Evidence in the Museum: Subjects, Objects and Memories in Vrancea*

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Abstract : *This article analyzes the uses of memory in the emergence of an irregular „evidentiary economy" paying attention to the ways in which objects are called upon to stand as proofs or witnesses in the disputes over the ownership of Vrancea's communal forests. I focus on some specific and relatively recent configurations of matter, meaning and temporality, which are locally identified by the paradoxical label of „personal museums". These are unusual arrangements of material objects (and less so of texts, in the strict sense) that mediate multiple forms of memory – personal, genealogical, regional – anchoring different and potentially overlapping communities of viewers. Their collections of things and persons precipitate not just the recollection of the past, but also the creation of newly meaningful representations of the collectivity. The article looks at three such museums in different villages of Vrancea, exploring some of the theoretical and practical questions that are raised at the intersection of memory and materiality.*

Keywords : memory, materiality, evidence, museum, communal ownership, Vrancea
Cuvinte-cheie : memorie, materialitate, evidenţă, muzee, proprietate comunală, Vrancea

It is a quiet summer evening in 2005 and Mihai C., twice mayor of Nereju before 1989, tells me of his more or less fortunate encounters with communist bureaucrats. In the mid-70's, during his second term as mayor, officials from the County office of the Communist Party kept coming in various controls and investigations, bent on finding something amiss in his administration. Most often, they criticized him for not delivering the whole milk quota, which he refused to give on account of the fact that the families of Nerejeni [inhabitants of Nereju] had many children who needed to be fed. Once, a friend of his at the County Party office announced him in advance about the arrival of a control team determined to sack him for the under-fulfillment of milk production quotas. In response, he thought of showing them what „the real life of the people" was like. Thus, he „sent word" to two large families of Nerejeni, who had each about 14-15 children, that they

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should stay at home together with the children, have their milk and mămăliga [corn bread, usually seen as poor people's staple food] prepared and eat their evening meal just as they do it everyday. When the control team arrived, Mihai took them to the first family : they were all seated on the floor, around the milk cauldron (placed in a chair turned upside down) and they were eating heartily, dipping pieces of mămăliga in the hot milk. The control team suspected a trick and asked to see the birth certificates of the children in the room, which the parents showed without hesitation (Mihai had told them beforehand to have them ready). A heavy rain started afterwards and the county officials refused to visit the second family, although the mayor insisted that they should go and convince themselves. „They must have kept a really beautiful memory of the visit, because they gave me an exemption for 500 liters of milk ! " he concluded with irony.

In this story, an excerpt from my field notes from Nereju, a fragment of everyday life flashes at the peak of the narrative bringing with it a sense of closure, and maybe even more, a happy ending. The everyday appears here as an *intermezzo*, rich in possibilities, but separate from the greater and more serious story of „communism" ; it is the terrain of profitable encounters wherein even state agents get a chance to manifest their humanity. By staging a scene of everyday life in a poor and numerous Nereju family, the mayor is able to counter the demands of the control team and even to gain something from them. It is, thus, a confrontation with the „staged authenticity" (MacCannell, 1976) of the everyday that manages to thwart the abstract claims of a distant political center. In the process, the backstage terrain of public culture becomes a stage in itself and the informal space of the quotidian is turned into a newly meaningful performance, a semiotic object that can be manipulated as a form of certification.

In this article, I analyze the uses of memory in the emergence of an irregular „evidentiary economy" (Yates, 2003, 35 ; Burke, 2001), paying attention to the ways in which objects are called upon to stand as proofs or witnesses in the ownership disputes over communal forests in Vrancea. I focus on some specific and relatively recent configurations of matter, meaning and temporality, which are locally identified by the paradoxical label of „personal museums". These are unusual arrangements of material objects (and less so of texts, in the strict sense) that mediate multiple forms of memory – personal, genealogical, regional – anchoring different and potentially overlapping communities of viewers. Their collections of things and persons precipitate not just the recollection of the past, but also the creation of newly meaningful representations of the collectivity. The next section explores some of the theoretical and practical questions raised at the intersection of memory and materiality, while the following ones provide a detailed analysis of these topics within three different museums that I encountered in different villages of Vrancea.

