objects appear to be captured as museum displays. What the design gains in uniqueness it may lose in recognition factor: neither the helmet but especially not the urn present any clearly recognizable features that would trigger the appropriation of the images; on the contrary pupils and even the general public may be left wondering where these objects come from and what they represent. The answer lies in the pages of the book, as the cover illustrations make a reappearance in the chapter about the Dacians, with explanatory captions.

The two other pieces are unequivocally Roman: one is a carved inscription in Latin, where the name “Caesar” is plainly visible; the other is the marble statue of a deity draped in a toga and carrying a long scepter.

The fifth component of the cover collage is the reproduction of a full-length portrait of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, wearing his military parade uniform, his chest covered in medals. One hand on the handle of his sword, the other poised on top of papers lying on a table, the prince seems to have just stepped up from the red plush throne visible behind him. Cuza’s main positive achievement is the unification of the two Danubian principalities under his rule. This process, sanctioned by the democratic vote of the representative assemblies of Wallachia and Moldova in 1857, was urged by Napoleon whose support translated into the creation of a “single Romanian state, an autonomous constitutional principality under Ottoman suzerainty” ruled by the elected prince Cuza, a “Romanian boier [noble] and military officer”, whose inability to speak in public and to take care of a complicated administration did not prevent him from achieving some progress in modernizing the political and economic systems of the new Romanian state (Hupchick 2002: 231). Despite his other noteworthy attempts to improve the situation of the peasant via a more just agrarian law (1864), to introduce mandatory public education and to found two universities, one in Bucharest the other in Iasi, or to develop Bucharest into a modern city, a worthy capital for the new state, the most important of his achievements remains the unity of Wallachia and Moldavia, a symbolic union in the age of national awakening.

It seems the graphic designer of the book was quite fond of the beautiful silhouette of the statue of the Roman god since we are given the chance to admire it again on the back cover (and once again on the first page of the book). The Roman Empire symbols dominate the thematic content of the illustration. Behind the head of the statue there is a reproduction of a battle scene from Trajan's Column and a bit to the right of it another statue telling the legend of the she-wolf feeding the twins Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome (the legend itself is told on page 22). The she-wolf came to be regarded as the symbol of Latinity and an identical statue like that in the picture but on a larger scale, is displayed in Bucharest's Roman Square in the center of the city. Even the Italian state has embraced the statue as a certification of Roman heritage: the statue in the city center is a gift from the Italian government as a token of the strong cultural ties that exist between the Romanians and the Italians. Because of the considerable preponderance of Roman antiquity it can be surmised that a theme of the illustration is the desire to portray the descent of the Romanians from this center of civilization and culture that was Rome and perhaps, therefore, the European heritage of the nation (the book was published in 2006, a year before Romania became a full member of the European Union).

The other two images are the drawing of a medieval town and the copy of a partly damaged document carrying almost illegible handwriting. At first sight neither of these is easy to place in a geographical context. When looking for clues inside the book one identifies the city as Vienna in the Middle Ages; the picture of the letter is used as a generic illustration of historical source material. The presence of Vienna on the cover is a reference to the content of the book which is, according to European

guidelines, increasingly inclusive on non-national historical events that contextualize national developments. This is also visible at the level of the table of contents where for example the chapter dedicated to national history is followed by one discussing world-wide events. The pro-European trend that was signaled by underscoring the Latinity of the Romanian people can be said to continue in the inclusion of images that come from outside the Romanian cultural space, but at the risk of not being easily identified. This depiction of the Austrian capital is not famous at all.

Even if the European integrative trend is perceptible in the cover design, the focus on the myth of national unity is not effaced. It survives most obviously on the prominent front cover in the presence of Prince Cuza, one of the main artisans of the unification. Another myth, referring to the origins of the nation, is also present in the balanced presentation of Roman and Dacian artifacts. Romanians are Latin and therefore Europeans, but let it not be forgotten that they still carry their Thracian heritage with them.

Another 4th grade textbook printed in 2006 (Petre et al) but still available for purchase in bookstores in 2008 has a very Spartan illustrative style. Both front and back covers are divided in two equal parts, one light beige, and the other green. Besides the heading and the names of the authors, the only visual attraction is a disproportionately small photo reproducing a statue or bas-relief of a rider clad in an antique toga and his horse preparing to jump over an invisible obstacle. The rider's cape floats in the wind and his right arm is stretched backwards as if he were just about to throw a spear. He has short, curly hair and seems to be quite young. Because of the pelerine blowing in the wind and the sudden rising of the horse on two legs the

statue appears to be animated, in movement. The stone out of which the statue is sculpted has a deep dark green shine which veers toward black, in sharp contrast with the light beige of the background. The viewer lacks a sense of perspective because the statue seems suspended in mid-air; there is neither shadow, nor physical support for the statue to stand on. There is also the immediate question as to who this warrior might be. All that can be guessed from his appearance is that he may have lived some time in Antiquity and that he was culturally under the influence of Rome (his toga) but perhaps not a Roman (he does not wear a typical Roman legionnaire's outfit). The answer as to the identity of the mysterious rider is to be found inside the book. On page 28 there is a smaller scale reproduction of the cover picture that illustrates the lesson about Alexander the Great. The text besides the picture tells the story of how Alexander managed to tame a wild horse and how he was praised by his father, King Philip, who predicted his future as a world-wide leader.

How can the cover illustration be interpreted? It seems that the design of this textbook wants to circumvent all reference to traditional myths and their visual companions and prefers a neutral approach. A rather anodyne photo of a museum artifact to which no pupil has already a pre-established reaction may be a strategy to place the textbook clearly outside the nationalist frame of presentation of history (also to be noted that in line with more recent amendments to the standards of textbook writing, the title of the book is no longer *The History of the Romanians* but simply *History*). So a non-national focus – but why precisely Alexander the Great, why this particular illustration? The hermeneut provides us with few clues. It may be that by choosing a hero of Southeastern Europe the designer wants to highlight the glorious

past of a region known otherwise as a source of trouble, a region to which Romania belongs. Or the choice might be simply esthetic; a good-looking active warrior might catch the attention of unruly schoolchildren. From this last point of view however, the selection might have been more felicitous, as the proportions (too small compared to the rest of the page), the lack of fine detail and the monotone representation are not exactly an attention grabber.

The history of Romania is also taught in the eighth grade, covering, just like the fourth grade curriculum, everything from prehistoric times to the contemporary period. The level of sophistication of the text, from illustration, to the choice of words and the presentation of original sources, is more complex, as expected. The differences at the level of the graphic presentation of the cover are minimal, however.

A textbook first published in 2000, and reprinted in 2007 (Vulpe et al), has a manuscript as a background for both front and back covers. The text, sometimes hardly visible on a very light yellow, parchment-like, background, is written in green, red and yellow letters, all in the old Cyrillic alphabet with which most Romanians these days are not familiar. The manuscript, illegible as it is for the majority, serves not as a communicator but as decoration: its importance is primarily stylistic, as it evokes the Middle Ages, a remote and exotic time.

The manuscript aspect is reinforced by the use of other decorations typical of the books handwritten in monasteries: scrolls, vignettes with floral motifs, and illuminated script. Perhaps the design draws a parallel between the medieval book, an objet d'art, written with care by specialized and dedicated craftsmen, and the current textbook, also written with a similar amount of concern for durability.

At the top of the front page are the two classical coats of arms of the principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, the auroch head and the cross-carrying eagle respectively. Both symbols are enclosed by a circular frame and both backgrounds have shining stars. Surprisingly, the Transylvanian blazon, a black Aquila, seven castles, a sun and a moon, is missing. The Transylvanian presence is very discreet, as part of the coat of arms of Greater Romania, where the heraldic representations of all the historical provinces are included. This coat of arms, an eagle carrying a cross and a shield surrounded by two lions and topped by a crown is also displayed on the cover of the textbook, together with the motto of the royal house of Romania, “nihil sine deo” or “nothing without God”.

The final heraldic insert is a flag bearing three horizontal stripes in the national colors (red, yellow and blue), with a grey crowned Aquila bearing a shield with the coats of arms of Moldova and Wallachia and carrying a sword and a scepter under the ribbon with the inscription “honor et patria”, “honor and homeland”. In the external corners of the flag the letter A is surrounded by a laurel crown. Because the stripes became vertical only after 1866, and because the motto “honor and homeland” is even today used by the Ministry of Defense, it appears that this flag is a military flag from around 1863, therefore created under the reign of the aforementioned Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the first prince of both Moldova and Wallachia, whose initials the flag bears.

The focus on emblems and heraldic symbols is obvious throughout the book, as every chapter includes at least a reference to such imagery, so the inclusion of such illustrations on the cover is part of the general design. At the same time, one must

solve the puzzle of the message the cover wants to impart to its readers. The myth to which these symbols allude is certainly the myth of national unity, but in a somewhat truncated version as there is much more of an emphasis on the southern and eastern part of Romania than on Transylvania which is barely included. The two large coats of arms that dominate the frontispiece, as well as their reoccurrence as part of the 1863 army flag and in the 1918 flag, give prominence to Moldavia and Wallachia, just as the text which serves as background alludes to the liturgical literature used in the Danubian principalities.

Even if the Transylvanian symbols are not as present, the idea of national unity dominates. One could even envision some tendentious explanations as to why it is the coat of arms of Romania at its largest expansion that should be included. Could this be a sign of the nostalgia the authors of the manual feel for the achievements of Romanians under Ferdinand I? Could this even be a claim that national history should discuss even those areas currently outside the jurisdiction of the state but which belonged to it at some point in time? Finally, could this reflect a more aggressive standpoint of the textbook writers, partly supported perhaps by the inclusion of a military symbol with its emphasis on honor, a soldierly value? Could this standpoint have something to do with the desire to use history to prove some form of historical right Romania might claim to neighboring territories? These are all suppositions, of course, and the imagination and priorities of the authors are always restrained by the existence of a clearly delineated curriculum that excludes expansionist attitudes. The least that could be said is that there is a focus on the unity of all Romanians in one

state, as symbolized by the reigns of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and Ferdinand I, whose flags are represented on the cover.

The last Romanian textbook examined from a visual point of view was originally written in 2001 but has already run to seven editions. Oane and Ochescu (2007) have not changed their text since 2001 nor has the cover of the book been updated. On a dark red shaded background, there is only one picture, a reproduction of a book cover dating from the 17th century representing a king and his queen. They are depicted in the Byzantine fresco tradition made famous on the wall of Christian churches, a non-naturalistic, relatively rigid posture and somewhat non-descriptive facial features. Both of them wear very richly embroidered clothing, high-heeled shoes and gold crowns studded with precious stones. The king and queen hold together a thick volume, heavily and luxuriously bound in leather and precious stones, with metal buckles. The book is placed at the center of the illustration, it is the focus point that draws the eye, especially since with their free hand each of the characters points to the book, showing it as one of their personal achievements. The book attracts attention also because of its position at the intersection of visual vectors – the two main characters are placed each under a vault or an arch, imitating an architectural composition of a gate. This makes the king and queen appear to stand in front of the entry of a palace or a church, whose walls are decorated with birds, flowers and vines with leaves painted in dark greens, blues and reds. The book they hold is placed precisely at the center of the visual composition, where the two arches would meet if they were to continue in a downward pillar.

The design has an interesting conceptual arrangement, as the book lies at its center, in a triple formula: first, we have the book presented by the royal pair, which itself is part of the cover illustration of a miniature from the Romanian cultural high period of the 1600s. Finally, the photo of this book depicting another manuscript serves as the illustration of the textbook students hold in their hands today. Like the previous 8th grade text, perhaps this manual also wants to highlight the importance of books, of learning, and to advance the long intellectual tradition the authors situate themselves in.

The cultural and intellectual tradition that the illustration refers to by including the portrait of Prince Matthew Basarab and his wife Helen, sees a revival in the 17th century. Matthew, ruler of Wallachia during one of its most long lasting and peaceful reigns, 1632 – 1654, was known for his support for education⁷⁰ and printing. In general during the 17th century there was a dramatic growth in the number of Romanian language prints, besides texts in Slavonic or Greek, reflecting the process of the increasing use of the local language in administration and culture even in churches (Andea, 2006: 384, 385). As more books were printed, and more of them became accessible to a wider public, and as education received more attention from the princes and boyars, a process of cultural effervescence resulting in a clearer definition of the local element took place. This process saw a manifest reorientation away from what could be called Western references and towards the heritage of the Roman Empire of the East. This is known as the “Byzantium after Byzantium” thesis, as Iorga, a historian from the first part of the 20th century, envisaged it. The culture in

⁷⁰ He founded for example a school with Greek and Latin as teaching languages in his capital city, Targoviste, Schola Graeca et Latina. He also reopened the printing shops of several monasteries (Andea, 2006: 384)

Wallachia and Moldova turned to Byzantium centuries after it was gone; this trend is apparent for example in the contrast between the appearance of Michael the Brave, equipped just like any princely warrior from the Western part of the continent, and that of Matthew Basarab, some half a century later, dressed in robes inspired by the imperial costumes worn in Constantinople before its fall to the Ottomans.

The inclusion of this illustration on the cover may be not only a bow for the importance of books and learning, and therefore an incentive for the pupils to treat this textbook with respect and attention. It may also signify a certain pride in the Byzantine heritage of the Romanian culture, which is different than the mainstream Western version, but nevertheless equally erudite and certainly on par with the West.

The textbook covers analyzed illustrate the Romanian mythical narratives, as it was hypothesized. The ethnogenesis myth, with its emphasis on the combination in equal part of local and foreign elements, is clearly on display, as well as the theme of national unity. There are numerous signs of a certain preference for the inclusion of symbols of military valor as well, with armors, weapons, uniforms and even battle scenes as elements of design. There is a change over time, with an increasingly sophisticated and visually more attractive style as we enter the 2000s.

Visual content of Serbian textbooks

The school curriculum is differently organized in Serbia in comparison with Romania. National history is taught in the 6th, 7th and 8th grade, together with some reference to the general history of Europe and the world that fit into the same time frame. The 6th grade history covers the beginnings of the Serbian historical journey

until the start of the modern period. The story is picked up in the 7th grade which discusses the modern history of the nation until the 1848 revolution. Finally, in the 8th grade students are expected to acquire knowledge about the history of the contemporary period until the present day. The distribution of historical information over three consecutive years in the curriculum signifies that history as a subject is considered to be important and that the amount of knowledge accumulated during the school years is vast, including numerous details, events and personalities.

As with Romania, it is of interest to connect the visual message expressed in the cover illustrations and the myth typologies discussed in the theoretical section. Moreover it would be interesting to note what changes if any occur over time and what difference the education reform after 2000 makes in the design of the textbook.

The first textbook cover is a 6th grade edition from 1992 (Mihaljcic) which sets the trend of the dominant style of history textbook available during the 1990s (especially since the Serbian textbook market is not liberalized: there is only one publishing house allowed by the Ministry of Education to produce and distribute educational material). On a dark green almost black background there is a diamond shape drawn in lighter shades of green. Inside this shape is placed the picture of a medieval brick monastery in the Christian Orthodox architectural style. The picture is taken from above and from a distance so one gets a good idea of perspective over the size and layout of the various buildings forming the religious complex. One can easily distinguish the gentle curve of the church roofs, topping the three small towers positioned to suggest the cruciform. The curved shape of the roofs later inspired the

architects of the Ottoman Empire in their design of the mosque. At a distance one can also see the angled roof of a longitudinal building that could have been the refectory.

The title of the textbook says only *History* but by using the symbol of the Orthodox monastery the viewer can easily understand whose history will be mostly discussed in the pages of the book: Serbian identity is closely knit to the belief in the Orthodox Church almost to the same extent as the Polish or Croatian national identities are tightly spun with the Catholic faith. To some, placing an Orthodox Church on the cover of the book is simply a shortcut to saying this is about Serbia and its past. The myth we might be seeing at work here could be the myth of origins, saying that the essence of Serbianness lies in its connection to the Church which defended a sense of special mission during the tough years of the Ottoman occupation.

The association of Orthodoxy and its monuments on one hand and Serbian national identity on the other is very strong, and this is also reflected in the stability of the message. The same textbook published in the year 2000, eight years after the edition discussed above, displays an identical illustration. There are no changes whatsoever in the design even if the contents are slightly modified. This also can be explained by practical considerations: in a market where there is no competition, there is no incentive for the publishing house to promote its products via attractive commercial designs. What has been tested and proved can be used repeatedly without the risk of buyers choosing a visually more attractive alternative.

A 6th grade textbook from 1995 (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic) follows the same standard format as the ones previously discussed (perhaps the publishers choose the

least costly strategy by reusing the same macro for all their covers). This time on a white background we see the familiar diamond shape, in the same light green colors, but with a different picture at its center. Instead of a photograph, we have now the reproduction of a medieval painting or more probably a fresco representing two women wearing colorful tunics (one red, the other blue) with decorated edges. A piece of furniture, perhaps a large armchair or even throne, also in vivid red, forms the background of this static depiction of a meeting in which the lady dressed in red holds an urn and the other, wearing a long blue veil matching her dark blue dress, extends her hands as if she is begging for or is ready to receive the golden vessel in exchange for a smaller container decorated with white and blue zigzags.

The slight wear at the bottom of the page indicates the wall upon which the fresco is painted most likely comes from a church wall and gives life to the biblical story of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus who was raised from the dead. The sisters prepare a proper welcome when Jesus and his followers come to visit, setting up the table and bringing things to drink (hence the large amphora). Whereas Martha is very practical and quickly takes care of the reception for the honored guest, Mary prefers to leave the chores to her sister and instead to listen to Jesus' stories and to wash his feet with precious balsam (probably the content of the smaller urn in the painting). In Christian exegesis Martha has been traditionally associated with practical rationality, the one focused on the earthly world, whereas Mary has been seen as the spiritual force, looking beyond the ephemeral existence in this world towards the world thereafter.

As on the previous front cover the main reference is to the Orthodox Church, the repository of the Serbian tradition and the main spiritual tradition in the history of the Serbian people. The story of Mary and Martha reminds the reader to keep the focus on the essential, the spiritual world, and not to worry about the earthly tasks which have little value if not connected to the higher purpose of acceding to a better existence in the kingdom of heaven. Here we have another traditional reference in Serbian literary and historical tradition, the definition of Serbia as the “heavenly kingdom” (see Anzulovic, 1999). Serbia chose Mary, the spiritual sister, as its guiding figure and the legend of Prince Lazar who, when presented with the choice between winning a temporary battle at Kosovo Polje or gaining the eternal kingdom for himself and his people was decidedly on the spiritual side and prioritized eternity at the cost of some losses in the temporary existence on earth.

Besides exemplifying the vision the Serbs have of themselves and of the values that should form the backbone of their society, the illustration also alludes to the Golden Age of Serbian history, the period of the early medieval Serbian state of the Nemanja brothers when the religious and political structures saw their simultaneous apogee. In the 12th – 13th centuries the Serbian kings managed to create a unified state to counter the ambitions of their neighbors (the Bulgarian tsars, the Byzantine emperors). At the same time, these kings were deeply spiritual: both Stefan Nemanja, the first king of the Serbs, and his brother Sava became monks; the latter was the first to establish an autonomous Serbian orthodox church located in Pec (Kosovo) and was later sanctified. Saint Sava is considered even today the father of both Serbian literature and Serbian orthodox tradition (Resic, 2006: 35). Therefore

the implicit references to the medieval period can be interpreted as allusions to this ideal time, now gone but potentially attainable in an undetermined future.

The most recent 6th grade textbook to be included in this analysis dates from 2003 (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic), several years after the education reform. In comparison with the previous editions, this textbook seems to be more concerned with the esthetic value of the cover design: no more green diamond frame, now the photograph covers completely the available surface and spreads on both front and back covers. The title, *History Textbook*, is written in deep red letters that contrast well with the soft browns of the background. The style of the writing recalls that from old Slavonic manuscripts from the Middle Ages and this is complementary to the visual theme: the picture of a wooden carving illustrating a biblical scene.

On the front page we see Jesus, crowned with a halo and carrying a walking staff, holding a finger up close to the face of a veiled young female figure whose eyes are wide open and looking up towards heaven. Behind Jesus one other male face is visible, most likely one of the apostles, and behind the woman in the foreground, standing in the entry to a tower, we can see another female perhaps slightly older, also strictly robed in multiple layers of clothing. The background to the meeting between Jesus and the two women is an entire city, with many towers and roofs, both rounded and rectangular arranged in a pre-modern perspective. The carving appears to be in good condition even if there are some cracks in the wood and the color of the wood is soft, honey-like. Taking into consideration the artistic style and the theme of the work of art one is tempted to date it in the 12th or 13th centuries, at the time of the erection of the major site of Serbian Orthodoxy, the Pec monastery.

What parable do we have in front of our eyes here? Jesus seems to be coming towards the city and the two women look ready to receive him and his companion. We see again two females, one of them in a pious attitude, the other expectative, looking from a distance. The front female figure seems entirely enraptured by what Jesus tells her – her eyes are wide open in amazement and her hand grasps her mantle as if to repress a sigh of wonderment: “is it really true, can it be really true?” Jesus’ raised finger is less a warning more a pedagogical indicator; he explains and aims upward toward the skies to make a point. Given these elements, it is not too far-fetched to argue that we have here again the story of Mary and Martha, captured in wood just as they are coming to greet their visitors.

The reiteration of the story, as well as the use of the same frame of reference (medieval ecclesiastical art) reinforces the importance given in the Serbian symbolic heraldry to Orthodoxy and to the polarity earthly – heavenly kingdoms. The emphasis on the Christian values, the Christian heritage of the Serbs and the connection to the Golden Age of the Serbian state are all here, once again. The education reform does not imply, at least at the level of the imagery, a change in the definition of the self or in the ranking of priorities. Perhaps holding on to tradition is justified in times of trouble, of perceived adversity on the part of the surrounding states or even the world at large. The connection between the Church and national development appeared and strengthened during the period of Ottoman domination. This link is reinforced when Europe, NATO, and the Kosovo Albanians, to name a few, appear to be attacking the very idea of a strong independent Serbian national state. The mythical allusions may give strength and hark back to times of splendor. Moreover, the scenes from the life

of Christ are also a reminder of the possibility, or even more the promise, of resurrection. Like in a true restorative myth, those who suffer for the right cause will come back again; the final victory belongs to them. The life of the Serbian people could be read like a parallel to the life of Christ, who had to suffer and die in order to triumph over death itself⁷¹. Finally, one cannot leave aside a practical consideration; the 6th grade curriculum stops at the beginning of the modern period, and that restricts the choice of available historical epochs to illustrate. The Serbs, like the other Slavic tribes, arrived in the Balkans around the 6th century A.D., so the Antiquity did not figure as an important period in their national development and there is much less information about the life of the Slavs prior to their European establishment. It was easy then to look towards the Middle Ages as the exemplary time from which the major theme should originate.

For the 7th grade textbooks, dealing with the history of modern period, we follow the same principle: identifying the most representative and possibly the most glorious of the events or personality of the time and place them on the front cover.

In terms of artistic design, textbooks from the first part of the 1990s embrace exactly the the exact same model as their counterparts for the 6th grade: a monotone background upon which a colored diamond frame surrounds the picture of an event or personality. For example, a textbook printed in 1992 (Perovic and Strugar) displays on a dark red background a light orange rhomboid which embraces the portrait of George Petrovic, most famous under his pseudonym, Karageorge or Black George,

⁷¹ The same justification for historical periods of humiliation and dependency is to be found in Polish national mythologies. The disappearance of the Polish state during the 18th century, as well as the tragedy of World War II at the hand of Nazi Germany were interpreted with the passion of Christ as the model. See Norman Davies in Hosking and Schöpflin (1997: 149-151).

the founder of the first truly Serbian dynasty since the 14th century. The portrait is a courtly one, and shows this illiterate son of a peasant (Resic 2006: 111) as a noble, elegantly dressed and charming young man with short black and slightly unruly hair and a thin moustache, holding what could be the handle of a pistol. His military uniform is in the same style as that of Napoleon or the Russian Tsar Alexander, both of whom were his contemporaries⁷². On his right shoulder sits a beautiful star-shaped medal and his chest is crossed by a red ribbon. Karageorge looks straight at the viewer with determination, and his attitude seems to emanate dignity and resolve. The portrait evokes the time when Petrovic became the hereditary leader of the Serbs in 1808, at the end of a successful campaign against the Ottoman Empire, started four years earlier, but in fact finished in exile in 1816. The first Serbian uprising was crushed by the Turks and its leaders sent into exile. Now the portrait hangs in the National Museum of Serbia in Belgrade.

Karageorge is a crucial figure in the history of Serbia because of his role in giving new life to the national idea. The sixth edition of the Columbia Encyclopedia describes him first and foremost as “Serbian patriot” (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2008). The history of his life is to some extent exemplary of the history of the Serbian people, who also had to fight against degrading circumstances in order to gain the right to self-government. He went from being a trader with livestock to leading the most important Serbian revolution, liberating Belgrade for the first time after 500 years of Turkish occupation and putting a Serb, himself, at the wheel of the first attempt at Serbian modern statehood. Perhaps his death, most likely planned by his

⁷² The resemblance may be due to the fact that the painter who did the portrait, Vladimir Borovikovsky, was a court portraitist for the imperial family of Russia.

archrival, Milos Obrenovic – another Serbian patriot with claims to the throne - , is also exemplary of the fate of the Serbian state, weakened by internecine struggles.

The placement of Karageorge in this prime position designates the importance given to the national movement and the liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The project of building a viable Serbian state completely dominates the history of the 19th and at least the early 20th century, even though one could argue that the entire 20th century is marked by the desire to bring all Serbs under the authority of the same state. Karageorge and the inauguration of a new dynasty with roots in the national soil is the symbol of a renewal, of a regenerated hope in a state that alludes to the medieval Golden Age of Nemanja's Serbia. In this sense, the Serbian and Romanian visual reference system are closely compatible: both of them seem to emphasize the national element and, especially true for the modern period, the success of national affirmation and state independence. Those historical figures who stand out as heroes are those whose life is driven by the desire to create a national political unit at the expense of the existing grand powers: in Romania, as we saw above, Prince Cuza, in Serbia, Prince Karageorge.

Another textbook, from 1995 (Perovic and Vojvodic), has the same macro setting but instead of a kingly portrait displays an action painting. The focal point is a man, wearing a large turban and bright red oriental-looking costume, with golden embroidery and matching shoes. At his waist hangs a long thin sword and one can see the handles of two pistols emerging from his belt. He has a long thin moustache and appears to stand on a stone or pedestal. His right hand makes a sign vaguely reminiscent of a Christian blessing, a raised hand with the thumb, index and middle

finger pointing upwards. Most importantly, the eyes are drawn to the flag he waves in his left hand - a massive fluttering standard with a red cross centered on a white background.

Behind the major figure at the center of the piece there are two large groups. On the left side of the painting one can see an enthusiastic Orthodox monk, recognizable from his black robe, long beard and typical headdress, behind whom one can make out numerous male figures, some of them carrying sheathed swords. On the right side, close to the central hero and with a hand on the flag pole (it is unclear if he wants to take away the flag or to help bear it) there is a man wearing Turkish clothing - a red fez, shalvar pants, and a dolman. He holds a thin blade or a stick in his other hand and behind him, as far as the horizon, extends a crowd of men wearing the same thick moustaches, red fez, and heavy dolmans. Both the right and the left hand crowds make the same blessing sign, with three fingers pointing upwards towards the sky.

The three-finger salute, or *tri prsta*, is a symbol closely associated with the Serbian national tradition and it is said to have originated precisely with the painting that largely inspired the textbook cover. Although its meaning is disputed, the three fingers appear to symbolize the Holy Trinity and thus be the sign of membership into the Orthodox community. This religious interpretation is supported by the use of the salute as a rallying cry at meetings led by church officials, like the one in 1937 where the Bishop of Zica, Nikolaj, said: “Rise three fingers Orthodox Serbs! [...] Down with all antinational elements: parasites and bloodsuckers, capitalists, godless and

communists! The Serbian faith is awakened because it is hurt” (quoted in Perica, 2002: 18).

The original painting by one of the most famous Serbian realist painters, Paja Jovanovic, illustrated the second Serbian uprising against the Turks, and depicts the moment when Milos Obrenovic, the other great leader of the Serbian national revival in the 19th century, declares to the gathered people “Here I am and here you are: War to the Turks!”. The first Serbian uprising (1804-1813) led by Karageorge Petrovic (illustrated on the previous cover) allowed for almost a decade of autonomous rule but was crushed by a decisive Ottoman attack in 1813. As the heads of the revolt were sent into exile, a new generation of leaders took over, signing a temporary pact with the Sultan but secretly planning to revolt against his authority. The Serbian Obor - knez Obrenovic only accepted the authority of the Porte until he was able to mobilize the forces against the Ottoman armies. In April 1815, at Takovo, he proclaimed the beginning of a new attempt to shake off the Turks – the start of the second uprising. This lasted two years, and led to the creation of a legal Serbian principality endowed with near- independence from the Sultan and the consolidation of the position of power of the Obrenovic family to the detriment of the Karageorge (the revolutionary leader died in the last year of the revolt, 1817, probably at the hands of his political rival).

It is interesting to note that this hero of the Serbian nation is represented in this particular painting wearing a very Turkish-inspired costume, most strikingly a turban. This could be a reference to his collaboration with the Sultan during 1815-1817, and his temporary adoption of the customs of Istanbul; but he later was to

reverse the tables and show his real attachment to the Christian cross. Half of the people gathered to greet Obrenovic are also wearing oriental-style vestments, but contrary to expectations they are not the enemy: like their leader, these people are simply undercover patriots, ready to show their true colors when the moment is ripe. And their true colors are the colors of the flag proudly fluttering in the wind. From a visual point of view, the flag competes with the figure of the hero for the focal point of the composition. The striking contrast between the white field and the bright red of the Greek cross (a cross with equidistant arms) draw the eye. The flag is in itself a rallying cry: it is a variant of the flag of the Montenegrin family of Petrovic-Njegos and, most importantly, it is the flag supposedly flying at the battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389, after which it came to represent the will of oppressed Christian people to fight against the Ottomans and their creed. The waving of the flag by Knez Obrenovic is saying without words the same thing that those close enough reportedly heard: a warning to the Turks that the Serbian army is on its way.

Both 1992 and 1995 textbooks took their inspiration from the early 19th century national revival movement. In a duality typical of the modern period, one of them chose Karageorge, the other Obrenovic as the archetype of the hero, fighting for the liberation of his people – thus pointing out the split between the two leading families that dominated the domestic politics of Serbia and later of the first Yugoslavia. The same division weakened Serbian unity during times of adversity. At the same time, the interest shown in the first steps in the creation of Serbian statehood hints at the tendency of the textbooks to highlight the national element. Both heroes are nationalist warriors (one of them is wearing a fancy uniform and a medal, the

other carries weapons and leads a tumultuous crowd), thus supporting myths of military valor. The presence of the cross on the flag and the monk in the crowd give symbolic continuity in terms of identity (to be Serbian is almost equivalent to being Christian Orthodox) and it serves as visual link to the 6th grade textbooks that depicted biblical stories.

Lastly, the Serbian salute that appears on the second cover has seen a revival in nationalist circles during the 1990s. However, its significance is diverse and its usage cannot be monopolized by radical rightwing politicians, even if some of them did use it – for example, Bosnian-Serbs displayed the salute on a poster used by the Serbian Democratic Party in their campaign for a plebiscite of the Serb people in Bosnia-Herzegovina in November 1991⁷³. Football supporters, Milosevic opponents but even most recently Serbian president Boris Tadic during the Summer Olympic Games in 2008 have used it without aggressive nationalist connotations. Nevertheless the salute remains a distinctive sign for the ethnic Serb and a symbol for belonging to the Serbian nation⁷⁴.

These controversial references to the national past completely disappear on the cover of a compendium for the 7th grade from 2003 (Ljusic). Gone are the standard diamond shape and the historical characters. Instead we are given a winter landscape painted in modern strokes to admire. We are invited on a short trip along an

73 The plebiscite allowed the Serbs to vote for or against belonging to the Bosnia-Herzegovina authority (the alternative was to unite with Serbia). The results of the vote were overwhelmingly in favor of the union with Serbia. The nationalist Serbian Democratic Party used a poster full of historical references ("Remember the battle of Kosovo and the yet unborn generations. Rally your numbers and summon all your strength to avoid the curse of ancient Czar Lazar and make your end invincible") and a graphic display of the three-finger salute as a shortcut for Serbiannes. (Case IT-94-1, witness declaration at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, p 1668-9).

⁷⁴ For an interesting use of the Serbian salute, both humoristic and defensive towards the nation, see Robert C. Hudson (2002: 149).

empty country road bordered by tall poplars which form a visual barrier towards the free exploration of the small village which extends towards the horizon. The colors are all cold, whites and icy blues, because it is winter and everything seems to be still, almost lifeless. The only contrast in these muted tones comes from the orange and red leaves of some bushes that guard the edge of the road. No other signs of life, especially no humans, are to be seen.

There is no attribution or credit given to the painter behind this work of art, but its choice is explained perhaps less by its historical significance and more by its purely esthetic quality. This goes hand in hand with the content of the compendium, intended as a supplement for students in the 7th grade of primary school, which includes a focus on traditions, Serbian identity and the place of women in the Serbian society of the 19th century. The neutral connotations of the illustration is perhaps more in the spirit of the times after the departure of Milosevic and the new education law that played down the national elements and the “big” history of kings and heroes and introduced ideas about the everyday life of ordinary people.

Finally a look at the Serbian books dealing with contemporary history (from the middle of the 19th century to the present day). In an edition from 1993 (Gacesa et al), the standard decorative pattern of the textbook printing house is easy to recognize: on a dark purple background we see the diamond frames in light blue and pink and contained within them the profile drawing (or the posterized version of a photograph) of a man. The strong black lines delineate a worn-out face, deep-set eyes and sunken cheeks shadowed by a dark beard. Over his shoulder the man wears a heavy scarf or more likely a blanket, whose folds cover his neck and part of the lower

face, and on his head he has a cap, a soldier's kepi which helps to identify him as a Serbian infantryman from the time of World War I. The figure is leaning forward slightly but not as if he is preparing to attack, more as if marching slowly with a tired but nevertheless determined step. The idea of determination and even stubbornness, despite the physical decay and exhaustion, is underlined by the look on the face of this man, piercing and scouting perhaps the enemy, perhaps the future.

The selection of textbook cover illustrations is arguably an indication of which events and characters are considered significant by the authors and by the government who approved the textbooks. Therefore the choice of World War I as the highlight of contemporary Serbian history means that the idea of reaching independence, breaking free from the hands of surrounding empires is also judged to be of prime order. If we look at the illustrations sequentially, from the 6th to the 8th grade, it is possible to discern a common theme: the desire to affirm the uniqueness, the glory of the Serbian nation and its struggle to achieve an independent status. At the end of the Great War the Serbs, together with the Croats and Slovenes, were able for the first time since the Middle Ages to proclaim their self-government in a new and autonomous state, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The decision to create a state together with other South Slavic people was controversial and the birth of Yugoslavia was from the beginning painful and problematic. The balance of power between the members of this tripartite union was unstable and the ambitions of dominance of one ethnic group over the others could be discerned clearly. As Resic explains, "the three constituting ethnic groups, the nations, went into the creation of a common state with very different expectations. The old Slovenian but especially Croatian thought they

would take part in a common ‘Yugoslavia’ was based on the idea of a union of separate peoples with a high degree of self-government. The Serbs had their sights set instead on the opposite, a centralized Great Serbian state, and moreover their plans emanated from the notion that they all were really a single people - Serbs” (2006: 195). The new king, Alexander Karageorgevic, was also relatively controversial especially as he was a Serb – there were fears that he might be partial to his own people and not to the idea of unity among all the members of his kingdom. These factors made it easier for the cover designers to pick an anonymous figure, the Soldier, and to emphasize the general nature of the struggle to obtain a new state. The tragic features on the face of this combatant together with his determined look and the fact that he can be seen as a generic character suggest that World War I represented the people in general: this time the hero is not a prince or leader but the unknown soldier.

