(Hi)story-telling the nation: the narrative construction of Romanianism in the late 19th century

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Abstract

This paper is a study in historical socio-anthropology, focusing on the political process of Romanian nation building and its corresponding anthropological program of creating the national self. Starting from the assumption that human being is a "storytelling animal" nested in a (hi)story-telling community pillared upon "narrative traditions," this paper examines the stock of stories told through history schoolbooks about the Romanian past as a means of narrative construction of Romanian national identity. Consequently, the paper looks at the nationalizing process launched by Romanian state authorities in the wake of the political union of 1859, arguing that the political building of Romanian nation implied the narrative articulation, followed by the recursive institutional reciting within the public educational system, of a "Romanian master story" as a means of breeding national Romanians out of Orthodox peasants. After detailing the pedagogy of the nation emerged in the second half of the 19th century as establishing the norms of (hi)story-telling the national past, the study concludes by highlighting the main themes, or "schematic narrative templates," into which the Romanian master story has been poured out.

Keywords

Meta-narrative, narrative traditions, nation building, Romanian master story, Romanian nationalism

(Hi)story-telling communities, narrative traditions, and the making of the dramatic self

The "narrative turn" in the social sciences pressed for the updating of the metaphorical bestiary into which humankind, especially through its philosophically driven thinkers, has collected its own set of self-conceptions. The famous metaphorical incarnations of

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human nature in the "political animal" of Aristotle, the "logical animal" of C.S. Peirce (1877), or the "*animal symbolicum*" of E. Cassirer (1944: 44) had to make room for a new animal embodiment of human nature directly inspired by the narrative turn: human being as a "storytelling animal" (MacIntyre, 2007: 216). Given the narrative fabric of the human self, the problem of collective identity and social belonging can be addressed by answering the question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (ibidem). After recognizing the centrality of the story in human existence, A. MacIntyre is led to postulate the hermeneutic injunction according to which "there is no way [to understand] any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things" (MacIntyre, 2007: 216). Embracing MacIntyre's ideas, this paper accepts that there is no way of understanding the making of Romanian society except through the stock of stories by which it was narratively constructed. Collective memory, in its narrative sense, is, indeed, at the heart of the nation. This paper explores the founding stock of stories of the Romanian nation taking shape in the late 19th century as the canonical narratives upon which the Romanian nation-state has been built. It tries to unravel the process by which a "community of stories" emerged through the diffusion of historical narratives about Romanian past in the social body. It also attempts to understand the social-psychological alchemy involved in the making of what we would refer to as "the dramatic self." Before plunging into historical details, a little more conceptual groundwork is deemed necessary for the purpose of semantic clarification.

The powerful metaphor of the human being as a "storytelling animal" must be supplemented by three complementary concepts, those of "narrative traditions" and "communities of stories," within which the "dramatic self" of the individual can emerge. Focusing on collectivities rather than assuming MacIntyre's individualist stance, it can be argued that every social community can be conceptualized as "storytelling communities," preserving their value-consensus and collective identities in "narrative traditions." These narrative traditions, made up from stocks of stories about the salient features and particular nature of the in-group, are the depositories of that group's collective identity. It is through these narrative traditions embodying the historical epos of the group that communities are able to preserve the consciousness of their own continuity in time and unity in space. Temporal continuity and spatial unity are not only the cross of collective identity (formed by the interlacing of the vertical axis of temporal continuity with the horizontal axis of spatial unity), but their intertwining creates the *chronotope* sustaining that collective identity.[2] Paraphrasing M.M. Bakhtin's use of the term, chronotope's supreme importance lies in the fact that they are the "organizing centers" for the fundamental narrative events of the nation. "The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without

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[2] The notion of "chronotope" permeated into the discourse of the humanities and social sciences with the rediscovery of M.M. Bakhtin's work. In the context of his literary studies, Bakhtin (1981: 84) defines *chronotope* (literally "time space") as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." This paper liberates the term from its original caging in literary criticisms and employs it to theorize collective memory's embedding in the time space matrix.

qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin, 1981: 250). The past of the nation cannot be emplotted but within the time-space coordinates provided by the chronotope.

Parsimoniously, collective identities can be defined as "narrative constructions which permit the control of the boundaries of a network of actors," creating thus a sense of we-ness, as well as "narrative bonds" between the members of the in-group sharing the same stock of stories (Eder, 2009: 427, 431). It is important to underscore the ubiquitous nature of narrative traditions as *social binding devices*, acting as powerful integrative forces keeping society together. The omnipresence of narrative structures in organizing collective identity and promoting social cohesion was highly emphasized by anthropologists decrypting the functions of myth in non-literate societies as well as in modern societal configurations (Barthes, 1991; Eliade, 1963; Girardet, 1997). Indeed, historical myths as narrative structures and mythohistorical systems as narrative traditions seem to be *narrative universals* structuring the collective sense of we-ness in all known human societies, non-literate or literate alike.

Starting with the early 19th century onwards, the idea of the nation entered the political scene and captured the spotlight. As the national idea was gaining ideological momentum in the political imagination of the 19th century, new narrative traditions were starting to take shape describing the nation as a people with its own particular historical destiny (national messianism). Narrative building blocks were used in the construction of the nation, which told the Herderian story of the collective historical drama of the nation. It is in the context of the emergence of these narrative traditions of the nation that "the dramatic self" started to shape up as a particular component of the self.

In a definition that attained canonical status within social psychology and beyond, H. Tajfel (1974: 69) characterized social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership." The social self arises with the awareness of belonging to groups. Following Tajfel's classical definition, it can be argued that, from a socially-psychological angle, national identity is that part of the self derived from the individual's belonging to the national group. The national self arises then with the awareness of belonging to the nation. It emerges with the consciousness of being part and parcel of a historical transcendental whole. It's cognitive root lies in the awareness of being an integral part of a collectivity endowed with its own historical destiny, of being part of the communion of the dead, living, and unborn that makes the intergenerational reality of the historical nation. In the same line of argumentation, the dramatic self can be defined as the consciousness of being part of the historical collective drama of the nation. It arises with the awareness of being part of an unfolding story drama (i.e. the dramatic national story), and entails assuming and enacting from the part of the individual of a specific role in the unfolding collective drama of the nation.