Mihai's story has often come to my mind when considering the subject of this article – the emergence of the museum genre as a form of cultural validation in Vrancea after 1989. Mihai recalled this event in the midst of a conversation about the chances that villagers from Vrancea had of recovering their rights of communal ownership over forests, once a law passed in 2000 by the Romanian Parliament turned this old desire into a possibility. The gist of the story was to show that „we always found resources to press our claims, to make a point..." and thus, that similar modes of validation can be re-discovered and put to use in the present contest over communal ownership. The success of Vrancea peasants' ownership claims depends, indeed, on their ability to muster evidence and to create allies for their cause. However, the usual types of proofs that attest ownership claims (titles, documents of transmission, contracts, oral testimony) are not always efficient in their case. The 2000 law for the restitution of communal ownership over forests has already granted

legal recognition to their claim ; nevertheless, in the postsocialist context of a fragmented state whose principles of governance seem to rely on the distance rather than the identity between rules and their practical implementation, the ownership promised and inscribed in the law fails to materialize in reality.

All the villages in Vrancea, including Nereju, have (re)created communal associations (*obşte*) for the administration of their forest properties, but these associations are, in most cases, mere appendages of the State Forestry Offices, which have managed the local forests since the 1948 nationalization by the communist state. Instead of including local members and leaders, they promote the same state foresters whom the villagers see as usurpers of their legitimate rights of use. These ubiquitous foresters, simultaneous impersonators of *obşte* councilors, state agents and lumber businessmen have found thus an accessible and, apparently legal avenue for the large-scale commercialization of lumber. Most of the villagers are acutely aware of the deceptive stance of a state that claims to restitute their property while, at the same time, excluding them by posing as the rightful embodiment of their traditional form of association – the *obşte*. „This is not our *obşte*. It's *theirs* ! " exclaims a peasant from a distant hamlet of Nereju. „It is *they* who have the power, the connections, and the money ! They cut down the forest and they threaten to kill us if we speak against them".

Such critiques are not mere condemnations of fraudulent legal delegation, but strong claims about what constitutes „true" communal ownership and what is, in fact, a misrepresentation of longstanding local principles. In this sense, the struggle for the realization of „authentic" communal ownership is, at the same time, a complex exercise in remembering and a litmus case for the social efficacy of memory. Vrancea's villagers aim to re-create a form of ownership characteristic of this highland region since at least the 15th century (Sava, 1929 ; 1931), but whose principles were never fully codified, locally or by the national juridical apparatus, before their elimination in 1948[1]. Given this context, the villagers of Vrancea have to navigate a complicated and highly unstable landscape of the past wherein memory claims are asserted, challenged and exchanged. The character of the ownership dispute in which they are engaged with the state as well as the intermediary, extra-legal space in which it must be waged precludes the articulation of a consistent politics of representation and validation (Zerner, 2003). That could be why villagers from Vrancea refrain from using the legal categories of ownership (such as „rights") and speak instead of an ineffable and „extraordinary sense of property", a supposedly collective characteristic of all the „native" inhabitants of the region[2]. In this sense, this dispute over the limits and meaning of ownership provides an excellent opportunity for studying the importance of change, flexibility and re-conversion in the work of memory. A corollary of this perspective is, of course, the fact that memory needs to be thought as an active process, a mutable practice rather than as a static storehouse from which images and ideas of the past can be imported in the present (Confino and Fritzsche, 2002).

1. An attempt by the state to impose legibility by streamlining customary practices into positive law (the 1910 Forestry Code) was largely unsuccessful and met with widespread local resistance (Stahl, 1939, 232). However, it is precisely this questionable legal codification, which portrayed the local *obşte* as a corporation based on the principle of identifiable and potentially commodifiable shares that underlies the legal recognition offered in 2000.
2. Similarly, terms such as communal or collective ownership are absent. There is, instead, a complex vernacular register glossing the relationship between communities and forests : *devălmăşie* (unruly togetherness), *dinmpreună* (togetherness) and most frequent *obşte* (community, collectivity or gathering).

Flexible categories : museums, memories, subjects and objects

A „museum" may be any real or imaginary site where the conflict or interaction or simulation of or between personal and collective memory occurs. Museums are more than cultural institutions and showplaces of accumulated objects : they are the sites of interaction between personal and collective identities, between memory and history, between information and knowledge production" (Crane, 2000a, 12).