Since all the textbooks published prior to the reform of 2000 follow exactly the same cover design it is not surprising to see on the front of a manual from 1994 (Bekanovic and Stojanovic) the identical rhomb frame, this time purple on a white background. Instead of a moment from World War I, however, the authors chose a photograph, representing a popular manifestation from the time of World War II. This photograph is often reproduced, for example in the pages of the 8th grade textbook previously discussed. With a city as background, numerous young people, judging by their posture and style of clothing, march arm in arm, chanting and waving flags, with a British one clearly visible among them . The event illustrated here is precisely dated. We are looking at the enthusiastic demonstration of support given to the new

king of Yugoslavia, Peter II, who took over the power from his uncle Regent Prince Paul with a coup d'état supported among others by Britain on March 27, 1941(Hupchik, 2002: 357). The coup took place only one day after Paul signed an alliance pact with the Axis and one of its main objectives was to realign the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with the Allied Powers. The consequences of this change of heart on the part of the Yugoslav leadership were severe: Nazi Germany attacked two weeks later; on April 17, 1941 the combined forces of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria occupied and divided the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes according to their national interests. But at the time of the coup, King Peter II, later forced into exile in the UK, was the most popular leader and people gathered on the streets to welcome the decision to move to the side of the Allies. Because of their special support, the British were particularly favored and this is why the Union Jack is borne so noticeably on the streets of Belgrade

The reason this particular event is considered as crucial as to place it prominently on the cover is that it marks a watershed for the post-World War II history of what was to become the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia. Without the coup and the subsequent alliance with Britain and notably also with Soviet Russia, the future of the country would not have been the same. Hitler's simultaneous invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, the conquest of the country by enemy forces, the territorial divisions (including the formation of the independent fascist state of Croatia), and the appearance of two parallel anti-occupation militias, the chetniks and the partisans, all originated in the act of March 27, 1941. This coup d'état has been described in official historiography as a demonstration of anti-Fascism and Yugoslav patriotism.

And truly both a majority of the politicians and of the general public in Serbia was convinced anti-fascists. On the streets of Belgrade the main chants were “Better war than pact” and “Better dead than slave” (Resic 2006: 210). The more relevant, therefore, was this act which was in essence democratic since the public took to the streets by its own calling and thus gave legitimacy to the anti-German position of the government. The same event was used to legitimize the Communist regime (linked with the Partisan movement) during the years of the Socialist Federation. The Partisans were able to hijack the epithet “anti-fascist” which during the communist time exclusively designated their organization. Only those who had been with the Partisans were against the Nazis. . In the post-communist era, the demonstrations of March 1941 could be interpreted as sign of the democratic and European attitudes of the people, a mark of their position on the side of the “good guys”.

The street manifestation can be interpreted in the light of its historical context and consequences (the invasion and occupation, the loss of life, the tragedy of war taking place on one’s own territory) as a symbol of the values that characterize Serbian (and in this framework probably just as much Yugoslavian) people: courage, love of freedom, spirit of sacrifice for the greater good, enthusiasm and democracy.

The most recent of the 8th grade textbooks to be analyzed here comes from 2003 (Kovacevic et al) and just as with the school texts for the other grades the changes are perceptible from the very first contact with the book. The cover does not follow the pattern of previous years but embraces a newer, more attractive design in lively colors. The dominating feature is the face of an old astronomical clock with multiple screens including one that showed the phases of the astronomical bodies,

judging by the presence of a small star. The clock is probably a metaphor for time and therefore history.

More interestingly from an interpretive perspective is the presence on the right sidebar of a series of photographs, almost like stills from a film, perhaps a film symbolizing the life story of the entire nation. The first moment we see clearly in this symbolic chronology is a sepia picture of a fancy horse-driven carriage accompanied by riders in gala uniforms. Inside the open coach sit two bearded and mustached men, one more corpulent wearing an elegant suit with a large decoration on his chest and a top hat, the other much thinner dressed in a military uniform, waving gently at the crowd gathered on both sides of the boulevard. The buildings in the background of this welcoming parade are imposing, with massive neoclassical entrances and the general impression one gets from the image is that it must represent an important moment, a ceremonial point. And indeed, what we are witnessing is the welcoming reception for King Peter I Karageorgevic, returned from exile to take over the Serbian crown in 1903 after a bloody military coup removed king Alexander I Obrenovic from the throne.

King Peter I remains probably one of the most admired and popular leaders in former Yugoslavia. Forced into exile at a young age because of the eternal domestic competition for the Serbian throne between the Karageorgevic and Obrenovic families, Peter I was educated in the Western style and wanted to modernize Serbia into a constitutional monarchy after the British model. He was also a successful military commander, leading Serbia to victory in the two Balkan wars of 1912 – 1913. Besides being remembered as a fair and progressive king, Peter I stands in the

contemporary history of Serbia as the first king of the united South Slavs – on December 1, 1918 he was crowned king of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, now living in an independent state. Due to old age, Peter I did not take an active part in the politics of the new state, which he lived to see for only three more years. After his death in 1921 the throne passed peacefully and legally to his younger son Alexander I Karageorgevic (Resic, 2006: 160-161). Peter I is also the one who consolidated the House of Karageorgevic, who was to hold power for the remaining south Slavic monarchy.

Peter I Karageorgevic is considered a prominent historical character in the history of Serbia for his military leadership in the Balkan wars, during which Serbia almost doubled its territory (Resic, 2006: 173), but he achieves symbolic status especially as the king of the “golden period of democracy”. If the textbook covers analyzed so far are seen as a series, they could be read as a story about the desire to affirm Serbia’s qualities on the battle field and the success in creating a modern and democratic state, synchronized with the rest of the continent. The presence of a powerful but also modern monarch on the cover may want to suggest the way Serbia sees itself in relationship with Europe today: as a strong actor, but not one on the periphery – a full-fledged state, on par with the other states in the region.

The second picture in the sequence is a black and white shot of soldiers dressed in typical First World War uniforms. In the foreground there are two men standing besides the lifeless body of another soldier, one of them taking off his kepi in order to honor the memory of his fallen comrade, the other preparing an improvised wooden cross from two broken branches. Behind them a third soldier is

digging the grave that is to receive the dead body of their companion. As a background a beautiful valley bordered with small bushes creates an idyllic and peaceful contrast with the quiet tragedy of the burying scene.

World War I represents both a tragic moment in the history of the South Slavs and a beginning of their true independence. The possibility of a Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes opened up because of the fall of the great European Empires. But the price to be paid was extremely high. The death scene illustrated on the cover was encountered repeatedly on the battle fields of the great conflagration. The numbers are uncertain but more than 300 000 soldiers died in the war. This number is further increased by civilian casualties. As a result of either deportations, food shortages, or a pandemic typhoid fever more than half a million civilians perished in the four years of the war. Half of the entire male population of Serbia aged 18 to 55 was wiped out during the war, either in armed battle or as civilian casualties (Lampe, 2000: 109). This great sacrifice was justified in the name of the ideal of independence from both Ottomans and Habsburgs and if we are to look at the entire series of images selected on the cover we can argue that the tragic deaths portrayed in this are justified even more by the next picture.

In this third episode of the contemporary history of Serbia, we are shown a modern dynamic and prosperous town. Tall stylish buildings extend to the horizon, and in the center of the picture (a reproduction of a postcard from the 1920s) there is a large piazza, decorated with flower arrangements but also full of tramway tracks. The trams are visible in the far right of the photo, coming and going, and giving the impression of modernity and bustling activity. The modern design of the urban

planning is underlined also by the gracious street lamps which are placed alongside the main boulevards which intersect in the Terazije (a caption on page 131 of the book identifies the square). The city is, of course, Belgrade, a Belgrade proud of its transformation into the capital of a free-standing state, ready to come into step with the rest of Europe⁷⁵. This postcard is an advertisement for the urban development and planning from which the city benefited. The physical center of this vast open space may be the actual piazza, but the symbolic weight is placed slightly north of the transportation hub that is Terazije, in the Hotel Balkan Building. The hotel, which is still standing today as one of the most luxurious in the capital, is both modern and traditional, both Serbian and European, as its architecture combines the size and the simple lines of the contemporary constructions seen elsewhere with the tilted roof, and the windows that are somewhat reminiscent of a typical “han”, a place for the wearied traveler to rest. Perhaps most telling of this duality is the inscription, Hotel Balkan, written with both Latin and Cyrillic characters in decorative writing.

This should be a metaphor for Serbia in the interwar period: a meeting place of East and West, as the crisscross of tram tracks also leads the viewer to believe. These modern rails are the continuation of the other, historical trade routes that brought the place its renown, its wealth but also its history full of battles and conquests. They could be also seen as tokens of the country’s optimism and

⁷⁵ The process of urbanization, rather slow in Serbia, started as soon as the principality attained autonomy in 1815. By the 1870s, a foreign traveler to Belgrade could write “The ambition of the Serbs is to make disappear from their country everything that would remind them of the Ottoman rule [...]. The Turkish Belgrade has ceased to exist; it has been replaced by a western city like Paris or Budapest; palaces in European style stand on the place of former mosques with domes and minarets; magnificent boulevards cross the old neighbourhoods with crooked streets, and a lovely planted park covers the place where the Turks used to exhibit columns with cut off, bleeding heads” (quoted in Yerolympos, 1993: 247). Note here the orientalist perspective of the writer, as well as the placement of Budapest firmly on European, rather than Eastern European, ground.

confidence in the future, now that the major obstacle, the dependence on others, was removed. The modernity of the planning, the electrification, the new means of transportation and the tall houses are signs of prosperity, of keeping up with the times. And the times were the 1920s, a decade of transformation for the new Yugoslav kingdom, but also a decade of achievement reflected on the face of the capital city. Belgrade grew in size to about 226 000 inhabitants in 1929 (Lampe 2000, 145), and since they were mostly bureaucrats, professionals and intellectuals they brought with them the desire to express themselves culturally and esthetically. Thus a flourishing civil society and art scene developed especially around the cosmopolitan cafés alongside the main avenues, just like in Zagreb and Ljubljana, (Wachtel, 1998: 82); the most en vogue was Café Moskva located precisely on the main square portrayed on the textbook cover. The intellectual discussions were concerned with the identity of the new state, seen in its relationship with the already existing ethnic identities of each component group. The debate around the popularity of the Yugoslav idea among Belgrade intellectuals has been discussed for decades now⁷⁶, but one could agree with Lampe that the cultural “currents favored a Yugoslav and a European identity as much as or more than separate ethnic identities [...] and this was particularly true and particularly important for Belgrade” (Lampe, 2000: 145).

Finally, it is interesting to comment on the appropriation of the name Balkan. As Todorova (1997) so extensively discussed, this designation originated in the West and was applied as a negative label to the southeastern region of Europe. The people from this part of the continent did not feel it applied to them, but it was rather an

⁷⁶ An example is the discussion between Ivo Banac (1992), who argues against the existence of a vibrant pro-Yugoslav attitude in Belgrade circles, and Andrew Baruch Wachtel (1998), who maintains the opposite.

imposition from outside, a critique of their way of life, values and behavior that only buttressed the West-East dichotomy. In the attempt to associate a positive symbolism with the word Balkan, one can read the desire of the local people to give their own meaning to this concept; if they are forced to live with it, at least to fill it with a significance that emerges from inside their society. This is also particularly interesting as it may demonstrate the attempt to transform Belgrade from a Serbian to a Yugoslav capital, representing the multi-national heritage of a young and diverse kingdom. Who lives in Hotel Balkan, one is left wondering? This hotel seems to be both inviting and accommodating all those for whom Balkan is not an insult. The general impression emerging from the illustration is therefore one of pride in the modernization process, in the noticeable progress in architecture and urbanism and of confidence in the future of a region that used to be seen as full of dangers and backward but which overcame its own past.

The following picture in the series illustrates a non-Serbian event: the meeting between Khrushchev and Nixon at the United Nations. The meeting is famous because it has been immortalized on film and we see the result here: Khrushchev, small, bald and relatively on the defensive, is the target of Nixon's pointing finger in a moment known as the Kitchen Debate. The meeting between the two leaders of the superpowers of the Cold War took place at the U.S. Exhibition in Moscow 1959, in the room arranged to look like a typical American home. The debate started, innocently enough, about the qualities of washing machines but then moved on to the standards of life of Soviet and American citizens, the tone getting sharper and sharper. The moment captured by the photographer reflects the accumulated tensions,

signaled by “jabbing fingers and lapel-grabbings”, when Khrushchev “appeared to be using, rather than losing his temper, and Nixon played off that, firm but not unfriendly”, saying that it is not a competition in everything, from kitchen equipment to rockets, but that “you are strong and we are strong [...] For us to argue who is the stronger misses the point. If war comes, we both lose” (Safire, 2008: 374).

Why include this scene, in a chronology that otherwise is exclusively focused on Serbian history? Perhaps presenting the two blocks, the communist and the liberal ones, face to face in what looks like a confrontation was judged to be the most adequate description of a time period when nothing else mattered but the affiliation of one’s bloc. The position of Socialist Yugoslavia as a communist country outside the sphere of influence of Moscow and therefore friendlier to the West is not directly hinted at in this black and white, good and evil depiction of the period after World War II. Perhaps the picture is used to underline that the most defining event of that period was the balance of power between USA and USSR and that smaller countries like Yugoslavia had no choice but to play a game whose rules they could not change, caught in the confrontation between two dominating states and two dominating ideologies with no middle ground. The fact that the Cold War period is exemplified by the absence of Yugoslavia and/or Serbia can therefore be seen as a way to underline the effacement of smaller countries in the face of the two world giants.

The last picture in the timeline of contemporary Serbian history is a colorful dynamic one, representing the revolutionary day of October 5th, 2000, as we are to discover from a caption under an identical picture on page 206 (Kovacevic 2003). The crowd is mixed, both young and old, male and female, all gathered outside an

imposing building with a colonnade, which can be identified as the Yugoslav federal parliament building in Belgrade. Many participants in the demonstrations carry a light blue flag. The events of that day are indeed stormy: the mass rally was supposed to be the push over the edge for Milosevic's regime, with thousands of people gathering on the streets of the Serbian capital and angrily claiming the departure of the leader that put them through four different wars and a NATO bombing. The day's manifestations were not peaceful: the Parliament's building was set on fire, while the police were shooting tear gas at the protesters. Later that day, the demonstrators besieged the headquarters of the national television which was eventually forced off the air, in a move reminiscent of the Romanian revolution of 1989, which some commentators called the first live revolution in history.

The protests of October 5th 2000 signaled the beginning of the end for Milosevic, who was nowhere to be seen.⁷⁷ Police fraternized with the opposition demonstrators and at the end of the day Vojislav Kostunica, the opposition leader, took power and later declared "Milosevic can no longer fight against the people's will; today in Serbia history happened" (Quoted by CNN, October 5, 2005). Again the scenario is reminiscent of the Romanian revolution of '89, when the undemocratic leader of the country disappeared amidst heavy popular protests, police forces fraternized with the crowds, who took over both Parliament and the TV station and at the end of the day installed a new leader in charge of organizing the democratic transition. Admittedly, there are significant differences, most notably in the degree of violence employed by the government forces against the demonstrators and in the

⁷⁷ For a very detailed analysis of the fall of the Milosevic regime and the power transition to Kostunica and Djindjic, see Ramet (2002), especially chapter 14.

number of resulting casualties. Nevertheless the sequence of events is similar just as the day of October 5th became the mark of a new, democratic, pro-European era, so did December 22, 1989, the Romanian new beginnings become similar in significance.

The reason for including this last scene is perhaps a desire to underscore the break with the past, and the democratic basis of the decision to let Milosevic go. Its inclusion also indicates the aspirations of Serbia to be recognized as a democratic European country and not excluded from international and regional cooperation. This message becomes even clearer if one refers directly to the paragraph that accompanies the picture in the pages of the textbook itself: "During the month of October of the same year [2000], the F.R.Y [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] was reaccepted into important international organizations and the special decisions punishing the country exercised by the international community were annulled" (Kovacevic 2003: 206). Clearly the popular protests in October against the Milosevic regime were seen as the gateway to a new and respectable Serbia, whose only partner left inside the FRY was, at that time, Montenegro. The final picture therefore is not only the end of an era of nationalism and war but also the promise of a better future. This future is clearly connected to popular legitimacy - the image of the people gathered in an effort to recuperate power from those who unjustly kidnapped it. Especially in the light of the paragraph quoted above, it implies a tighter cooperation with Europe as a whole and perhaps with the EU and other international organizations. However the matter has not been solved as a recent series of articles in the leading daily newspaper Politika leads us to believe. In the series of articles the

journal asks what are judged to be important questions about the future: “How can we integrate into the ever-growing family of European nations and preserve our identity? Serbia between East and West, Serbia in Europe, but how, when and at what price?”. The very existence of this series of questions reveals a tension preoccupying Serbian intellectuals today, even if perhaps this split does not apply to the entire population. However, this is a false predicament according to Ivan Colovic, created by and beneficial for the Serbian intellectual class. He states that it is “difficult to believe that the citizens of this country are torturing themselves with allegedly difficult dilemmas concerning Serbia’s so-called European road; or that they are discussing them in their homes, with their friends, with their colleagues at work, in cafés” (Colovic, 2008). Such argument says that the people we see demonstrating on the streets of Belgrade in the autumn of 2000 have already found the answer to these questions, in the sense that for them there is no doubt: Serbia is not split between Orient and Occident. On the contrary, it is firmly planted on European soil, imbued with European values. It is only some Serbian intellectuals who want to award themselves a position of primacy and thus creates false dilemmas where they do not exist.

Looking back at Romanian and Serbian history textbooks, one can make some general remarks, valid in both cases. Unsurprisingly, the covers of the textbooks reflect their time and age. The most noticeable influence of the education reform of 1999 (Romania) and 2001 (Serbia) is at the level of the esthetic presentation. In other words, the cover and the textbook itself becomes, in most cases, more attractive, with a slimmer, more modern and more colorful design. Part of the reason lies in the

pressures of the economic liberalization, especially in Romania where there are several publishing houses competing for a limited number of pupil-consumers – the manual that looks best has an advantage over the more anodyne alternatives. The improvement of the design over time is also a reflection of the better printing technologies available and of the computer-assisted layouts that all printing houses use today.

The transformation at the superficial level of the look and feel of the book is not always accompanied by a similar change of the type of historical references employed. On the contrary, what characterizes the message reflected through the visual content is constancy rather than change. Both Romanian and Serbian authors and illustrators use the same reference frame to place their definition of national history. Recurrent traditional myths are common: in Romania. The myth of origins related to the Dacian-Roman mix, as well as the myth of national unity illustrated either by the inclusion of emblematic figures or by the portrayal of crucial events that illustrate the gradual fulfillment of what is to be understood as the ideal of all Romanians across time and place. In Serbia the myth of origins appears to be connected to (Orthodox) Christianity – thus the predominance of Christian motifs in the presentation of Serbian history of the Middle Ages.

Another prevalent myth that appears at the visual level is military valor, represented by the masculine and forceful images of the national heroes as well as by the inclusion of numerous scenes from battles, revolts and wars as representative for Serbian history throughout time. The same images can also be interpreted as representations of the archetype of the hero (always male, almost always with a

military allure) that is also to be found in Romanian cover illustrations. The reference to battles and wars can be a twisted version of a myth of victimhood. The same can be said of illustrations of the brave Serbian soldier and their astute leaders. According to this myth, the numerous confrontations and attacks that the Serbs had to, however valiantly, withstand have made them the victims of various Great Powers invading their territory. Despite their heroism on the battle field, fighting took its toll, weakening the country and therefore allowing it to develop at a slower pace than other, more protected states. The myth of victimhood, which justifies the setbacks in comparison to other places on the continent, does not necessarily imply weakness; it can equally entail a perception of bravery and pride in one's disinterested actions. The Serbs, and to some extent the Romanians as well, have been at the borderlands of civilization (understood by these peoples as European civilization) and have defended it to the benefit of a now ungrateful West. This *Antemurale Christianitatis* story is one with most contributors in Eastern Europe and it poses the question who is the real defender of Christianity in face of the infidel invaders? Poland argues for the title in the name of Catholicism⁷⁸, just as much as Croatia; Serbia or even Romania perceive themselves entitled to the claim in the name of Orthodox Christianity, even if the myth and the phrase that gives it its name originated in the Catholic cultural sphere.

In fact, both Serbia and Croatia used the rhetoric of defenders of Christendom, as an analyst of post-Yugoslav politics observed: "Croatian propagandists declared

⁷⁸ The Polish self-definition as the „Bulwark of Christianity” has been used not only in the historical context of the Ottoman attacks but also to refer to all acts of resistance against Russian or later Soviet invasion. Davies (1997:145), Davies (2005: ch. 6, pp. 125-155) discusses this as a historian whereas Prizel (1998, esp. pp. 12 – 152) looks at the uses of this myth for the creation of Polish national identity. For the Croatian version see a short account in MacDonald (2002: 114 and forward), or Lindstrom (2003).

that for centuries their country had been the *Antemurale Christianitatis*, ‘the bulwark of Christianity.’ Serb propagandists claimed that their people had defended Europe from a Turkish invasion at the Battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1389, three days after which the bells of Notre Dame in Paris had rung to celebrate the Christian victory. As usual the supine consumers of the propaganda did not question these assertions” (Stevanović quoted in Bechev, 2006: 14).

The same to the north of the Danube, where as early as the 17th century the Wallachian and Moldovan princes were aware of a European consciousness; both the Musat and the Basarab ruling families clearly articulated in texts produced under their authority that they belonged to a European family and had a role as “defenders of its borders with the infidels” (Georgescu, 1992: 71). The same role was attributed, especially during the communist period, to Mircea the Old, prince of Wallachia in the 14th century who confronted the Turks in their advance towards the center of Europe. The battle at Rovine, often presented in literary rather than historical terms, is mythical in its importance in the eyes of historians such as Zamfirescu, for whom without the victory at Rovine the whole of Europe would have had to become Islamic (Zamfirescu quoted in Boia, 1998: 217).

By their very nature, the textbook covers focus on the self-image of the people or country they try to portray. When looking at the textbook cover, we see the reflection of the nation as it sees itself, or maybe as it wants to be seen. This is one of the reasons why we are not confronted so much with the Other, who is not needed for contrast at this early point in the national presentation. One exception from this rule may be the Serbian cover illustrating the uprising against the Turks lead by

Obrenovic (Perovic and Vojvodic, 1995) where we can see several people dressed in an oriental fashion, with turban, fez and shalvar. But these are not the enemy, they are also Serbs since they are making the three-finger salute and their behavior is not aggressive towards the main character, but supportive. In most of the war scenes the enemy is implied, but never present. Either it has already been vanquished, as in the triumphal entry of Prince Michael the Brave in Alba Iulia, or it lurks in the background, threatening with more disasters, such as those we can guess the Serbian soldier, outlined on the cover of the 1993 eighth grade textbook (Gacesa et al), undergone.

Even if many themes are common to both Romanian and Serbian illustrations, there are nevertheless some differences. Clearly, the Romanians strongly emphasize their Latinity, which is one of the major national myths emerging during the national formation processes of the 19th century but it has deeper roots in the history of ideas (Boia, 2001: 28-58). Latinity has been a source of pride and argument for the uniqueness of the nation, as well as one of the grounds upon which the European identity of the Romanians has been build. The Serbs prefer to start their history in the early Middle Ages and to focus much more on a Christian, later Orthodox Christianity, than the Romanians, especially at the level of the illustrations. Both the iconic references in the first of the textbooks studied and the presence of the flag with a red cross make the link between national belonging and religious belief obvious. Finally, the Serbian textbooks include several pictures from the modern and contemporary periods (Belgrade in the 1920s, the protests of 2000), whereas Romanian covers focus entirely on the ancient and medieval times. This could be

explained by a space issue: there is more room for history in the Serbian curriculum in comparison with that of Romania. The Serbian students can concentrate on the contemporary period for an entire year, which is not the case in Romania where history from the dawn of humanity (prehistoric era) to the present times must fit into one school year.

The textbook cover is a mirror of the desired national image, presented in very large strokes, a simplified preview of what readers can expect inside the book. It offers a taste sample of what it is to come in terms of content, which will be more detailed in the textual analysis. The most important events and personalities, those that deserve a place of prominence on the cover of the book, are likely to be the ones discussed at length inside the textbooks. The purpose of this chapter has been to outline those stories and characters that have been selected by the authors of the books themselves as most significant for the history they are trying to tell. Each cover and its links with the ones that come before or after, either in a chronology based on publication year, or based on periodization, is significant because it serves us with in-group selection criteria, telling us how highly ranked in the national Parthenon a figure or an event is. Overall, the Romanian and Serbian textbook covers succeed in thematizing the content of the history manuals, and to present the mythological narratives in visual form. In the next chapter we will investigate if there is a match between the message emerging from the images and the one captured in the details of the text itself.

Representation of the self in Romanian and Serbian texts

Mirror, Mirror, in my hand,
Who's the fairest in the land??

Grimm brothers, Snow White

The spirit promoted by history textbooks in both countries is patriotic and encourages pride in the nation. For the textbook authors it appears that Dr. Max's character in Julian Barnes *England, England* sums it up in one key phrase: "history is a hunk" (1998: 148). In other words, history is about manly things, about wars, and battles, and some measure of blood and courage must be also present.

Romania

Myths find their way into the Romanian textbooks. Some of them will also appear familiar when the Serbian example will be examined, like the myth of victimhood, of being at the mercy and discretion of the Great Powers, and the myth of national unity, of creating a state for all Romanians. Some others are more emphasized than in the Serbian case, like the myth of noble descent or the antemurale Christianitas, of constituting the last line of defense of the Christian faith. Heroes and villains also find a home in the pages of history books, both during the communist period, when the number one hero was none other than Ceausescu himself, and in present times, when a more inclusive pantheon kept the princes of the old but replaced communist revolutionaries with some of the political figures "forgotten" during the dictatorship.

Myth of origins: Latinity

To demonstrate the cultural unity of all Romanians, the first step was to provide them with a common origin: the Romanians descend in equal proportion from the local population inhabiting the area currently known as Romania (the Dacians) and from the Romans, who conquered the region in 101 -102 AD under the leadership of the emperor Trajan. This common ancestry is presented as a very noble one, reminding of other mythological accounts about a new people being formed by mixing colonized and colonizers, like the stories of Pocahontas and John Rolfe for the US, or of La Malinche and Hernan Cortes for Mexico. The historical source that is most often referred to when describing the Dacians is Herodotus, who calls them “the most courageous and just among the Thracians”, phrase which is included in all the textbooks when dealing with the original inhabitants of the Romanian lands. The same phrase appears both before and after 1989 in reference to the double origins of the Romanian people, described as “the successor of the brave Dacians and of the proud Romans” (Almas, 1988, and 1996: 17). Courage and pride, we are to understand, were qualities that Romanians inherited almost directly via their genetic heritage. A noticeable exception is Oane and Ochescu (2007), where the famous quote is included, but placed in a larger context, which actually says that these brave people were in fact the losers of a war: “The Gets however, who took the foolish decision to oppose him [Darius, Persian emperor], fell immediately as slaves, even if they are the most courageous and the just among the Thracians” (Herodotus in Oane and Ochescu, 2007: 28).

We also find out that the Dacian men were “tall and robust, with fair skin and blue eyes. The commoners wore their hair long [...] whereas the nobles had a woolen

hat.” The Dacian women were “tall and supple, with long hair worn in a bun.” The connection between the Dacians of the old and today’s Romanians is made even clearer: “The Dacian clothes resembled the Romanian national costume” (Burlec et al., 1999: 14). In another textbook we read that the Dacians were farmers and “skilled craftsmen” and that their kings were also “skilled” (Grigore et al., 1998: 11). There is even a list of the qualities of the Dacians, which includes again their stature and fair tone of their complexion; the resemblance of their clothes to those of the Romanians; their love and knowledge of nature; their mastery of a 360/365 day calendar; and their love of beauty as reflected in the artful decorations of their everyday objects (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 21).

The Romans need no extra praise as they are already known to the children of 4th grade and up as the epitome of refinement and development, the fathers of the Western civilization. We are drawn to conclude that the result of the fusion of such two noble, beautiful and skilled peoples, the present-day Romanians, must also carry the same qualities: courage, justice, and an esthetic sense. The Dacian – Roman symbiosis is presented as unperturbed by later additions to the mixture (say the migrating peoples of later centuries), leading straight to the Romanians.

This myth illustrates also the Latinity of the Romanians and thus their belonging to the great cultural family of European cultures, like the French, Italian and Spanish ones. Historically, the nationalist intellectuals have argued for the noble descent of the Romanian language directly from the spoken Latin of the Roman conquerors and have even attempted to purify the language from all the non-Latin, and in particular Slavic, words in the 1880s.

Latinity is one of the features that lend itself easiest to a pro-European interpretation. Descending from the Romans automatically qualifies the Romanian people as full-fledged members of the European civilization. Rome has been the space of civilization by definition during the time of the Roman Empire and throughout the history of Europe, and many a leader attempted to recreate it, both in size and influence. From Byzantium to the Germanic Holy Roman Empire to the aspiration of relocating the Third Rome to Moscow, there is nostalgia for the greatness of the Roman achievements. Napoleon and Hitler, to name just the most two famous leaders, were largely motivated in their wars of expansion to bring under their control all the lands that once belonged to Cesar. It is therefore easy to understand that Romanians could not miss the train offered by chance and embrace their Latin heritage in order to gain recognition points at a time when they were nothing but small quasi autonomous principalities at the edges of the continent. Being Romanian is equivalent with being European, since “to speak of ‘Europe’ is (as has been for two centuries) at one and the same time a statement of political intentions and a statement of national identity” (Verdery, 1996: 105).

And the most obvious feature of the Latin connection is the language, at once trump card and factor leading to isolation (Tanasoiu, 2005: 120). Many things can be contested about the identity and the history of this people, but the belonging of their language to the romance family is out of doubt. This gives to language and implicitly to its Latin component a certainty almost unseen in other areas, and thus a position of primacy, reflected for example in the desire of the nation-makers to give a meaningful name to the new state and people they were promoting. The word Romanian (rumân,

later român in order to resemble even more the link to Rome) was originally designated the people and the land of Wallachia (The Romanian Land), later extended to all the people speaking various dialects of Romanian (Boia, 2001: 30-31).

Textbooks reflect this way of thinking. A 4th grade textbook from 1998 has a special lesson about the “formation of the Romanian people and Romanian language” (seen as simultaneous processes) preceded by a lesson on the connection between Romanian and other Latin languages. In these lessons children are taught that “the Romanian people formed via the living together of the Dacians with the Roman colonists and the assimilation of the Latin language by the Dacians” (Grigore et al, 1998: 15). Subsequently the pupils are invited to test how Latin the Romanian language is by solving quizzes where Romanian and Latin words that sound and look very close to one another must be paired, like “angelus” and “înger” (angel), or “pane” and “pâine” (bread). Finally, there is a quote from a poem that makes it clear how important language is and how worthy of protection: “Our language is a treasure/ Deeply buried/ A string of precious stone/ Spread out over the land” (21).

This lesson is no longer included in textbooks from 1999, where only the formation of the Romanian people has a special chapter. Within this chapter however, the Latinity of the language is mentioned, together with a list of Latin and Romanian words, paired because of their similarity. This is not included in an exercise, as above, but is presented just as an example of the Latin connection. Another proof of the Latin descent is “the name Romanian [român] as the people north of the Danube calls itself, [which] demonstrates that it is the direct continuation of the Roman culture and of the Latin language” (Burlec, 1999: 27). At the end of the chapter, one phrase does

allow for other elements than the pure Dacian – Roman combination to play a role in the ethnogenesis of the Romanians (30), but it is disproportionately small in comparison with the space given to the Latin link. Combined with a negative portrait of those who migrated over the current territory of the country, this makes the Latin descent, as proven by the language, a quintessential Romanian feature.

A textbook published after the education reform, still contains a lesson about the formation of the Romanian people, presented together with the formation of the language, as “the “fundamental problem in the history of Romanians” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 16). In it, pupils learn again that there are two main “vines” (Xenopol quoted in Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 16) to which the migratory element has been added later and superficially. The textbook highlights two processes that gave birth to the nation: the process of Romanization and Christianization, both having at their root the Latin language⁷⁹. In a summary, the textbook says “The Romanian people was formed through the fusion of the Daco-Romans with some of those who migrated through a complex process, taking place about on the same land that is today’s territory of the country, including the region south of the Danube” (18). As this quote illustrates, there is a fusion, a welding together of the two primary folk groups into a new, proto-Romanian mixture, the Daco-Romans, - this gives the impression of perfect symbiosis, and unity into a new type of ethnic group, to which “some” (less significant we are lead to believe) migratory contributions have been added. The phrase about the “formation through a fusion between the Dacians and Romans” can be easily traced to the Program of the Romanian Communist Party of 1975, which

⁷⁹ The process of Christianization, described as occurring at the same time with the Romanian ethnogenesis leads towards the argument that the Romanians have been born Christian, a recurrent theme which is also part of the self-definition of the nation.

uses exactly the same formulation (1975: 27) – another example that supports the slow process of change in matters of history teaching.

In the latest versions of history textbooks there is less of an emphasis on the national element. The curriculum changes so as to be more synchronized with the European trend in history education that presents the national and the continental trends at the same time. For example, in Mihailescu et al (2006) the fourth and fifth parts of the book are dedicated to European modern and contemporary history, with a special chapter on the European Union (92-94). This Europeanization of history based on EU's policy on highlighting the European dimension of the common history (Hansen, 1998) does not necessarily come in conflict with the maintenance of the national focus in those parts of the book dedicated to Romanian history. Even if there is no more a chapter entitled “the formation of the Romanian people”, we can still read about the same theses as in previous textbooks: the Romanization process took place over several centuries and lead to the formation “on both sides of the Danube up to the Black Sea” of a new people and a new language. The Romanians are the results of the “fusion of the Dacians and the Romans” by taking possession of the Latin language, the customs and the way of life of the Romans. Migrating populations “have also contributed” to this process, even if over time they have been “assimilated because of the superior civilization of the Daco-Romans” (Mihailescu et al, 2006: 31-32).

Even the curriculum for the 8th grade schoolbooks includes an obligatory lesson about the formation of the Romanian people and language, as the title of a subchapter in a text from 1998 announces. The key word in this version is

“synthesis”, the ground upon which the Romanians of today appeared historically. A “Romanized population” developed over several centuries into a new type of people, whose main characteristics were Christianity and speaking a Romance language. The emphasis on linguistics is strong, since it is with the help of phonetical tools used against historical documents that one can establish that by the 8th century A.D. the Romanian people already “occupied a distinct place in Europe” (Vulpe et al., 1998: 28). The textbooks for the older generation employ a more problematized approach to the origins of the nation and even have an overview section where various theories are exposed. Referring to several established historians, theories about the Romanization of the Dacian population and about the continuous presence of this Daco-Roman mix on the Romanian territory are contrasted with the immigration theory which argues that the entire space north of the Danube was devoid of people after the Roman retreat of 271 A.D.

An interesting commentary makes the link between politics and history: “the claim of a people over a territory was supported in the past with arguments based on historical right, primarily claiming the right of the first inhabitation of the respective territory. Disputes around historical right have worsened the relations between neighboring peoples, as was the case with Romanian and Hungarians. In our days, historical right lessened its importance being replaced by the principle of national self-determination. According to this principle the inhabitants of a country can freely decide, via plebiscite, the political future of their nation, respecting at the same time the rights and freedoms of the minorities with whom they live together” (Vulpe et al., 1998: 34). The purpose of the paragraph is to reassure the students of the legal right

Romanians have over the entire territory they currently occupy, even if they would fail to be convinced by the continuity argument presented in the preceding pages. It is nevertheless reassuring to see even a superficial and relatively biased discussion of the idea of a political use of history, even if in this case it is understood that only Others (a.k.a. the Hungarians) would more or less falsify the past in order to reap benefits today, at the expense of the Romanians. The text concludes with the hope that history will be allowed to remain free of political influences and to investigate the past scientifically and objectively. This hope is based on the belief in the actual capacity of history as a science and of historians as individuals to achieve objectivity and refutes the post-modernist claim that there are several versions of the past all equally true at the same time.

It is in fact remarkable to note how the uniqueness of the Romanian linguistic heritage has been interpreted as both a prestige-full passport to Europe and as a punishment. Romania has more or less developed an island mentality and this is reflected at the level of the language, both in textbooks and in historical and sociological works. Even critical historians as Lucian Boia adopt this perspective; in his *Romania: Borderland of Europe* (2001) an entire chapter is entitled “An Island of Latinity”. Another author discusses the “paradox of belonging” describing Romanian again like a “little Latin island lost in the surrounding Slavic and Hungarian mass” (Alexandrescu, 1996: 12). The nature of the paradox is the multiple spheres of belonging that Romanian culture can subscribe to: Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans somehow united in their diversity on the territory north of the Danube. At the same time there is a “paradox of simultaneity” which refers to the

major cultural periods of the European culture that did not follow the same chronology in what we call Romania today, but that came there all at once: Renaissance, Enlightenment and Baroque appear all at the same time in the Danubian space (Alexandrescu, 1996: 13). The very idea that Romania is an exception, a paradox, emphasizes its isolation; perhaps from here derives a perception of being under scrutiny and threat, especially from one's neighbors.