The great Scottish philosopher David Hume thought of history as worthy of interest mainly because of its "amusing" potential. From Hume's perspective, then,

history fulfills the function of amusing its readers.[3] Without denying history's amusing factor for some coteries in lack of other sources of entertainment, this paper attributes to history a more grave task, that of legitimizing power structures, fashioning the sense of "we-ness," and modeling the desired type of human being by an act of political anthropomorphosis. More tightly localized on the temporal axis in the 19th century Romanian society, history is took to have performed a triptych of decisive ideological functions: i) legitimizing the political nation, ii) catalyzing collective identity around the national idea, and iii) making the *homo nationalis*. Nothing amusing about these political functions of history, as nationalism turned up to be both the most powerful driving-force of the last two centuries of human existence, and one of the most lethal political ideas – claiming the lives of millions of people willing to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the nation. Emerged as a quest for dignity, individual and collective alike, the national idea ended up leaving in its tracks a massive trail of blood spread across modern history.

The nationalizing process: breeding national Romanians out of Christian peasants

In a masterpiece of historical sociological work, N. Elias (2000) [1939] traced out the socio-genesis of the norms regulating interpersonal civility that he called as "the civilizing process." Resorting to some eloquent examples like the introduction of the fork as an eating device or the self-inhibition of spitting as signs of the increasing of the thresholds of shame and repugnance, Elias masterfully reveals the slow emergence of a civilized self. In similar fashion, but in an incomparable faster pace, *the nationalizing process* unfolded in the late 19th century, its end-result being the political molding of the national self.

A few broad impressionistic brushstrokes sketching the political backdrop seem necessary before adding the more fine shades detailing the mass nationalizing process launched by the Romanian nation-state. The first sparks of Romanian nationalism sprang erratically in the early 1800s, but it was not until the Revolutions of 1848 and after their dramatic failure that a unionist political program started to be articulated and pushed forward by Romanian liberal elite. On the top of the unionist agenda stood the goal of bringing together into a unified polity the Romanian countries subjected to foreign sovereignty. Cutting a long (hi)story short, eventually, Moldova and Wallachia merged in 1859 to form what was later recognized internationally as The United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (1862). The unification process was finally completed with the adoption of the first constitution (1866) that established officially the nominal identity of Romania to the new nation-state that emerged on the political map of Europe. This political breakthrough was to set the minimal formula of the Romanian nation-state, the

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[3] It falls in the province of ironic paradoxes that during his lifetime, the currently considered one of the most subtle and consequential thinkers of Western philosophy, Hume was appreciated by his contemporaries rather a failed philosopher. His philosophical masterpiece, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, went unnoticed, while Hume's literary reputation and intellectual fame were brought by his history writing, *The History of England*. It is in this quality, as successful history writer, that Hume finds in history three kinds of advantages, "as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue" (Hume, 1777, SH 3, Mil 565) [1741-1742].

core to which, in time, other territorial parts will be joined. The process of nation building started in 1859 will be completed only in 1918, when Bessarabia, Bukovina, and finally Transylvania will unite with the Romanian Kingdom in the aftermath of the First World War creating the maximal formula of the Romanian nation-state in the form of Greater Romania. It is between these political temporal watersheds (1859-1918) that the nationalizing project was launched by the state authorities, aiming to nationalize the people and to Romanianize the peasantry.

Romania has been made. Now Romanians were to be made (to paraphrase Massimo d'Azeglio's famous dictum: "We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians"). How was this massive program of identity conversion to proceed? Through the means of political anthropogenesis, i.e. the political creation of the "New Man," specifically in the breed of *homo nationalis.* An entire methodological apparatus of constructing the self has been mobilized in the form of the *pedagogy of the nation* meant to bring to life the national self. The groundwork was laid down by the Law of Instruction issued in 1864, which imposed free and mandatory primary education for all pupils between the ages of eight and twelve. The institutional foundation underpinning the system of public schooling was thus poured as the structural framework indeed necessary for breeding Romanians out of Orthodox peasants.[4] With a network of state sponsored public schools in place, a *storytelling institutional apparatus* has been established in Romanian society designed to diffuse in the social body the national historical meta-narrative. This master story relating the Romanian historical destiny was narratively codified in national history schoolbooks, which can be seen as forming the textual building blocks of Romanian national memory. The first generation of history schoolbooks, published in the Organic Regulation period (1831-1859), was still displaying what retrospectively speaking could be qualified as a pre-nationalistic, regio-centric logic. In this pre-nationalistic historical time, each of the three Romanian countries were developing its own collective memories (Aaron, 1839 for Wallachia; Albineţ, 1845 for Moldavia; Rusu, 1865 and Moldovan, 1866 for Transylvania).[5] In was only in the wake of the political creation of the Romanian

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[4] In another masterpiece of historical sociology, E. Weber (1976) traces the transformative process of turning *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1918*, covering roughly the same time span as the one examined in this paper. In contrast to the French case, Romania in the late 19th century was still an almost completely rural society. In 1910, for instance, out of the total population of 6.966.002, 82,84 percent were living in country villages, while only 17,16 percent were city dwellers (*Anuarul Statistic al României*, 1912: 17). It is also instructing to specify that in terms of confessional membership, 91,52 percent of Romanian population in 1899 were Orthodox (ibidem: 20). Romanian civilization did not develop an urban tradition, the existing major cities in the Old Kingdom resembling closer to expanded villages made up of clusters of slums (*mahalale*) centered around boyars houses than to Western burgs. "In the Orthodox East cities were – at least until the invasion of civilization – simple hypertrophied villages" (Blaga, 1969: 148) [1936]. Moreover, towns were centers of *foreignism*, enclaves of Jew and other non-Romanian ethnic groups controlling trades and businesses. No wonder that the city was denounces as a place of sin, and the village was depicted as the idyllic *locus* of the Romanian spirit by the traditionalist ideologies praising rural life that erupted at the turn of the century.

[5] In Transylvania, because the Principality was part of the Habsburg Empire (until 1867), and then of the Dual Monarchy (after 1867), the regio-centric logic and provincial collective memory continued to persist until the incorporation of Transylvania in the Greater Romania in 1918 (e.g. Rusu, 1865; Moldovan, 1866).

nation-state in 1859 that a second, followed by a third, generation of didactic schoolbooks started to promote a unified vision of the Romanian past. The political making of Romanian nation-state triggered a wave of didactic literature imbued with nationalist tints whose end product was the creation of a *unitary national past*. During the period stretched between 1860s and the end of the century, the process of nationalizing Romanian past by merging the former regio-centric collective memories into a single coherent master story of Romanian historical becoming has been completed. The newly emerged political nation-state has ensured itself with a firm historical foundation. In this way, the new political order buttressed itself in history. It was the right time for *nationalizing the people* – not so much for „inventing the national people" (Karnoouh, 2011), as for transforming Christian peasants into national Romanians. In this purpose, the state's new institutional apparatus (especially the institutions of school and army) became what could be labeled as *identity recycling devices*. Their identity function was to recast religious, kinship, regional, and peasant solidarities in national form. Loyalty to the nation had to rule supreme as superordinate solidarity. Passing the population through school and army, "through a network of apparatuses and daily practices," the nation-state instituted the individual "as homo nationalis from cradle to grave" (Balibar, 1991: 93).

In the first line of attack within the nationalizing program launched by the young Romanian nation-state was a new educational philosophy taking the shape of the *pedagogy of the nation*. Two books must be outlined from the mesh of nationalistic didactic literature as cornerstones of the pedagogy of the nation. First, Simion Bărnuțiu's *Pedagogi'a* (1870), a scholastic treatise, set the stage for a militant nationalistic pedagogy, replete with xenophobic overtones. Professor of philosophy at Iași University and an influential public figure in Romanian culture, Bărnuțiu develops a pedagogical system around the kernel idea of "the love of the fatherland" (*amoarea catra patria*, Bărnuțiu, 1870, 176-183, §135). This is the paramount principle that has to guide the entire educational process. The model of national education for which Bărnuțiu passionately pleads has to pulse with unconditional love for the country. Defined on the coordinates set by the Herderian-type of nationalistic patriotism, Bărnuțiu's patriotism "consists in respecting and conserving as well as cultivating the *fundamentally* ancestral freedom, language, land, rights, institutions, and customs: it is in these that the true *national spirit* reveals itself" (Bărnuțiu, 1870: 179). This fundamentalist patriotism consists, thus, in defending and cultivating the national genius, that *Volkgeist* identified by Herder as the identity quintessence of a collectivity of people. In stark contrast to the inclusivism specific to civic patriotism founded on citizenship and constitutional rights, ethnic patriotism is exclusivistic. Bărnuțiu vehemently protests against "foreignism," to which he opposed a form of national purism under the guise of a Romanianism cured by any kind of outside interferences that would alter the ancestral institutions. It is in Bărnuțiu's doctrine that we find the elements of a *pedagogy of xenophobia*, his anti-foreignism being the extreme consequence of ethnically defined patriotism.

The national spirit and the "love of the fatherland" must be fanned up through patriotic education centered upon historical knowledge. Romanian genius reveals itself

through national history, expressing its nature especially in "Romanians' glorious deeds" (Bărnuțiu, 1870: 180). Conceiving history is a Carlylesque key, as the work of the Great Men, Bărnuțiu recommends the study of history through "the biographies of the great Romanians" (ibidem). To which he immediately adds a Herderian cypher of decrypting history, through our Roman language, which is "the palladium of our freedom and independence" (ibidem). Only through such a history, centered on the Great Romanians and their glorious feats of arms, "the Romanian educator will awake [...] *the heroic spirit* of the ancestors, who loved their country, language, and freedom more than their lives, because there is nothing more noble than to die for the fatherland" (Bărnuțiu, 1870: 183). It is then imperative for patriotic education to breed *the sacrificial spirit* in children's consciousness, their devotion to the country, and their pious veneration for the homeland. The pedagogy of Romanianism necessarily implies military education of the youth: "education is to grow within each student a *defender* of the *homeland* when the time calls" (Bărnuțiu, 1870: 182), ready, of course, to spill his blood in the name of the national spirit following the model of his heroic ancestors. As this sacrificial motif becomes a built-in feature of Bărnuțiu's pedagogical philosophy, the doctrine of integral Romanianism reveals its gloomy facet under the guise of *funereal nationalism*. Here are to be found the seeds of the cult of martyric death emerged in the Romanian interwar period's far right nationalist movements such as Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Iron Guard.