The myth of the Latin origins of the Romanians is the most common myth of origins encountered in textbooks. As mentioned before it serves the purpose of endowing the Romanians with a noble origin, that entitles them to make an Europeanness claim. It also sets them apart from the rest of their neighbors not only because of a more prestigious origin but also because of their antiquity, claim supported by the Dacian element. Some textbooks declare Romanians to be among the oldest people in the regions together with the Greeks and the Albanians (and among the first to be Christianized, another important aspect of the self-definition of the Romanians, which will be discussed below). (Burlec et al., 1999: 27). The rediscovery of the Dacian element as one not to be clouded in darkness but brought forward takes place especially in the 19th century, when for example a leading literary magazine founded by the historian and statesman Mihail Kogalniceanu bears the name "Dacia Literara" (Literary Dacia). The argument is that the heritage of the Dacians is what really sets apart the Romanian people not only from among their neighbors (as this difference already exists because of the Romance language) but also from their Latin brothers elsewhere in Europe. Placed into the larger debate

between traditionalism and Europeanism⁸⁰, between copying a Western model and placing extra value on the originality and authenticity of the national element, the positive valorization of the Dacian contribution supports the desire of the architects of Romanianness to accentuate break with the slavish copying of Others and to focus on homegrown values.

One textbook that critically engages with this subject is the 8th grade book by Oane and Ochescu (2007). Not only are the two currents of traditionalism and modernism/ europeanism succinctly presented with space devoted equally but in the questions and exercises section the students are offered a passage from a critical historian which they have to analyze and debate which of the two trends is more convincing (138). Some previous pages also include first hand sources from authors representing both sides of the story, thus allowing students to form their own opinion. The same authors are behind a 4th grade textbook where this problematization is not part of the lesson.

Myth of origins: Christianity

The major foundation myth adopted by the intellectual discourse in the forming years of Romanian nationalism is the Latin origin (and to some extent the Dacian origin as well). Some argue that in contrast with Serbia and Bulgaria, where orthodox belief had been awarded more primacy, the religious factor has been

⁸⁰ The distinction between traditionalists and modernists has been discussed among others in Verdery (1991), chapter 1 “Antecedents: National Ideology and Cultural Politics in Presocialist Romania”. Also worth to note that under these two generic labels other subcategories may hide (for example traditionalists could be referring to the peasant and folklore as sources of the nation, or to the orthodox belief; modernists may be strong Europeanists or could place themselves in the wider context of the ‘West’). There were also those who wanted to escape the dichotomy and took a third way. For more on this see for example Hitchins (1996), chapter 7, “.The Big Debate”.

downplayed in Romania (Laruelle, 2002: 63). The two mythical origins have sometimes been interpreted as at odds to each other. Especially during the interwar years, the traditionalist line of thought preferred to emphasize the Christian Orthodox lineage, whereas the modernists referred to the Latin heritage as source of national and European identity. This is illustrated by a quote from a traditionalist philosopher, Nichifor Crainic, writing in 1926 against an Europeanist author with deep irony “What would have been the integral solution according to Mr. Lovinescu’s doctrine? To put an end to this Oriental exile, to leave this Romanian land which does not suit us [...] to get rid of our history – and thus of our ancestors – and to get rid of orthodoxism – thus of our spirit – in order to move [us] somewhere to the classic land of Latinity (quoted in Livezeanu, 2002: 123). The parody of the Westernizing thought, ridiculed in its attempt to reposition the culture from a marginal to a more central position, serves to underline how impossible would be to separate the people from “its” faith, its motor.

Even if the Roman heritage has come to be considered the cement uniting all the members of the imagined community of all Romanians, Christianity is part of the national imaginary. A smaller but nevertheless consistent reference to a myth of noble descent is part of the curriculum for both 4th and 8th grades and makes the link between the Romanian ethnogenesis and the process of Christianization.

Christianity or better said the process of becoming Christian is at the center of the presentations given in the 4th grade textbooks about the formation of the Romanian people. All the textbooks include the picture of an archeological find from Transylvania in the shape of a Christian cross placed in a circle and bearing a Latin

inscription – the metal brooch appears in connection to lessons about the origins of the Romanians, as it combines both the Roman and the Christian origins. Sometimes there is a special lesson, but even when it is not, most authors include a historical reference (either a professional historian or a literary voice) to talk about how Christianity spread to the Danubian people.

In a recently published book (Mihailescu et al, 2006), the lesson about the ethnogenesis has three main pillars: the permeation of the Latin culture in the mass of Dacian folk, the Latinization of the language and the Christianization of the Romanized population both north and south of the Danube (32). Language and religion are brought together in a mutually supporting act, since the main argument for the natural (as opposed to the forced conversion) diffusion of Christian thought and practice comes from the Latin origin of all the basic Christian words (cross, God, angel, church, prayer are all of Latin descent in Romanian).

Another 4th grade textbook (Grigore et al., 1998) uses similar words like in the example above (angel, church, God) in an exercise meant to demonstrate the Latinity of the Romanian language. Christianity is not mentioned explicitly, but the implicit connection between religion and language is the same as in the more forthright text from 2006 analyzed above. The role of the language is not as explicit in a 2003 book (Oane and Ochescu) – here Christianity is not something that naturally occurred in the Danubian space but a current of beliefs brought there by missionaries and bishops, “whose activity and self sacrifice made Romanians’ religion to be Christianity” (17). Elsewhere there is a mention of the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire (without details about when this changed and when the new religion became adopted

by the state). Therefore the impression left is one of great struggles against an unfavorable state of affairs that plagued Christians, thus ennobled by suffering. The theme of persecution is taken up again on page 42, this time when the situation of the Orthodox Transylvanians is discussed. Both the Hungarian state and the Catholic Church are responsible for the lack of official recognition of Orthodoxy, and therefore for the maltreatment of those who continue to embrace it despite difficulties. The suffering of the Orthodox faithful is placed in the heritage line of the early Christian missionaries.

For the more advanced level of pupils, the presentation of Christianization is more detailed and includes more primary sources. Vulpe et al. (1999/2007) identifies the first Christians as members of Trajan's invading army but places most emphasis on subsequent waves of evangelization, via Greece (which results in the establishment of a Christian center on the borders of the Black Sea in the 4th – 5th century A.D.) and via Byzantium. Interesting to note how the link between national formation and religious affiliation is nuanced: because archeological finds identified both Christian and non-Christian gravesites, it is clear that "in Dacia, like in the whole of Europe, Christianity coexisted for a long time with the old pagan faiths" (Vulpe et al., 1999: 24). This view is complemented by the theory, presented as one of the many and not as closer to truth than others, that Romanians, in contrast with other people, had a form of "popular Christianity" isolated and without the support of established church structures (idem). The idea of a "popular" form of religion means that it was not imported from outside, but was formed from within, as part of the definition of the new Romanized people that were to become the Romanians of today.

The thesis of a popular Christianity or of the organic link between the definition of the ethnic group and its religion was very popular among historians of 19th century, and even before them, among the first authors of medieval chronicles. All textbooks include references to this theory – the major difference is whether or not it is accompanied by a counterargument or counter-theory. In Vulpe et al. (1999) the source quoted is the historian and militant for the rights of Romanians in Transylvania Vasile Parvan, who writes in the 19th century that “our Romanism and Christianity are born and grew naturally: slow and thorough, in Trajan’s Dacia, and are not “immigrated” later from other lands” (25).

In Oane and Ochescu (2007), another 8th grade textbook, the quote comes from a contemporary historian, Radu Vasile, who seems to concur with his 19th century predecessor; he argues, that in contrast with Dacia’s neighbors, who adopted Christianity because of rational interests and political gains, the Romanian people could not date the time of its conversion, because this never took place: “our people [...] was born Christian, spontaneously, at the same time as its Romanization, to whose completion the popular Christianity brought its most important contribution (37).) The same authors do not add a counter view to the “popular Christianity” thesis. In a side vignette they mention again that the Christian vocabulary, based exclusively on Latin words, is the proof of the natural Christianization process of the Romanians. The Slavic influence in ecclesiastic matters, like the use of Old Church Slavonic in liturgies, is a later acquisition (Oane and Ochescu, 2007: 37). The quote above and the extra emphasis on the link between Roman heritage and Christianity give weight to the image of the Romanians as a special people, perhaps a chosen

people for whom Christianity came “spontaneously” or “naturally”. The implications are at least twofold: that those nations who can date their conversion are somehow less Christian, less worthy. The other is that Romanians, because of their pedigree simultaneously Roman and Christian, belong to the *crème de la crème* of the European civilization.

Another consequence of pairing ethnic and religious belonging so tightly is the potential for exclusionary tendencies within the group. Just as we had the concept of Pole-Catholic (Davies 1997: 146) and even of Slovene-Catholic (Velikonja, 2003: 246), it seems that this immanent Orthodoxy of the Romanians leaves out the possibility of a secular definition of the political community (secularization is a threat, and regimes who attempt it, for example the communists, are bound to fail since they cannot remove this fundamental trait without destroying the nation itself). The possibility of secular individuals may exist, even though there may be some form of social stigma attached to hardcore atheism, but the possibility of a Godless Romanian nation is denied *a priori*.

In a 4th grade history book (Grigore et al., 1998) an entire section is dedicated to the role of the Orthodox Church and of religious life during the medieval times. The book enumerates three major points: the cultural importance of monasteries, the spiritual value of the church but most importantly (presented in bold letters), the “church maintains the unity of the Romanian people, who even if split among three states, respects the same Christian traditions” (40). Certainly, the fact of the shared Orthodox faith of most Romanian speakers is not to be denied. At the same time, the simplification of the nature of the institution of the Church and the rather essentialist

definition of the unity of faith should benefit from a nuanced presentation, which include the fact that the Christian beliefs were combined with a large set of traditional peasant practices connected to natural rhythms and that, perhaps ironically, those who first articulated the national doctrine of the Romanians were not the Orthodox but the Uniates (Hitchins, 2002: 83-84). The myth of unity and the myth of origins are connected via the institution of the church.

The same theme of the church and religious life gets a different treatment in textbook from 1999 (Burlec et al.). We learn again how Christianity spread over the Romanized province of Dacia but this time with a clearer connection to the Slavic world: for example Cyril and Methodius are mentioned as important in spreading the religion and its canon, based on old Slavonic, both north and south of the Danube (56). Interesting is also the accentuation of the plurality of religions, the effort to de-essentialize the special link between ethnic and religious identities: “Christianity has been mixed with old beliefs” and “several religions coexisted during the Middle Ages in the Romanian space” (56-57). The final step in this process of placing religion in a larger perspective is the statement that the church was created by the state; princes in Wallachia and Moldova sponsored the foundation of monasteries and churches, known as cultural and educational centers. This presentation does not make much use of the mythical element; rather, there are attempts to capture in few words the complexity of the religious life in the medieval period.

The link between the institution of the state and the creation of a separate Romanian church, with a high degree of autonomy from Constantinople, the capital of Eastern Christianity, is emphasized also in Oane and Ochescu (2003). The 4th

grade pupils learn that Romanian princes founded churches and monasteries, and that the “power of the church was very large because it had control over the intellectual formation” of the people (42). This was particularly vital in Wallachia and Moldova, where Orthodoxy dominated (it does not transpire from the text what was that Orthodoxy dominated over). The image of a coherent, evenly spread religious belonging of all Romanians is clearly stressed; the church “dominates” culture and education and is tightly bound with the state.

If this myth of origins is held to be true, the equality sign between Romanian and Orthodox becomes a *sine qua non* in terms of national self-definition. The risk that the attachment to the Church may degenerate into some extreme form is higher if the definition of the origins of the nation is directly steeped into religion. The Church may get more politically involved – such was the case in the 1927, when the Patriarch of Romania, Miron Cristea, became member in the regency troika that administered the country between the death of Ferdinand I and the enthroning of Charles II in 1930. The same Patriarch returned to political power as the leader of a national unity government in 1938 (Salagean, 2006. 595, 603).

An even more dangerous situation may appear in which religion becomes the basis of exclusionary politics, and this was witnessed in Romania during the 1930s, when the Legion of the Archangel Michael (founded 1927), later known as the Iron Guard, occupied the far-right side of the political spectrum. The Iron Guard was a populist extreme movement not far away from its contemporary counterparts in Italy or Germany, combining nationalism, anti-Semitism, and a cult of the leader with some more local elements such as anti-Occidentalism, mysticism and radical

orthodoxy (Georgescu, 1992: 209). The links between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Iron guard have been close, even though one must say that the high Church officials never came out and supported one party or another. It was mostly at the level of the villages and smaller towns, where the influence of the priests was high, that the rapprochement between the orthodox priest and the extreme right activists made itself more obvious (Banica, 2007: 154 - 155). The orthodox hierarchy ended up condemning the activities of the Guard and to send away those priests who collaborated with the extreme right⁸¹. Even if they benefitted at times from the reflection of the charisma and popularity of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the Romanian Orthodox Church considered the leader of the Iron Guard, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, a dangerous politicians, and the entire movement a heretical one (Iordachi, 2004: 117).

Many of the 4th grade textbooks do not talk about the interwar period, with some exceptions, like a text from 1999, which has a chapter on the political life in the years between the two world wars which includes references to the Iron Guard (and the Communist party) under the headline undemocratic politics. Both these two extremes used “terror and force” to seek power and both had their support externally (in Germany and USSR respectively) (Burlec et al., 1999: 88). The presentation conflates the two extreme ideologies and treats them as one unit, emphasizing their roots elsewhere than in the Romanian society, which, one may surmise, did not want to have anything to do with these totalitarian parties (no data about the electoral success of these parties is presented). Moreover, the ideology of the Iron Guard is

⁸¹ This condemnation notwithstanding, Romania had the only interwar fascist movement grounded in orthodoxy (Ornea, 1995).

said to be connected with German Nazism, defined as “anti-democratic, militarist and racist” (88), without any mention of the special role of the orthodox connection in the populist discourse of the legionnaires.

Oane and Ochescu (2003) write about the life in the interwar period in a positive tone. Most of the achievements of the Romanian society and politics are enumerated or presented in colored textboxes embedded in the text, for example the constitution of 1923 (“one of the most democratic in Europe”), and the creation of Greater Romania where people’s rights and liberties were respected (79). The Iron Guard is mentioned only once, as one of the many active political parties. Even if in a parenthesis the authors do qualify the Guard and the Communist Party as “undemocratic” (80), the pupils are left to guess what was the reason why the last two parties in the long enumeration were exceptional in their behavior. Nowhere is the link between Orthodoxy and politics made overt.

It is in the 8th grade that the opportunity to clarify the undemocratic nature of some political actors in the interwar time, as the curriculum contains a special lesson on the political parties in the interwar period, about the political alternatives in the political life and society during that time and with one optional lesson about the everyday life of a Romanian person after 1918. In this context, the Legion must be acknowledged as a political actor – the textbook presentation is evenhanded and neutral. Characteristics are “nationalism and anti-Semitism” and the use of “political assassination and their sacrifice for the cause” (Oane Ochescu, 2007: 144), or ideological totalitarianism, traditionalism and the aim for a state following the fascist model (Vulpe et al., 2000: 122). Notably however, only one of the textbooks makes

the connection between the Legion and the orthodox faith. Oane and Ochescu discuss the split in the society according two division lines, Europeanism and traditionalism, with the latter tightly coupled with “orthodoxism, the byzantine cultural heritage and folklore” (152) but do not make the connection with the political current of legionarism. Vulpe et al on the other hand state clearly that the Legion of the Archangel Michael “exalted the orthodoxy and the ‘pure soul’ of the Romanian peasant as the only two authentic values of the nation” (2000: 122).

As we saw in the above examples, the myth of a popular Christianity has made its way in most of the textbooks, even if not always in an unambiguous formulation. The Romanians have a special relationship with the faith of their forefathers, and this strengthens their national identification. The church is always presented in a positive light, as a center for education, culture, power and identity, and even when it may take an ambiguous moral position, like in the period between the wars, its standpoint is never criticized, if at all mentioned.

Myth of national unity

The myth of national unity developed as a result of the popularity of nationalism towards the end of the 19th century. As the national slowly replaced the local identification of the people, intellectuals, and in particular students of history, endeavored to demonstrate the common nature of all the Romanian-speakers living in the three historical principalities of Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania. Ever since then, national unity constitutes one of the major pillars in the construction of national Romanian identity and a dominant myth (Boia, 1995).

The cultural unity based on a shared descent justifies the formation of a “national unitary state” including all Romanian speakers. This is presented as the most ardent desire of the people and a constant preoccupation of their leaders. The focus on national unity leads to an otherwise inexplicable emphasis on the unity or unification attempts of any political organizations functioning at one time or another on the territory of today’s Romania. For example, the 8th grade textbook of 1988 has specific chapters or subchapters on topics such as the *unification* of the Dacian tribes, the territorial *unification* and the formation of the Romanian Principalities, the *common* fight against the Ottomans, or the *permanence* of contacts among the Romanian lands.

The trend only amplifies after 1989. Looking at the table of contents for a textbook for the 11th grade of 1996, one can read even more details about the unity of the ancient parents of the Romanians (subchapters on the cultural unity of the North Thracian tribes, and the ethical, linguistic, spiritual and geopolitical grounds for the religious and political unification of the Dacian tribes). The same approach characterizes the medieval and modern periods, with a chapter entitled the unity of Romanians in the Middle Ages, divided in titles like the economical commonwealth of the Romanian lands, the common political action, the cultural unity in the 16th century – headings that clearly emphasize the desire to portrait the Romanians as always together, sharing the same features and ambitions, even though some historians would dispute the existence of such coordinated or harmonious relationships between Moldova, Walachia and Transylvania in those days.

The most recent textbooks register a toning down of the unity myth, but by no means its disappearance. The table of contents of a textbook for 8th grade of 1999 (Vulpe et al.) does not mention even once the word “unity” or one its synonyms before the 19th century; more so, we are now observing subchapters discussing the non-Romanian people: the colonization of the Saxons and Szeklers in Transylvania, or the Romanian political formations in relationship with their neighbors. A 4th grade textbook (2003, Ochescu and Oane) also places the word “unity” for the first time in the context of the 19th century, but does not necessarily lose the grip on the national aspects: a subchapter is entitled for example “Transylvania – conquered land, but Romanian state”.

The myth of unity is reflected at the level of the visual content, as it became apparent from the overview performed in a previous chapter. It is also an organizing principle of the content for entire textbooks, where historical themes (the village life, religious life, culture etc) are followed separately in each of the three major historical provinces. There must be both parallelism and equality in the discussion, and the principle of equal representation is strictly respected.

The heroic figures of the middle age are always three: one prince from each historical province. Stephen the Great, who ruled over Moldova in the 15th century, is portrayed as the defender of Christianity against the Turks, and his image has been reinforced in the early 1990s when he has been officially proclaimed by the Romanian Orthodox church a saint because of his work in the promotion (e.g. monastery construction) and protection (defeat the Ottomans) of the Christian faith.

No mention is made of his less than Christian lifestyle, his abuse of power against his nobles and his treatment of the poor.

The Walachian prince Michael the Great is known as the first unifier, as he succeeded to temporarily gather under his rule the largest part of the three provinces before finding his death, betrayed, in 1601. His figure, almost always painted as riding a white horse into the city of Alba Iulia, the geographical center of this Great Romania, is on the cover of many textbooks. When historical sources are used to describe him, the terms are laudatory, almost hyperbolic: “a distinguished man, famous and praised for the beauty of his body, for his high and various virtues, his love of the homeland, tolerant towards his fellows, gentle towards the low, just towards everyone, for the honesty, steadfastness and dedication that crowned his much praiseworthy character” (Balceascu quoted in Mihailescu et al., 2006: 54). The same textbooks includes a “supplementary reading” that tells the story of how young Michael, then just a local lord, was sent to his death because of political machinations, and is saved by the crowds who chant his name and ask for his pardon from the prince. Even the executioner screams “I cannot kill this man!” Michael is described as a “just ruler and judge” ... preventing the Turks from pillaging across the Danube”. He is also stopping to pray in front of an icon, and fearlessly placing his head on the trunk ready for the execution. The question at the end of the text asks the pupils to highlight Michael’s qualities that made him “loved by the people” – this early democratic support for their ruler appears to be the most important sentiment to communicate to the reader (56).

The ruler is presented with the help of a verse from a “folk ballad” that talks about his valiance and his military skills; his portrait is outlined with the help of quotations from historical sources contemporary with Michael (“if ever was there in the world a prince worthy of glory for heroic actions, this is signor Michael, the prince of Wallachia”, Grigore et al., 1998: 36), but the primary place is occupied by the painting of his entering the central city of Transylvania, considered a symbol of the union to the detriment of Moldavia, perhaps because it was a rarer feat to bring it under the control of a Wallachian lord. The same painting occupies the bottom quarter of the page and is preceded by a long paragraph describing with an abundance of detail the appearance of the prince (“wearing a white tunic and over it a white cape embroidered with several falcons. On his head he wore his well-known hat with crane feathers caught by a golden brooch; his sword, studded with rubies and gold...”) and the joyous reception reserved for him at the gates of the city. The details are important to give authenticity, just as the identification of the author of the paragraph as an “eyewitness” (37).

As expected, the 8th grade history textbooks offer a more complex picture of history, but in their major strokes they paint the same princely portrait. Of all the medieval rulers of the three provinces, Michael the Brave is by far the one occupying most space, both figuratively and literally. In Oane and Ochescu (2007), on the opposite page of a lesson enumerating and briefly describing the most important lords of Moldova, Wallachia and Transylvania there is an entire special lesson dedicated to the personality of Prince Michael. The words used are more sophisticated, and the tone of the description is less passionate, enumerating facts without attaching

qualifiers: he uses both diplomacy and war, he has international prestige, he “proclaims himself” lord over Transylvania after his victory against the local leader. Even his death is related with a certain distance: the prince is simply “killed” (73). Even the historical sources quoted do not pertain to the person of the Wallachian ruler, but describe one of his victorious battles against Sinai-Pasha, at Calugareni (also illustrated with the help of a painting).

The same moderate tone is used in another 8th grade textbook (Vulpe et al., 2001: 56), where the emphatic epithets are replaced with a matter-of-fact account of the rise to power, success on battle fields (also Calugareni, like in all other history textbooks), and precarious alliance system both with foreign powers and with the Moldovan boyars. In contrast with the previous example however, Vulpe et al. spends time in discussing Michael as an *orthodox* prince, one who favored the Transylvanian Orthodox Church and thus attracted the ire of the Magyar nobles who allied with the Saxon aristocracy against him. The picture illustrating this chapter is also related to Michael’s faith, but not in a direct iconic way like in 4th grade texts: this portrait comes from the pages of a Greek poet’s account of his life, witnessing of his popularity “in the Orthodox world, from the Balkans to Russia” (56). To underline this connection one of the historical quotes comes from another Greek poet who deplores the death of the Wallach as the death of the only champion of the faith (57). Even if the authors want to keep the voice down, some enthusiasm and praise for the figure of the prince does transpire in phrases like “Michael’s personality was too strong” or “popular songs, legends and poems glorified his name” – the same poems perhaps as those another author was encouraging the pupils to identify as homework.

The prince appears to have the popular support warranting his legitimacy as a ruler, and his betrayal comes only from the upper classes.

The most difficult case in presenting the three-folded unity of the Romanians comes from Transylvania, which has been under Hungarian control since the 11th century. The Romanian speakers constituted the lower social strata, mainly landless peasantry, and were not allowed to gain positions of power. The choice for Transylvania is the prince Matthias Corvinus, who later went on to become king of Hungary and whom the Hungarians claim exclusively as their own. Regardless of his potential Romanian descent (his father might have been Romanian), Matthias never acted on this identity and behaved as a representative of the Hungarian aristocracy.

There are several historical episodes in which the element of national unity is evident, as the ones highlighted on textbook covers: the role of Prince Michael the Brave, the first union of Wallachia and Moldova under Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and the crucial moment of World War I and its direct follow-up, the Trianon Treaty. The same word, “union” is employed to designate the above mentioned historical events, as it becomes obvious by looking at the table of contents of Mihailescu et al., 2006, establishing a symbolic chronology of the state, which gains historical permanence (since it existed at least as a desire, since ancient times).

The First Union under Michael the Brave

The first stepping stone in the unification process is taking place under the rule of Michael the Brave. The lessons begin with praising the appearance and the skills of the prince, as we saw above. When describing his deeds, it often seems the authors have access to the thoughts of the prince: “the biggest wish of Michael the

Brave was to unite all the Romanians in a single state, independent and strong” (Mihailescu et al., 2006: 55) or “with the intention to unite all Romanians and to reconstruct the anti-ottoman front” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 39).. Mihailescu continues from this omniscient point of view, and we observe Michael “crossing the mountains”, defeating the Transylvanian ruler and triumphantly entering into Alba-Iulia (the same illustration as used on the cover of Grigore et al, 1998), where he is “welcomed with joy”. Next year, in 1600, we see the ruler “crossing the Carpathians” into Moldova where he “drives away” the prince who “bowed in front of the Poles. The end of this first union is brutal: the prince is “cowardly” killed but, we are lead to believe, he lives on as his head was deposed in a monastery (and the hope for eternal life is substantiated by a picture of Michael on the walls of the Cathedral of the Union (Mihailescu et al., 2006: 55).

We have here the core narrative of the symbolical figure of Prince Michael. The same elements are almost identically reproduced in other textbooks. Petre et al. (2006) opens the chapter with a shortened version of the story of Michael and his pardon at people’s demands, and the same picture of the iconic prince displayed in the Cathedral of the Union (40). The map presented highlights the three provinces that came under Michael’s rule, like in other textbooks. The same choice of words is to meet the reader: Michael “crosses the mountains” and obtains the “submission” of Moldova but the union is short lived as the price was “cowardly murdered” in 1601 (41). There are some small differences in the text: the emphasis on the participation of Michael’s troops in the Holy League, a Europe-wide alliance, and the identification of the reasons for the assassination: “the accomplishment of the Wallachian lord was

not accepted by the neighboring states” (41). This identification of failure not in the behavior of the ruler himself, or in the adverse general circumstances, but in the treacherous neighbors reflects the presence of a perception of victimhood, to which we will come back. The omniscient perspective is directed in this case towards the thoughts of the nation, assumed to think in unison, and assumed to hold dear the unification, “a dream treasured by Romanians” (41).

Almost an identical phrase concludes the last paragraph of the lesson on the “Unification of the Romanian Lands under Michael the Brave” in a textbook from 1998, where the emphasis is placed even more on unanimous thinking: “his union becomes over centuries a dream of all Romanians” (Grigore et al, 1998: 38). The phrase denoting the title appears again in the body of the texts, in bold letters, making clear that the Michael’s merit was to unite for the first time the “Romanian lands, becoming lord over the Romanian Land[another word for Wallachia], Transylvania and Moldova”. Perhaps making clear is too ambitious a phrase: there may be some confusion as to how many Romanian lands there are – the three provinces are assumed to be already by 1600s “Romanian”. Not only the victims, the betrayed, are identified by their nationality; also their enemies are defined in ethnic terms: Austrians, Poles, Turks (interesting that the Moldovans appear both as part of the larger Romanian category and as a separate species, depending on their positive or negative role in the story). Only one textbook refers to individual actors: the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II, or the actual planner behind Michael’s murder, general Basta (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 39).

The story is told according to the same structure and again almost in the same words. The union is ephemeral because of the complots of Hungarian nobles and Moldovan boyars helped by Austrians, Poles and Turks, again enemies from without. The prince dies, “cowardly murdered” (Grigore et al, 1998: 39) again, innocent victim of the shortsighted Moldovans and of the unreliable neighbors. The “Romanian lands” betrayed by those who once were allies, must wait centuries for the realization of their “dream”, the “reconstitution of the unity of ancient Dacia” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 39). The reference to Dacia places the national ambitions of Romanians far in the past; this is a reminder of the myth of the origins and at the same time a justification for the political project of the Prince of Wallachia.

The narrative episodes figuring in the account of the life of Michael the Brave are largely the same in 8th grade history books, with a difference in the vocabulary used (much more objective, without adjectives) and in the amount of details provided. The motivation of Michael’s plan was to reform the anti-ottoman alliance that fell through because of the lack of collaboration of neighboring powers, which one of the textbooks describe as “enemies” (Vulpe et al., 2001: 56). These enemies are no longer identified as entire ethnic groups, but either as individuals (Moldovan ruler Jeremy Movila, Emperor Rudolf etc), classes (Hungarian nobles) or as states (Poland, the Ottoman Empire). An exception is the selection of historical quotes in Vulpe et al (2001), where Michael himself identifies his foes as “the Transylvanians” who betrayed their oath and “the Turk, the natural enemy” (57).

The death of the prince was the symbolic death of the union, says Vulpe et al. Oane and Ochescu on the other hand describe the project with an impassionate voice:

“the union of the three Romanian lands was a powerful source of inspiration for the historians and writers of the Romantic era, moved by national ideals” (2007, 73). If any sentimental excesses have been committed in the telling of the story, the authors wish to make clear it was not due to them. Acknowledging the passionate historical description of the past, they take a critical distance, at the same time as some of the reflexes of the Romantic school are still present: how much of a “Romanian land” was Moldova, or Transylvania, or Wallachia, at the end of the 16th century?

The difference in tone between the 4th and the 8th grade textbooks is easy to sense from the first paragraph; the younger pupils are exposed to a patriotic declamatory language, whereas the older generations learn about the life and deeds of Prince Michael in a language without ornaments (even though here also there are distinctions, Vulpe et al, using a more emotional tone than Oane and Ochescu). The reasons for action are more rational in the 8th grade books, as opposed to the mind-reading technique used for the 4th graders, and the individual actors appear more clearly outlined.

Despite these differences however, the story told is very similar, with the same examples, sometimes the same illustrations and maps, and the same general tone. Constantly emphasized are the strategic qualities of the ruler; the union has both a high national purpose (especially in for the 4th grade) and the goal to bring together a Christian coalition – how the Christian unity relates to the “proto-Romanianness” of the prince is never explained. The reasons for the failure of Michael’s enterprise are also left very unclear; even at a 8th grade level, the pupils are to write an essay about “the attitude of the great powers towards the perspective of a strong Romanian state”.

The Hungarian nobles, the Poles, the Turks, appear to the unaware reader as simply evil, or anti-Orthodox, or anti-Romanian; in any case, not as rational actors that pursue rational goals of their own. The rationale for failure is in the betrayal of those who were once allies, whom the prince trusted, as any good Christian would. Great Powers, enemy neighbors, canny aristocrats conjure to the death of the greatest leader of the “Romanian lands” in the medieval period.

The second partial union under Alexandru Ioan Cuza

As the analysis of the textbook covers and a brief overview of the tables of contents across the textbooks studied clearly point out, it takes about two hundred years for the second appearance of the idea of unity in the grand narrative of Romanian history, this time under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, known as the “lord of the Union” (Petre et al. 2007, 50). The 1800s, called the “century of unity and independence” (Grigore et al., 1998, 57) has as its central event the creation of the first Romanian state in the modern political sense in 1859 and the independence of the new state from the Ottoman Empire after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The national idea took firm roots in the imaginary of political elites, who first expressed a practical action plan at the time of the 1848 revolution, which planted the seeds of the future union even if the principal protagonists were forced into exile, from where they lobbied the Romanian cause (Georgescu, 1992: 159-160). International circumstances allowed for the Wallachian and Moldovan National Assemblies to elect with a unanimous vote the same person, a young boyar and officer in the Moldovan army, as the ruler of both principalities (Hupchick, 2002: 231).

Alexandru Ioan Cuza was not a charismatic leader, shy and uncomfortable in public and having a hard time to navigate the world of diplomacy both with his own political partners and with big powers abroad. The textbooks have a harder time to describe him in glorious terms but present him and his achievements in drier tones. A textbook from 2007 opens with an anecdote about Cuza the military man who makes sure that his soldiers receive enough bread. The emphasis is on his officer career (it appears with bold letters in the text), fact reinforced by the picture besides the text, with Cuza in full uniform with sword and medals. His qualities, “a firm character, a spirit of justice” (Petre et al., 2007: 50), are enumerated as well as the fact that he became ruler of both Danubian principalities very young at only 39. The union itself is glossed over in just a couple of lines, saying that Cuza has been elected first lord of Moldova and a couple of days later lord of Wallachia. And with this, the matter of the union is settled.

Oane and Ochescu (2007) use a more passionate tone in describing Cuza’s reign and the moment of 1859. The historical sources opening the lesson demonstrate the necessity of the union, “this concentration of forces” (Barnutiu, quoted in Oane and Ochescu 2007, 74), the “sublime expression of the eternal wish of Romanians” (Kogalniceanu, *ibidem*). After having outlined the international context which allowed for the expression of national interests all over Europe, and thus placing Romania in tact with contemporary trends, the union is discussed in two short paragraphs, emphasizing the determination of the Romanians to achieve a recognized status as legitimate state, via the policy of *fait accompli* and the popular legitimacy of the decision to unite. The last aspect is emphasized by detailing the participation of

“representatives of the peasants, boyars, city dwellers, intellectuals” to the ad-hoc assemblies voting for the Union; one of the in-class exercises asks the students to comment on the phrase “the union, the nation has done it” (the same quote appears in other textbooks, for example in Grigore et al. 1998: 60) and another homework suggest the pupils find arguments for (but not against!) the description of Cuza as a “citizen prince” (75).

Cuza is not described as a person, it is his political activity that takes primacy: his effort to achieve international recognition of the new state and to lift it up into modernity via reforms in important areas like agriculture and education. The union is perceived as not so important per se, but only meaningful as a step leading to the “conquest of independence” (75). The teleological direction and the post-factum interpretation of history come out from the undertone of this presentation: history as a path-dependent trajectory.

The path-dependency approach appears also in Grigore et al 1998, where the union is described as “an important first step in the realization of the national unitary Romanian state” (61). Wallachia’s and Moldova’s joint leadership means little in itself, and becomes interesting for the student inasmuch as it points towards bigger better achievements. It is almost as if everyone knows that eventually Greater Romania would appear on the map of the continent – the Union of Transylvanian with the Old Kingdom was however highly improbable during Cuza’s rule and the politicians of the time did not work towards this goal but tried to consolidate what they considered the achievement of a national goal.

Grigore et al also take pains in adding more concrete details about the internal politics of the new state, describing the agrarian reform and the redistribution of land of the church and big landowners to the poor peasants, the military modernization and the introduction of mandatory education at the primary level, as well as the foundation of universities (60-61). A positively valued portrait of the prince comes out of these pages, a modernizer with a good working project of comprehensive changes, a man of the people (an anecdote describes him wearing regular clothes and inspecting for himself the situation of ordinary people, fighting for justice and against corruption).

Fighting against corruption is not seen with good eyes by those who profited from underground activities, “a part of the political class and of the aristocracy” (61) who plan against the prince, who ends up in exile, betrayed by his own people. He dies abroad but his body is buried in a church in Moldova. The same tragic end as the one awaiting Michael the Brave was in the cards for Cuza, betrayal is the reward of those who want change, especially change for the ordinary people – perhaps here the class distinction so important in the communist historiography left its final imprint.

The same accusation that Cuza, because of his reforms, upset the establishment and “made unhappy the leading circles” who “conspired” against him, appears in another textbook (Burlec, 1999: 71). The ruler is a victim of the others, this time from within, who worked behind his back against his progressive changes – he is a victim of his good intentions. Nevertheless, his work lasts and is to be appreciated, especially the redistribution of land to the peasants (which upset the “big landowners” - again one can feel the class discourse here) and the union of the two provinces. The

last achievement continues to be presented as a “step towards obtaining independence from the Ottoman Empire” (71), as opposed to the other reforms, which modernized the state and are of intrinsic value.

In general, the union of Wallachia and Moldova is presented as the result of the ability of the political class to be inventive and use the diplomatic and international legal rules to achieve their goals. The Union is not the work of one man but the common realization of the national elite, which had the popular support warranting the legitimacy of the move in the eyes of the great powers. Precisely these great powers remain an important actor in the story, and all the textbooks highlight their role, since their position is determinant of strategy chosen by the elite at home, and of the success of this strategy. The principalities are depicted as being in a dependent position in relation to their big neighbors whom they cannot trust and must wrestle with via all means. The external factors weigh heavily in the domestic decision-making process directly and indirectly, as they set the standard of modernization the new state, for the first time called Romania, aspires to obtain. The Union of 1859 shows the power of the enlightened and patriotic elite to attain the desired goals at the same time as it portrays Romania as caught in a web of dependencies, pointing to another instance of the myth of victimhood. The political process behind the union gets a quick description, without an insistence of the fine negotiation going on behind the closed doors, the obstacles moved out of the way, the costs involved in doing so and the benefits of the union for those who worked so hard for it. Instead, we get a teleological narrative, with 1859 being a “step” on the imaginary ladder that climbs up to the crowning accomplishment, the real union.

The real union. Greater Romania

National unity was possible only at the end of WWI, just like in the case of the first Yugoslavia. This moment is presented in the textbooks as an epochal achievement, the “Great Union” of 1918, “an ancient dream of all Romanians which became reality in 1918”, “the fulfillment of the Romanian national state”, “the natural result of the centuries- long struggle lead by the Romanian people” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 77), symbolically taking place in the same city of Alba Iulia where the first attempt at unity was curtailed in 1601.