The new paradigm of exclusivist ethnic nationalism whose critical junctions were enunciated in Simion Bărnuțiu's *Pedagogi'a* will be established as the foundation of Romanian education by George Radu Melidon. In the capacity of director of the Normal School of Bucharest, Melidon writes the second cornerstone book of the pedagogy of the nation, *The teacher's textbook or Elements of practical pedagogy for popular schools* (1874). This work of applied pedagogy written for teachers' instruction will play the role of a transmission belt between Bărnuțiu's abstract ideas developed in his scholarly treatise of pedagogy and the educational praxis done in the grassroots. Calibrating his discourse as to target rural education, which he considered to be the litmus paper of Romanianism, Melidon invests rural instruction with a missionaristic purpose. Rural teachers have to become the apostles of Romanians in order to preach the nationalist ideas in the socio-cultural universe of the Romanian village, still dominated by the religious ethos. Time has come, says Melidon, for completing Christian morals with the national ethic. As incubator of nationalism, the school has to become "precisely like a second church" (Melidon, 1874: 103). Education, even if it has to keep the foundations laid down by orthodox morality, cannot remain anymore the prerogative of the church, nor in the hands of the clerics. Professionals are called for in the pedagogy of the nation: "the priest cannot be teacher anymore, for the very reason that math lessons cannot be taught in the church, since Christ himself banished from church with the whip the calculating Pharisees. [...] Romanians [cannot protect themselves] only with icons like the Byzantines. [They have to understand] that just like they cannot live without church, so they cannot live without school" (Melidon, 1874: 12). Youth's moral education, which represents the keystone of the entire process of instruction, has to be bifurcated into two directions: a) *religious education*, for the purpose of knowing the moral duties

towards God, society, and self; b) *history and geographical education*, for the purpose of knowing the duties towards the national other. Religious instruction contributes to "the formation of the Christian man, that is to say the righteous man," while history coupled with geography "are necessary for forming the *social patriot* and *citizen* man" (Melidon, 1874: 78-79). Without denying or minimizing the role of religious instruction, the *centrum gravitates* has to be shifted towards nationalist education, accomplished through historical study: "Thou shalt make from the study of national history the principal part of thy mission" (Melidon, 1874: 131). Only the knowledge of national history "awaken the man with regards to the duties that he has towards the land in which he was born, and in which rest the bones of his ancestors, as well as towards his fellow brethren of language with the help of which he can inherit, in a better goodwill, the land from which he feeds himself and his family, and towards which he is therefore indebted to flourish with his work and to protect with the sacrifice of his life" (Melidon, 1874: 79). Sacrificial spirit, total devotion to the fatherland, the joy of dying on the nation's altar, these are the penetrating ideas that have to pierce through the consciousness of the young patriots. Studying national history is the initiation ritual in the Romanians' community of destiny, in whose name they all have to be ready for the ultimate sacrifice: "only when every Romanian will know to feel and to prove by its past [...] that there is no other race nobler than his, as descending from Romans, who ruled and civilized the whole world, [...] Romanian nation [...] will be ready to sacrifice for its rights" (Melidon, 1874: 122).

The new pedagogical philosophy of Romanianism reaches, without major delay, from principles and directions laid down in scholarly treatises into actual didactic literature. Here is how xenophobia and anti-foreignism philosophically elaborated by Bărnuţiu and worked out into pedagogical directives by Melidon reach down into the reading books and history textbooks written for primary school: "In our country live about 5 million Romanians. [...] But besides Romanians, in free Romania also live many foreigners like Yids, Hungarians, Greeks, Lipovans, Russians, Bulgarians, Germans. But Romania belongs to Romanians only and only they have the right of owning it; because our ancestors have shed streams of blood to defend it, for 1700 years against many fierce enemies who wanted to take it from them" (Creangă et al, 1875: 107).[6] This kind of messages were disseminated in elementary schools by the teachers of the nation and the apostles of Romanianism (Ion Creangă, one of the authors of *The children's teacher* [*Învăţătorul copiilor*] from which the excerpt is drawn, belonged to this category). The xenophobic ardor was not expressed only by humble rural teachers, but was espoused by refine intellectuals like A.D. Xenopol. In one of his textbook, *The History of Romanians for primary classes* (1890), the learned historian and subtle philosopher of history launches a message with a powerful xenophobic charge: "In Romania live different types of people, that speak different languages and worship different religions. [...] Free

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[6] "Free Romania" refers to the Romanian nation state formed by the unification of Moldovia and Wallachia in 1859, not including the Romanian population and the territories occupied by them in Transylvania and Bessarabia which were part of the Habsburgic and Russian Empires respectively. Worthy of highlighting is the pejorative designation of Romanian Jews as Yids (*jidani*), expressing the state sponsored anti-Semitism promoted in official textbooks.

Romania belongs to Romanians, because they have won this country by conquest and kept it by shedding often their blood for it. The other peoples who live in Romania are welcomed by Romanians only as guests, and they do not have other rights except for those that Romanians want to give them" (Xenopol, 1890: 13).

This is the hardcore formula of the national pedagogy, whose basic ingredients are ethnic nationalism, purified Romanianism, anti-foreignism, awe for the ancestral homeland, and sacrificial spirit. It is on these alignments that a *Blut und Boden* type of nationalism emerges in Romanian didactic and meta-didactic literature, in the core of which resides the idea of ethnicity conceived of as the conjunction between blood and land. A full-fledged cult of Romanianism, emerged earlier in the intellectual avant-garde of political reflection, is being now publicly diffused in the social body through the double medium of school and textbook.[7]

The national master story: narrating the Romanian *Geist* through history

After the strategic directions were laid down by the pedagogy of the nation, the second line of attack was made up of national history schoolbooks. The national army of schoolteachers ideologically trained to spread the word of the nation was in a great need of "weapons of mass instruction" (Ingrao, 2009) which came as history schoolbooks narrating the Romanian past. Although Florian Aaron encouraged parents to raised their children in a patriotic spirit so that "along with the mother's milk, [the infant should] suckle the love for the homeland" (Aaron, 1843: 42), it would be the teachers who will feed them the nationalist milk. Impelled by imperious demands to transform the school into a "second church," schoolteachers took on the sacerdotal role of preaching the sacramental idea of the nation. They have become the apostles of Romanianism and the pedagogues of the nation. By the end of the century, the concept of the "nationalistic school" gained ideological traction (Haret, 1907), guiding the state authorities' endeavors to transform the educational system into a nationalizing apparatus. An instrumental position in this ideological installation was that occupied by a special educational tool: the national history schoolbook. Prophets of the past and political architects of the future, the historians committed to the national cause needed engineers of the soul for kneading the national self as the spiritual basis upon which Romanianism could be materialized into the nation state. These engineers of the soul were the pedagogues of the nation, the teachers of Romanianism, armed to fulfill their nationalistic mission with the textual weapons made up of history schoolbooks. Although the first specialized history schoolbooks appeared in Romanian space before the Revolutions of 1848 (Aaron, 1839; Albineț, 1845), they have become a massive phenomenon only during the 1880s, when didactic literature of this kind experienced a publishing boom.

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[7] The notion of Romanianism (*Românism*) was coined and theorized as early as 1858 by V.A. Urechia, professor of history at the University of Bucharest, author of a monumental *History of Romanians* in 14 volumes (1891-1902).

Figure 1. The dynamics of history schoolbooks published between 1831-1918
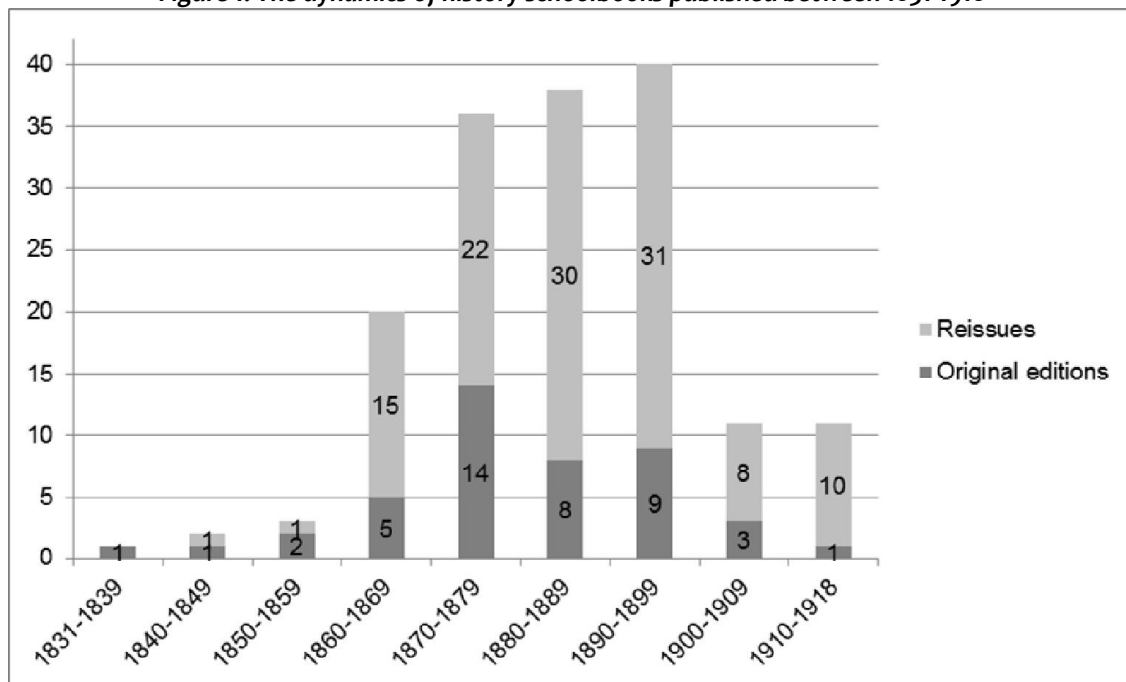
Source: author's calculations based on *Modern Romanian Bibliography 1831-1918*

A triptych analysis distributing the focus of attention simultaneously on the laws concerning public education, the syllabi and curricula, and the publishing boom of history schoolbooks reaching its peak in 1870-1890s, will reveal that history teaching has become a central axis in Romanian educational system (Murgescu, 1999). History schoolbooks were used by state authorities as vectors of national memory, preserving the reservoir of Romanian historical collective experience, and for socializing infants in the historical tradition of their nation. Becoming part of the Romanian story, the children of Orthodox peasants were made into Romanian national subjects. Christened at birth into the community of Orthodox faith, children were then ideologically baptized, through a prolonged educational ritual, into the "terminal community" of national faith (Emerson, 1960: 95).

In the second half of the 19th century, everything was in place for the great national transformation. Both ideal and material factors set the grand stage for the national becoming. On the idealistic side, the national idea, and later, the nationalistic ideology, has established itself as the axiomatic principle of Romanian culture and identity. On the material side, an educational infrastructure made up of a network of primary schools was founded for nationalizing the peasantry and injecting the national spirit into the social body. Building upon the nationalistic principle, a national pedagogy has been articulated in the purpose of creating national subjects out of Orthodox faithfuls. Their national selves were to be ideologically sculpted with history schoolbooks chisels within the workshop of the nationalistic school. Historical narrative traditions were needed to that effect. As Romanian nation-state was at pains for ensuring its existence on the political map of Eastern Europe by forming alliances and seeking

international recognition in foreign policy, domestically, it strived to become a "storytelling community" grounded in national narrative traditions depicting its historical becoming. A master story narrating the Romanian *Geist* through history was being told in every town, village and hamlet, using as ideological vehicles the national history schoolbooks. The Romanian state authorities succeeded in setting the institutional stage for telling the same master story about the nation's historical destiny. They have managed to fulfill what P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann (1966: 79) highlighted as a prerequisite for a successful socialization: "the same story, so to speak, must be told to all the children." The new political reality of the Romanian nation-state could achieve a sufficient level of symbolic legitimation only by developing a coherent historical meta-narrative as a kind of collective self-biography of the Romanian people. The time has arrived to take a closer look into the narrative fabric making up this national master story of the Romanian historical destiny.

It should be kept in mind that the grand narrative construction of the Romanian master (hi)story unfolds in the age of the meta-narrative, in a time when the modern spirit, far from manifesting any "incredulity towards meta-narratives," was quite obsessed by *grands récits* (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). So the hypothesis of a "Romanian exceptionalism"[8] must be ruled out from the very outset, since all the Western World fell under the spell of developing historical meta-narratives as symbolic legitimations of the new institutional order brought about by the new reality of the nation-state.