The “Great Union” of 1918 has been “prepared by Michael the Brave in 1600, by the ‘Little Union’ of 1859, and by the heroic battle 1916-1918” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 75). Many textbooks refer to the “re-unification”, even if technically speaking this was the first instance when the Romanian nation overlapped territorially with a single political space. The idea of reunification connects to, like in the quote above, the other short lived integration projects. It may also be a reference to ancient history and the Dacia before the Roman conquest, a space of freedom and self-rule. In comparison with these other historical attempts, the “great union” shines alone, unique in its scope and size. This apogee is presented in the most imposing of displays: the map of Greater Romania contains the verses of a patriotic poem full of pathos; a small scroll at the top of the page proclaims “Long Live Greater Romania” and three textboxes in the national colors contain quotations from the declarations of adhesion to Romania of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania. On the next two pages (the lesson just about the Union spreads over three full pages, the longest lesson dedicated to a single event), we also see a picture of the Cathedral of the

Reunion in Alba Iulia, a portrait of Ferdinand I, the first king over the enlarged Romania, and several instances of popular joy at the news of the unification.

Not all textbooks are using the same arsenal of emotions in their teaching about the moment 1918, but all of them make use of the motif of the tricolor flag, the picture of king Ferdinand I and the map of the new state. They also identify concrete lieux de mémoire: the Cathedral of Reunification, the Union Hall where the document enabling Transylvania to become part of the new state was signed and the city gate of Alba Iulia - the same city where circa four hundred years before Michael the Brave proclaimed himself lord over Transylvania; the Cernauti palace where Bukovina's leaders decided that this province, previously a part of the Austrian part of the Double Monarchy, should join the Old Kingdom; the building housing the Council of the Land of Bessarabia; and the large field outside Alba Iulia, where the people gathered in December 1918 to celebrate the Great Romania by waving flags in red, yellow and blue.

Another common element is the repeated quotation of the opening paragraphs of the official documents legally binding the new provinces to the Old Kingdom. Their language is loaded with the awareness of the importance of the moment: “Bessarabia [...] torn by Russia more than hundred years ago from the body of the ancient Moldova, [...] from now on and forever joins its mother, Romania” or “the General Congress of Bukovina [...] decides: the unconditional and eternal union of Bukovina within its old borders with the kingdom of Romania” and finally “the Romanians of Transylvania, Banat and the Hungarian Lands, gathered via their rightful representatives in Alba Iulia decree the union of these Romanians and of all

the lands they inhabit with Romania” (same quotes appear in Mihailescu 2007, 84; Ochescu and Oane 2003: 75; Grigore et al, 1998: 70, 72; Burlec et al., 1999: 82, 84). Even 8th grade books dedicate space for the discussion of these texts: the Union Resolution, as the document confirming the union of Transylvania with Romania is known, is detailed at large in a special “case study” in Vulpe et al. (2000: 106) and takes more than a third of the lesson about the “formation of the unitary national state” in Oane and Ochescu (2007: 121).

Images and historical quotes are used by the textbook authors to underline the major support the idea of a union among *all ethnic Romanians* enjoyed among regular folk. Besides images of crowds waving the national flag, or official texts declaring the source of their legitimacy in a popular mandate, the act of the union is seen as “the result of the popular will” that “paved the way for large democratic reforms” (Burlec et al., 1999. 83). In a textbox describing the popular assembly in Transylvania, we can almost see the 100 000 people gathered on the field, singing patriotic songs (one of which will become the national anthem of today’s Romania), applauding the reading of the resolution, “approved with joy by everybody present”, according to the eyewitness accounts upon which the description is based (Grigore et al., 1998: 72).

All lessons emphasize the basis upon which the new state was formed, the principle of self-determination and again in this context underscore the common will of the Romanians or the people (at times the two are conflated to mean the same thing). In an 8th grade textbook the meaning of the union is summarized at the beginning of the lesson in these words: “For the Romanians, this meant the

fulfillment of their hopes to unite in a single state all the territories inhabited in majority by them. Great Romania is born out of the joint effort of the Romanian population from the provinces till then under foreign rule and of the diplomatic interventions of the Kingdom of Romania by the Peace Congress in Paris” (Oane and Ochescu 2007: 120). An effort is being made to distinguish the Romanians from the other ethnic groups living in those provinces now united under the Romanian crown, and to point out the collaboration across borders of all those who felt they belonged under the same rule. Even if the purpose of the paragraph is to include an element of diversity and to highlight that not “everybody” perhaps wanted this Great Romania, one can turn the statement above on its head and say that indeed, not everyone was in agreement, but all the Romanians were – there was unity inside the group and the only opposition may have come from non-Romanians (even though this was not necessarily the case)⁸².

In the eyes of most authors, the idea of unity and the idea of unanimity seem to become one and the same. All Romanians were united in their wish, all Romanians were ready to fight for their brothers and sisters, all politicians supported the participation in the war, all efforts were spent to achieve the universal dream of unity – the accent is firmly placed on one nation speaking with one voice. The implications of dissent may be interpreted as anti-patriotic: to oppose what the majority of the people, your co-nationals, want is to betray a noble cause. The value of consensus, of agreeing with the majority is underlying the presentation of the events of 1918; at the same time as the democratic spirit of the assemblies in Bessarabia, Bukovina and

⁸² For a complete overview of the Hungarian – Romanian relations during the interwar period see Nastasa and Salat (eds.) (2003).

Transylvania appears to occupy the center stage, the implicit positive appraisal of unanimity and the quieting of discordant voices sends opposite signals about the welcoming of debates and a spirit of pluralism.

In the hierarchy of importance assigned to the newly acquired territories, Transylvania holds the absolute primacy. This is partly the consequence of political choices made at the time (the symbolic place of the union is Alba Iulia, city at the center of Transylvania, hosting the Cathedral of Reunion), partly the result of subsequent interpretations. The lieux de mémoire considered significant for the textbook authors are located on Transylvanian soil, the Union Resolution is discussed in detail, as a special case study, the images of cheering crowds come from the popular gathering outside Alba Iulia. Transylvania has always occupied a very important role in the social imaginary of both Romanians and Hungarians, and the competition over the right to govern over this symbolic land has been fierce.

According to the mythology prevalent in both cases, Transylvania is perceived as the birthplace of each of the two ethnic groups; Hungarians claim for example that “Transylvania has safeguarded the historic continuity of Hungarian culture and of the Hungarian state” while Romanians even if do not always place the ethnogenesis of their nation precisely in the Transylvanian basin consider that “despite numerous invasions and conquerors-- Avars, Scyths, Huns, Turks and others--Romanian identity was well protected by the Transylvanian mountains” (Van de Vyver, 1996: 387, 389). Myths of territory, like Transylvania or Kosovo, are common in grand narratives of nations as places of sacred origins, where the virtues and purity of the national soul are safeguarded, and are important for two reasons: they inculcate the

duty to defend the territory against (se)cessions, and/or provide an argument for historical rights over a given land. Secessions are perceived as body parts being torn away from the organic unit of the nation-state; historical rights are granted by the priority of occupation over symbolic ground. Both Kosovo and Transylvania are, perhaps just as much as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, places of symbolic but also political contestation between two ethnic communities, separated by language, religion and divergent narratives of the past used as argument for historical rights (Ramet, 2002: 174).

It is unsurprising that the national unity and especially the right over Transylvania at the expense of Hungary became such a popular political theme in post-communist politics. The importance of this region for both Hungarian and Romanian national identity has been studied at large, but it can be briefly summarized in the points made by Kürti: the use of Transylvanian history to advance current political goals, the nationalist homogenization policy under Ceausescu regime which rose the defensive reaction of Hungarian nationalists, the rise of populism and the waning of the role of the peasant as repository of the Magyar soul, and, after communism, the foment of Hungarian – Romanian tensions despite (or maybe because) of the opening for freedom of expression and democratic politics (2001: ix). Mobilizing the fear of dismembering the organic unity of the state won many points for the nationalist parties, as it appealed to values (unity, territorial integrity) to which Romanians have been exposed throughout their lives, ever since childhood. To this suspicion one might add the ambiguous attitude of the Hungarian state, who tried to represent Hungarians abroad through a “discourse on nationhood and the unitary

Hungarian nation” and such policies as the status law, thus placing Romania’s Hungarians in a “dilemma of belonging” (Culic, 2006: 191).

The one exception to the rule of emphasizing the Great Union at the expense of all other historical events is present in the Petre et al (2006), which is organized according to a different plan, as reflected in the new curriculum introduced by the Minister of Education in April 2005. The new organizing principles for the study of history at the primary school level are personalities and places. History is no longer presented chronologically, as a narrative with a beginning and an end. The timeline format is preserved, but critical events are no longer highlighted; instead key personalities are introduced via a short biography that places them into a larger context and describes their achievements. In accordance to international guidelines, for the first time both genders are represented even if timidly (out of the sixteen persons covered, only two are women and both are from the 20th century); women are portrayed for the first time as self-standing actors in history.

The events of World War I and the creation of Greater Romania are introduced via a discussion of the personality of Queen Mary, whose involvement in the Red Cross and support for the national cause of a “small country, a new country, but a country that I love” (Queen Mary, quoted in Petre et al., 2006: 52) are brought to the fore. The contrast with the previous descriptions of the events around the unification of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania with old Romania is striking. Instead of the primacy awarded to the nation, to the king, to the national assemblies, we have now a woman, a foreigner (“the niece of queen Victoria of Great Britain and of the Tzar Alexander II”, *ibidem*), standing for the biggest event in Romanian

history, according to the traditional canon. Instead of armies, uniforms, and flags, the left side of the page covering the subject presents the sepia picture of a woman in a vaporous long white dress, seated on an imposing throne and bearing a diadem, gazing somewhere into the unseen. And instead of the long descriptions of the event, instead of quotations of documents, and of lyrical exhortations of the nation, the moment of the union is placed as a small text in a chronology, reading “1918 – Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania unite with Romania” (52). The main body of the lesson does not focus more on the Great Union, but mentions sparsely that the coronation ceremony taking place in Alba Iulia in October 1922 “represents the final moment of the union of all Romanians” (52). The emphasis shifts from 1918 to 1922, and from the popular expression of the collective will to the link between the people and its monarch. More than anything, the change in tone is remarkable, from the declamatory voice of the other textbooks to a low-key presentation, in simple words. There is no lack of emotions, but they are mild and directed at the person of the queen rather at the act of the union; the only slightly more impassionate verbal account occurs in a small side box describing the First World War as “the opportunity to liberate the Romanian provinces from foreign occupation [...], the war of reunification”. The standard phrase is used here but its position is marginal, and it stands out rather than fit in with the rest of the text; perhaps it has been included here as a sign of recognition or maybe as an authorial reflex after years of following the canon of history writing.

Myths of victimhood

In times of struggle, the Romanians prefer to emphasize, unlike the Serbs for example, not their military might but their peacefulness; a common image of the self is the pacifist Romanian, who would rather avoid war at all costs. This is a popular image and one that has been used politically to justify an otherwise hesitating foreign policy (a partial neutrality during 1914-1916, the shifting of alliances in August 1944). Even scholars support this perception of conflict avoidance at all costs and place it into a historical tradition. Most peoples of Europe, including the Serbs, were both subjugated and subjugator in the long run of history; very few have avoided the dominance of others while they spread their power further and further from their center: for example the Normand and the Turk. But among all the Europeans, only two have been never been neither the vanquished nor the vanquisher of other folk: the Finns and the Romanians: “in this carrousel that ends up transforming a conquering people into a conquered people, one finds very few European people that did not want to take over any other and who never accepted to be submitted to the yoke of another” (Lazaresco, 1996: 84).

Did Romanians avoid foreign domination in their millennium long history? Depending on the definition of “submitting to the yoke of other”, it can very well be argued that the (proto) Romanians depended in fact in on external powers in terms of their security, economy and trade; Wallachian and Moldovan princes had to pay tribute to the Porte and at times their nomination to the throne had to come from and be accepted by the Sultan; Transylvanian Romanians were completely under the political and social authority of other ethnic groups and were not even recognized as a natio, and thus outside the realm of political representation.

These historical events (the tribute, the exclusion etc) are not hidden away but form a large part of the narrative of the collective past, but they are and have been interpreted in two major ways: either as a sign of the intrinsic qualities of the people (their reluctance to shed blood, reflection of their deep Christianity) or as an expression of the external pressure that prevented an otherwise talented people to develop as fast and as good as the rest of the continent. It is the latter interpretation that will be in focus in the pages to come.

The idea of victimhood is related to fatalism, a passive attitude reflected in the traditional myth of the Mioritza, in which a young shepherd does nothing to avert his own death at the hands of envious others, even though he knows about their murderous plans, and in popular saying like “what is written for you is stuck on your forehead” – usually interpreted to mean that one cannot avoid the fate written by providence or some other impersonal forces. Man is not the motor and master of his or her life; there are unseen actors whose force is far more powerful and who decide instead of the individual or the small group. From this mindset derives also the understanding of history as a series of events outside the control of the small men, or the small countries, left more or less at the mercy of the Great Powers (states, empires, History) who make the world go round. Fatalism and a sense of powerlessness lead to the formulation of such titles as “From the Habsburg to the Ottoman Domination”, the suggested theme that pupils of the 8th grade should discuss in a take-home essay (Oane and Ochescu, 2003: 77). Words like domination, subjugation, yoke, and subordination are common in the vocabulary of textbook authors in all the cases studied.

Instances of betrayal, of mistrust, of backstabbing, of hidden complots abound in Romanian history writing. We have already seen several of these occurrences in the description of events such as the death of Michael the Brave at the beginning of the 17th or the forced exile of Alexandru Ioan Cuza at the end of the 19th centuries. Another instance is the situation of the Romanian population in Transylvania, described as unfair and determined by others: “Romanians have no rights. They are considered “tolerated” (meaning barely accepted) in their own country, even if they form the majority” (Grigore et al., 1998: 47). In this section we will look at other instances of a perception of a wounded soul Romanians carry in their social imaginary, more often than not connected to some form of conflagration or battle opposing the nation to some invading forces.

The Romanian participation in WWI – known as the “war of national reunification” and later in WWII, is always motivated by the ideal of national unity. The Romanians are supposed to be peace-loving and just, like their ancestors, and they would not get involved in a war unless the highest of goals is to be met. In the name of unity, the Romanian army “even though insufficiently prepared entered in August 1916 in the midst of the war. It attacked the enemy troops in Transylvania to liberate the Romanian brothers from across the mountains” (Grigore et al. 1998: 68).

The narrative is a glorious one, even if the sacrifices and difficulties are mentioned in passing. Little details are given however of the less than victorious beginning of the war. Romania quitted its neutrality in 1916; in December of that year, according to Hupchick, “the Romanians were crushed by the united Central Power forces [...] and their army and government driven northeastward into

Moldavia, where they tenuously retained a foothold around Iasi [the main city in Moldova region] thanks to timely Russian military intervention. Bucharest was occupied by the Central Powers, and the bulk of Romania's oil- and grain-producing regions was captured. The failed attempt to win Transylvania by force cost the Romanians 350 000 casualties and the loss of over half of their state" (Hupchick, 2002: 326).

Some textbooks do not mention at all the losses on the home front (Petre et al., 2006), and in most others there is only the briefest of hints to the situation in which the troops found themselves in the winter of 1916. In others the losses are only superficially mentioned, counterbalanced by gains: "In the beginning the Romanian army is victorious across the Carpathians. Then it is defeated. A part of the country, Wallachia and Dobrudja, is occupied by German troops." And after some details about the activities on different battle fields, the story of WWI closes with "The end of the war finds Romania among the winners" (Grigore, 1998: 68-69).

Losses on the battle field are explained not because of some internal failure of the Romanian army command but because of the lack of international support; the Romanians are again falling victims to the Great Powers: "But the allies did not respect their promises to help the Romanians, and the Romanian army, caught in crossfire, had to retreat step by step. Heroic battles took place [...] but the disaster could not be avoided" (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 76). The theme of betrayal is a red thread in the Romanian historical narrative, and the Second World War is nothing but one of the more recent cases. The Romanian government must give in to Soviet ultimatum of June 28, 1940 because it "lacked any kind of external support" (Vulpe

et al., 2000: 127). The country was “left without allies” and had to endure the “abuse of the Russian troops” who took more land than they claimed in the threatening document forcing Romanians’ hand (Oane and Ochescu, 2007: 147). The Romanian representatives are also “forced to sign the transfer of Northwestern Transylvania to Hungary” (Vulpe et al, 2000. 127) under the eyes of the very states who promised to be on their side, Germany and Italy. One textbook dedicates half a page to memoirs of the Foreign Affairs minister who signed the giving up of a piece of Transylvania – the reading transmits the feeling of powerlessness, of disappointment, of deep trauma. Words used convey a state of mind of profound disarray: “On the table before me laid the folded map, like a death sentence. [...] My return to Romania was excruciating and sinister. The arbitrage solution is monstrous and non viable” (Manoilescu quoted in Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 87). The poignant sensation of injustice is present at the end of the war, when Romania’s participation from 1944 onwards on the Allies side is “dismissed by the great antifascist powers” (Grigore et al, 1998: 80). No alliance, neither with the Axis, nor with the Allied Powers, could be trusted; Romania was tossed around like a dice between the big players, at the mercy of which it was left.

WWII brought about territorial losses for the newly independent Romanian state. Hungary took the northwestern corner of Transylvania, the Soviet Union occupied two provinces, Bessarabia and Bukovina, whereas Bulgaria gained the southern part of Dobrudja, known as the Quadrangle. The year 1940, when the country suffers loss of control over these territories, has a special lesson, or “case study” in the 8th grade textbooks. Significantly, the loss of the eastern territories happens via a secret treaty signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in

1939, treaty whose nature was left unknown for the Romanians, feeding afterwards into the suspicion of conspiracies: Hitler and Stalin “secretly agree to occupy each the countries they want” (Grigore et al., 1998: 79). The very fact that the year 1940 enjoys such a primary position, assigned the role of turning point in the modern history, is significant for the focus on defeat and for creating the feeling of victimhood. This is the end of the Golden Era of a big powerful national state: “at the end of the year 1940, Greater Romania ceased to exist” (Vulpe et al., 2000: 127). And another case study of 1940 calls it a “tragic year” and asks the students to explain “why did Greater Romania last only 22 years?” (Oane and Ochescu, 2007: 147). At the end of these two decades, Romania was again “mutilated” (the word appears in several textbooks, Oane and Ochescu, 2007; Grigore et al., 1998) and its borders were “torn apart” (Burlec et al. 1999: 90). This leaves the reader with the vision of a body without some its limbs, a bleeding, suffering, living organism; this image of the symbiosis between the land and the nation makes any negative changes in the border configuration a calamity of infinite proportions.

Another common theme in the repertoire of victimhood is the presence of treacherous neighbors. The feeling of being an island surrounded by potential enemies is reinforced in the retelling of such historical episodes as the redrawing of the map in 1940. Romanians are again described as peace-loving, wishing to avoid confrontation and therefore proclaiming neutrality at the beginning of WWII. Their involvement in the armed conflagration was motivated by others, by these neighbors who wanted a piece of the Greater Romania: “Horthy’s Hungary and Bulgaria made territorial claims over Romania” (Oane and Ochescu, 2007: 147), which created the

right context for yet another aggressive act by the most powerful of the states in the vicinity, USSR. Later on in the war, when the Romanian troops are on the advance and recuperate the territories lost in 1940, the military tactics of Hungary, perhaps the least trustworthy among neighbors, lack respect for the local population; instead of obeying international conventions, the Hungarian troops “commit crimes against the Romanian inhabitants [in Transylvania)” during their retreat (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 86).

Disaster and heroism alternatively take the scene: when they are not betrayed by others, the Romanian soldiers distinguish themselves on the battle field, and thus are worthy of admiration. One textbook discusses the heroism of Romanian soldiers under a headline marked “Pay Attention!” where it says: “The sacrifice of the soldiers on the front contributed to the fulfillment of the Romanians’ centuries-long dream [*n.a.* same phrase as above, but in another textbook]: the Great Union”. The same textbook urged the pupils “to take care of historical monuments in your locality dedicated to the heroes of world war I. Honor them on Heroes’ Day or whenever you have the opportunity, by depositing a bouquet of flowers” (Grigore et al., 1998: 69).

Romania’s entry into the Second World War is justified again on the basis of the necessity to reunite the state: “In June 1941 Romania enters the war on the side of Germany, against the Soviet Union. Romanians’ wish was to liberate Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina” (Burlec et al.), or the “hope to remake the national unity” (Vulpe et al., 2000: 127). When Romanian troops continued into the Soviet territory, despite initial promises from the military leadership that Romania is not interested in an attack on foreign grounds but only in the retrieval of lost lands, the responsibility lies

again outside Romanians' power, namely in the hands of Hitler: "Romanians' wish was not to move forward into foreign territory. Hitler demanded to Antonescu [Romanian general] to continue fighting until the complete defeat of the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances the Romanian army continued the war" (Burlec et al., 1999: 91).

When the Romanians switched sides and joined the Soviet troops in their westwards advancement, the textbooks say that "Romanians fought also for the liberation of Hungary and Czechoslovakia" (Grigore et al. 1998: 80). In this case, no invasion but liberation is the type of action that Romania is forced to take because of the circumstances. The same theme is taken up by all textbooks, in one form or another. "Romanian troops had an important contribution to the defeat of German resistance in the cities of Budapest and Banska Bystrica" (Vulpe et al., 2000: 128), and continued to fight in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Austria, playing a significant role and paying a significant price – only on the Western front, 170 000 soldiers' lives were claimed, and 1.2 billion US dollars spent (Oane and Ochescu 2007: 150). Some other textbooks (like Burlec et al. 1999 or Peter et al. 2006) do not mention the placement of Romanian troops on the side of the Red Army in its westward advancement, with the lesson focusing exclusively on events taking place on the territory of the country.

The switching of sides on August 23, 1944 is another case study for the 8th grade pupils. The importance of the act is placed in the general context of the war: "by leaving its alliance with Germany, Romania contributed to shortening the duration of the war with several months (Vulpe et al., 2000: 129). The same lesson

uses the memoirs of a high ranking Romanian military to explain the role played by the country in the war in general: “Our effort was among the largest, because for eight months we carried the war by our own means, not having received any help from the Allies. [...] our factories have worked more for the Russians than for ourselves” (Sanatascu quoted in Vulpe et al., 1999: 129). Final injustice then that after all this sacrifice, this effort for the benefit of others more than for one self, at the end of the war Romania is considered a losing party and is forced to make war payments to USSR whose army is stationed on Romanian soil, “a high price to pay” (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 86).

Besides deleting any sense of responsibility, such an account of historical events as the two world wars places the Romanians in a position of passivity, at the mercy of generic others or in the hands of History. The Romanian fatalism, perceived by some also in some folk tales like the Mioritza (Tanasoiu 2005), shows its face even in the writing of textbook authors. Romania at the mercy of others and especially at the mercy of the Great Powers leaves little room for initiative. A map in a 4th grade textbook graphically portrays the main body of Romania caught between the powers of Nazism and Communism, represented by a arrowed cross and by a hammer and sickle respectively, like in a vice (Ochescu and Oane, 2003: 87). Moreover, the presentation given to these large traumatic events like WWI and especially WWII leads to an evolutionary, linear vision of history, in which some Golden Age (Smith, 1999) is explicitly located in the interwar period, qualified as “Romania at the apex of its history” (8th grade, 1996). This kind of formula is not to be found after the education reform of 1998. The period between the wars is entitled

in a 8th grade textbook (Vulpe et al., 2000) “Romania between democracy and authoritarianism” and in a 10th grade manual only as the “interwar period” (Selevet et al., 2005). The more practiced is the democracy in today’s Romania, the less idealized is the version of political competition of the interwar time, which was like elsewhere in Europe marred by instability and radicalism⁸³.

There are also textbooks that either because of their thematic organization (by places and people, Petre et al. 2006), or by chronological choice (Mihailescu et al., 2006), do not refer at all to the Second World War. This makes a time hiatus when one discusses, even in the pages of these newer texts, the communist time or the European Union. From a didactic point of view one can wonder how well the appearance and the expansion both in powers and size of the European Union can be explained in the absence of a lesson providing the young pupils with a basic understanding of WWII and its place in the European imaginary as the trauma of the 20th century. Or how can one describe the Cold War, the power and control the Soviet Union exerted over Romania and other countries in the Eastern part of the continent without discussing the system of alliances formed during and immediately after the Second World War. If the idea of skipping over an event with problematic consequences for a nation was to avoid confrontation and conflict, there is a good risk it may backfire. The more complex the event, the more long lasting its consequences, the more necessary a direct engagement with it in order to make it known and understandable for a generation that otherwise risks to get its information from

⁸³ The interpretation of the interwar period and especially the role awarded to the military and political leader of the mid- and late 1930s, Marshall Ion Antonescu, is very controversial and has given rise to a debate which overflowed from academic circles into the media. For a more detailed study on Antonescu, see Deletant (2006).

incomplete or partial sources and never critically discuss it in the public space, thus possibly perpetuating misconceptions and prejudices.

Serbia

Content-wise, the Serbian history textbooks for the 8th grade used in 2001 had 88.6% of their content dedicated to political history, the rest being split between social, economic and cultural strands (Djurovic, 2005: 320). The general impression left by textbooks prior to 2000 has been that “history and literature textbooks offer the dominant narrative of national identity (as being a heroic nation constantly surrounded by enemies, endangered by others’ assimilatory or hostile aspirations, suffering enormous losses, but enduring them with dignity...) without any alternative opinions” (Kovac-Cerovic, 2000: 3). History has been also very national-focused, representing 70% of the content of history education by 2001, according to Stojanovic (2002: 502) – but the trend is towards inclusion of others, diversification, including elements of social and cultural history, and a de-ideologized presentation of the past, as one teacher interviewed in an UNESCO project responded in 2006: “teaching history is based on the newest results of historiography, which is especially important if we bear in mind ideological influences present in creating curriculum during the period after The Second World War until 2000” (quoted in Gasanabo, 2006: 32).

Myths of election: Kosovo and Serbian greatness

The research of other local sociologists also points out that, in Serbian history textbooks, national history is the main focus to the detriment of all that is non-

Serbian, and that the story told in the manuals is a story of tragedy and victimhood, focused on moments of conflict (Rosandic, 2000: 32). Serbian history is presented as a series of wars and bloodbaths, a violent and cruel history, where disagreements are solved by the power of weapons and where the weak ones are those who make concessions (Rosandic, 2000: 18-20).

In a comparative analysis of Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian history textbooks in use in Bosnia Herzegovina in the late 1990s, it is shown that Serbian textbooks dedicate most pages to the national history of their own group, to the detriment of the inclusion of other ethnicities: 44% of the pages of Serbian textbooks at both primary and secondary levels were devoted to Serbian history exclusively (in comparison with Croatian textbooks with 57% national history dominance and Bosnian textbooks with 38%). Moreover, Serbia saw itself the direct continuator or representative of former Yugoslavia: “Contrary to the Croatian and Bosnian textbooks, which identify separate Croatian and Bosnian histories within Yugoslavia, the Serbian textbooks do not exclude or separate Serbian history from Yugoslav history. They cover Serbian history as an integral part of Yugoslav history” (Baranovic, 2001: 19).

This idea also appears in recent editions, where an increased filtering out of the other south Slavs takes place together with a focus on Serbia as the main actor in Balkan politics. Historical events are presented and even explained only from a Serbian standpoint. This comes in sharp contrast with previous textbooks, in which the creation of Yugoslavia was portrayed as the common wish and effort of all the south Slavs. For example, in a textbook for 8th grade it is stated that South Slav unity idea did not enjoy support among the Serbs at the beginning of the 20th century,

because the Serbs were far better off by themselves, having “created conditions for an independent political and cultural development” (Gacesa, 1993).

Even less of a common effort seems to be behind the creation of Yugoslavia at the end of WWI in an 8th grade textbook from 1994, which refers to this historical event as “annexation of southern Slav regions of Austria-Hungary by the Serbian state” resulting in the ideal of the “unification of all Serbs”. The “brotherhood and unity” ideal is now reinterpreted as the creation of the Greater Serbia ideal. Textbook authors do not even seem to pretend to be objective, they can express opinions and personal points of view directly in the text, saying that the Greater Serbia idea, “a state of the Serbian people in which they would live together with the Croats and Slovenes”, is to be preferred to other solutions of cooperation in the Balkans.

The Serbs exceptional ability in combat is often the focus of attention. A selection covering various historical periods leaves little doubt about the military prowess of the officers and the valiance of the soldiers of the Serbian army. In their second uprising against the Ottomans of 1815, the Serbs led by Milos Obrenovic “overthrew the Turkish government thanks to their heroic fight” (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 107). During the 1848 revolution Serbs “offered an energetic resistance”, and showed “courage and patriotism”, taking a leading role among the other “subjugated” nations of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 152). The army is the repository of the “heroic traditions” of the Serbs.

As in the Romanian case, the victories of the national armies are achieved in the name of the liberation of the national territory, as exemplified by the “famous” battle of Kolubara (1914) where the Serbs accomplished nothing short of “one of the

best maneuvers in the history of warfare” (Kovacevic, 2002: 87), defeating the invading Austro-Hungarian troops.

All 6th grade history textbooks dedicate pages to the battle of Kosovo Polje of June 28th, 1389. Some also discuss the process of passing into legend of Prince Lazar and his companions on the field during that fatidic day. However, not very much is said about Lazar himself. One textbook completely leaves aside the historical personality of the Serbian prince⁸⁴, whereas an earlier school text covers his life in two paragraphs, from which we learn that he came to power late, that he built a “strong, consolidated and organized” state at the confluence of the three Morava rivers and, as with most medieval rulers, that he enjoyed the “sympathy and support of the Serbian church”. It was because of his constant concern with, and support for, Orthodoxy that he actually gained his throne. It was the church that promoted him as a leader who could create a joint resistance against the advance of Sultan’s troops into the Balkans (Mihaljcic, 1992: 143).

The account of the battle is factual and reserved, with genuine concern for facts. The story of the textbook and that told by professional historians do not display large discrepancies and some of the more problematic issues are included although they may challenge a purely national interpretation of the event. The pupils learn that it was not a purely Christian versus Muslim struggle but that the Sultan counted on the support of Christian soldiers as well, and that the Serbs were not such a united army as one would expect – on the contrary, Lazar failed to bring all Serbian lords

⁸⁴ Nevertheless the authors include a reproduction of the King’s portrait from the walls of a cloister, with the caption Saint Prince Lazar (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 131). Another textbook illustrates the lesson about Lazar Hrebeljanovic with a photograph of the most famous of the monasteries he founded, Ravanica (Mihaljcic, 2000: 131) but not with an image of the Knez himself.

under his flag and could summon the support only of Vuk Brankovic, from Kosovo, and of Tvrtko I, from Bosnia. The textbook also admits the lack of authoritative sources describing the course of events and the final outcome of the battle, with the exception of the loss of life for the leaders of both camps (Mihaljcic, 1992: 44).

The authors allow themselves to be somewhat more enthusiastic in their interpretation of the significance of the battle in the long perspective. The impact of that day was considered to exert a “powerful influence” and at first the Christian powers of Europe rejoiced at what they saw as a victory against the Turks that sent “waves of enthusiasm” all over the royal chanceries in the West. This is supported with a long quote from the letter sent by the Florentine court to King Tvrtko I of Bosnia just some months after the confrontation, where the battle is qualified as a “glorious victory” and a “salvation” for all Christians that Sultan Murat lost his life (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 131), news of which caused “an earthquake” in Turkey. The Florentine letter can be considered among the first sources behind the cult of Milos Obilic, later to become the classic model of the hero and who is praised, together with his noble companions, for “having heroically broken through to Murat’s tent”; “above all happy is the one who stabbed the leader with such force” (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 132). In the long run however, the Serbs were too limited in numbers to stand against the Ottomans alone and so the battle of Kosovo could not prevent the heirs of Prince Lazar from succumbing to Porte’s demands and becoming vassals of Istanbul (Mihaljcic, 1992: 45).

With unusual objectivity and in dispassionate words the same authors inform about the Kosovo legend, not to be confused with the actual events. It is explained

that the lack of concrete information about the events of the day allowed for the transformation of June 28, 1389 into a story where historical facts and people became entangled over time with “imaginary, not historical persons” and “imaginative details”. This process of myth-making is analyzed and exemplified with a 15th century text, in which the anonymous translator departed from the original text and instead included “what he himself knew about Prince Lazar, Milos, Murat and the course of the battle, based on stories and poems” (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 133). The fictional account of the battle, spread over three pages, takes more room than the historical version, and is illustrated with a colored drawing of the two confronting armies, as well as one of Murat’s tent and a photo of the armor of a typical Serbian combatant from the 14th – 15th centuries.

In order to illustrate the mixture of fiction and documentary in the Kosovo tale, the pupils may read about the epic poem of the “Ten Jugovic and old Jug Bogdan”, in which two historical characters, Milos Obilic and Vuk Brankovic, are cast as the archetypal Hero and Traitor. The bravery of Obilic is accepted as historically accurate, whereas the treason of Brankovic is immediately qualified as fictitious; and both are said to have played a role on the imaginary of the Christians under Ottoman rule: “On the eve of later struggles for freedom, treason warned the hesitating and the disheartened, whereas the bravery stimulated even more the brave” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 146).

Besides having a direct reference to the 1389 moment, the Kosovo myth sends its shadow over other parts of the historical narrative told in the textbooks analyzed

here, whenever Kosovo is the theater of operation. The land of Kosovo is presented as holy and the importance of the Pec patriarchate is repeatedly emphasized.

Especially sensitive are situations when this holy land is threatened. To illustrate the veneration when entering the cradle of the civilization of the Serbs, a textbook from 1994 includes a quote from a Serbian writer and diplomat who served as consul in Kosovo in the early 1900s. The emotion with which he enters Pec, the former headquarters of Serbian orthodoxy, is heartrending. As he passes from the hostile Turkish and Albanian quarters into the Serbian neighborhood, he is met by flowers and cries of welcome, such a passionate reception that the consul “cried a good deal” himself (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 20). The intensity of the moment recalls the emotional letter sent by a Serb commander describing his entrance to Kosovo for the first time during the Balkan wars. He saluted the land, hailed the ancestors and started to cry, “tears flow in streams down his cheeks and grey beard and fall to the ground”; he shook “from some kind of inner pain and excitement” (Judah, 2000: 72). Tears of emotion are shed, and this is not a refutation of the masculinity myth, but a confirmation of the passion and dedication and love for the land – factors that strengthen motivation in battle.

Myths of masculinity and military valor

Reading the textbooks published by Belgrade is like looking at a military history of Serbia, or of the world. However, this is only a reflection of the traditional tendency of history as an academic discipline to focus on the “macro” level, and to consider wars the most significant events of the past. This tendency is not unique to

the Balkans, nor is the emphasis of myths of military valor. European education systems have habitually emphasized a chronology of war when presenting national or world history (Coulby and Jones, 2001). In Japan history textbooks also have a long tradition of praising militaristic values, going as far back as the 1920s. The intensity of the pro-military message was in direct relationship with the politics of the Japanese state. When the Empire went to war, the tone of the textbooks sharpened considerably in favor of the hero-soldier: “Japan’s textbooks have taught generations of its children that war is glorious, and have concealed many of the sad truths of war, with sometimes tragic results. [...] Given the prominence accorded to militaristic ideas, the schools were a powerful instrument for maintaining the ‘warfare state’” (Ienaga, 1993-1994: 181).

Perhaps warfare state is too strong to describe the message communicated in the contemporary Serbian textbook but, as in the Japanese case, there is a correlation between the type of politics used by the state at a particular moment (for example, when Serbian armed forces were fighting in Kosovo or earlier in Bosnia) and the type of values and message appearing in the textbooks. Vesna Pesic investigated eight elementary school Serb literature textbooks in 1994 and discovered that war themes dominate peace themes in a proportion of 4:1, in terms of the number of texts selected by textbook authors. Even more of a discrepancy is registered in the number of pages, with 84% of the total being dedicated to military virtues (1994: 63). Another research paper on Serbian history textbooks 5th – 8th grade (Ivic et al., 1997) pointed out that “Patriotic values are absolutely the strongest value message in our textbooks. They appear only in the positive form and almost exclusively as the national value. The

significance of those values is practically equated with the fight for freedom of the homeland or, even more concretely, with the enormous sacrifices in this fight and the readiness to sacrifice in the future” (p. 20).