The central node in this narrative fabric was knotted by the Transylvanian School at the turn of the 19th century around the monomaniac idea of the Latin character of Romanians. The rest of the master story has been narratively embroidered and discursively woven upon the templet given by the Latin origin of the Romanian people. All history schoolbooks published in the time span of 1830s to 1880s are at pains to highlight the direct ethnic, political, and characterial descendance of Romanians from Romans. Some intellectual legatees of the Transylvanian School followed on the footsteps of their masters with such loyalty as to deliberately blur any distinction between Romans and Romanians. A.T. Laurian (1853) went so far on this Latinist path as to completely merge the history of Romanians into the history of Rome. Seen as nothing but heirs of Romans, it made sense to date the Romanians' history according to the *ab urbe condita* chronological system (meaning, "from the founding of the City," i.e. Rome). Laurian's *History of Romanians* (1853) starts with the founding of Rome in 753 BC, as the year 1 (i.e. the *chronogenetic moment*) of the Romanian history. Two of the three volume work deal with the histories of Rome and Byzantine Empire respectively, only the third one treating proper Romanian history. Paired with the *Romanian language dictionary* co-authored by the same A.T. Laurian with I.C. Massim (1871) written in the same ultra-Latinist vein, Laurian's *History of Romanians* represents the most radical expression of Latinism in Romanian culture. Aside these ridiculous exaggerations hyperbolizing the

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[8] The thesis of Romanian exceptionalism seems to be a national species of what P. Iluţ (2000) has labeled as "the illusion of localism," itself a genus of the general bias of "ethnocentrism" (a term coined by William G. Sumner [1906: 13]).

Latin origins and character of Romanian people, an amended Latinist credo continued to keep a firm foothold in Romanians' collective identity and historical memory. Even on the brink of the 20th century, the great historian A.D. Xenopol was emphatically asserting the identity postulate of Romanianism: "We have been and we still are Romans" (Xenopol, 1890: 5), while in another schoolbook he made it clear that Romanian people belong to the "Latin race" (Xenopol, 1897: 9).

Putting into practice his manifesto for the national pedagogy, R.G. Melidon's schoolbook entitled *National history for the people* (1876) epitomizes the ideal type of *historia militans*. Aware of the quasi-magical power residing in the notion of purity, Melidon brings out into sharp relief the uncorrupted Latin origin of Romanians. In what is a strong candidate for the most extravagant formulation of "collective narcissism" in Romanian culture, Melidon builds upon the Latin character the conclusion of Romanian superiority: "national history teaches us but also proves to us" the indisputable truth that "we Romanians are the foremost people in the world, as descendants of the old Romans from Rome in Italy" (Melidon, 1876: 84).

The quest for purity concerning Romanians' origins is as old as the national identity, springing forcefully in the historical consciousness with the Transylvanian School's writings. But it was Ion Heliade Rădulescu who expressed the Romanian "will to purity" to the utmost. In his *Abridgement of Romanian history* (1861),[9] Heliade Rădulescu reads the entire Romanian history in terms of the ebbs and flow of purity and impurity. The pure Roman origins are corrupted and polluted in the course of history by allogenic ethnic elements altering the Romanian ethnic fiber. The third and final stage of the process, after the pure overture and the secondary pollution, is political purification and the restoration of purity. The foundation of the Romanian statehood in the 13th century by the mythical figure of "Radu I Negru," credited to have established the dynastic fountainhead of the Bassarabs, heralds the historical epoch labeled as "The Pure Romania" (Heliade Rădulescu, 1861: 198). At work is the powerful metaphorical device depicting *history as identity still*. Historical time is the boiler into which Romanian identity is progressively distilling, filtering out the foreign compounds that have forced their way into the national being.

A century old sociological wisdom asserts that "all origins are lost in mystery, and it seems vain to hope that from any origin the veil of mystery will ever be raised" (Sumner, 1906: 7). Romanian scholars, generation after generation, obsessed as they were by the idea of the origins, did definitely not subscribe to what for W.G. Sumner seemed to be an unquestionable sociological postulate: the fundamental agnosticism concerning origins. But we should bear in mind that Romanian scholars were not engage in value-free historical sociology, but they were, instead, laboring in the workshop of "mythistory." It is by knotting these narrative traditions around the central node of the pure Roman origins that Romanian scholars in the 19th century brought their contribution to the process of nation building.

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[9] The schoolbook was reissued in 1869 as *Elements of Romanian history*, while an Italian translation was published in Naples in 1876 as *La Dacia e la Romania: compendio di storia rumena* (see Zub, 1981: 67, 291).

Unraveling from the central woven fabric of origins, other narrative threads cluster around themes such as historical continuity, spatial unity, and a heroic struggle for political freedom of the Romanian people throughout history. As seedbed of collective identity, the historical memory of a continued existence through time is instrumental in creating the sense of we-ness transcending the here and now of the present. The consciousness of belonging to a trans-historical community of destiny can be aroused only by highlighting the unbroken existence of the Romanian being from times immemorial to the present day. The thesis of historical continuity is the Romanian species of the universal myth of historical permanence. Building on shaky grounds – given the "documentary silence" covering the "black millennium" of Romanian history (3rd–13th century) – Romanian historians constructed some highly seductive, but deadly false, theories. First in line was Samuil Micu's thesis of Roman continuity in the old Dacia after Emperor Aurelian abandoned the province (Micu, 1995) [1805]. More elaborate was I. Heliade Rădulescu's theory of state continuity after the military evacuation of Roman Dacia in 271 A.D. A "new and autonomous government" came into existence filling the power vacuum left by Aurelian's retreat, establishing a new Roman Republic founded upon the political principles of republicanism, democratic liberalism, and Christianity. In fact, the argument goes on, during Constantine's rule in Byzantium in the 4th century, Christianity became the official religion in "the States of Romania" (Heliade Rădulescu, 1861: 40, 42). This is how Heliade Rădulescu solved the conundrum of Romanian statehood's historical (dis)continuity, by devising a fictional history revealing that "the thread [of Romanian statehood] is not cut" (Heliade Rădulescu, 1861: 69). It will unfold unbroken to create the Pure Romania dreamt by all Romanian scholars directly engaged in the process of writing the nation as part and parcel of its political construction.

The mythical desire to spatial unity blends with the longing for historical continuity to form the *Romanian national chronotope,* i.e. the narrative fusion of time and space into the master story of Romanian *Geist*'s journey through history unfolding in what L. Blaga would later call the "mioritic space" (Blaga, 1969) [1936]. The idea of Romanian unity, although cast in an ideologically monolithic mold, it is nonetheless internally structured in terms of a multiplicity of different layers. The foundational layers of this architectural model of Romanian unity rest upon the double pillars made up of the ethnic unity of the Romanian people and the geographical unity of the Romanian territory. These fulcrums of the mythical idea(l) of Romanian unity were already set in place by the turn of the 19th century by the Transylvanian School's coryphaei. Until the brink of the 20th century, the next generations of Romanian historical literati formed in the wake of the Union of 1859 laid down, on top of these foundational layers, new strata of meanings, whose symbolic keystone was to be placed with the great political union of all ethnic Romanians in a unitary nation-state covering all Romanian populated territories. A.D. Xenopol expressed all these overlapping layers in his programmatic introduction of his history schoolbook:

> The History of Romanians does not include the history of a single country, but the history of a people, of a nation having the same origin, the same language, and the same customs. If the Romanian people does not form a single whole in terms of [political] territory, it is one and indivisible in terms of moral and intellectual outlook; it is the same body, the same soul, and therefore it has to be studies in its wholeness, although it is politically sliced up, that is to say divided under different rules. This is why the history of Romanians will include the depiction of the destinies of the whole group of the Eastern Latins (Xenopol, 1897: 10).

This excerpt extracted from Xenopol's history schoolbook summarizes in a single paragraph the *ethnic* and *linguistic unity* of Romanian people, its *customary unity*, its *moral* and *spiritual unity*, its *unity of historical destiny*, as well as its aspiration towards the *political integration* of the Romanian body split up under multiple state dominations. Two decades earlier than Xenopol, it was R.G. Melidon who made the *prima ratio* of his history textbook to arouse the national consciousness as a prerequisite to protect and expand the national unity of the Romanian nation-state. Melidon (1876: 5) reveals as the driving force of Romanians' history their "instinctive tendency towards unification." This "Romanian instinct to unite" will ultimately prevail in 1918, with the creation of Greater Romania, an event that can be seen as the *political apotheosis of Romanianism*.

A third narrative stream flowing out of the springhead of the idea of Latin origins, alongside those of historical continuity and Romanian organic unity (with all its internal layers), is that of political independence and the primordial quest for freedom of the Romanian people. The idea of national liberty, tightly threaded with that of political unification, merge to become the prime principle in terms of which the entire Romanian historical epos is being organized. Xenopol divides the (presumably) 2.400 years of Romanian history (513 B.C.–1894) in four periods: a) the formation of Romanian nationality (513 B.C.–1290); b) the epoch of Slavism (1290–1633); c) the epoch of Hellenism (1633–1821), brought to an end by the coming into being of d) the epoch of Romanianism (1821 onwards), an epoch whose overture was the Revolution of National Liberation of 1821. The four historical acts into which the Romanian epos through time is being staged stand under the sign of the irreconcilable tension between national liberty and foreign subjugation. What seems to take the shape of a historical drama foreshadowing a tragic end turns out to be a *messianic redemption story*. Once formed and self-conscious, Romanian nationality passed through the double ordeal of Slavism and Hellenism, both of which tried to smash the core identity of the Romanian spirit. Romanianism not only survived this dual historical trial, but prevailed linguistically and politically, partially at first, in 1821, and fully later, in 1878, when "the Angel of National Redemption" conjured by Heliade Rădulescu in the program of the forty-eight revolution descended upon Romanianness at Grivița, Plevna, Vidin and Smîrdan during the Independence War of 1877-1878 against the Ottoman Empire.

The Romanian master story was cast in the "schematic narrative templates" (Wertsch, 2008) made up of the ideas of pure Latin *origins*, unbroken historical *continuity*, organic *unity*, and permanent struggle for national *liberty*. Starting with the writings originated in the paradigm set forth by the Transylvanian School and later