Heroes

The pantheon of heroes is almost entirely populated with male figures. The portraits of kings and their kin are published together in auxiliary school material like the *Overview of Serbian Dynasties* (Veselinovic and Ljusic, 2002), but even in regular textbooks the proportion of characters, especially at the visual level, is predominantly male. This is supported by research done in the early 1990s, when this proportion was even more to the detriment of the female (Jaric, 1994). Some textbooks are completely devoid of graphic illustrations (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994), but even in image-poor textbooks, like Gacesa (1993), Perovic and Strugar (1992), Perovic and Vojvodic (1995) and Mihaljcic and Cirkovic (1995), this imbalance is obvious. The first, second and third textbooks have no female character portrayed, whereas the third includes a small reproduction of a medieval print where the outline of a female is half-hidden behind a weaving stool. In the more recent and more richly illustrated books the proportion does not change radically. Mihaljcic (2000) includes no representation of a female figure, and two women make their way onto the pages of Mihaljcic and Cirkovic (2003) but not as individual historical characters simply as fictive elements in the imagination of the illustrator of lesson topics such as the “life of towns in the early middle ages”.

For the first time we begin to observe the presence of several women in Kovacevic (2002). Of the six instances encountered, there is only one person portrayed as an independent individual, important in her own right, and that is Rosa Luxemburg (82). All the other female characters are included in their capacity of wives and mothers of someone else, endowed with more significance in the eyes of the authors. The mother watches from a painting of Paja Jovanovic as her son learns how to work the sword; there are mothers and grandmothers in the group portrait of a family from Podrinje in a photo from 1937; the tragic silhouettes of a black-clad mother and young daughter in the hunger year 1942; Queen Mary, wife of King Alexander Karageorgevic, seen in a modern outfit as she gathers her three sons; and finally Jovanka Budisavljevic Broz, wife of the great Yugoslav leader, seen by his side as he receives flowers and applause from the public at a congress.

Closer to the present day, textbooks are more inclusive of the female element. Rajic et al (2005) has 14 images of women, some of which appear in the previous textbook but some new and more assertive ones have been added. For the first time we see three women artists (one international – Virginia Woolf, and two from Serbia – Nadezda Petrovic, one of the first and certainly the most successful woman painter, and Isidora Sekulic, poetess, writer, and all-round adventurer). In the same gallery of independent women presented as themselves and not as companions or symbols, we see a peasant woman spinning wool and a partisan heroine bearing a gun on her back.

If it is not the women that are seen, who populates the historical narratives of the Serbs? An overwhelming majority of the characters displayed are soldiers, both Serbian and foreign, in various representations. There are modern drawings of the

“typical Slav soldier”, or battalions of different types of armies, depending on the epoch discussed, or, especially as we enter the modern period, generals and other military commanders, sometimes seen in the company of their troops. The second most frequent category is that of political leader, from emperor and knez to sultan, to prince, to leader of insurgencies, depicted in a truly vast array of styles and techniques but almost always static and majestic in their attitude. Thirdly come the religious personalities and here again one can double count the early royal gallery since they were all present there: warriors, kings and saints. In their visual representation, however, they are most strongly reminiscent of icons as they seem to step down directly from the walls of churches they have had erected. There are also representations of independent church officials, patriarchs and saints, plus monks (but no nuns).

Many analyses have concentrated on the link between religion and nationalism in the Balkans, and have certainly demonstrated that this is not an exclusively Serbian tradition (see for example, Ilic, 2005; Rogobete 2004). The Serbian tradition of sanctifying their monarchs appears very clearly at the graphic level. The most prominent figures in this tradition are the princes of the Nemanja dynasty, considered as the founders of both faith and nation. They are depicted in frescos on the walls of those monasteries they founded in the early Middle Ages and those images are reproduced on a large scale. There is no history textbook that does not include the image of St Sava Nemanja in his iconic representation. The Nemanja certainly appear to be dominant in the ranks of royalty displayed in special collections on the theme of the Kings of Serbia (Veselinovic and Ljusic 2002). This transmits the

impression that “the Serbian congregation was formed both in heaven and on earth, reiterated by the liturgical commemoration of sanctified patriots that eventually evolved into a precious spiritual and exegetic referent [...]” and thus supports the view that Serbia’s national identity is sacred (Mylonas, 2003: 52). History and religion blend to offer irrefutable proof of the noble origins of Serbians.

The two most famous medieval kings are Stefan Nemanja, founder of the Serbian state, and Stefan Dusan, and their treatment is idealized, iconic. They appear as the embodiment of the national ideal of the Serbs: true faithful of the Orthodox Church, but also excellent military planners, brave in battle as well as clever at the negotiation table. They seem to have pursued by sword and treaty only one goal: the advancement of the interests of the Serbian nation.

The coming to power of Stefan Nemanja marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Serbia. He was able to expand the territory under his rule, including Kosovo, thus “greatly exceeding his predecessors” in his capacities (Mihaljcic, 1992: 78). Nemanja impersonates the quintessential or ideal noble leader: he is “*tall and handsome*” (the italics are in the original and presumably refer to quotations from medieval chronicles), “vigorous and resolute”, and had “wisdom given to him by God” (chronicle fragment quoted in Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 70). Much emphasis is placed on Stefan Nemanja’s relationship with the ecclesiastical world, as he is “beatific lord” (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 70) and “heavenly patron” of the state and his dynasty (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 70). Half of his biography is dedicated to his actions as a Christian lord. He “built and renovated churches”, and defended the official dogma from heretics like the Bogomils, whom he sent away,

after “brutally punishing their leader and burning their heretic books and property” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 78). He was “pious” and valued the spiritual over the temporal - he decided to withdraw from politics and to spend the rest of his life in monastic solitude. Nemanja’s behavior entitles him to be God’s favorite, who grants him a “*miracle*” in allowing him to survive his brothers’ murderous plans. Because of his profound attachment to the faith, Nemanja deserved to be “pronounced a saint” (Mihaljcic, 2000: 57).

This is a family blessed by the Gods, as both father and son received the celestial vocation, a fact reflected also at the visual level, with all dynasty members being depicted in the iconic fashion typical of church frescoes. Rastko, Stefan’s youngest son better known under his holy name, Sava, is hailed as a “competent statesman” and both an erudite, and especially as the first Serbian archbishop. The connection between church and state is explicit: “only two years after it became a kingdom, Serbia had an independent church” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 78). Nemanja father and son are both representations of the medieval attempt to wed political and religious power, with the former obtaining legitimacy from the divine. In contrast with the Western European solution to this political legitimacy dilemma, here the king’s two bodies, to paraphrase a famous title, are not simultaneously present, but appear in succession. The king is not a saint while he is ruling over “this” world. He becomes holy and closer to God by abandoning the material in favor of the spiritual. Or, in the case of St Sava, he never enters the mundane but, because saintliness means also wisdom, limits himself to smaller incursions into the everyday to help the state powers in need of his advice. The myth of heavenly Serbia is grounded early in

national history. The secular is guided by the spiritual that holds the key to morality and thereafter to eternal life.

Serbia's first state and first church were founded by Nemanjas, and so it is not surprising that the first Serbian emperor also descends from the same noble tree. The words of praise to describe Stefan Dusan abound. Known as the Strong (Mihaljcic, 1992: 87), this prominent figure of Serbian statehood is a "strong and audacious heir", a "competent general" and a skilled diplomat, who married into an alliance with Bulgaria. He made good use of the inner tensions within the Byzantine Empire in order to extend his dominion over enough territory to justify his claim for the title reserved for the rulers in Constantinople, and this is demonstrated by the frequency of the word "conquer" and its semantic family, "expand", "come under control", and "rule over", used 14 times over little under four pages (Mihaljcic, 1992: 83-85) and eight times on two pages in a later textbook (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 90-91). Stefan Dusan was crowned "emperor of the Serbs and Greeks" in 1346, and established his rule with a new set of laws, following the footsteps of Justinian. With the ascent of the Serbian empire, came the rise in status of the Serbian church, whose archbishop was now titled patriarch, "the highest order in the Eastern Orthodox Church" (Mihaljcic, 1992: 83-84). The tight bond between Church and State, embodied in the lineage of its early monarchy, is a recurrent theme in Serbia's medieval history. As the author states, "the Nemanja exercised their power thanks to the aristocracy and the church" (Mihaljcic, 1992: 84). Church and state development seems to ebb and flow in parallel motions, at least until the Ottoman takeover in the 16th century, where the heavier task is assumed by the ecclesiastic structures.

Both state and church were nationalized, and the message is one of internal ethnic coherence in the membership of these institutions. This is a Serbian state, at least in the sense that its rulers are claimed by the Serbian modern nation as their ancestors, and this is a Serbian church, where the faithful, according to the textbooks, seemingly used the contemporary definition of ethnic belonging as identifying clues. The author projects backwards in history the standards of good and evil used in today's world. In a typical example of anachronism, Mihaljcic writes that the Serbian Empire during Stefan Dusan and his successor Uros was hard to govern because "its population was of different ethnic and religious backgrounds"; just some lines below he restates "large sized and diverse, the Empire gives signs of weakness" (1992: 87-88). The decline of the medieval Serbian state seems to correspond in detail to the problems in the Serbia in which the textbook author lives and writes. Not only is this erroneous from a theoretical point of view, as few would contend that the Serbian nation as we see it today could be found in the 13th or 14th centuries, but nations are mostly a modern creation⁸⁵.

The Serbs make their church a national institution and simultaneously present it as an institution of interethnic solidarity, but with the Serbs in a leading position. The Pec patriarchate "preserved the Serb national consciousness" but extended its authority over other people of the region living in parts of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia, a fact supported by historical evidence (Mazower, 2000; Resic, 2006). Textbooks argue that the Orthodox Church had an overall positive influence, "because Christian people, through their religion, preserved their national

⁸⁵ Certainly this is not a point completely without controversy, as Armstrong's argument on the existence of nations before the birth of nationalism (1982) demonstrates. However, most of the literature on this theme sees it as a modern phenomenon (Gellner 1993; Hobsbawm, 1992).

characteristics”, but it also says that it was at times in conflict with the national goal, for example when the Serbs were transferred from Pec to the authority of Constantinople, a time during which the Greeks “subjugated religiously and culturally” the Serb nations (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 41). The authors see no contradiction between giving accolades to the Serbs when they had a special influence over faithful from other groups, but perceive Greek ecclesiastical power as a burden and threat to their own national survival.

Most textbooks devote special lessons to the role of the Pec Patriarchate and to the church in general and without exception their presentation is made in laudatory terms, and very often with juxtaposition between the religious and national functions of the institution. The role of the church was cultural and political. Culturally it had the duty to preserve the medieval heritage of the Serbian state, both in terms of traditions and texts, including writing biographies and historical accounts of the past, and building physical constructions (churches, monasteries etc). Politically it was an active promoter of anti-Ottoman resistance, with priests preaching the right or even the necessity of revolt against the infidels and even directly leading such uprisings (Perovic and Vojvodic, 1995: 32-33), the most famous of all being probably Patriarch Arsenije III. He led the Serbs out of the Old Serbia and towards today’s Vojvodina, then under Habsburg authority, during the Serbs Great Exodus (Resic, 2006. 95). But he was not alone, and the readers are shown a long list of priestly figures active in the armed uprisings against the Ottomans of the 19th century (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 108). Because of this double role, the church and the clerics as a social group enjoyed an “excellent reputation” founded upon its mission, repeatedly presented across

historical eras: “maintaining national consciousness” and “supporting and strengthening the Serbian state” (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 108). This was even more relevant in the case of Vojvodina, where the representation of the Serbs fell upon the shoulders of the church-national assembly, “protectors of the Serbian autonomy” which later came to include not only members of the clergy but also aristocrats, and cultural personalities. (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 151).

The royal line-up of major characters includes some more recent figures, like Mihajlo Obrenovic, a figure similar in political goals, and in the representation he is accorded in the textbooks, with his contemporary the Romanian Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Mihajlo Obrenovic is described as the national unifier, the agent of the forces of the most radical transformation in the life of the Serbs. His goals were two-fold: on one hand to increase the national consciousness of his people, on the other to obtain their liberation from the Ottomans and to lead the other oppressed people of the Balkans towards their freedom (Gacesa et al, 1996: 12-14). Serbia pursues its national goals which seem to coincide with the goals of its neighbors, thus leading the student to accept the idea that Greater Serbia, created by uniting in one state all the Serbs dispersed throughout the Balkan Peninsula, is compatible with the logic of Yugoslavism.

Another popular hero of textbooks stories is the hajduk, a Robin Hood of the Balkans who becomes a true rescuer of the poor, a corrector of social injustices and a fighter with altruistic goals (Perovic and Strugar, 1992, 1993: 36-7). The cult of the hajduk is well known all over the region (the Romanians also have a major name in this category, Iancu Jianu), and like most folktales it hyperbolizes at the expense of

accuracy. The hajduks were more or less bands of thieves, who selfishly attacked and robbed the richer passers-by and who seldom if at all were willing to share the spoils with the poor peasants (see Zanic, 2007, ch. 7 and 14).

The hajduk virtues are not only martial prowess but also audacity and astuteness. Stefan Dusan, the first Serbian emperor, acceded to power not by blood heritage but by cunning – “he stole away the heritage” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 85). Another ruler for whom bravery and cunning mattered more than blood is the leader of the first Serbian uprising against the Ottomans, Karagerogevic Petrovic, who is described as a “hajduk” and outlaw (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 98). The Karagerogevic dynasty had as its foundation myth the story of the strong and extremely courageous outlaw, and this supported their claim to be a “national dynasty” (Zanic, 2007: 410). These hajduks gradually refocused on national goals. For example, the origins of the nationalist Serb militia of World War II, the Chetniks, stemmed from the mid- 19th century, when bands (or čete) of hajduks roamed Serbian and Bulgarian lands in their fight against the Turks (Resic, 2006: 213).

History textbooks written during the early 1990s preserve the ideological framework of socialism, interpreting World War II in terms of the struggle between the fascist and the anti-fascist forces. Most textbooks, despite their leanings to the left or to the right of the ideological spectrum, follow the foundation myth of the second Yugoslavia which resulted from the popular resistance against the foreign invaders, in

the same vein as other myths of the Résistance against the Nazis, in France and Italy⁸⁶.

The tension within the resistance movement between a nationally oriented and a communist revolutionary wing are not exclusively Yugoslav. France witnessed the same split between the Communist and Gaullist factions, who more often than not were at odds with each other. The same can be said in the case of the anti-occupation effort across Yugoslavia, where the communists and the nationalists had to struggle to overcome ideological differences and coordinate their actions. As one textbook expressed it, the joint action of the two movements was marred by “mutual distrust, incidents and misunderstandings” (Gacesa, 1993: 112). The dynamic relationship between Chetniks and Partisans, and more personally between Mihailovic and Tito, is a good marker of the ideological sympathies of the textbook authors.

Historical characters are distributed in a “good guy – bad guy” gallery. The Hero and the Villain are legitimate figures in traditional storytelling and they find their way into history textbooks unharmed. It is interesting also to note that the archetype remains the same, but that the content of the myth changes according to the political regime. For example, during the Yugoslav period, Tito and his communist faction, the partisans, were presented as the heroes of WWII, the anti-fascists par excellence, those who were able to defeat the invading armies led by the Germans. The figures of Tito and his Partisans were raised to a quasi-religious status: “The narration that underpinned the communist ideology in Yugoslavia was the “cult” of the liberating Partisan-battle against Hitler’s Germany under Tito. The mythologized

⁸⁶ One major reference about the Italian resistance is Pavone (1991). About the Italian resistance myth and its political uses see Pezzino (2005). The French résistance was first problematized in Paxton ([1966] 2000).

narration, based on the Second World War, focused on the heroism of the Yugoslav nation under the guidance of the unique, charismatic, and almost “messianic” figure of Tito[...].” (Tosic, 2006: 73). This story was supported not only by history textbooks but by a wide range of public rituals, public monuments, and other official activities which awarded special hero status to the communist fighters of WWII.

Tito was a charismatic leader by all accounts, perhaps in the same league with revolutionary heroes like Che Guevara. He embodies not only moral righteousness, bravery, steadfastness to an ideal, but also the practical qualities of a good manager: the capacity to listen, to compromise or to refuse to give in, to communicate with the populace⁸⁷. Depending on which text is analyzed, Tito may emerge as a heroic guerilla leader, the communist Luther, a Balkan Caesar or, quite the opposite, a scoundrel, an American hireling, a war criminal, a typical tyrant, an anti-democrat, a charlatan, a mass murderer, and even the Balkan Pol-Pot (Velikonja, 2008: 14). This assortment of perspectives is combined and contrasted also in the pages of textbooks from different historical periods.

In a textbook from 2002, republished in 2003, Tito appears in one sepia photo with the caption “secretary general of the Yugoslav Communist Party and supreme commander of the partisan army” (Kovacevic, 2002: 161). The chapter outlines his career in the leadership of the partisan movement, then the accession to the leadership of the Anti-fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (167). This council was proclaimed the first legislative and executive authority in 1943, and Tito became its president in the same year. He was awarded the title of marshal in recognition of

⁸⁷ Numerous biographies and historical accounts of his life have been published both in the former Yugoslavian space and elsewhere, enough to justify the term “titography”. Among the most recent see Pavlowitch (2006).

his special merits in the fight for the liberation of the country in 1943 (170). The chapter about Yugoslavia after WWII is illustrated almost exclusively with instances from the life of Josip Broz. The opening picture shows Tito, in military uniform and with his chest covered in decorations, receiving flowers and a standing ovation. The gallery continues with a picture of the “four architects of the domestic and foreign policy of Yugoslavia” (Pijade, Kardelj, Kidric and of course Tito) (199), Josip Broz and the US president JF Kennedy (200), an enthusiastic and well organized public applaud to greet the nomination of Josip Broz Tito as lifetime president of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation in 1973 (201). And although there is no picture, Tito’s name appears at least once in the text on the subsequent pages (203, 204). Even if the text does not praise him explicitly, the structure of the presentation, the graphic form and the constant repetition make the life of Tito appear intertwined with that of the socialist Yugoslavia.

The most recent textbook analyzed here (Rajic et al., 2005) is the one that praises Tito most warmly. In a caption under the figure of young Tito in the military uniform of the Partisans, the authors chose words of praise: “founder and the symbol of republican Yugoslavia” “main inspirer of the new system – socialism” who made “a major contribution” to the particular variant of self-management applied in the economy of the Yugoslav federation. More interestingly even, Tito’s international stature receives more coverage than previously, thus emphasizing the worldwide positive image of the country: Tito was one of the founding members of the non-aligned movement and he became a “famous international figure a “modern statesman” thanks to which Yugoslavia won international reputation” (137). The final

pronouncement on the personality of Tito combines positive features (he was a “great leader”, loved and respected, endowed with political competence) and negative ones (he abused his “unlimited power” to rule according to personal whim). His worst failure was however not his autocratic ruling style but the fact that he “did not leave a good or effective system for preservation of Yugoslav state and the idea of Yugoslavism”, which made his project fall to pieces irreparably after his death (182). One reading of this text can detect a certain degree of nostalgia for the Yugoslav past, and a mild reproach addressed posthumously to Tito, for setting weak foundations for the “brotherhood and unity” scheme.

The latest two textbooks not only eulogize the personality of Tito but also juxtapose the life of the leader and that of the country: Tito WAS Yugoslavia, as the final sentence of the chapter Yugoslavia Kovacevic concludes: “after the death of J.B. Tito [the federal republics] obtained their full independence resulting in the falling apart of Yugoslavia” (2002: 204). The same tone is to be found in almost identical words three years later: “Eleven years after his death Yugoslavia crumbled in a terrible civil war into five separate states” (Rajic et al., 2005: 137). Tito’s death draws the B.C. – A.D. border line for the personal chronology of Yugoslavs, with B. C. standing for “before the crisis” and A. D. “after the disaster”, to paraphrase a journal article.

Earlier textbooks did not make Tito the number one protagonist of Yugoslav history since the 1940s. In an 8th grade book from 1994, which does not follow the classical schoolbook format but assigns only one quotation from professional history books for each event considered important, Tito appears only marginally. His name

appears in a lesson about the Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia, in connection with the signing of an agreement between the Marshall and Ivan Subasic, leader of the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, about the making the country once more into a federative republic (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 83-84). No questions are asked about the role of Tito as leader of this new federation and in the remaining three lessons covering the period 1945 – 1981, his name does not reemerge. Even if published in 1994, the Bekanovic and Stojanovic textbook gives a very superficial overview of the socialist period and does not take into account recent evolutions in the region, not even the death of Tito, or the disintegration of the Yugoslav state.

Gacesa (1993) includes a short presentation of Tito's role as leader of the communist party and of the partisan movement (109) in the context of the very detailed presentation of the events of WWII, in a year-by-year chronology. His name and image disappear, however, in the following chapters, even if their themes ("the resistance of Yugoslavia against USSR and the struggle for independent development", "self-management in Yugoslavia" etc) could have been more focused on the influence played by the Yugoslav leader. The exile of Tito from the early 1990s textbooks comes thus in sharp contrast with the prominent role in which Tito is cast by authors writing in the 2000s.

In the period of national rallying around the flag demanded in times of war, Tito changed role from loving leader to foreign agent, and his position as Hero was taken by the father of the nationalist Chetniks, Draza Mihailovic. Mihailovic is introduced as a refined intellectual, educated abroad, a lover of French literature,

dedicated to the national cause in the name of which he and his Chetniks had sometimes to make compromises but only for the common good. Collaboration with the Italian forces, “the least of all evils”, was done to “ensure the bare survival of the Serbs”; the same explanation is proffered for the collaboration with the fascists by the government of Milan Nedic, whose aim was “the very biological survival of the Serbian people”. (quoted in Stojanovic, 2007).

In other textbooks the language describing the personality of Mihailovic is more neutral, “colonel in the Yugoslav army” (Kovacevic, 2002: 163). He was subsequently named general of the Homeland Yugoslav Army and minister of defense in the government in exile in London (Gacesa 1993: 113). His military merits are underscored, as his distinctions are enumerated and his bravery in the First World War rewarded by numerous medals (Rajic et al, 2005: 136).

His credo and supreme allegiance were to the king and to the idea of Greater Serbia, as a quotation from his 1941 Instructions to his subordinates reproduced in Bekanovic and Stojanovic makes clear: the goals of the Chetniks, a paramilitary group he led, are to fight for freedom under the rule of King Peter II, create a Great Yugoslavia and within it a Great Serbia, and refuse the collaboration with the main enemy, the communist – partisans (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 78). He appears inflexible and tough and dedicated to the national cause, and only in some books, but not in all, are his methods and objectives clearly delineated. Even if he appears to put the interests of his nation closest to his heart, the end of Draza Mihailovic is that of a defector. He was arrested in 1946, charged with sedition because under his leadership the Chetniks signed an agreement with the German enemy, and “pronounced a traitor,

sentenced to death and killed” (Rajic et al, 2005: 136). There is no greater humiliation than to be judged unworthy of the country for whom, as an officer, he was ready to sacrifice. To die is acceptable, but only if it is an honorable death, as the Kosovo myth instructs us.

Briefly, the trend identified in the postcommunist period has been that in the early 1990s, at the peak of the nationalist regime of Milosevic and during the Yugoslav wars of secession, the figure of Tito was cut down to size only to return to the forefront of the historical narrative in the 2000s. Nostalgia for the old days of Yugoslavia and the man who made it all possible began to spread, reaching the proportions of a “nostalgia industry”, which “comprises a wide spectrum of products featuring his image, signature, quotations, important places in his life and the like, a truly impressive array of memorabilia, resembling those from contemporary pop stars” (Velikonja, 2008: 40).

In Yugoslav and early post-Yugoslav textbooks, national belonging was considered largely irrelevant; what mattered was the ideological affiliation. A textbook whose general tone is derived from the former socialist times places the tension within the resistance movement in a class struggle frame, where the morally superior side are the Partisans, as they attempt not only to liberate the country from the foreign troops but also from the yoke of the bourgeoisie. The heroes are the Partisans, whose exploits are positively described: they are patriotic, adamant and ready for self-sacrifice. This is the typical image of the valiant Serb soldier, except that instead of fighting for Christianity or for the nation, the Partisans thirst for class equality and social justice. On the other side of the barricade we find the Villains, the

anti-communist fighters, willing to make compromises for their own survival and betraying the higher ideals for the sake of menial interests. They are collaborators, traitors, accepting the fascist regime inasmuch it served their own goals. Their fight was directed not against the real enemy, the armies that invaded the country, but against the Partisans (Gacesa et al, 1996: 162-233).

During the early 1990s, the Villains are the communist militia, the Partisans. They were the only ones whose crimes are described in detail: they “imprisoned, tortured and put before the firing squads not only those suspected of having collaborated with the occupiers, but also those of whom they thought as potential class enemies” (12th grade textbook, 2005). At the same time, since the Partisans have benefited from positive propaganda for decades, it is difficult to completely replace their image as heroes, so another strategy has been employed: to nationalize the grand narrative of WWII⁸⁸ and to retell it from a Serbian perspective alone. The claim that most Partisans were Serbs allows for the survival of the Heroic Partisan myth, in a new form, where “only the Serbs have a legitimate right to own and manipulate it (Antic, 2005: 212). This transfer was possible because of the previous association between communism and particularism promoted by Tito, whose effort to have the popular legitimacy of his Partisan movement recognized within the Soviet bloc “inaugurated national communism” (Tismaneanu, 1993: 47). It was national not in the sense of promoting one of the national identities of the Yugoslav ethnic groups at the expense of others, but in its focus on the interests and concerns of the Yugoslav state and refusal of “the suppression of patriotic attachments required by Stalin”.

⁸⁸ This strategy is not restricted to the Serbs alone. The ideology of communist solidarity and of the common anti-fascist front is replaced by nationalism in Croatian and Slovenian history textbooks as well (Höpken, 1999).

Tito's use of Yugoslav patriotism was, in the same way as for Romanian leaders later, an "instrument to strengthen their [communists'] popular base" rather than a genuine inclusion of the masses into the policy-making (Tismaneanu, 1993: 48). Nevertheless, this association between communism and local patriotism paved the way for the contemporary shift from Yugoslav patriotism to Serbian nationalism in the representation of the Partisans.

The image of the Partisans tends to be more stable than that of their rivals, the Chetniks. The latter are attributed a wider span of interpretations. As above, they may be defined as quislings, a good negotiation partner for the Germans, and also somewhat more cautious, since they "refused to start a fight against the occupiers saying the time is not right yet" (Gacesa, 1993: 112). As we saw above, the Chetnik commander ended his life sullied and discredited. His army is also described in negative terms, as pusillanimous, lacking vigor and determination, and having incapable soldiers, who "did not undertake one fairly significant action against the occupiers" (Gacesa, 1993: 113). The only words to be said in their favor remain those of the more nationally-inclined authors, who give more space to the Chetnik project of creating a "homogenous" "Greater Serbia" (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 79).

In the post-Yugoslav Serbian textbooks, as in other former communist states, nationalism replaced the communist ideology as the guiding light and organizing principle (Berelowitch, 2003: 5). If collaboration with the fascists is ever mentioned, no words are said about the major actions that Chetniks took against the non-Serbs of Bosnia and Croatia, nor about the camps of Sajmiste and Banjica which hosted about 60 000 people, nor even the arrest of more than 90% of the Serbian Jews (Resic,

2006: 214). Even less are we to learn about the tactics of the communist resistance, who adopted terrorist strategies against all their enemies, defined either as the occupying forces or as their ideological rivals, and who created a secret police modeled after the Soviet NKVD (Tismaneanu, 1993: 17). Organized forgetting implies the consistent removal of information that does not fall in line with the official ideals of the state, and thus we can observe the elimination of negative aspects from the presentation of the Hero and the accumulation of crimes on the head of the Villain.

An interesting case is the person of Slobodan Milosevic. During his life in power his image in the Serbian media was more often than not that of a hero, but never reaching a larger than life stature. Even in the eyes of his followers, he was known as “the second Tito”⁸⁹ – not quite a personality of his own. As he became history and thus was entitled to a place in schoolbooks, his image became too big a burden to carry. Thus, the first history textbook published after his fall, in 1999 - 2000, excluded him altogether and there was no mention of Milosevic as a political leader. His legacy was too fresh and his image too controversial to be neutralized in history teaching, and that motivated textbook authors to keep a very summary and fact-based presentation of the recent past. This led to criticism from the nationalist side, who accused the new textbooks of “anti-Serb politics” but also to negative reactions from the moderates, who thought that the text glossed over the nature of the Milosevic dictatorship, making events such as the NATO attacks or the October 5th, 2000 democratic protests unintelligible for the 13-year olds who read the book (Suica,

⁸⁹ “The people ask who will replace Tito, now we know who the second Tito is, Slobodan is a noble name”, so did the song go (Velikonija, 2008: 130).

2002: 325). Slowly he reappeared as part of the recent Yugoslav and then Serb history and there seems to be an extra degree of carefulness with which textbook authors treat his period in power. Not even in a chapter on the “contemporary problems of Yugoslavia” from a 2002 textbook (Kovacevic) does Milosevic make an appearance, although it must have been rather difficult for the author to avoid mentioning the Serbian leader when discussing the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Agreement or the NATO bombing of Belgrade.

The first time that Milosevic is acknowledged as a major actor in post-Tito politics is in a textbook from 2005, and then only in a short biographical sketch where his mythical persona is replaced by a critical evaluation of his regime. He appears as a manipulative opportunist, “skillful” in appealing both to the nationalist and to the pro-Yugoslav, federalist sides. His time in power is described as a watershed but in negative ways: neighborly relations within Yugoslavia opened to “hostility” and “thus Serbia entered into a long period of isolation, warring and decline which in turn brought Serbian people to the edge of survival” (Rajic et al., 2005: 184). Milosevic seems to have completely lost his aura and decayed to the status of villain, made responsible for the disastrous situation the country and its people currently face.

The antinomies Tito – Mihailovic, Partisan – Chetnik, communist – nationalist illustrate the inchoate nature of the current social imaginary, which is not stable but, as in a magma, brings from the bottom to the surface contestable elements making coming to terms with the recent or the more distant past very difficult, but all the more necessary. The thorniest problem of all may be the desire to overcome the communist – nationalist tension by transforming the communists into good Serbs.

The attempt to do so in the newer textbooks, where the Tito era is presented in rather positive colors, has been rejected by the moderate strata of society. Certainly, textbooks, together with other commemorative practices, do not reconstruct the former Yugoslavia, but re-make it anew, in their imagination, a Yugoslavia as it never was but as it should have been. At the same time there is an overdose of nationalist discourse which may lead some people towards yugostalgia, and the impact of the last 20 years campaign in favor of a national interpretation of both past and future cannot be left aside. The textbooks unveil the temptation to justify a posteriori periods of decay and paucity with a simplified, black and white story, from which uncomfortable elements have been purged and which uncritically supports the political priorities of the people in power, especially the national idea and the goal of unifying all the Serbs in one state. This is made even more evident when discussing myths of victimhood.

Victimhood

Persecution and unfair treatment

One of the constant features of the self-perception of the Serbs is that they have been dealt a bad set of cards from the very beginning. This fits with the general description of Serbian past popular among professional historians who “propagated the thesis that Serbs, because of their goodness, have always been victims of others; that their enemies conspire to annihilate them; and that the time has come to act aggressively to avenge past wrongs and become the dominant power in the area” (Anzulovic, 1999: 7). Several instances of this perception of always falling prey to fate or to specific foreign interests have been highlighted in a previous chapter. Myths

of victimhood also permeate the content of history textbooks, and often take the form of an antemurale argument. The Serbs say they have always been willing to sacrifice in the name of larger-than-life principles and values, such as the defense of Christianity but instead of receiving laurels they had to carry most of the burden without any praise.

In terms of mythical representation of trauma, one emblematic story is that of the Jugovic family, told by one textbook in relationship with the Serbian tragedy par excellence, the Kosovo Battle. According to the legend, old Jug Bogdan was the father of Princess Milica, wife of Lazar Hrebeljanovic, the main protagonist of the Kosovo myth, as well as the father in law of Vuk Brankovic, lord over Kosovo and legendary traitor figure, and of Milos Obilic, a heroic character who kills Sultan Murat before being killed in his turn by Sultan's guards. Obilic and Brankovic compete before the battle to be the bravest, and Obilic is accused of treason. But Obilic and his "blood-brothers" of the Jugovic family fight to their death, the deaths of heroes (Mihaljcic 2000:116). This story of titanic vim and vigor is illustrated with extracts from historical sources of the time, where Milos Obilic (sometimes known as Kobilic⁹⁰) is hailed together with the others knights who lost their life: "blessed all who split their life and blood in glory as martyrs" (Florentine letter of 1389, quoted in Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 133). In other instances, Obilic takes the scene all by himself. Several paragraphs from a 15th century chronicle describe in detail the deeds of Milos, the accusations of betrayal, his determination to prove his worth, his brave

⁹⁰ The character of Milos Obilic remains one of the most prominent for the self-definitions of the Serbs and even in some form of competition of myths with the Albanians, who claim Milos as one of their own. Based on linguistic arguments, the Albanians argue that the real name of the hero was Kobilic, from Vlach-Albanian „kobil”, „bastard”. Serbs, on the other hand, give as correct the name Obilic, from the Serb „obilje”, „abundance” or „richness” (Malcolm, 1999: 73; Resic, 2006: 42, 291, fn 33).

killing of the Sultan and his death, the final spurt of a “famous knight” and “noble warrior” (anonymous 15th century chronicler quoted in Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 134-135). This is the mold according to which most of the trauma stories are told. But this mold is consciously mythical, and the authors never claim accuracy of these accounts. On the contrary, the fictive quality of characters and events is repeatedly brought to light and explained, with the implicit understanding that the legend retold has actually played a role in the creation of the social imaginary of the Serbs, these heroes of noble causes and self-sacrifice.

Serbs are also the ones most frequently hurt. No matter in which war, it seems the Serbs have always had the highest price to pay, even if they did not want to fight but were drawn into the conflict because of others. The Constitution of 1974 signaled the “victory of nationalist and separatist forces”, leading to the division of Serbia into three parts by the creation of the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina; thus Serbia was the “hardest hit” (Gacesa, 1993: 154). The Balkan conflict of the 1990s is blamed on the other federal republics, where nationalist parties became more vociferous over time, replacing one type of totalitarianism (the communist one) with another – something that “crosses into insanity” (Gacesa, 1993: 157). Republics’ nationalism is the reason for the desire to seek “increased independence” and ultimately for the “unilateral decisions” escalating into a belligerent situation (Kovacevic, 2002: 205). Even in the most recent curriculum the causes of the Yugoslav fragmentation are identified in the increased autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, directly discriminating Serbia: “And so Serbia found itself in unequal position, which led, in the coming period, to big political crisis in Serbia and

Yugoslavia and caused the breakdown of the state” (Rajic, 2005: 182) Interesting to see that the theme of nationalism returns as an explanation for the conflict, but this time positively connoted. War broke out not because of the unjust nationalist claims made by others, but because “the Serbs were not given rights as a nation” (Gacesa, 1993: 157). To defend the Serbian nation is justified, to protect or promote the independence of other nations is not, if one embraces the perception of the Serbs. This double standard is justified, according to Colovic, because in the Serbian social imaginary “national identity is a gift from God, but it is only the Serbs who received that gift in the proper way and justified it by their heroic exploits” (2002: 70).

The war in former Yugoslavia brought with it “much destruction and suffering”. More than several hundreds of thousands of individuals and families had to relocate, losing their homes, and “most of them were Serbs” (Kovacevic, 2002: 205). Especially in Croatia, horrifying acts of brutality took place against the Serbs: besides physical torture, “entire villages are burnt down and pillaged, Orthodox churches are destroyed, graves and sanctuaries are defiled” (Gacesa, 1993: 157). The text makes reference to the sacredness of the places of interment for the Serb culture (Colovic, 2002: 27) and brings to mind the famous saying of Draza Mihailovic, leader of the Chetniks, who stated that “wherever there are Serbian graves it is Serbian land” (Malcolm, 1994: 179), a phrase often quoted by another proponent of an ethnically homogenous Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic (Verdery, 1999: 98). The tragedy of the Serbs, in other words, is not only the struggle to keep themselves alive under the merciless attacks of others, but also the rupture of that continuous connection they have with their ancestors, who lay buried in the national soil. This is why often when

they were forced in exile, Serbs took these ancestors with them. Most notoriously, the first Great Exodus of 1690 saw the body of Prince Lazar of Kosovo Polje fame being removed from its site of peace to be carried by the monks of the Ravanica monastery with them to Srem, then under Austrian rule⁹¹.

In spite of this double tragedy, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), composed at the time of Serbia and Montenegro, was considered responsible for the conflict (and it is self understood that this decision is unfair, based on the previous causes of war statement) and was “punished”. And as if this were not enough, NATO used the failure of the Rambouillet negotiation for a common solution on Kosovo as a “pretext” to bomb the FRY, including civilian objectives (“houses, schools, hospitals, highways, bridges”), thus causing numerous “human victims” (Kovacevic, 2002: 205).