perfected by the contributions of the following generations of history scholars, the structural framework of the Romanian master story emerged as a meta-narrative construction held together by the internal crossbeams of *origins, continuity, unity,* and *independence* (Boia, 2001). The political events occurred in the second half of the 19th century, especially the decisive triptych made up of i) the instauration of the monarchy (1866), ii) the triumph in the Romanian War of Independence (1878), closely followed by iii) the proclamation of kingship (1881) left their marks upon the Romanian master story. Besides the central axes of origin, continuity, unity, and independence that have made up the resistance structure into which the Romanian historical meta-narrative has been constructed, the Romanian master story has been crowned with a monarchical superstructure. Consequently, Carol I becomes the symbolic figure around which historical discourse wraps up, while monarchy becomes the political category in terms of which the whole historical narrative of Romanianism is being reconfigured. Carol I is turned into the human incarnation of the paramount political idea of kinship, while the institution of kingship is seen as the supreme frame of Romanian statehood, political unity, and national liberty. Carol's centrality and the monarchy's importance in Romanian master story's symbolic economy start to take shape within didactic literature with some delay. Melidon's textbook (1876), published one decade after the crowning of Carol as prince of Romania, devotes only a three-line sentence to "His Highness Carol I, related to all the world's emperors, having the right of inheritance forevermore." The establishment of hereditary monarchy, seen as a warrant for a robust Romanian statehood, is taken to be the institutional formwork into which the Romanian fortitude will be preserved. Personified in the figure of Carol I, the kingship will ensure "Virtus Romana Redivivus" (Melidon, 1876: 84). It is only towards the end of the century, in the history schoolbooks written by G. Tocilescu (1889, 1896), that Carol I becomes the nodal point of the Romanian mythistory and master story, and kingship an intrinsic component of the nation. The proclamation of the kingdom in 1881 is turned into the keystone completing the building of the Romanian nation. It is through kingship that Romanian statehood, "that until now was built on sand," has finally been cemented to last (Tocilescu, 1889: 227). Summarizing the recent historical developments, Xenopol pointed out how, thanks to Carol's endeavors, "in less than a quarter of a century from the Union (1859-1881), Romania has become out of two weak little countries vassal to Turks and Russians, obedient and scared of everyone, a powerful and respected state playing today a significant role in European politics" (Xenopol, 1890: 174-175). Extending the encomium concerning Romanian politics' recent successes, Tocilescu specifies the cornerstones of Romanian identity as "*the unity, the dynasty, the constitution, the independence,* and *the kingship,* in a nutshell, *the nation*" (Tocilescu, 1889: 293). As the dynastic kingship becomes a constitutive part of Romanian nation, symbolically and politically crowning the national identity, the Romanian master (hi)story consequently takes on a royal twist. With this, the Romanian *Geist* steps into the royal road of its historical destiny.

Summa historica: the Romanian master story

Delving into the mesh of (hi)stories woven together to form the Romanian master story, we have explored the narrative dimension which we believe to be a crucial part in the identity making of modern Romania. Nations too, paraphrasing C. Geertz's anthropological dictum, have their identities caught in "webs of significance they themselves have spun" (Geertz, 2000: 5) [1973]. These nets of meaning are none other than the bundle of stories narratively structuring the collective sense of the past (i.e. historical consciousness) on which national identity is largely parasitical. That is to say, national identity derives largely from the sense of common historical destiny, or – inverting the word order – collective memory is the main fountainhead of national identity. This study revealed, hopefully, how Romanian nation builders, working in the field of cultural production as identity-weavers, emplotted the nation as a historical drama story shot through with political curses and miracles. In this purpose, they have used powerful "techniques of nationalization" including some "prototypical narrative structures" employed to depict the Romanian soul's struggle in history for its political redemption (Hogan, 2009: 66, 192). This finally came with the First World War, when the Romanian *Geist* was blessed by "the Angel of History,"[10] who descended upon it at the end of the conflict. Although Romania lost "The War for the Nation's Completion" (*Războiul de Întregire a Neamului*), by a series of political miracles, Romania managed to come out of the war fulfilling its political dream of a Greater Romania encompassing all Romanian populated territories (Constantiniu, 2011: 294-295). As we abandon the narrative thread in 1918, we are closing this chapter of the Romanian master story leaving it at the political zenith point of the Romanian historical destiny.

Abstracting the narrative essentials making up the master story of the Romanian *Geist*'s progress through history, this *summa historica* tells the heroic story of a brave people, heirs of the old Romans, the masters of the ancient world, who fought their way through a hostile history to finally fulfill their destiny as an independent and unitary nation-state, politically crowned and symbolically elevated to the rank of dynastic monarchy. The "terror of history," as M. Eliade called the Romanian tumultuous destiny, was strongly challenged during the second half of 19th century, as Romanians were making their way into "History." They broke into a long refused History with the Great Union of 1918, when Romanians not only overcome the "terror of history" to which their destiny was subjected, but managed to put an end to "the long, relentless, hallucinating

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[10] Although entering into the field of "angelology" is not among the objectives of this study, for the sake of clarity, we feel obliged to point out that "the Angel of History" whom we are refering should not be confused with Paul Klee and Walter Benjamin's homonym angel. *Angelus Novus* painted by Klee (1920) and described by Benjamin as "the angel of history" is far from being a politically redemptional force, but one who watches helplessly to history unfolding as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." It is an angel of despair, not of salvation, this *Angelus Novus*. "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin, 1968: 257-258).

bleeding" coming out of their collective history (Eliade, 1984). During the late 19th century, the newly formed Romanian nation state became a (hi)story-telling community, buttressed in its own narrative traditions, institutional infrastructure (the public school system), and the appropriate narrative currency (national history schoolbooks) circulating within the symbolic economy of the nation. It is within this state-sponsored narrative *milieu* telling the national master story of the Romanian *Geist*'s struggle against the "terror of history" that Romanian national subjects were ideologically bred out of Christian peasants. The success of the nationalizing process unleashed by state authorities in the wake of the political union of 1859 relied upon embedding its subjects' individual biographies into the collective biography of the nation. In creating these national "sociobiographies" (Zerubavel, 1996), state authorities resorted to history schoolbooks telling the Romanian master story as narrative chisels sculpting the "national selves" of their subjects. To wrap things up, we can conclude that the narrative construction of the Romanian master story and of the national subject was instrumental in the political making of the Romanian nation state. It provided a historical *alibi* legitimizing the political project of building the nation state. National identity rests on an intricate woven of stories incorporating the all-important identity categories of belonging ("we" and "them"), borders delineating between in-group and out-groups, and the trail of self-flattering qualities of the in-group contrasting against the pejorative attributes of the out-groups. It is no wonder that state authorities resort so often to narrative devices from their available identity tool-kit to arouse sentiments of collective belonging and shared feelings of common historical destiny. The Romanian master story we have explored in this study is only a national case in point, revealing the narrative fiber of collective identity and the story's decisive place in the political construction of the nation.

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[11] The titles are reproduced here in their original 19th century notations. Approximative English translations for each title are provided in brackets.

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