NATO is presented, in concordance with the image emerging from other media, as an immoral actor, breaking the very international laws it claimed to defend and inflicting unnecessary pain on a people that did not deserve this treatment. The NATO member states, as earlier the break-away republics, carry all the blame for the conflict, where the Serbs are nothing but victims. The claims for paying the highest human price are not followed by comparisons with the situation of other people involved in the conflict. This is presented as an obvious truth, not needing further factual support⁹².

⁹¹ The earthly remains of the prince have actually traveled more than expected. In 1942 the Germans repatriated them to Belgrade, where they laid until 1987 when, in view of the 600 year commemoration of the Kosovo battle, they were taken to all the major Serb-Orthodox sacred sites, to finally find rest where their journey once started, in the Ravanica Monastery the prince helped build and where he is still believed to perform miracles (Judah, 2000: 39).

⁹² The NATO attacks left a deep imprint on the public opinion in Serbia, where the feeling of being exploited or abused is still widespread. In an opinion poll of December 2008, 62 % of those

Conspiracy and betrayal

An example of such treason, led by a conspiracy, is the signing of the Peace Treaty of 1913, in London, putting an end to the Balkan wars. The treaty was seen as a manipulation by both Austria and Germany to weaken Serbia who would otherwise obstruct a German invasion of the Near Orient. Such geostrategic considerations had to take precedence over the more noble cause of national liberation of the people of the Balkans from the rule of the infidel Turk, a cause taken up exemplarily by Serbia. Serbia was a leader of the Balkan struggle; it invested most resources, fought most valiantly, suffered the most casualties and reported the most resounding victories of all the other participants in the wars. But despite such relentless efforts, its payment was disproportionately small, with countries like Bulgaria refusing to keep their part of the deal (Gacesa et al 1996: 27-28).

Even as recently as in the 1970s, conspiracies were at work to deprive Serbia, “the largest republic” in the Socialist Yugoslavia of “its” provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) based on a “prepared and well organized scenario inspired and supported by some foreign actors as well” (Gacesa 1993: 157). The point of this scheme was to place Serbia in a “subordinate position” and the most irredentist of voices came from Kosovo. Here the true conspiratorial plot was prepared, with the help of “counter-revolutionary elements carefully organized from one center of foreign headquarters, masked with nationalist – irredentist slogans” (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 90). “Secret separatist organizations” (Gacesa, 1993: 156) engaged in “subversive

interviewed believe that the EU is constantly imposing new conditions on Serbia, and additional 49 % said that the “constant political conditioning and blackmail that the EU is applying to Serbia” is the ultimate cause of Serbia’s slow integration into the EU(European Integration Office, Serbia, 2008).

activity” for the creation of a Kosovo republic meant to be annexed to the Albanian state.

The fears of a Greater Albania were fueled by the presence of an Albanian minority in the FYR of Macedonia, and by the tradition of strong mobilization of the Albanians from Kosovo at least since the 1920s and the kaçak movement (Kola, 2003: 18-19). However these fears were not justified at least as far as Albania was concerned. Tirana did not seek to modify the existing borders with Yugoslavia and then Serbia neither during the communist regime, nor in its aftermath. The student protests of 1981 in Prishtina in favor of a Kosovo republic, which were the reason for the incandescent language exposed in the two textbooks cited above (Gacesa 1993, Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994), were not instances of really existing unification plans. They were rather the romantic expression of Yugoslav Albanians who idealized their “mother country” but who never visited it and who, once they did, were disappointed by the reality of a pauperised and oppressed place (Judah, 2001: 9). Hoxha’s Albania did not support the separatist activities of Kosovo Albanian youths more than at the rhetorical level, limited to the condemnation of the Serb anti-Albanian actions at the UN and not followed by financial or know-how support (Kola, 2003: 392). Not even after the fall of communism was Albania in a position to support its expansion into a larger territory. The preoccupation with the declining standard of living was far more important than the dream of expansion in Albania, whereas in Kosovo the common opinion was that “the future of the Albanians as a whole lay not in their unification into one country, but rather in cross-border solidarity and good-neighborliness” (Judah, 2001: 10).

Renouncing the Greater Albania dream did not imply that the Kosovo Albanians preferred to remain connected to Belgrade. The process of breaking free from Serbia and binding stronger ties with Albania was gradual, but steady and involved cooperation in education, science and culture. Interestingly, the textbook author mentions the power of education and of textbooks in particular to influence the mindset of future citizens (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 90). The argument is that most cultural products and all textbooks in use in Kosovo during the 1990s came from Albania and therefore children “considered Albania and not Yugoslavia as their fatherland”. The import of education materials from the neighboring national state was however a common practice all over the region in conditions of low recognition of minority rights. Bosnian Serbs, for example, studied history until 2003 – 2004 only according to Belgrade-produced textbooks (Höpken, 2007: 178). Albanians were therefore not the exception but the rule in seeking a version of history that included also their story, not to be found within the pages of Serbian materials. In a rare instance of self insight the author continues: “It should not come as a surprise that large Albanian masses, after the Constitution of Serbia was written in 1990, and which limited their rights, acted inimically towards Serbia. For years history was falsified, real Yugoslav – Albanian relations were uncritically presented [...]” (Gacesa, 1993: 156).

Here we have the admission to what extent Albanians’ rights were curtailed, as well as the recognition of the role of history in moderating interethnic relations. One can only wonder what the sway the author wishes his own textbook to have over the way of thinking of the next generation of Serbs. The Albanian point of view, even

if acknowledged obliquely in the above comment, is otherwise completely absent. Their desire to survive as a nation and to protect their cultural rights, including the right to education in the mother tongue is neglected. Instead they are assigned the role of bandits and insurgents, because they refused to conform to the nationalizing policies imposed by Belgrade and preferred to boycott the system rather than accept its conditions, deemed unfair. Thus they organized a parallel education, in Albanian language, with Albanian teaching materials, and held courses in garages, in underground cellars and in shops (Kostovicova, 2005: 1).

The wars of secession of the early 1990s can be interpreted not only through the prism of the victimhood myth, as seen above, but also as the result of large scale international conspiracies. Some favorite connivers against the Serbs, besides the obvious Albanians and the other neighbors within the former Yugoslav space, are, as mentioned in a previous chapter, the Germans and the Austrians, the Vatican state, the NATO member states altogether, as well as the European Union and the Americans, and the Big Powers, undefined. How do these actors connect and what is their secret plan?

The most articulated of these conspiracies is led by the “economically strong” Germany, backed up by the rest of the European Union, who’s “most influential and most aggressive member” it remains. Germany, together with other big powers, wants to satisfy its “appetite” and chose to mobilize against Serbia. What kind of appetite is left unspecified, and so are the interests of the other big powers – the more uncertainty, the more conspiratorial the theory and perhaps the more credible. In this mixture the Vatican state is also thrown in, because the Yugoslav conflict is not just

about big power politics, it is also a religious war in which the “Catholic church and its fanatic believers” want to destroy the Orthodox faith altogether. These actors, together with some other states who acted via the UN, used “threats, blackmail and hidden bias” to break the Serbian resistance to their plan, a “new world order” (Gacesa, 1993: 157-158). The proportions of this clandestine operation are global and it appears that the Serbs, part of rump Yugoslavia, are among the very few who refuse to give in and give up, at the cost of international exclusion and economic sanctions: an antemurale of sorts, this time against an accumulation of international power in the hands of a chosen few. The passion that comes through the examples above may be admirable as a literary exercise, except that it is hardly a model of rational analysis of historical events. But then, it has been said that the exaggerated bellicose behavior of smaller nations is connected with their inferiority complexes and that the search for defining one self and the others comes from a perception of marginality. These impassionate expostulations may therefore be less the expression of self-confidence and more a mirror of insecurity. A Serbian historian writing in the middle of the wars of Yugoslav secession reacts strongly against this model of pedagogy: “the language insulting the international environment in which we still live, offending even the religious feelings of individual peoples [...] and offering a remarkable example on how to disseminate religious intolerance, expresses only an arrogant and primitive interpretation of the world and our self-exclusion from it” (Stojanovic, 1994: 109). It appears that both nationalist textbook authors and academic historians in Serbia made their point with equal determination and fervor. The rational analysis has little room when one is at war, either on the battleground or in the history lesson.

Comparing the Serbian and the Romanian history textbooks we can observe the presence of common themes, especially the perception of victimhood, and the desire to create a nation – state in which all the members of the ethnic group can live under the same political leadership. The distinction rests in the nuances: whereas Romanian textbooks specifically mention the fact that there is no political will to modify the current borders of the country (even though “the historical truth needs to be known”, the fact that Bessarabia and Bukovina were once Romanian), Serbian historians suggest that the Greater Serbia solution was a suitable one and thus imply that it may be applicable even today.

Both Serbian and Romanian group identity is strengthened by the message coming through in the history textbooks. The in-group is always positively connoted, and a national positive image begins to take shape. Specific values emerge as characteristic (e.g. Serbs are supposed to be brave and very skilled in military conflicts; Romanians are close to nature, brave and just; both groups are often displaying heroism). Even when events which could cast a shadow over the perfect picture of the nation are included, responsibility for the actions is assigned outside the group, usually in the hands of powerful leaders in the western world. The attitude towards the West is ambivalent; it exerts a strong attraction at the same time as the pressure to conform with the Western rules is perceived as unfair and provokes resistance⁹³. There is a strong emphasis on group unity and cohesion and the message transmitted through the textbook is that one cannot trust anyone but one’s co-nationals.

⁹³ A similar argument is made in Törnquist-Plewa (2005).

Representation of the Other in Romanian and Serbian textbooks

[...] The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go. [...]

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

Mending Wall by Robert Frost

After we have sketched the outlines of the dominant myths in the Serbian and Romanian national histories, a certain image of the self is slowly emerging. The myth, because of its function as a unifier and homogenizer of a community provides us with a very useful inroad towards the nation self-image: its virtues, its major characters, and its chronology of important events. In the course of the search for the national portrait as it appears in the pages of history textbooks it was unavoidable to meet the image of the other, since defining one self is a double movement: to draw the borders that separate the self and the other, in order to better identify the common features of the remaining group. Myths of victimhood for example, while telling the story of a group that sees itself persecuted by others, be it the anonymous forces of

history or providence, or the Great Powers, or one's neighboring states, also project a certain vision of these counter-forces, the ones who are outside the group and from whom the group wants to delimit itself. However, one should not forget that while the ideal-types or the theoretical categories of "self" and "other" or "in-group" and "out-group" are stable, their content is not. Identities are fluid and the boundaries that separate them permeable; today's "other" may be tomorrow's "self".

Especially when linking the issues of identity with the potential for conflict it is necessary to dedicate some time to the analysis of the Other, in its potentiality of both ally and enemy. The other is necessary in the identification of the self but the process of differentiation needs not to be hostile. The other can be admired for its qualities, envied, copied, and seduced, just as much as it can be despised, marginalized, ignored or hated. What is unavoidable is the emotional relationship that is built between the in-group and its environment, distinguished by the drawing of borders. Especially in the field of history education, it is important to "know thy Other" not only because it enriches the picture one has of the world but also for more instrumental reasons, to reduce the risk of social stigma, especially in the Balkans where the national project has led to "profound mutual ignorance about each other, coupled with passionate negative mutual stereotypes (on the level of nations, separate ethnic groups, state officials, intellectuals, business elites, etc.)" (Todorova, 1999: 167).

It is interesting then to continue and examine who are the out-groups from Serbian and Romanian points of view and how they are portrayed in relationship to the nation. As it already emerges from the representation of the self, a contrast is

drawn between the smaller nation and the big neighboring powers. For both Serbia and Romania, the most common two threatening others have been the Turks and the Habsburgs. Looking at the table of contents of several history textbooks from both countries, one can notice the remarkable presence of Turkey as an enemy in wars; the national unification projects are hindered by the interference of empires both from south and from north. In Romania's special case, there is a third enemy to be reckoned with, especially in modern times, and this is Russia (later on the Soviet Union).

The description quoted from the memoirs of a Serbian general participating in a WWI battle between Serb forces and the Austro-Hungarian army vividly illustrates the negative image of the Other: "The Austro-Hungarian military is committing bestial acts and brutality in our villages. Everywhere I can find a group killed, most of them children and women, some had been hung and some had been shot, some children as young as ten" (Perovic and Bojovic, 2002: 143).

The threats from one's big neighbors are a constant feature in the narrative emerging from the pages of the textbooks. The history presented is in most cases a history where wars and conflicts dominate, even though chapters about "life in the countryside", "a day in life of a Roman child", or "cultural personalities of the modern era" are increasingly present. Emphasizing the conflictual relationship with the neighbors proposes a worldview in which no one is safe, and where fear and uncertainty are main determinants of policy decision-making.

Romania

Even more problematic is the relationship with the other from within, various minority groups who under a longer or shorter period of time shared the land with the majority group. The tradition of exclusion of national minorities from the main historical narrative of the Romanian state is well established, and analyses of textbooks from the second half of the 19th century and the interwar period demonstrate the remarkable continuity of this approach of history didactics (Murgescu, 2002).

During the communist era, there were very few mentions of the existence of national or ethnic minorities, and whenever they appeared they were associated with the victimization of the Romanian population: “With the exception of Marxist dialectics, during Ceausescu’s nationalist regime, the function of the historian consisted in creating a patriotic conscience – conscience built on the exclusion of the other, be it national minority, neighboring country or ideological enemy. This exclusion built on a purely ethnic basis found its source in the past. Whether it was the Turks, the Hungarians, Poles, Jews, Russians or the Germans (the Gypsy minority does not appear at all in the history textbooks of the communist period!), it is them who are responsible of the ‘unfortunate destiny’ of the Romanians. The manipulation of the past served thus for contemporary political goals. Instrumentalized with the help of the historian, the ‘injustices’ of the past became collective frustrations” (Marin, 2007: 14).

The 1999 scandal around the history textbook written by Sorin Mitu and his colleagues unveiled the unpreparedness of the society and its political and academic elite to embrace a more relativizing perspective over nationhood. The attempt of the

young historians to challenge the static and ethnocentric definition of Romanianness led to a political crisis and to the withdrawal of their textbook from the market. The inclusion of Others as legitimate members of the community was seen as a threat to the very survival of the nation, and the authors, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, have been accused of teachery against the state.

Ever since 1999 there has been a constant attempt at political correctness, with the recognition of minorities. However, when the main focus is on Romanian nationhood, it is difficult to make room for a nuanced and detailed view of the other – most of the information about minorities was only in connection (or contrast) with the main group, without pausing to describe their specific traditions, customs, and characteristics. Most common were enumerations of this kind: “Besides the Romanian population, which constituted the majority on both sides of the Carpathians [n.a. meaning also in Transylvania, to counter the argument that there were no local people when the Magyars arrived in the 11th century], other ethnic groups continued their historical existence: in Transylvania the Hungarians, the Saxons (inhabitants mainly of towns due to the privileges given to them by the Hungarian king) and the Szeklers, and in Walachia and in Moldova the Greeks and the Armenians” (Manea et al., 1992: 8). As seen here, when details are provided about another ethnic group, they are usually casting it in a negative light: the Hungarians and Saxons were privileged, whereas it is understood that Romanians were excluded, victimized.

Later on, the curriculum of history teaching has been modified and adapted to the European standards so that textbooks had to address issues like “Romanian principalities, multicultural space”, “minorities’ culture” or for students in the last

grade of gymnasium, case studies about the situation of the Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries, or the multiethnic nature of Greater Romania. The inclusion of such topics appears to be halfhearted at best, since no effort had been made to specify what exactly the teachers are expected to cover during such lessons. This appears to be an attempt to conform to the form and not so much to the spirit of political correctness and respect for minorities (Murgescu, 2001: 231).

This change is most apparent in the case of the latest curriculum for the 4th grade history teaching, where the chronological presentation is replaced by themes, among which one of the most prominent is “People”. Under this heading are grouped several historical (Gauls, Romans, Dacians) and contemporary (German, French, Turks, etc) examples of European folk groups. The Romanians are presented only as one of the many, as a part of a long enumeration, occupying the same space (one page) as every other nationality included on the list. The organization of the book is meant to create the sentiment of togetherness that is bound to unite these various groups, as the heading of the chapter clearly explains “People of Today: Towards a World Based on Understanding” (Petre et al., 2006: 11). The same idea is picked up at the end of the introduction, where the pupils are told that Romanians share their territory with other people (and the enumeration includes the classical list inherited from the communist historiography: Magyars, Saxons, Szeklers, Russians, Serbs. Bulgarians) - a list from where the most notable absences are perhaps the Jews and the Roma. The textbook chapter on “People” is meant to educate the children about how these different people “gradually learned to live together” (Petre et al., 2006: 11), about each group’s history and the relationships developed with the others. The same

list of selected Others appears in other textbooks as well (Mihailescu et al., 2006: 35-36), but there each presentation takes just about a paragraph, each accompanied by a picture supposed to illustrate an element to represent the group (the embodiment of the Gauls is supposed to be a military helmet, that of the Slavs a church manuscript, the Saxons, as always associated with urban life, by a photo of a small town, whereas the Romanian symbol is the Arc de Triomphe is the center of Bucharest).

The presentation of the various Others is chronological, starting with the Greeks and the Romans, and each lessons has as a subtitle a short comment meant to illustrate the quintessential feature defining the people under examination on that page: for example the Romans are called “the founders of the most important empire in Antiquity” (14-15), whereas the Dacians are “the forefathers of the Romanian people” (16-17). The special relationship followed throughout the book is the one connecting these Romanians with the French. The Gauls are included only because they are “the forefathers of the French people” (18); the Romanian and the French lessons mirror each other, both graphically (they are placed on the same page spread) and textually: Romanians are the “Eastern descendents of Rome” (22) whereas the French are “Rome’s Western descendents” (23). Even though the presentations encourage a tolerant view of the others (the traditional enemy image of the Turks is replaced with a positive view, “the founders of an Empire between Orient and Occident” (21)), the use of such shortcuts may involuntarily foster a stereotypical perception of the other, simplified and reduced to its group features, thus risking the homogenization of differences within each category.

How about the presentation of one of the most important minority groups, both politically and demographically, the Hungarians? They come under the heading “the descendants of King Stephen” (Petre et al., 2006: 25), whose traditional folk costume and folk traditions are presented in brief. The one word highlighted in bold in regards to the Magyars is “minority”, as in the construction “a significant minority”, without giving concrete information about their numbers, for example that they represent currently about 7 % of the population of Romania. In contrast with previous textbooks, where information about them is scarce and only given in connection to their policies towards Transylvania, the most recent 4th grade textbook under consideration here (Petre et al., 2007) described the Hungarians only in terms of their specific culture or traditions. This is not the case in another book, almost contemporary with the previous case, where the two paragraphs dedicated to the Hungarians mention their arrival in Transylvania, their occupations as farmers and craftsmen and their influence over the Romanians’ way of life (Mihailescu et al, 2006: 36).

Also as a change with previous texts, in both cases from 2006 Hungarians and Szeklers are conflated into one, whereas previously more was said about an ethnic group related to the Magyars, the Szeklers, who live in an enclave in the southeastern corner of Transylvania. The Szeklers are a Hungarian speaking group brought in for the purposes of reinforcing the border of the Hungarian kingdom to which Transylvania belonged. In history textbooks, the Szeklers are called “the armed vanguard of the Hungarian Crown”; “although their origin is uncertain, the Szeklers consider themselves Hungarians too; they were hard working people, silent, loving

freedom but ‘quick at anger’” (Scurtu et al., 1999: 104). The author here attempts to be inclusive and to find something positive to say (hard working, freedom loving) about a group that he does not really interest him or the reader. In other books, the Szeklers are described as “colonists” (Grigore et al., 1998: 26; Mihailescu et al., 2006: 43).

The “national minorities”, as they were known, made an appearance in the communist period as well, but only as a pendant to the majority group. They never had a significance of their own: their role was to testify something about the Romanians, to bring forward their tolerance for cultural diversity or to serve as contrasting comparison factors. The typical description of the relationship Romanians – Others is solely based on an Us – Them distinction. As an example take this quotation from a textbook for the 8th grade from 1988: “Our culture, medieval and humanistic, has the essential features of the European culture and, at the same time, the specific traits in which are reflected the life and the aspirations of the Romanian people and of other inhabitants Hungarian, German, who lived and created side by side of the oldest inhabitants of the land, the Romanians” (quoted in Murgescu, 2001: 232). The contrast is more than obvious; “*our* culture”, inherently national and exclusivist, versus “the life and aspirations ... of *other* inhabitants”. Also of note is the slight undertone of insignificance carried by the word “inhabitants”, who are not even “the oldest” here⁹⁴, but some form of tolerated long-term guests. There is no vision of complementarity, the cultural borders are hard, impenetrable, and clearly not

⁹⁴ This is a reference to the dispute over which population, the Magyars or the Romanians, was the first to inhabit Transylvania. Historical primacy has been used as an argument by radical elements in both communities to put forward political claims. For a description of these concurrent theories see Dennis P. Hupchick (2002: 9).

to be crossed; the idea that the national culture is made up of both Romanian and other elements does not fit into the author's mindset.

In contrast with the Hungarian and Szekler presentation, the Saxons are described in positive colors. The Saxons are the “main creators of the urban civilization”; “the German presence in Transylvania had beneficial effects. The town, as space of even a limited freedom, promoted a way of life characterized by order, rigor, responsibility and the thoroughness of the well-done things. The German village with its fortifications and churches was a model of efficiency and competitiveness. The values of this world were a factor of progress and made living together acceptable” (Retegan and Capita, 1999: 147). The same connection between urban life and the German-speaking group appears in Petre et al., where the headline of the lesson dealing with them describes the Saxons as “the good managers [gospodari] of the cities” (24), the ones who, together with the Hungarians, are the founders of cities in Transylvania (25).

The grounds for which the Hungarians tend to be portrayed in less flattering colors than the Germans has to do with their status as a dominant minority in Transylvania, territory that they ruled until 1918. As discussed in the previous section, Hungarians and Romanians perceive the same historical event, the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, in completely opposite ways: what Romanians consider a day of joy, the Hungarians consider a day of sorrow bearing the mark of a collective trauma, which “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and

irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004: 1). Romania’s national day, December 1st, celebrates the Union of Transylvania with the Old Kingdom in 1918; for Hungarians this is a day of mourning, when Hungary, to which they still feel close, lost two thirds of its territory. The leader of the party of Hungarians in Romania, Marko Bela, declared during the electoral campaign in November 2008: "We must turn the wheel of history. Must be united in every moment for our future and the future of our children. Trianon hurts, and 1918 hurts. After the elections [of November 30, 2008] comes Romania’s national holiday, but the event does not makes us glad, it makes us hurt, because that turn of history meant 70 years of agony. Nobody should ask us to be happy for that day, even though we respect it” (Bela, 2008). This is the expression of deep-seated sentiments common to Hungarians everywhere, not only to those living as minorities outside the Hungarian state (Gerner, 2007).

The presence of two conflicting foundational myths related to the same territory, the Transylvanian plain, makes the interpretation of history from a Hungarian point of view to come in direct opposition with the interpretation of history seen from a Romanian perspective. This mutual exclusivity, present also in the case of the Serbian – Albanian contention over Kosovo, makes almost impossible the presence of positive stories about cohabitation and gives birth to many stereotypes. The description of the Romanian myth of origins as well as that of the myth of national unity highlighted the inclusion of Transylvania in that symbolic territory that had always been inhabited by Romanians. Magyar historiography on the other hand supported the argument of a Transylvania completely void of inhabitation at the time of their arrival, thus giving them historic precedence and right of territory.

These two opposed versions of the past seem to carry some weight in the way regular people imagine their past: in a study over the social representation of the past, Mungiu-Pippidi found out that even though a majority of Hungarians (71.8%) and of Romanians (39.1%) living in Transylvania do not take into consideration who was first in that region when they discuss entitlement to civic rights, there is still a significant number of Romanians, about a quarter, who believe that they have the right of the first comer and that gives them most rights, placing Hungarians in a second-class category of citizenship (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999: 98-99).

Besides the contention over the primacy over the land, another historical controversy that puts Hungarians and Romanians in opposite corners refers to discussions of responsibility and trauma: historical events may justify perceptions of victimhood on both sides and therefore a reluctance to assume the role of perpetrator. The same sociological study cited above concludes that the myth of victimhood is more present in the Romanian population, with 41% of Romanians and only 3.8% of the Hungarians seeing themselves as persecuted throughout history by the other. Romanians consider that they have been the injured parties of Hungarian rule over an extended period of time and place the blame on the present-day minority for their past suffering. Neither Hungarians nor Romanians are willing to say a *mea culpa*: less than 10% of the Romanians and about 20% of the Hungarians agree to the statement that both groups have engaged in actions detrimental to the other at some point in the past. This reinforces the perception of victimhood on the part of the Romanians, who are outraged that the Magyars do not stand up to their past and acknowledge what the Romanians describe as wrongdoings. It may seem that we are faced with an

immutable impasse here, but the solution is suggested by the results of the same opinion poll: 75% of Hungarians and 44.3% of the Romanians want to put the past behind them, or at least that past which involves conflicts and tensions; most of the inhabitants of Transylvania appear to be willing to remember only the good times and leave the bad times out, thus making room for a future where peaceful coexistence is possible (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999:124-125).

This readiness to start looking forward and leave the past transgressions out of the public space is not directly apparent in the pages of the textbooks. The Romanian historical canon does include many elements pointing out towards a self-perception of victims at the hand of mean neighbors, among whom the Hungarian aristocrats figure prominently and often. With the exception of one textbook (Petre et al., 2006), Hungarians are portrayed only as enemies, as counterweights to the Romanian action. They do not appear to possess specific features, others than an incessant desire to oppose the Romanian cause (and the reasons why this was justified from a Hungarian point of view are as good as never explained). Hungarians appear as archetypical “evil guys”, bearing similarities with the incompletely developed characters in the heroic-romantic literature: they are included in the story to highlight the nobility of reason, the generosity of the main character, or to explain its tragic fall, but they are not described as complete actors, with their own qualities and own motives.

Concretely, the contexts where Hungarians tend to appear in the history textbooks are bellicose: we saw their role as plotters against Michael the Brave for example. The words most often associated with their presence are “struggle” or “fight”: Stephen the Great “carried fights against the Hungarians” (Mihailescu, 2006:

53), Avram Iancu, a Transylvanian revolutionary of 1848, was engaged in “the fight against the Hungarians” (Grigore et al., 1998: 59); the same moment of 1848 placed the Magyar revolution, “animated by an excessive nationalism” (Oane and Ochescu, 2001: 106) in conflict with the Romanian one since the Hungarians were “after the annexation of the province [Transylvania] to Hungary and against the rights of Romanians” (Mihailescu et al., 2006: 72; 71). Hungarians are responsible for the “millennium-long slavery” of the Romanians (Mihailescu et al., 2006: 83), which ended only with the Great Union of 1918.

Certainly there are instances where the “cohabiting nationalities” are positively described. The Hungarians are praised for example for the high quality of their education, including at the university level. But the good image is regularly balanced by some negative comment or implicit allusion. When discussing the education system of Germans and Hungarians, the contrast with the poor quality of the Romanian system is immediately invoked, implicitly placing responsibility for this discrepancy on the shoulders of the dominant ethnic groups, who are “increasingly nationalistic” (Oane and Ochescu, 2001: 126). Even though this points out a new and favorable trend, of describing minority groups in a positive way, the presentation remains simplified and leaves aside the matters of conflict that certainly characterized the Saxon – Romanian relations during the Middle Ages. The Germans are not perceived as a threat, since they left Romania en masse during and immediately after the communist period, so their heritage is neutral. In contrast, the Hungarians are still present in Transylvania and are politically organized demanding

recognition of their specific rights, which is perceived as menacing by the Romanians.

Another interesting case is the Jewish minority. In the traditional society, the most obvious barrier with the Other was religion, or the “law” as it was known in the first texts of the chronicles. Whoever was outside the Christian “law” was considered different and potentially an enemy. Christianity provided solidarity with all other who shared the fate (and as such was the ground upon which military and political alliances were formed) and the automatic exclusion of the heathen, to be eliminated either by conversion or more radically by weapon. In this way, with one swap both Muslims (the Ottomans) and the Jews were placed outside the known and predictable normality. The “Turks” have traditionally been described as the enemy par excellence and in the old Romanian literature they are almost invariably portrayed in negative terms, as the cause of misery and the reasons for going to war (Mazilu, 1999: 71-100). If the obvious military and political threat of the Ottoman Empire allowed the medieval chroniclers to write diatribes against the Sultan and all the Muslims, known as followers of Mohammed (“Mahomedani”), the Jewish population did not pose such an obvious threat. Nevertheless, the radical Christian interpretation of the New Testament permitted and even encouraged the type-setting of the Jew as forever stained by deicide. As Mazilu points out in his analysis of medieval and renaissance literature in the three provinces, the religious texts serve as inspiration for a secular writing that propagates the theme of the Jew as the “permanently culpable, irrecoverably guilty for the blood of Christ, enemies always turned towards evil and dangerous in their relations with the Christians” (Mazilu, 1999: 101). The medieval

images of the Jew circulating in the Danubian space were the Torturer (of Christ), or the Traitor (as in Judas).

We discussed briefly in another part the popularity of the interwar anti-Semitic Legion of the Archangel Michael, whose discourse is not far from the medieval visceral antipathy of the non-Christian. The accusations against the Jewish population in the 1930s echo those of Michael the Brave, who accused the Jewish moneylenders of being predators and wishing to cause damage to the country (discussed in Mazilu, 1999: 170). This kind of historical problems, as well as the matter of the Holocaust, is not present in the communist historiography. On the contrary, the history written under the guidance of the Party refused to acknowledge the existence of anti-Semitism in Romania, and in those rare instances when anti-Jewish actions were reported they were either explained away or blamed on some one else (Cioflanca, 2004: 36).

The same attitude permeates history education. The textbooks written before 1989 do not include it among the accepted “national minorities”, and no specific information about the culture, traditions or the public personalities of Jewish origins is even included in the manuals. In contrast, the textbooks of the post-communist era make an attempt to recuperate this lost case, following the curriculum recommendation to include a specific chapter about the situation of the Jews during 19th century Romania. The new generation of history writers felt however uneasy about the topic and many a time adopted either a sterile description citing the texts of laws and numerous statistics or a justifying tone for the anti-Semitic trends present in the Romanian society of late 1800s. A quotation from the manual for 12th grade

(Scurtu et al., 1999: 103) from the subchapter “factors that influenced the attitude towards the Jews”: “Fear of foreigners is usual in every peasant traditional community. Also, anti-Semitism, as a modern ideology, could be encountered all over Europe in those days. Therefore, we cannot say that Romania behaved towards the Jews better or worse than other states in the same area. Violent manifestations against them, like in Russia, were absent here. But, in exchange, there were injustices, prejudices and negative stereotypes about the Jews, which they, as any human beings, did not deserve” (55). Here the expiatory and justificatory tone is obvious, the message being “we were following the spirit of the times, if abuses were committed, which were rare and few, it was not our fault”. The tendency to assign responsibility elsewhere, here to some general theories and historical trends that Romania could not escape, is explicit. As Murgescu (2001: 235) notes, it is significant that the next edition of the same textbook includes a modified version of the above paragraph in which the phrase “which they, as any human beings, did not deserve” disappears, replaced by a long paragraph in which further excuses are made “In spite of anti-Semitism, the Romanian society supplied enough resources for the development of the Jewish community in all its aspects: demographic, economic, cultural. The Jews, in their turn, contributed to the development of the Romanian state” (Vulpe, 1999: 65). No examples are given to demonstrate which resources were given to the Jewish community for its development, nor how they were applied in practice.

The problem of the Holocaust is a relative black spot in the traditional Romanian historiography, and only recently has there been an interest to bring accurate, non-ideological contributions to the debate. Not too long time ago,

Romanian intellectuals reacted firmly against the argument that Romanians did commit genocide against the Jewish population in Moldova, on both sides of the river Prut, and in Transnistria, as presented by Tony Judt. So many were these critiques of the British journalist and historian that they had to be collected in a small volume (Judt, 2000). After the publication of the report of the Wiesel Commission⁹⁵, there is a greater acceptance for a multifaceted discussion of the issue of anti-Jewish policies of the Antonescu regime, even though both the figure of the marshal and his political decisions are still a matter of debate both among specialists and in the wider public. Even if these attempts at examining more detachedly the issues of the recent past are laudable, many argue that they do not represent the mindset of the domestic public, nor that of its elites, but that these investigations about the Holocaust, as well as those about the crimes committed by and during the communist regime, are reflections of an outside influence. International organizations, among which the EU is the most active, project a list of desirable features and wish for conformity with their explicit norms, as expressed in their legal system, and with those unwritten norms that, by a process of socialization, must be adopted by states wishing full membership in the regional/ international community. (Dutceac Segesten, 2008).

Fourth grade textbooks do not mention at all the problematic situation of the Jewish population in Romania and in the Eastern territories where Romanian troops took control in their march accompanying the Nazi advance into the Soviet Union.

⁹⁵ The Wiesel Commission and later the Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (opened in October 2005) are the most important objective sources of information regarding the fate of the Jewish and other minorities during the WWII and its aftermath. The Wiesel Commission issued a complex report which made several recommendations in terms of the remembrance and study of the Holocaust, including the review and preparation of textbooks and other teaching materials (Comisia internationala pentru studierea Holocaustului in Romania , 2005).

Only in the 8th grade manuals do students read about the events of the year 1941, described in their brutality and using key words as “deportation”, “execution” and “extermination”: “The Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina and the Old Kingdom were deported in Transnistria, where many of them were executed or died because of the harsh deportation condition: the lack of food, diseases, chill. The order of the extermination of the Jews and Gypsies was given by Marshal Antonescu, pre-dating and adopted independent of the extermination policy practiced by Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union. The deportations ceased in 1942” (Vulpe et al., 2000: 126). This account is devoid of most pitfalls typical of the communist and early post-communist historiography, usually apologetical of the measures installed by Antonescu, blamed on the Germans. The situation of the Jews is described in no uneven terms, in its naked brutality; the only thing missing is the resonance of the word Holocaust.

Another 8th grade textbook (Oane and Ochescu, 2001) includes, besides a description of the events of 1941, also a clarification as to why the persecution and deportations take place against the Jews. The book makes the connection with the past discrimination against the Jewish population, thus presenting their extermination as an aggravating step of a condition having its roots in policies initiated in the years before. The re-conquest of Bessarabia and Bukovina from the Soviets signals the beginning of a “toughening of measures taken against the Jews in those lands (considered all to be Bolshevik agents!) and their deportation en masse across the Dniestr, circa 100 000 of them being lost – dead or disappeared” (150). This account is more vague as to the fate of the Jewish people (no mention of the Roma is made throughout the chapter) and omits for example to include anti-Semitic actions,

including mass killings or deportations, from the Old Kingdom, especially Moldavia. The explanation for the government anti-Jewish policies resides in the perception of communists as the ultimate threat, and the association of an entire ethnic group, the Jews, with this ideology. This argument however may leave the impression that the Antonescu regime was not anti-Semitic, but only anti-communist; this was not the case in reality, as statements made by the Marshal himself demonstrate his personal belief in the anti-Jewish message that was embraced by his entire government⁹⁶.

In a move more typical of the late communist historiography and its continuators, the disastrous extermination policies of the government in Transnistria are counterbalanced by the presentation of policies more favorable to the Jewish population in Transylvania: “At the same time, the government refuses to turn in Jews to be exterminated in the German camps, as it was done by the Magyar government” (Oane and Ochescu, 2001: 150). On one hand Antonescu kills Jews from some part of the country, but on the other he refuses to comply with German orders in another part of the country. Does he prefer those people to be killed by his own people, one is left to wonder? No justification for this preference is brought up. Is it so that the authors are attempting to see this refusal to comply as an act of resistance? One of the most common themes in the Romanian treatment of the Holocaust is to admit that it happened, but not in Romania, and to portray the Romanians not as perpetrators of crimes against the Jews but as their saviors from the hands of Nazi Germans and

⁹⁶Antonescu’s anti-Semitism cannot be denied after reading examples of his speeches such as this one, made on October 11, 1941: “I shall turn the Romanian nation into a homogenous group. Everything that is foreign must slowly leave. I have started the achievement of this desideratum with the removal of the Jews. [...] I have started with Bessarabia. In Bessarabia there will be no trace of a Jew left. Bukovina will also be cleansed of 80% of its Jewry.” Quoted in Oisteanu (2005: 20).

Horthy-led Hungarians. This is what Shafir calls “selective negationism” (Shafir, 2002).

Over time the problem of anti-Semitism, by no means a matter of exclusive historical importance but very much an active element in contemporary Romanian politics, became normalized. In 2005, a textbook for the 10th grade has an entire subchapter dedicated to the Holocaust and asks “Has there been a Holocaust in Romania?”. The very question is a political hotspot and it has been largely debated both in intellectual circles and in political ones. Like in many other cases before, the textbooks follow the political lead when it comes to which version of the past is most suitable for the moment. Since the politicians, with the help of a special commission for the study of the Holocaust, solved the issue by admitting that Romania did play a role in the European persecution of the Jews and officially marked the 9th of October as Holocaust Day (Government Decision 642 05/05/2004), the textbooks also begin to discuss the events of 1940: “In Romania and in the territories under Romanian administration (Transnistria) 280 000 – 380 000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews have been exterminated.” And in an interpretation as to why studying the Holocaust is important, we read that “today’s interethnic and interreligious conflicts have their explanations in history. These can be attenuated and eliminated by knowing their causes, their historical unfolding, and their effects. Maintaining these events in the collective memory is not meant to keep the conflicts alive, but to eliminate them through tolerance” (Selevet et al., 2005: 98). Clearly we notice a change in the vocabulary, with terms like interethnic conflicts, collective memory and tolerance taking the front stage. At the same time, there is a change in attitude, with the

educative role of history as primordial especially in promoting a new type of society, a tolerant one. This is in line with the trend towards an alignment with the European history teaching and its effect of slowly removing the focus of the national majority and focusing on such values as diversity and multiculturalism.

The general impression is that the textbook authors are torn between two goals: on one hand to promote the Romanian national idea even at the expense of historical accuracy and on the other to conform to international requirements and standards by including relevant information about other cultures. One cannot have at the same time a history where the aim is for Romania to belong to Romanians and at the same time a history where Romania belongs to and is enriched by a host of other ethnic groups. This tension remains yet unsolved.

Serbia

Previous analyses of the image of the other in the history textbooks of the Serbs have pointed out the imbalance between the self and the Other in favor of the ethnocentric approach. In a study of 74 textbooks covering the period 1918 – 2000, Zoran Janjetovic focuses on several historical episodes bound to reveal the nature of the contacts between South Slavs in general and their neighbors. Altogether, the presence of national minorities and non-Slav peoples is “extremely meager”, and that it covariates with the perceived national interest and dominant ideology of the times. Before World War II the minorities either did not make an appearance at all, or when they did it was in a negative position. The situation is mildly improved in terms of the frequency of minority activities being mentioned, but no change is recorded in the

suspicious attitude towards them. Even if the communist ideology claimed to be internationalist, it continued to preserve some of the nationalist flavor of pre-war Yugoslavian ethos while bringing in the new aspect of class struggle. The final period under Janjetovic's analysis, the Milosevic years, is the most lamentable of all: the neglect of the interwar period is replaced by outright distrust, the negative perceptions from before are preserved and even completed with new ones, especially in regards to the Albanians, the preferred target of Serbian nationalists (2001: 212-213).

It has also been noted that each national history is very much focused on conflict moments (either military activities or cultural, religious or other type of non-military tension) and is almost always glorifying its own people (presented as victims or as defenders of the national territory). Analysis point out that former Yugoslav partners describe each other as rivals during the 1990s: Bosniaks and Croats perceive the Serbs as their greatest enemies, whereas the Serbs look at the Croats as the most dangerous of their neighbors (Baranovic, 2001: 21-22).

This negative perception of the Croats is partly grounded in a religious difference that makes Catholics into "fanatics" (Gacesa, 1993: 157) and on the long history of religious differentiation that played a role in the formation of the two Southeast European nations. At the same time, the religious difference does not become automatically opposition. Lessons about Croats in the 19th century for example describe in a factual manner their economic, political and social organizations, their position with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and even include moments of Serbo-Croatian collaboration, like the Zadar Resolution about the common struggle to attach Dalmatia to Croatia proper (Kovacevic, 2002: 55). As we

approach the contemporary era, the attitude toward the Croats worsens. They appear as overly nationalist, lacking team spirit and pursuing their own agenda, focused on the desire to separate and “break up Yugoslavia” (Gacesa, 1993: 87). And of course this is the first, royal, Yugoslavia we are talking about. The disintegration of the second, socialist, Yugoslavia is also due to the other republics, among which Croatia, which “forcefully and violently seceded” (Gacesa, 1993: 157), breaking the bonds of solidarity.

The experience of WWII does nothing to improve the picture. The Chetniks have been mentioned previously in the context of their competition with the Partisans within the fragmented opposition against the German invaders and their acolytes. Among these acolytes one can count the Ustasha militia, an organized military group based in the newly formed and Nazi supported Independent State of Croatia. Led by Ante Pavelic, the Ustasha matched to a t the radical instructions of Draza Mihailovic’s Chetniks for a homogenous Serbia with their own plan for an ethnically pure Croatia, from where Serbs, Jews and the Roma must be deported (Lampe, 2000: 209).

The Ustasha texts describe the Croats in overwhelmingly beautiful and glorifying terms, which for the contemporary Serb reader must sound close to a parody. Even if presented in positive terms, any essentialization is incorrect, as it invites pupils to think in stereotypes and to ignore in-group diversity. The Ustasha’s discourse echoes the phrasing and the content of other fascist movements from Germany or Italy but also from Serbia or Romania. It claims full sovereignty, including the monopoly of violence, for Croats, defined according to *jus sanguinii*,

over the territory of Croatia. It also lists their virtues: “orderly and religious family life”, cooperation, and “proven military virtues”, plus a “natural talent and capacity for science and education” (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 77). These features enable and empower the Croats to take full control over their country, by force if necessary, with foreign help if necessary, and admitting the success that comes with “ruthless fighting” and which turns pacifism into treason. This portrait may appear flattering for the Croats, if not for its exaggerated brush strokes and for the repeated accentuation of the use of violence, a violence without limits directed against all the non-Croats, who are relegated to an inferior stratum, to be disposed of.

Serbian textbooks spend more time on the sins of the Ustasha committed against the Serbs than on the campaign of the Chetniks against Croats, Bosniaks, Jews and Roma and it is in unequivocal terms that the “crimes of the Ustasha” are described. In the geography of extermination, the Chetniks seldom take some place, whereas the concentration camps of the Ustasha are well documented. The most (in)famous of these camps is Jasenovac, and one of the textbooks spends three-quarters of a page in quoting the impressions of a German officer after having visited this “place of horror”, where nothing but “naked skeletons” “kids, partly already dead, partly at the point of dying” move this inspector and make him regret the choice of leader installed with German support in Zagreb (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 77). Another textbook also mentions that hundreds of thousands of Serb lives have been lost at Jasenovac and elsewhere in Croatia, and that over 150,000 have been deported (Kovacevic, 2002: 159).

This lesson is preceded by a text about the Nazi death camps at Treblinka and Auschwitz, and followed by a text dealing with an appeal to “rescue the Serbs from the Independent State of Croatia”. Framing such as this puts the equal sign between Auschwitz and Jasenovac and thereafter between the Jewish Holocaust and the imprisonment and killing of the orthodox Serbs, who are chased and assassinated (Kovacevic, 2002: 159), “their throats are cut, they are tortured and persecuted” with unprecedented cruelty (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 78). This presentation is in line with the interpretation given by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the events of Jasenovac and to Ustasa activities in general. An example of this took place in 1991, when the earthly remains of about 800 victims of the Ustasa were excavated from their mass graves and reburied in a chapel consecrated to the “New Serbian Martyrs”. At the same time as the Serb victims were awarded holy status, the Ustasa were generalized to include all Croatians. Some of the speeches made with the occasion describe the Ustasa as jubilant at the thought that “all Serbs have perished” (Perica, 2002: 121).

Serbs are depicted as a counterweight to the “bestial Ustasha tyranny”. Using hit and run tactics and finding refuge in the mountains when the Ustasha ordered massive killings and persecutions (Kovacevic, 2002: 161), the organized Serb resistance attacked both Nazi and Ustasha troops whenever possible and expanded their theater of operation as to include all the Yugoslav territory. This type of presentation equates Serbs with the anti-Nazis, even though in reality all the south Slavs were represented in the resistance movements, and by the same token makes all Croats into followers of fascism, when in fact the Ustasha did not count more than

50,000 people among its members (Lampe, 2000: 223). Textbooks do not mention the growing opposition from within Croatia to the regime of Ante Pavelic and do not balance the presentation of Ustasha crimes with at least a sketch of the activities of the Chetniks towards the non-Serb populations⁹⁷.

Another “usual” Other are the Muslims, as it appears for example in the Kosovo myth, and the Muslims par excellence are the Turks, especially as representatives of the Ottoman Empire. No positive features of the time during the Ottoman rule are mentioned. There Turks are designated as the tyrant par excellence, who “increasingly oppressed and behaved with constant distrust towards the Serbs as the enemies of the empire” (Perovic and Strugar, 1992: 36). There is, again, glory in suffering: as much as the Serbs are tormented by their iron-hand rulers, they earn the glory of resistance and the noble title of relentless defenders of the Christian and national causes. The Ottoman rule is a time of deep exploitation, culturally, religiously but also practically, via the high burden of feudal taxes. The entire administration in the service of the Sultan is portrayed as violent, corrupt, feeding on nepotism, favoritism or outright robbery (Perovic and Strugar, 1992, 1993: 29-30). The victims of this rapaciousness were the regular people, the *raya* – Turkish word embraced by the Serbian vocabulary, who had to fight for their sheer survival.

In general, the textbooks make very little to no mention of the more positive characteristics of the “Ottoman system”: no example of autonomy for a separate

⁹⁷ This was the reverse image of the presentation given to the Ustasha and the Chetniks in Croatian textbooks, where more often than not the national affiliation produces a bias discourse where the victims were only the Croats and perpetrators only the Serbs. The tendency was most acute in the early 1990s, at the peak of the wars of secession, with a slight toning down in the late 1990s and 2000s (Höpken, 2007. 182, 191 fn 42). For a general description of the treatment of minorities (including the Serbs) in Croatian textbooks, see Koren (2001).

educational and judicial system under the *millet* organizational unit; no mention of the treatment of the “people of the book”, Christians and Jews, who were not persecuted for their beliefs⁹⁸ (Hupchick, 2002: 132-134). Neither do the texts offer any examples of the flourishing economy that developed at the height of the Ottoman rule in the 16th century. Quite the opposite: the textbooks project a picture of the Serbs as the always injured party, the second class citizens, poor, mistreated, having to duck for the heavy hand of the state, the janissaries. As Antic points out, to expect inclusion and equal representation is an obvious anachronism where modern political concepts as universal citizenship is applied to a feudal social system, “in order to prove that the exaggeratedly poor and difficult conditions of the Serb populace originated from this civilizational and religious clash” (Antic, 2005: 194). This makes textbook authors like Perovic and Strugar, Mihaljcic and Gacesa adepts of the Huntingtonian thesis, but applied in another time frame, defined by another values, rules and norms.

Not only Turks are seen as an enemy, but by extension other Muslims as well. In particular the Slav converts to Islam, especially in Bosnia, receive a negative treatment in the pages of textbooks. Since by embracing Islam they could accede to positions of power, their behavior was similar to that of the oppressors from Istanbul. They behaved self-interestedly and tried to accumulate as much wealth as possible at the expense of their neighbors who refused to convert and thus had to suffer the constant abuse and interference in their private life by these local agas (Perovic and

⁹⁸ Certainly lack of persecution did not imply equality. On the contrary, the protection the theocratic state of the Sultans offered to the Christians and the Jews was conditioned on their acceptance of the superiority of the Islamic religion (Hupchick, 2002: 132). The Ottoman Empire can be judged as tolerant only in comparison with other political organizations with which it was contemporary, for example the Spanish or French monarchies where religious tolerance did not extend even to sectarian Christians, not to mention Jews or Muslims.

Strugar, 1992: 101). As the Njegos epic poem so bluntly puts it in the 19th century, those who became Muslims are traitors of the nation and are to be punished by death. This intransigent attitude remains the dominant undertone of representations in the textbooks today. The sufferings of Muslims at the hands of the Serbs are also constantly left out. A significant episode like the confiscation of the property of Muslims, not all of which were Turks, and their physical persecution during the first and second Serb uprisings of 1804 and 1815 is completely ignored.

Albanians are another category of Muslims who have become over time competitors of the Turks as archenemy and major threat to the Serbian nation. However there are some textbooks do make an effort to sketch a more accurate image of the Albanians, and one strategy is to use the voice of foreign chroniclers to describe them. This is the path chosen by a more recent book (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003) where we read the words of a Catholic monk on a trip to Albania in 1308 on behalf of a French king. The authors use a passage from the monk's trip log where Albanians are described as "very belligerent", "very good archers and throwers of spears", who do not live in cities but in tents, because most of them live a nomadic life, except for the people of Southern Albania who are settled as farmers. The language of the Albanians is different from that of their neighbors. In terms of religion, "they are not entirely Catholic, nor are they completely schismatic", but have a "natural love" for the Latin people (120). Certainly, the monk is interested in the religious belonging of the Albanians and the potential for a conversion to Catholicism, but beyond his specific mission the image that emerges from his

description is not necessarily a dark one: we see the Albanians at work, and hear them speak in a unique language and hear about their daring in war.

This last characteristic is taken up in the following lesson, which introduces to the Serbian pupils the figure of Skanderbeg, the legendary Albanian hero. Even though he was given as *devşirme* or “blood tribute”⁹⁹ to the Sultan and had to convert to Islam, George Kastriotis, or Skanderbeg, renounced his allegiance to the Porte and led an anti-Ottoman front. The text is a medieval description of the defense of a medieval fortress led by the Albanian warrior, who is described as brave, intervening in the battle himself, and “performing deeds which deserve to be talked about”. His troops demonstrate courage and volunteered to jeopardize their life in order to defeat the enemy, which they did “in an unimaginable way” (Mihaljcic and Cirkovic, 2003: 122).

Generally speaking, the Albanians in the Middle Ages are portrayed more or less objectively. There is a constant emphasis on their special tongue, and on the fact that they already inhabited the land upon which the migratory Slavs settled until the 7th century, but that they retreated into the mountains, where the Slavs did not penetrate (Mihaljcic, 1992: 30). Albanian and Serbian rulers even “had good relations” before the kings Stefan Nemanja and Stefan Dusan took over most of the Albanian districts, but only until the Turks took over, especially after the Kosovo Polje battle (Mihaljcic, 1992: 115). The resistance against the Ottoman conquest was

⁹⁹ The *devşirme* was a mechanism for the Ottoman Empire to populate its military-administrative system with free labor. Between 1000 and 3000 children every one to seven years were collected and sent to Istanbul to convert to Islam and work as soldiers or functionaries for the Sultan. This special type of levy was imposed only on the Balkan possessions of the Empire. Over time it became a path for social advancement as many *devşirme* officials favored their former families with jobs. Ironically, parents would bribe local authorities to have their children taken as tribute, hoping for future personal benefits (Hupchick, 2002: 129-130).

tough, and here again we meet the same description of the Albanians as “very belligerent and good archers”, and the same image of George Iskariot Skanderbeg as a great fighter, “famous all over Europe” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 116).

The same textbook, which has been reprinted in numerous editions up until 2000, dedicates three pages, with illustrations, to the Albanians in the medieval time, with detailed information about their economic habits, about their towns and villages, and about their social organization. No explicit negative or purposefully biased description of their traditions is in print, perhaps with the exception of a comment on the Albanian culture which, because of foreign influence, “lagged behind and started quite late”, with the first written Albanian text from the 14th century. At the same time, the culture of the monasteries and of the aristocracy is praised: “a large number of Albanians were educated to become priests” in monasteries of both Western and Eastern Christian faith, turned into “centers of literacy and education” (Mihaljcic, 1992: 117).

It does not appear in the intention of the authors to minimize or denigrate the Albanian group, and their presentation is made in the context of the “Serbs and their neighbors” chapters, thus placing them on an equal footing with the Bulgarians, Hungarians or Romanians. The image that forms itself on the retina of the social imaginary of the reader is certainly filtered by other knowledge, accumulated from the media or from family histories, but based on the text alone, it would be a stretch to accuse the textbooks of negative stereotyping. It is true that the violent nature of the Albanians is reemphasized, but not in a pejorative sense. Given the penchant of

Serbs for values such as courage and military skills, to award another group these same features may stand in for praise rather than dismissal.

The Albanian culture is not presented as monolithically Islamic. On the contrary, their Christian heritage is underscored, as well as their integration into the Mediterranean region (contacts with Venice and the “Frank kings” but also with the Serbian medieval state and with Byzantium). Their conversion to Islam is entirely attributed to the Ottoman conquest and rule (Mihaljicic, 1992: 116). By not focusing on the religious divisions within the ethnic Albanian group and by referring to their unique language, the authors fall in line with the perception of the Albanians themselves, for whom language and not religion is the key national marker (Babuna, 2000: 67)¹⁰⁰.

Perhaps more is to be learned by looking at the Serb historical narrative and noticing the absence of the Albanians. The Albanians do not appear as companions of the Serbs at any of the historical points of intersections that could bring them in contact: at Kosovo Polje in 1389, during the Great Exodus of 1690, during the Serbian uprisings of 1804, or during the entire anti-Ottoman struggle of the 19th century, no word is being said about the Albanians. Perhaps it is in the eye of the beholder to look in all the wrong places, but a careful scrutiny of page after page of history textbook returns more or less the same result: no Albanians here. It is true that Albanians have always been the most elusive of the Balkan people, and it is also true that, *grosso modo*, the Serbs keep a narrow focus on themselves as main characters of

¹⁰⁰ Even the fathers of Albanian nationalism recognized the importance of language as the only unifier for a people split in two communities (Geg and Tosk) and along three religions (Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic) and therefore pushed for the creation of a common language with a common alphabet and a common educational system (Vickers, 1999: 28).

their national history, with not many others casted as important actors. Nevertheless, an alternative take may be that behind this purposeful ignorance hides the desire of the Serbian historiography to diminish the role and importance of the Albanians in the collective past of the Balkan region.

Albanians fall out of time: the treatment of 500 years of their history is speeded over in one short paragraph, which begins with Skanderbeg and his failure to stop the Turkish conquest in 1479 and ends with the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. The period in between these two events is covered in the sentence “Albania became a part of the Turkish Empire and remained so until the Balkan wars” (Gacesa, 1993: 47). In a sense, it is almost as if the Albanians are so insignificant, they are not even worth mentioning. Not worth mentioning except when it comes to the modern era. When the Albanians embark on the road towards the affirmation their national identity, they begin to be perceived as a threat from a Serbian national point of view.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries are tough times for the Albanians according to the above author, who uses words with a negative undertone to describe them: development was “very slow”, the economy was “very backward”, and their social relations “feudal”. They lacked a modern organizing system, instead being grouped in “tribes” ruled by an “unwritten code” that implied “tribal autonomy” (both Gacesa, 1993: 46 and Kovacevic, 2002: 63 use the same key words). Perhaps this may not be considered necessarily an insulting reference, as indeed, Albanians were among the laggards in terms of social and economical development. Their society was structured according to traditional configurations of families and clans and they did employ the Kanun of Lek as a form of constitution or set of norms that prescribed

the acceptable behavior of the members of the community, Kanun which survived the modern introduction of a civil and penal code under the rule of King Zog in the 1920s (Vickers, 1999: 5-6, 118). It is a matter of the language used and the tacit irritation that transpires from the description above that transmit the impression of Albanians being of an inferior quality. The lingering bitter aftertaste of this description is enhanced by the contrast with the Serbs. At the same time with the Albanians' complacency or imprisonment in traditionalism, the South Slavs "achieved significant results in all areas of cultural creation", joined European modern literary movements, spread their education, improved their literacy, and made the universities of Belgrade and Zagreb "centers of scientific activity" (Gacesa 1993: 50). The two groups are positioned in stark contrast and radical opposition.

The "Albanian terror" (Gacesa, 1993: 113) justifies the otherwise unpalatable collaboration between Chetniks and Nazi troops during World War II. As much as the author is critical of the Chetnik compromise with the occupying power elsewhere, when dealing with the "separatist and nationalist" Albanians in Southern Serbia (not named Kosovo) this collaboration is justified. The pupil is left to wonder if there was another way to deal with the bands of rogues spreading, again, "terror", destroying villages and forcing Serbs into exile (Gacesa, 1993: 109).

This notion is buttressed by the remaining passages of the lesson, where the dichotomy Albanian – Serb is clearly spelled out: Albanian "robbery and terror" is tolerated by the Ottoman authorities because it was a "method for pushing the Serbs out from Kosovo and Metohija and for appropriating their land" (Gacesa, 1993: 46). It is not clear how the Turks would benefit from the forced exile of the Serbs and why

they should support the Albanians, especially since we learn in the paragraph below that these Albanians developed a national, anti-Ottoman movement, fighting against the Sultan albeit via “poorly organized, uncoordinated and unsuccessful rebellions” (again Gacesa, 1993: 46 and Kovacevic, 2002: 63 have identical texts). The Albanians were in such poor shape that they could not set themselves free from the rule of the Porte through their own power; their first independent state became a possibility only because the Serbian army liberated them at the end of the first of the two Balkan wars (Kovacevic, 2002: 64). Gacesa in his turn highlights the role of the Big Powers in finding a solution for the Albanian “problem” and assigns responsibility for the birth of an Albanian kingdom to the London Peace conference and the support given to Albania by Britain and Germany among others. The texts consulted take away the actorness of the Albanians and in doing so disempower them. Albanians appear weak and wavering, left at the mercy of others.

The impotence of the Albanians, these “wanton Arnauts” (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 21) begins to wither as a descriptive formula at the time of the debate around the autonomy granted to the province of Kosovo by the constitutional amendment of 1968. Their claims for regional self rule are interpreted by the authors of 8th grade textbooks as “separatist – chauvinistic” activities, directly challenging the territorial integrity of Serbia. Serbs are forced to live in an “atmosphere of fear, property destruction, threats and constant exile” (Rajic, 2005: 183) and most of them are forcefully banished away from Kosovo, leaving behind “ethnically clean”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ The authors appropriate the terms „ethnically clean”, usually associated with the Serbian policy against the Kosovo Albanians, and reverse its target: now it is the Serbs that are ethnically cleansed first. Thus the later intervention to eliminate the Albanians in 1998 is justified as a proportional reaction to the tragedy inflicted upon the local Serbs.

Albanian areas. As late as 1994, the authors include an excerpt from a speech held by a Serbian representative at a meeting of the Yugoslav Communists, where the wooden language of propaganda takes over: the counter-revolutionary goals of the Albanians were to “threaten the foundations of our brotherly community – brotherhood and unity, equality, constitutional order and self-government” (Bekanovic and Stojanovic, 1994: 90). The word “enemy” is used three times in two paragraphs in reference to the Albanians, and the speaker urges the Party to “cut off the roots” of their movement.

It is left unknown what effect a text like the one briefly quoted above has on a public no longer exposed to the “new speak” of the Communist propaganda machine. Do words like counter-revolutionary, self-government, “achievements of our revolution” and so on provoke any reaction in a pupil using the book in 1994 or after? The virulence of the language is likely to leave an imprint nevertheless, and the complete identification of the Albanian with the adversary leaves no room for nuances or in-group variations.

Textbooks do not mention the ill treatment of Albanians by the Serbs in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, when the Serbs’ autonomy gain was accompanied by massive forced expulsions of the Muslim population, with the Albanians being most affected as an estimated 25 000 were killed in 1912 (Resic, 2006: 173). Neither is there much of a discussion of the acts of violence committed by the invading Serb troops into Northern Albania during the First Balkan War of 1912. The pupils are invited to focus on the Serbian diligence, dedication and military ability and not to take stock of the human costs involved in such operations, if they

are not on the Serbian side, that is. This attitude is a direct example of prejudice at work. As Bauman argued, prejudice not only prevents any positive qualities to be reflected upon the Other, but it leads to the fact that “one's own atrocity against out-group members does not seem to clash with moral conscience” (Bauman, 1990: 32).

The pattern emerging from the textbooks is a clear imbalance: the tragedy of the Serbs is maximized, in contrast to the suffering of the Croats, Bosniaks, and Muslims in general, diminished or not included. However, in the latest edition of the 8th grade history textbook analyzed here, there is a change in this uneven presentation: for the first time, the wars of Yugoslav secession emerge as a catastrophe affecting equally all the parties in the conflict and some measure of empathy with all the victims can be sensed in phrases such as these: “the consequences of these conflicts were catastrophic for all populations regardless of national and religious background. Collective graveyards/tombs witness about the massive killing of civilians, Serbs, Croats and Moslem [...], devastated cities [...], deserted villages. [...] Many religious buildings were destroyed as well: Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, monasteries, parochial houses, mosques and medrese” (Rajic et al., 2005: 183).

This empathy does not extend to the Albanians. Even the 2005 textbook does not describe the actions of the Yugoslav army in 1998 as anything but a response to the terrorist activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army. No numbers describe the Albanian victims and refugees pushed away by the Milosevic policies. Instead pupils read only about the Serb tragedy, since the “systematic destruction of Christian temples began although some of them were older than several hundred years”. The

exile of non-Albanians is accounted for: “Since the summer of 1999 over 200,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians moved away from Kosovo” (Rajic et al., 2005: 186) but the author includes no reflection of the estimated 850,000 Albanians who had to move outside the province and the additional 500,000 who were internally displaced by March 1999, when the NATO campaign began (Udovicki, 2000: 335).

The Other appears in the pages of history textbooks as a shadow of the main character, the Self. Even in the case of Serbia, whose curriculum does not separate national and world history, the national group is the one occupying the main stage. In the little room that is allowed for its presence, the gallery of Others is mostly composed of negative characters. However, to generalize and argue for a demonization en masse is not fair. There are groups like the Saxons in Romania or historical periods, like the Middle Ages in Serbia, who are treated evenhandedly, and even described in a positive light. After reading the textbooks under examination one is left to wonder where are the Others? Even if this analysis focused on only some of the potential alterities, the oppressive presence of the in-group leaves no space for the description of out-groups that would do them justice. Most of the time, they appear as half-sketched figures seen against the light, fading contours that only serve as terms of comparisons to the main group. The change over time, especially in the case of Romania, has been towards inclusion and the most recent textbooks there are also the most generous in their presentation of national minorities, neighbors in the region and general Others. This presentation is the exception and not the rule: for the most part, those who do not belong to the in-group are automatically dismissed or treated with distrust.

Conclusion

This business is well ended.
My liege, and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief:
Shakespeare, Hamlet

Education in general and history education in particular may play a special role in the socialization of norms, as history affects the identity of groups, placing them in a time continuum, connecting them with previous and future generations. If ethnic identity, and to a large extent, national identity as well, are based on the perception of common descent shared by all members of the group, then it deduces logically that history education directly affects the identification process by providing a common past to all the members of the target group. The building blocks of the common past do not have to be entirely consistent with historical facts, whose existence as undisputable truths can be questioned from a theoretical point of view. On the contrary, the common past needs only to be credible and can be organized in the form of shared narratives about the common origins of the group, defined here as myths. Myths play several roles, two of which being of primary importance: 1. organizing and making sense of an otherwise complex and irregular reality and 2. drawing borders between various groups and their external environment or neighbors. On the basis of these two functions, the present research has argued that myths are an inevitable presence in all communities, and that they play a political role.

One of the political implications of myth is related to its relationship with interethnic conflict. The argument presented holds that myths provide the cement of a community, as well as the basic norms and values for behavior governed by the logic of appropriateness. When certain conditions are present (regime change, political instability, resource scarcity, high mobilization of masses, etc.), myths can articulate ethnic identity which, in its turn, acts as catalyst for collective action, making the loss and gain of one apply for for the entire group. The present study does not deny the importance of rational motives for engaging into conflict, but wants to pay attention to the formulation of such motives: as in the discussion about the existence of a national interest for states, the interests of ethnic groups can be said to emerge from an embedded rationality, framed by the existent norms and values that are partly expressed in mythical narratives.

At the end of the day, how does this research fare in accomplishing in what it set out to achieve? The paper has hypothesized that ethnic identity is relevant for conflict, that myths are part of the process of identification, and that the history textbook is a good locus to identify the political myths active in a given time and place for a given community, in this case the Romanians and the Serbs. It has concretely asked whether myths can be found in the pages of history schoolbooks and if there are differences in the types of myths used in the self-definition of the Romanians and the Serbs as well as in the definition of their respective Other. It has also looked at how these self-images change over time and if these changes are paralleled by similar processes in the political and social space.

A summary of findings indicates that myths are present in the history school texts, and that they vary over time, in parallel with the changes noticeable at the political level. Special circumstances, like war, are also finding their way in the interpretation of the past, sometimes with a delay: curricula and textbook content are slow to change, even if they do adapt to new requirements from the part of different relevant actors in the textbook production process (state institutions, scientific communities, civil society, and markets).

The most interesting result of this research is also the least expected: the working hypothesis has been disproved. Romania and Serbia exhibit very similar myths resulting in comparable self-representations based on the propagation of national sentiment, very positive, uncritical self-valorization and a consistent identification of the in-group as victims of the Great Powers, neighbors or fate. This finding disproves the existence of a direct link between textbooks and conflict. Both Serbia, a conflict case, and Romania, a non-conflict case, display more or less the same pattern of identification through myths.

A more detailed overview of the conclusions is outlined below. The study began by identifying some of the most important myths currently in circulation at the level of the general public discourse in the case of Romania and Serbia (in media, in political statements, in modern folklore, and as much as one could identify, in the minds of regular people). The study has asked if these myths can be found in the textbooks pages and the answer to this question has been mostly in the affirmative. Myths circulate in history schoolbooks just as often as they appear elsewhere in the social imaginary. However, the study also revealed a change in the interpretation of

myths over time, an evolution largely coinciding with the developments in the political context. When the political elites used an aggressive and exclusionary discourse (for example at the height of interethnic violence) the interpretation of myths has mimicked the set tone: myths of uniqueness, of antiquity, of military valor predominated and set up hard, impermeable borders between self and Others. Slowly, the tone of this interpretation has become more moderate, and the contacts with these Others have begun to be portrayed as less hostile. The present research did not focus on the processes behind this change, and did not claim causality but only covariation. However, it has ventured to assign some agency to international actors such as the EU.

Romania and Serbia presented numerous similarities in their political mythologies. Christianity was a dominant identification factor and received primary placement in the textbooks, but under different guises. Romania emphasized the existence of a popular Christianity, summarized in the belief that “the Romanians have been born Christian”. According to this myth, Romanians did not have to go through a conversion. Instead their Christianity was the result of an organic growth, which translated, in their eyes, into a more genuine type of religious connection in comparison with Others. In Serbia, Christianity was interpreted mostly according to the Heavenly Serbia myth, which describes the Serbs as willing to self-sacrifice in the name of the superior values of God and eternal life, at the expense of victory or recognition in the temporal world. In choosing the Eternal Kingdom, Serbs demonstrate their moral superiority and their essence closer to the divine one.

The myth of the Kosovo battle, often seen as an expression of the Heavenly Serbia myth of sacrifice and redemption, can also be interpreted as an election myth. Serbia thus joins the company of countries known for their illusions of grandeur, like the USA, France or, more recently, Poland, in presenting itself as endowed with special attributes which imply responsibilities of resolute leadership in military, cultural and moral matters. Serbia's myth of military valor buttresses the messianic myth of Kosovo and allows for presenting the Serbian army or Serbian Church as showing the way for and defending the interests of other people in the region. Unexpectedly, the textbooks discuss the actual Kosovo Polje battle in neutral, moderate tones and dedicate special lessons to the construction of the "Kosovo legend", seen as separate from the actual event. The approach to the Kosovo myth is both uncritically embracing, as when it connects with the heroic depiction of military victories, and critically rejecting, in those lessons that make pupils aware of the made-up nature of stories circulating in folklore. Sometimes both approaches emerge in the pages of the same book, leading to issues of inconsistency. Nevertheless, in contrast with the narrative proposed in the political discourse of the nationalist forces or in the public positions of the Serbian Orthodox Church, textbooks display categorically a more moderate attitude towards the Kosovo myth.

Romanian textbooks adopt a detached attitude when discussing the idea of "historical rights" connected to myths of antiquity and of territory. Romanian textbook authors make reference to the political use of history when they present territorial claims of Hungarians and Romanians over the symbolic land across the woods, Transylvania. In other sections of the textbook however the analytical

approach to historical rights and claims of primacy is replaced by a one-sided presentation that gives ground to myths of sacred territory. Both Transylvania and Kosovo enjoy the status of holy land whose control is essential to the survival of the nation.

Another common point between the two countries has been the presence of myths of victimhood, betrayal and persecution. The stories figuring high in the textbooks are very similar: they tell about deceiving neighbors, temporary alliances, backstabbing and treachery. Both Romanian and Serbian mythologies assign great responsibility elsewhere, most commonly with the Great Powers but also with neighbor states. Serbia has a more developed and articulated conspiracy myth, and a more fierce depiction of the Other in religious terms, with Catholicism and the Vatican as main foes. Romania's victim status is usually related to the inferior treatment of Transylvanian Romanians during the centuries of Hungarian rule. In both cases there is a good dose of revanchist sentiments being mobilized, with victimhood giving entitlement to a right for compensation, at least in moral terms, and to finger pointing towards the purported perpetrators.

Both mythologies define the Other in terms varying from indifference to outright slander, making great use of the short vision of prejudice. Biased, simplified or truncated historical narratives exclude the neighbors and/ or place them in the position of perpetrator of crimes and injustice against the in-group. There are also instances of positive stereotyping, as is the case with the Germans in Romania – their image, even if far from nuanced, includes some words of praise (rigorousness, organization, urbanism), which give a slanted but nevertheless affirmative

impression. This is not the case with the Jewish or the Magyar ethnic groups, largely relegated to the “bad guy” category. In Serbian textbooks, the emergence of a clear contender to the good neighbor position isn’t apparent. The assignation of neutral or negative characteristics fluctuates over time, but rarely has a single group consistently received more eulogies than critiques. Surprisingly then, the Albanians and the Croats, two of the most controversial Others, have benefited from a neutral description concurrent with professional historical analyses of their medieval past. In contrast, when moving into the modern and contemporary eras, neutrality changed to the negative and both groups’ representations became full of disapproval, discontent and occasionally anger.

A difference between the two national mythologies has been noted in their definition of Other as Europe. Romania, basing its case on a linguistic argument, perceives itself more European than the Europeans, according to a “geopolitical bovarism”. Serbian textbooks oscillate more between describing Serbia as entirely European – civilized, cultivated, developed – or more European than Europe itself, as the holder of a more genuine definition of civilization than a Europe that betrayed itself.

The anger of the Serbs is a temperamental difference between the two cases studied. Myths of military valor dominate the self-representation of the Serbs, whereas the Romanians, although not ignoring military achievements, see themselves as milder, more pacifistic, with heroism that comes in well-portioned doses. The Romanian soldiers and generals, with the entire military system, are qualified as valiant, qualified and noble, but there is no real myth of the Romanian fighter that

transpires from the textbook pages. The Serbs have more of a tradition that values the home element, including the unchiseled power of the man still in touch with nature and the figure of the hero as soldier. This tradition may come in contrast with that of mainstream Europe, at times perceived as frivolous, decadent and not worthy of emulation. Romanians seem to have interpreted their relationship with the forces of nature in a more fatalistic, resigned way, less pro-active in any case. Wisdom lies in knowing to accept what one cannot change, as the skeptics would argue, and Romanians seem to have embraced this view of their history. This makes them also more malleable and willing to adapt to others' norms and standards. Concretely, this has rendered European integration easier, at least at the formal level, with few voices in the public debate consistently rejecting Europe in favor of autochthonism.

Romania's moderation and Serbia's apparent more radical, all-or-nothing self-representation may have something to do not only with the underlying cultural and political trends in the respective cases, but also more immediately with the organization of the textbook publishing. Romania has a liberalized market with at least three alternative school texts, whereas Serbia allows only one. The relatively more pluralist and moderate overall picture of myths in Romania is a composite result of all the texts in use at a given time, some of which are, as we saw, more professional and some of which are less so. In Serbia there is only one channel that sends the message to the pupils, so the textbook analysis remains inevitably more monochromatic.

Generally speaking, the presence of myths has been identified in all textbooks for both countries, but with a perceptible change over time. In the early 1990s both

Romania and Serbia displayed a strong national orientation and an exclusivist telling of the past. This tendency gradually effaced in Romania, where serious attempts have been made at synchronization with European standards both in the form and the content of history textbooks. The most recent textbooks are also the most open for discussion, most inclusive and, pedagogically, most favorable for fostering critical reasoning. In Serbia, the trend has not been that straightforward. The early 1990s were still marked by the Yugoslav canon, slowly replaced by a national reinterpretation of the past accepted even today. Nationalist sentiment peaked in the mid to late nineties, at the height of the Milosevic regime and the war period, and has not disappeared today, almost a decade since the end of the conflict in Kosovo.

This evolution can be interpreted to illustrate two theoretical points. As assumed, the history textbook is indeed a reflection, even if sometimes delayed, of the political priorities of governments. The “Europeanization” of the Romanian history textbook is in line with the wide-ranging transformations taking place elsewhere in that country’s society, economy and politics. In Serbia, the reluctance to entirely incorporate the European model into the history textbooks is related to the ambiguity and split within the society there, so deep as to qualify the description of “Weimar Serbia” (Stefanovic, 2008). In other words, the textbook has been found to provide a good shortcut for the type of politics driven by national governments and a good mirror for the state of mind dominating at the level of the social imaginary. The removal from power of the Milosevic regime did not imply a democratization and liberalization in education, nor in textbook production, and was conducive only to timid changes in the content of history lessons. This was paralleled with a surprising

continuity in the cultural arena: the *ancien régime* cultural tradition, assumed to “be the consequence of collapsed values and across-the-board hopelessness, survived even after the demise of the dominant political order of the 90's. That survival was the first sign that the stated cultural model was not only a mere attachment of this era, but rather a persisting cultural blueprint [...]” (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2007: 53).

The other theoretical point has to do with the role of myth in political analysis. One of the side purposes of this thesis has been to demythify myth itself, to dispel its bad reputation as an unemployable, if not useless, concept in political science. Myth is helpful in providing a catalogue of the self-perceptions of a given community – it is therefore useful if one wants to find out how the group sees itself, from the inside. At the same time, myth helps explain collective action, since it is a principle of solidarity and a principle of transmission of morality. In this, it is an essential component of social organization and collective action and therefore more or less inevitable. As much as the concept of myth is necessary, its content may vary widely across time and space for the same group. Myths can draw borders, but these borders are permeable and flexible, soft and supple; the groups that were once separated can become one (from peasants into Frenchmen, in the words of Eugène Weber (1976)), just as unitary groups may build boundaries that result in new communities. While the categories of in- and out-group are constant, their definition can vary and with it the interpretation of myths. As we have seen, textbooks exemplify both a simplified, template-bound interpretation of the past, and a more nuanced, polyphonic and

reflexive style. Even though it would be incorrect to deny the predominance of the former, the latter strategy must also be acknowledged.

This may ultimately dispel the notion that the Balkans are somehow especially prone to myth-making and to a dangerous sort of emotional politics that leads more often than not to conflicts and violence. Not only do myths exist and circulate in all cultures, but it is often the same type of myths that can be encountered in the Balkans and elsewhere, including in the rational Enlightened West (for example myths of antiquity, of election, of antemurale, and so on). In addition, by using the comparative method, a thick description based on local materials and grounded in generalizable theoretical propositions, this study has tried to overcome not only the West's preconceived ideas about the Balkans but also Balkan's preconceived idea about itself. There are not many the voices in the public sphere from Southeast Europe who would resist falling into the trap of the *sui generis* argument, following along the lines of the famous saying "it takes a Serb to know a Serb" (replace "Serb" with "Romanian", "Croat", "Greek" etc.). This argument is fallacious on two grounds: it assumes the irrefutable and immutable existence of a homogenous nation of Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, and so on, and it precludes a priori the possibility of a valuable contribution from the outside looking in. While fully recognizing the value of local sources and local scientific traditions, widely referred to here, the present research vouched for a normalized and non-dogmatic perspective over the region, where external observers' and insiders' acumen combine to provide a picture more faithful to the complexity of reality.

How do these findings fare along the lines of the four evaluation criteria of interpretive social science research: thick description, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and triangulation? The present study has attempted to assemble a complex picture of political myths as they are reflected in the history textbooks, illustrated with numerous examples and direct excerpts from the books, so as to leave open the possibility for other ways of understanding the same texts. Since word and image are not mere echoes of each other but complement and sometimes contradict one another, textual analysis has been accompanied by a critical examination of visual elements appearing on the textbook covers, which open wider the angle of interpretation.

As much as the analysis has focused on the textbooks, the identification of these symbolic narratives has required casting a wide net, capturing elements of mythology at work in literature, political discourse and media. The resulting images have been compared and contrasted with existing academic scholarship in the field, revealing thus the multiple perspectives on the same stories and opening up for parallel interpretations. Using multiple and diverse first and second hand sources and a thick description of the textbook presentations, authorial subjectivity and bias have the chance of being reduced and, when present, complemented by readers' own take.

The most surprising finding is the lack of relevance of textbooks for conflict in the case of Romania and Serbia. This goes against the established doxa on education and conflict, which emphasize the potential for education, history education and history textbooks in particular, to aggravate the immediate conditions leading to violent confrontations. The exception here is Romania, where strong national myths of nobility, heroism and precedence over neighbors, combine with a view of the

Hungarians, the ethnic group with which Romanians have been in conflict historically and most recently, as the archetype of the Villain and the traitor. Despite these preconditions for belligerence, the conflict never took place, even though the rhetoric of intolerance and aggression continued to be visible in the media and in the political discourse. Serbian textbooks also unexpectedly include a few positive references to Albanians and Croats, and critically presented the Kosovo Polje battle as both fact and legend. In other words, Romania's textbooks could have given grounds for more aggressive anti-Hungarian behavior whereas the Serbian texts could have reduced or eliminated the negative stereotyping of ethnic groups with which Serbs have recently been at war.

Seen in combination with another finding of this research, the overwhelming continuity of grand narratives from the mid-19th century to today, one possible explanation for this conclusion may be the very slow reaction speed of textbooks to political contexts. It appears that even though the interpretation of certain events (for example World War II in Serbia) changes in parallel with regime changes, the major mythical aspects survive intact. The story about the formation of the Romanian people through the mixing of two "noble essences", the Dacian and the Roman, could be traced in the historiography of 17th century chroniclers or even earlier, and is made explicit in the very first generation of history textbooks, in the 1830s. In Serbia, traditional values (like masculinity, heroism and sacrifice) and traditional stories (the Heavenly Serbia myth), circulating in oral legends, suffuse the textbooks now as well as in earlier periods, including the interwar decades.

If textbooks themselves are reticent to change profoundly, they are likely to be less effective as instruments of societal transformation, as they have been expected to be. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, myths are malleable, more like processes than fixed structures. They incorporate new themes and shed old ones, and in doing so they remain up-to-date, speaking to new generations in their own language. So do history textbooks, as they are supposed to embody the sum of knowledge of and of the deep beliefs held by any given society about its past. The findings of this research may imply that the original balance between textbook as a mirror of the society and as the hand that holds was not entirely calibrated. Textbooks as instruments may be less important than textbooks as reflections, as mirrors of society's at large, and perhaps less of the elite's, view of itself and Others.

Another consequence of the incongruity between hypothesis and results may alert future scholarly endeavors to the time span required in order for textbook research to be more meaningful. The postcommunist period studied here proved to be too short a period to notice any major effects. Perhaps a truly all-encompassing overview of history textbooks from at least the beginning of the 20th century to today would be more rewarding. This ample coverage was however outside the reach of this project.

Certainly, the study has limitations, implying that the link textbooks – conflict needs further investigation, as the perception coming from the history schooltexts used by the Others of Romanians and Serbs (Hungarians on one hand and Croats and Kosovo Albanians on the other) has not been included here. The explanation for the lack of conflict in Romania would lie not in the Romanian but in the Hungarian

peaceful presentation of the past and in Serbia conflict inclination may be a response to aggressive mythologies present in the neighbors' textbooks. However, if this analysis is anything to go by, textbooks elsewhere are also likely to register change slowly. The conflicts must have originated many decades before the current period to have the time to affect the public mind.

While the conclusions of this research are narrowed by the exclusion of the impact of textbooks in classroom practice, they nevertheless cast a shadow of doubt over the expectations placed on the possibility of education as an institution of peace and over the effectiveness of policies of peace promotion in post-crisis contexts through education instruments. Perhaps the change motivated by education and textbook reform is too slow to be measured in only decades, thus losing relevance as an emergency assistance tool. From a policy perspective, funds invested in textbook redesign and similar programs may have a better use in other areas. Textbooks in Romania and Serbia strongly emphasize the national element. They are focused on the promotion of a positive image of the in-group, using mythical narratives that support claims to prestige and fame. Even if they are excluding the Other or framing the neighbors or historical enemies as constant threats, textbooks do not seem to be sufficient to mobilize groups against one another. Textbooks appear to be more important for the construction and consolidation of in-group identity seen more in isolation rather than in contact with Others.

What now, can be legitimately asked? Are there certain trends leading away from the findings of this research, and if so, where to? Aware that it is entering the

speculative terrain, the remainder of this final chapter peeks into the future and elaborates on a scenario about the future of myth in history education and beyond.

The inward focus of mythical narratives in history textbooks in Romania and Serbia may give ground to the possibility of changing in-group identity in a more European direction, especially since the creation of national histories followed a pattern common to all European states in the 19th century, or, as Thiesse puts it, “Nothing is more international than the formation of national identities” (1999: 11). History education follows in the footsteps of changes in history as an academic discipline. Traditionally, history has been keeping pace with the logic of states: when it became established on scientific grounds in the 19th century, history writing was closely entwined with a national agenda. The current trend in the historical science is becoming apparent: the path leads towards more decentralized, more transnational, and more democratic way of writing history. One can therefore make the argument that, as we may see some changes in the nature of the state, under pressure from globalization and regional integration, it is expected that history and history education in due time will follow. We have already seen how democratization as a principle of political life trickled down into the education system, which attempted to become more inclusive, more tolerant, more representative and pluralist. This trend is evident also in historiography, with the shift in focus from the military and political monographs to histories of private lives: “the traditional ‘great men’ – usually statesmen, war heroes or mythical figures previously used to represent a common past, present and future have been replaced on the one hand by social groups, on the

other hand by individuals who were not rich, famous and influential, in other words: by ordinary men and women” (Schissler, 2001: 93).

This change in key and tone of the historical interest, may aim even further as the birth of a new field within the discipline attests. Historians are also interested in approaching globalization, this most significant catalyst for change, and they do so via a proposed ‘transnational history’ defined by one such center as “the study of historical processes above and beyond the structures of states and nations, as well as comparative history, *histoire croisée* or *Transfersgeschichte*” (Center for Transnational History, University College, London). There is a renewed interest in processes that cut across national boundaries, attempting thus to free the discipline from the constraints of nation-by-nation comparisons or case-studies and to include in the historical analysis the process of globalization, already under the microscope of other academic fields.

Globalization, defined in political and cultural terms, has exerted an influence over education as well by imposing new norms and standards in pedagogy, curriculum content, and didactic materials. In this sense, one can talk about the normative effect of transnational and international politics over the realm of education policies across countries, with principles such as democracy and human rights becoming a *sine qua non* condition for admission of a state in the club of modern and respectable states worldwide and especially in Europe. States’ identities must be performed, meaning that states must be ‘quoting’ the ‘normative resources’ or pre-defined features of this identity in a new context (Weber, 1998: 82). States

must demonstrate in practice, in their behavior, that they have internalized the norms that govern the group identity they want to be associated with.

Education is, as argued in this thesis, a part of the socialization process in the hands of the state and one of state's Foucaultian discipline tools. The type of education is reflective of the type of state vision proposed by the elites and accepted by the people. The nation-state however is increasingly less of an independent actor, especially in the European regional context, where the EU asserts its own actorness (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). Therefore the disciplinary norms followed and applied by the state are certainly affected by the norms that make possible membership into a desired club. In other words, if Romania and Serbia want to define themselves as democratic modern stable states, they must follow the rules already in existence about what it means to be modern, democratic and stable. Their domestic politics and the norms that inspire them must adapt to the new norms of the group to which they desire) to belong. Therefore they need to change national policies, including education, in order to achieve a better fit with the existing standards, which they have not participated in shaping but to which they must adhere. And since the European trend has been in this direction, perhaps even Eastern European politics will take a path leading beyond the nation-state (Verdery, 1994).

Through this normative channel, and via explicit policies like conditionality and implicit actions such as socialization, organizations such as the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Union have pursued an active change in the education set-up of both Romania and Serbia, with different degrees of success¹⁰².

¹⁰² As a full member of the EU, Romania vowed to apply all the EU legislation in all the areas where the European Community has authority. Serbia qualified as a potential candidate country in 2003 and

The goal of the policies encouraged by these institutions has been to develop education systems that are firmly grounded upon international norms and standards, reproducing these norms and standards and therefore contributing to the consolidation of democratic attitudes and internalization of values perceived as necessary by such regional organizations as the ones mentioned above. At the same time, it has been a concern to mix these international requirements with the existing local tradition in schooling and in academia. In this sense, the change of the educational system takes place simultaneously with the transformation of other aspects of the society, economy and political life, and it is expected to perform along the same lines, aiming at the same goals: a stable democratic society and a prosperous capitalist economy, compatible with the norms and the de facto situation in countries of the Old Europe. Education has been seen as a necessary requirement, especially in terms of social development. Without a political body composed of well informed, politically aware, and critical citizens, democracy is an under-performing mechanism, opening up the door for such phenomena as populism.

The civic values meant to underline the common European identity, itself a topic of vast proportions that will not be elaborated here, may form this common foundation upon which a shared notion of belonging together can be built, but it has become apparent that Europe, as expressed in the European Union, needs something more than the practical everyday definition given by the four freedoms or by the Euro (even though in a recent Eurobarometer 40% of those interviewed connected

has signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008, whose entry into force is conditional upon the collaboration of Belgrade with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Since Serbia's intention is to eventually become an EU member, it also needs to comply with the *acquis communautaire*.

European identity with the Euro coin). One of the avenues the EU travels more and more often is leading towards a Common European history.

One obvious example of reframing the separate national histories of the member states into a shared story was the opening of Musée de l'Europe in Brussels, in 2007, timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary celebration of the Treaties of Rome, the founding stone of the common European project. Another one has been previously named: the attempt to teach a common European history, eventually systematized into a common history textbook for all EU, modeled after the German-French or German-Polish collaboration.

In putting together a common grand narrative for Europe, two major problematic issues are apparent: the lack of a heroic past that Europe can build upon and the intra-European division between East and West. Some have proposed that the Holocaust be the negative foundation myth for the new and united Europe (Dinar, 2003; Probst, 2003). But is it really possible to imagine the creation of a community of guilt, for the common ancestry to go back to a monstrous crime? Can Europeans legitimately answer “we are the ones who avoid the crimes of our forefathers”? As far as this author knows, there are no successful, long-lasting communities based on a negative foundation myth.

As for the East-West split, there have been two general alternatives out of the conundrum on how to overcome it. One would be the “assimilation” of the East into the West. The EU conditionality policy can be seen as an attempt to offer economic support in exchange for adoption of (mainly Western) European values and conformity with (mainly Western) European norms. Most of the Eastern European

states have not offered an active resistance to this incorporation into the largely Western narrative (Blokker, 2008), even though discourses by such voices as the Kaczynski brothers in Poland or Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic make the exception to the rule. Another alternative may be the birth of a new version of Europe that makes East-West divisions irrelevant and allows for the construction of a culture where the two merge in novel ways, a post-Western Europe (Delanty, 2003).

The other variant is a post-national Europe, cosmopolitan, not in contradiction but in cohabitation with national identities since it does not threaten their position as primary affiliations at the ethnic level (Delanty and Rumsford, 2005). The post-national Europe should be founded as a political identity shaped in the interaction among European citizens in a common public sphere of debates and ideological discussions that ignores EU's internal borders (Habermas, 2003).

The problem with a cosmopolitan culture is that it is "memoryless" and, should it be created anew, its ingredients would likely be *national* memories and myths, already tied to "specific people, places and periods". If a post-national Europe is to come, it must position itself "between national revival and global cultural aspirations" (Smith, 1992: 66-67). The same dilemma is apparent in Hedetoft's formulation: European nationalism is cultural, trying to "reconstitute itself in order to weather the dual storm of [...] postnational globality on the one hand, and the late twentieth-century supermodernist, technocratically - rational project of EU integration on the other" (1999: 87). Ironically, the post-national culture must use the basic components and the basic strategies of nationalism in order to succeed in creating a convincing myth.

Besides the proposal for a common European history textbook, which might have taken things too far too fast (Jager, 2003), there are other programs¹⁰³ meant to shed extra light on the common past of EU citizens, most notably the project “Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century” at the Council of Europe (CoE) (CoE Education site). With the support of the Standing Conference of European ministers of education, the three-year long project resulted in the design of teaching materials to be used besides national textbooks. These new materials, meant to better explain the nature of conflicts in Europe, come in line with the concrete guidelines agreed upon by the Committee of Ministers in its Recommendation No R (2001) 15. The recommendation outlines the concrete guidelines valid at the European level in terms of “the aims of history teaching, the European dimension, syllabus content, learning methods, teacher training, information and communication technologies and the misuse of history” (CoE website). This text had direct reverberations in the teaching of history in both Romania and Serbia. Both countries had to conform to the standards set up by the Council of Europe and applied through the Stability Pact, which includes a Working Group on History and History Teaching in South East Europe, if they had or still have European ambitions.

Now that we have made it full circle, some arguments about the Common European History scenario can be summed up. As the projects highlighted above illustrate, Europe (both as EU and as the Council of Europe) has a dynamic role in the process of shaping what and how history is taught across the region. It acts partly as a

¹⁰³ For an overview of EU’s attempts to increase its legitimacy through an education policy, see Theiler (1999: 315-327).

security actor, in its capacity of conflict moderator, hoping that by its value export it will bring together parties inimically disposed towards each other. Additionally, the active role European institutions have taken in exerting influence if not control, is justified by the desire to create a more consistent canonical narrative about a common European past. In turn, this joint understanding may form one of the starting points for the construction of a myth of common European descent. A warning drawn by the results of this research is about time optimism: textbooks change and textbook penetration into society simply take a long while. Although they play a significant role in the consolidation and diffusion of established grand narratives, textbooks may not be the loci of construction for a European myth. Other socialization channels, more responsive to the immediacy of political demands, may start the process, and textbooks would be those repositories of myths that are already well set in place.

Myths are “indispensable elements in the construction of any durable and resonant collective cultural identity” (Smith, 1992: 72). The European Union knows it needs one if it wants to form a stable community of citizens on whose allegiance it can count. In order to obtain such a foundation myth, the EU faces several issues, such as overcoming the nationalist dilemma (building a post-national community with nationalist methods and elements) and identifying a “usable past” that is not thoroughly tragic, continentally divisive or already taken by one or another of its component nations. Furthermore, Europe faces the challenge of defining itself against an Other that is hard to identify. Even if this issue could have several possible

solutions¹⁰⁴, the question of how to engage in othering without using a strategy of negative difference still remains problematic.

Myth may provide an answer to the last point above. Myths are useful in the identity-making process because they are accommodating: defining oneself in positive terms does not necessarily imply the negative portrayal of the Other. One can believe to be the best not in isolation but by association. At the same time as Europe looks for a myth to underscore its unity, individual nations, especially those placed asymmetrically to the large economical and normative power of organizations such as EU or CoE, have been presented with the alternative to adopt the European way. They are reassured that the European ambitions are consistent with the preservation of national grand narratives, to the extent as both seek points of convergence. Perhaps the most important point made by the future political mythologies of Romania (and perhaps even Serbia) will be to draw pride from the high integration with the European civilization. It is unclear whether this process of association with the greater European heritage will perpetuate the perceived periphery – center polarity currently present in the collective mindset of the two Southeast European publics. If this project succeeds, it will be proof of the ideatic power of the EU and, again, of the persistence of myth.

¹⁰⁴ Some have argued that so far, Europe's other is itself, or better said, its own past: „Europe's “other”, the enemy image, is today not to a very large extent “Islamic fundamentalism”, “the Russians” or anything similar—rather Europe's other is Europe's own past which should not be allowed to become its future” (Wæver, 1998: 90).

Appendices

Chronology of historical events in Romania

Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*

513 BC - first written evidence of tribes (Getae or Dacians) inhabiting the region by Herodotus

74 BC - Dacian Kingdom at its peak under King Burebista

101-102 AD - first campaign of Emperor Trajan against Dacians

106 AD - Battle of Sarmisegetusa, Dacia becomes a Roman province

271 AD - retreat of Roman occupation of Dacia

275–376 -Visigoths invade Dacia, without leaving a deep impact

end of the 4th century to 454 – Huns invade Dacia

602 –Avars and Slavs occupy much of the Balkan Peninsula

8th century – Slavs achieve political and social preeminence in Dacia while undergoing assimilation by the more numerous Daco-Romans

9th century - the first Bulgarian empire extends control over Dacia

10th century - ethnogenesis of the Romanian people was probably completed. The first stage, the Romanization of the Geto-Dacians, had now been followed by the second, the assimilation of the Slavs by the Daco-Romans.

10th century - Byzantine, Slavic and Hungarian sources, and—later on—Western and even Oriental sources mention the existence of Romanians and Romanian state entities under the name of Vlachs

11th century – Hungarians overwhelmed the Slavic-Romanian duchies, or *voivodates* in Transylvania, which became part of the Hungarian Kingdom

1330 – several smaller duchies coalesce in the south of the Carpathians to form the independent Romanian principality of Walachia

1359 - Moldavia, to the east of the Carpathian mountain chain, achieved independence

1386-1418 Mircea the Old, ruler of Wallachia, had to face the advancement of the Ottoman troops into Europe. He attempted to resist them most famously at the Rovine battles (1394,1395) but eventually agreed to pay tribute in exchange for peace and the recognition of Wallachia's independence

1420 – Wallachia becomes a tribute-paying state to the Ottoman Empire

1441 – 1456 John Hunyadi, first voivode of Transylvania, then governor and commander general of the Hungarian Kingdom, was at the leadership of a Christian anti-Ottoman front but died of plague just as he defeated Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror at the Battle of Belgrade (1448). He is also the father of Matthias I Corvinus (1458–90), king of Hungary.

1456 – Moldavia becomes a tribute-paying state to the Ottoman Empire

1457-1504 Stephen the Great ruled over Moldavia, leading an absolutist policy at home and an anti-Ottoman policy abroad. He is also known for grounding numerous monasteries in the northeast part of the land.

1500 – Unio Trium Nationum is formed by the three ruling estates in Transylvania (Hungarian noblemen, Saxons and Szeklers). Romanians, mostly peasants, were not included

1541 – Transylvania swore to pay tribute to the Sultan. At this point all three Romanian principalities were indirectly dominated by the Ottoman Empire, while preserving some of their autonomy

1593–1601 Michael the Brave ruled over Wallachia and for short periods over Moldavia and Transylvania. He was also a member of the Holy League, a Christian alliance to stop the Ottoman advances

1661 – Turkish and Tatar troops invade Transylvania

1697 – The Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church is founded in Transylvania, when in acceptance for the union with Rome the Uniate church is recognized as equal with the Catholic one.

1692-1768 – Bishop Inochentie Micu-Klein and his Transylvanian followers strove to achieve recognition of the Romanians as a constituent nation of Transylvania. They also elaborated a modern, ethnic idea of nationhood based on the theory of Roman origins and the continuous presence of the Daco-Romans in Dacia since Trajan's conquest.

1711 – Beginning of the Phanariote rule in Moldavia, with Nicholas Mavrocordat who, in 1716, becomes also ruler of Wallachia. The rule of princes sent by Istanbul

from the Greek neighborhood of Phanar lasts until 1822, when native princes are allowed again on the throne.

1791 – *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* – the most comprehensive formulation of the political program of the Romanians of Transylvania arguing the national cause and for equal rights with the other three *nationes*

1746 (Wallachia), 1749 (Moldavia) - Constantin Mavrocordat, Phanariot ruler, abolished serfdom

1774–82 Alexandru Ipsilanti, another Phanariot ruler in Wallachia, introduced reforms in the administration and the legal system that bring its principality closer to the West

1812 – Bessarabia, previously part of Moldavia, was annexed to Russia

1829 – Treaty of Adrianople, signaling the end of the Ottoman trade monopoly over Wallachia and Moldova.

1848 – 49 Revolution across Europe and in all the three provinces, and everywhere defeated.

1859 - Alexandru Ioan Cuza is elected Prince of Moldova on January 5. Three weeks later he is also elected Prince of Wallachia, thus achieving a de facto union of the two principalities. He is the founder of the modern Romanian army and of the first university in Iasi (1860), and the supporter of an Agrarian reform in the favor of the peasants (1863). He is forced to abdicate in 1866.

1864 - The Parliament of Romania is formed. A tuition-free, compulsory public education for primary schools is introduced in Romania for the first time.

1866 - On 26 March, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen becomes Prince of Romania as Carol. On 1 July, the first constitution of Romania is ratified

1878 - Romania independence is recognised by the Central Powers on 13 July.

1881 - On 26 March, Carol I is crowned as King and Romania becomes kingdom;

1894 - Leaders of the Transylvanian Romanians who sent a Memorandum to the Austrian Emperor demanding national rights for the Romanians are found guilty of treason.

1913 - At the end of the Balkan Wars, Romania acquires the southern part of the Dobrogea from Bulgaria;

1914 - On 10 October, Carol I dies and he is succeeded by his nephew, who becomes the second King of Romania as Ferdinand I.

1916 - Despite choosing to stay away from the First World War, the death of King Carol I and the course of events made Romania to change its view and decide to enter the war on the Entente side, demanding the territory of Transylvania. Romania declares war to the Central Powers on 27 August and launch attacks through the Southern Carpathians and into Transylvania. Poorly trained and equipped, the Romanian Army cannot face the power of the German, Bulgarian and Ottoman armies and București is lost in December. Iași becomes temporarily the capital city of Romania;

1918 - After the successful offensive against the Entente on the Thessaloniki front which put Bulgaria out of the war, Romania re-entered the war on 10 November. On 28 November the Romanian representatives of Bukovina voted for union with the Kingdom of Romania, followed by the proclamation of the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania on 1 December, by the representatives of Transylvanian Romanians and of the Transylvanian Saxons gathered at Alba Iulia. Both proclamations were not, however, yet recognized by the Entente powers.

1919 -The Greater Romania is recognized by the Treaty of Versailles and later by the Treaty of Trianon.

1922 - King Ferdinand I and Queen Maria are crowned in Alba Iulia as King and Queen of all Romanians;

1927 - On 20 July, King Ferdinand I dies and Mihai I, his grandson, becomes the third King of Romania after his father Carol renounced to his rights to the throne in two years earlier. On 24 July, the Iron Guard is formed by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

1930 - Carol II returns to Romania on 7 June and he is proclaimed King one day later, thus becoming the fourth King of Romania.

1938 - In a bid for political unity against the fascist movement known as the Iron Guard, which was gaining popularity, Carol II dismissed the government headed by Octavian Goga. The activity of the Romanian Parliament and of all political parties was suspended and the country is governed by royal decree. Miron Cristea, the first Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church become Prime Minister on 11 February.

1940 - On 27 June, following an ultimatum issued by the Soviet Union, Romania loses Bessarabia. On 30 August, under the Second Vienna Award, Romania loses the northern part of Transylvania to Hungary. On 4 September, the leader of the Iron Guard, and Ion Antonescu, a Romanian Army General, Prime Minister of Romania at that date, form the "National Legionary State" in Romania, forcing the abdication of King Carol II. On 8 October, Nazi troops begin crossing into Romania. On 23 November, Romania joins the Axis Powers.

1941 - Between 21 January and 23 January, a rebellion organised by the Iron Guard takes place in Bucharest. Later known as the Bucharest pogrom, it follows the decision made by Ion Antonescu to cut off the privileges of the Iron Guard. After the order is restored, the Iron Guard is banned. On 22 June, Romania joins Operation Barbarossa, attacking the Soviet Union hoping to recover the lost territories of Bessarabia and Bukovina. Later, Romania annexes Soviet lands immediately east of the Dnister.

1944 - On 23 August, King Mihai leads a successful coup with support from opposition politicians and the army. Ion Antonescu is arrested. On 12 September, an Armistice Agreement is signed with the Allied Powers. Romania joined the Allied Powers.

1945 - On 1 March, Petru Groza becomes the first Communist Prime Minister of Romania. Later in the year Romania takes part to Battle of Budapest as well as the Battle of Prague.

1946 - The Romanian Communist Party win the elections held on 19 November through electoral fraud;

1947 - Following the abdication of Mihai I, the People's Republic of Romania is declared on 30 December against the majority of people who supported the monarchy. The new leader of Romania becomes Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party;

1955 - Romania joins the Warsaw Pact.

1958 - The Soviet Union Army leave Romania after fourteen years of occupation;

1965 - Nicolae Ceaușescu is elected General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party and become the state leader. The official name of the country is changed into The Socialist Republic of Romania.

1989 - On 16 December, a popular protest breaks out in Timișoara. Five days later Nicolae Ceaușescu organises a mass meeting in Bucharest that erupts into riot, as the crowd takes to the streets. Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife leave the capital putting and end of a four-decade long Communist period in Romania. On 25 December, after a short trial, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife are executed.

1989 - The National Salvation Front (FSN) take the power during the Romanian Revolution. The leader is elected Ion Iliescu. The new name of the republic becomes Romania;

1990 - On 20 May free elections are held in Romania for the first time after fifty years. Ion Iliescu is elected the second President of Romania.

1991 - A new constitution is ratified;

1993 - Romania applies to become a member of the European Union.

2004 - Romania joins the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;

2007 - On 1 January, Romania joins the European Union

Chronology of historical events in Serbia

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

2nd century AD - Ptolemy's Guide to Geography mentions a people called "Serboi," but it is not certain that this is a reference to the ancestors of the modern Serbs

late 6th century - The earliest information on the Serbs when they were vassals of the Avars and later clients of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.

late 7th century - The Slavs had become firmly established throughout the Balkans

850 – Vlastimir established the first Serbian state, centred on an area in eastern Montenegro and southern Serbia known as Raška

Late 9th century – Cyril and Methodius preach in the vernacular, and invented a script using the phonetic peculiarities of the Slavic tongue

1169 – Stefan Nemanja became grand zupan (clan leader) of Raška under Byzantine suzerainty

1196 – Stefan Nemanja abdicated in favour of his son Stefan (known as Prvovencani, or the "First-Crowned")

1217 - Stefan Nemanjic secured from Pope Honorius III the title of "King of Serbia, Dalmatia, and Bosnia

1219 – Serbian autocephalous church seated in Zica led by archbishop and later Saint Sava

1331–55 – Stefan Dusan makes that the Nemanjic state reached its greatest extent, incorporating Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, all of modern Albania and Montenegro, a substantial part of eastern Bosnia, and modern Serbia as far north as the Danube.

1346 - Dušan adopted the title of emperor at his coronation in Skopje (later "Emperor and Autocrat of the Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Albanians"), but he is more commonly remembered by Serbs as Dušan Silni, or "Dušan the Mighty." To this day the Serbs consider the empire of Dušan Silni as the Golden Age of their nation.

1349 - Dusan authors the Zakonik (code of laws) where the law of Constantinople fused with Serb folk custom

1375 the archbishop of Pec was raised to the status of patriarch, in spite of the anathema of Constantinople

June 28 (June 15, Old Style), 1389 –A combined army of Serbs, Albanians, and Hungarians led by the Serb knez, or prince, Lazar Hrebeljanovic met Murad's forces on the Kosovo Polje

1459 - Fall of Smederevo and end of Serbian resistance

1690 - Armed uprising by the Serbian peasantry who supported Austrian armies, eventually defeated by the Ottoman forces

1691 - Archbishop Arsenije III Crnojevic of Pec led a migration of 30,000–40,000 families from “Old Serbia” and southern Bosnia across the Danube and Sava. There they were settled and became the basis of the Austrian Militärgrenze, or Military Frontier

1766 - The patriarchate of Pec was abolished and an attempt was made to Hellenize the Serbian church. In response, newly established monasteries in Srem, a region between the Sava and Danube under Austrian control, took on part of the role of Pec as a centre of ecclesiastical authority

1804 - An uprising broke out in the Šumadija region, south of Belgrade; it was led by Djordje Petrovic, called Karageorge (“Black George”), a successful pig trader who had served with the Austrians in the war against Turkey in 1787–88. The rebels continued to hold out and were strengthened by the arrival of Russian reinforcements in 1808. Threatened by Napoleon's invasion in 1812, however, Tsar Alexander I concluded a treaty with the Turks. The withdrawal of Russia left the Serbs open to Ottoman reprisals, and Karadjordje and his men were compelled to retreat across the Danube.

April 1815 - under the leadership of another knez, Milos Obrenovic, this rebellion succeeded in driving the Turks from a wide area of northern Serbia. Faced with renewed Russian intervention following the defeat of Napoleon, the Porte made several important concessions to the rebels, including the retention of their arms, considerable powers of local administration, and the right to hold their own assembly. The firmans granted to Miloš did not amount to the creation of an independent state, however. The region remained a Turkish principality, with a resident pasha and Turkish garrisons in the principal towns.

1844 - Ilija Garasanin prepared a memorandum, Nacertanije, or “Draft Plan”, outlining the principles upon which he believed the foreign policy of the state

June 1817 Karageorge returned from exile. He and Miloš had never enjoyed an easy relationship, and, when Karadjordje was murdered in mysterious circumstances, Obrenovic's complicity was suspected. A feud erupted between the Karageorgevic and Obrenovic families that continued throughout the century, dividing Serbian society between supporters of the rival clans.

1830 - the Ottoman government granted the Serbian principality full autonomy, and the Serbian church was given independent status. Miloš was recognized as a hereditary prince

1903 - Alexander and Draga were brutally assassinated by officers in the palace in Belgrade, bringing an end to the Obrenovic dynasty.

1903 - the Ilinden Uprising

October 1912 – the first of the two Balkan Wars

1913 - Bulgaria's refusal to accept the division of spoils instigated a brief Second Balkan War in 1913, the result of which was that Serbia divided the Sandzak with Montenegro and acquired Kosovo and Metohija and the lion's share of Macedonia. Its area was expanded by some four-fifths and its population by more than half.

June 28, 1914, the Austrian archduke Francis Ferdinand assassinated

July 1917 representatives of the two groups met in Corfu and signed the Corfu Declaration, which called for a single democratic South Slav state to be governed by a constitutional monarchy

1915 - Treaty of London

December 1, 1918 - a delegation from the National Council invited the prince regent Alexander to proclaim the new union; four days later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was announced to the world

June 28, 1921 - highly centralized Vidovdan constitution modeled on that of prewar Serbia

January 1929 - King Alexander, frustrated by the inability of the politicians to make progress declared a personal dictatorship.

1934 - Alexander was assassinated by an agent of the Croatian terrorist organization, the Ustasha.

April 1941 - Yugoslavia was invaded and broken up by the Axis powers. A client regime was established in Belgrade under General Milan Nedic.

1937 - The Communist Party of Yugoslavia had developed into a significant political force

1942 the communists formed the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, a self-declared “temporary government,” which linked the

acknowledgment of the ethnic plurality of the peoples of Yugoslavia with the reconstitution of Yugoslavia as a federation

January 1946 - new constitution monarchy was replaced by a federation of six republics, of which Serbia was only one.

June 1948 Yugoslavia was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)

June 1950 - Basic Law on the Management of State Economic Enterprises by Working Collectives took the first steps toward what came to be known as workers' self-management.

1963 - constitutional revision Autonomous province of Kosovo-Metohija.

1974 - new constitution new constitution

1980 - Tito died and vested authority in a collective presidency made up of representatives of the republics

1986 - Slobodan Milošević, a former business official, rose to power through the League of Communists of Serbia

January 1990 - collapse of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia

1991 – Independent republics in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Croatia and Bosnia Serbs constituted 12 percent and 31 percent of the population, respectively. Serbia backed local Serbs in civil wars with the aim of retaining some areas of the republics within the rump of Yugoslavia.

1991, 1992 – UN sanctions on Serbia

December 1995 - Bosnian peace agreements of Dayton, Ohio

January 1996 - Agreement for demilitarizing and returning to Croatian control the Serb-occupied region of eastern Slavonia

1998 – Kosovo Liberation Army staged a substantial armed uprising

February 1999 - Yugoslav army and Serbian forces launched a major offensive against the KLA. Rambouillet peace talks fail

March 1999 – NATO air strikes against Serbian military targets. The Serbian response to the NATO action, however, was to drive out all of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, displacing hundreds of thousands of refugees into neighbouring Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro.

June 1999 - Yugoslav government accepted a proposal for peace that had been mediated by representatives from Russia and Finland. UN peacekeeping troops deployed into Kosovo, now under UN administration

2000 - Milošević was defeated by Vojislav Koštunica in the Yugoslav presidential election

February 2003 – Yugoslavia is replaced by a new looser federation Serbia and Montenegro

2003 – Serbia qualifies as a European Union potential candidate country

March 11, 2006 – Slobodan Milosevic dies in the prison of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague

June 3, 2006 – Montenegro proclaims independence

February 2008 - With the support of the EU and the United States, Kosovo declared independence. Serbia, backed by Russia, refused to recognize Kosovo as a sovereign country.

May 2008 parliamentary elections - For a European Serbia, a pro-EU bloc led by Serbian president and DS leader Boris Tadic, won nearly 40 percent of the vote, the nationalist Serbian Radical Party captured nearly 30 percent

2008 - Serbia signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU conditional upon the collaboration of Belgrade with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

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