This inclusive definition of the museum, particularly useful for the purposes of this article, emphasizes the museum's potential for heterogeneity, its role as a point of intersection between memory and history, personal and collective memory, the creation and contestation of identity and, I would add, between humans and non-human entities, such as material objects. However, this is a recent and tolerant understanding of the museum genre, one that circumvents the longstanding debates surrounding the creation of this institution since the mid 19th century. As Didier Maleuvre (1999, 1) points out, the „traditional" museum has been heavily criticized for a whole score of intrinsic failures : „the loss of context, loss of cultural meaning, destruction of a direct connection with life, promotion of an aesthetically alienated mode of observation, instigation of a passive attitude toward the past and of a debilitating mood of nostalgia"[3]. As cultural constructs based on classification, schematization and abstractness, museums are particularly vulnerable to modern, and, at the same time, nostalgic critiques of memory loss. One such example is Pierre Nora's analysis of the fixation and simplification of the past I *lieux de memoire*, vicarious modes of representation that fail to approximate the unmediated relation between past and present, existent in previous, traditional *milieux de memoire* (1989).

From a different perspective, anthropologists, sensitive to the processes of collecting and reification that define their discipline, have looked at the paradoxical notion of culture as static possession that is propagated by the selective work of museum-like displays as well as the attendant immobilization of an „authentic" cultural identity (Handler, 1988 ; Karp and Lavine, 1991). Indeed, as James Clifford (1993) notes, all such collections of material objects and memories inevitably „embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self". One way to avoid sweeping critiques and assumptions about the role of the museum as a unique, homogenous institution is to look more rigorously at the development of particular forms of representation and the creation of the multiple hierarchies they sustain.

In contrast to the classical art or history museum, and even the late 20th century experiments with more inclusive forms of cultural exhibition, such as the ecomuseums or the community museums (Fuller, 1992), the three „personal" museums I encountered in Vrancea are not the final results of institutional or communitarian projects. As this recurrent name suggests, they are presented, at least initially, as personal creations, whose collections index incremental processes of identity-formation. The owner is an intrinsic part of the installation, whose congruence would be threatened without his/her narrative – such personal narratives, often intertwined with detailed biographies of the objects that make up the collection, stand as the most potent forms of cohesion in the absence of a prior, well-defined system of classification.

Seen thus as a form of subjectivity, these museums have more in common with the

3. See also Baudrillard (1994) and Stewart (1993) for similar critiques of the decontextualization that serves as a premise of collections as well as of the particular (Western) notion of ownership as obsessive possession that drives the work of collectors.

early-modern world of private collections and cabinets of curiosities (Elsner, 1994 ; Crane, 2000b ; Findlen, 2000 ; Shelton, 1994 ; Impey and MacGregor, 1985) than with the classical genre of the cultural/ historical or art museum. Furthermore, even though they use the „museum" vocabulary, they are mostly predicated on the space of the everyday life – courtyard or house – and their mechanical decontextualization of artifacts is minimal, or sometimes, even non-existent. In this sense, it is almost incorrect to identify them as museums, precisely because the use of this word is part of their technology of persuasion. This transformation of the „museum" into a sign of itself is a good illustration of Maleuvre's (1999, 108) observation : „the museum's involvement in mediating community identity is carried to the point where it lets itself be mediated by these identities".

However, what makes these personal museums powerful is their very state of emergence, of non-coagulation and indecisiveness. They are exemplary forms of hybridity, straddling many genres and media through the re-conversion and combination of different modes of cultural display : the ethnographic exhibition, the socialist manipulation of folklore for nationalist aims, normative projects of kinship embodied in traditional „guest rooms" or „dowry rooms" or religious installations. The ethnographic vignette presented at the beginning of this paper stands as a good example of such combinatory re-conversion. The staging of an „ordinary" evening meal in a Nereju family for the education of visiting communist officials used the very parameters of national-socialist ideology – the extolling of peasant life, family values, and traditional simplicity – in order to certify the impossibility of fulfilling the inflated claims of the same socialist planned economy.

However, it would be misleading to assume that the celebration of a peasant, „authentic" way of life originated with the national-socialist project. In the course of the same conversation, Mihai recounted his story of the monographic „campaign" organized in 1927 by the Romanian School of Sociology in Nereju – an event that was intimately intertwined with his own family history. Not only did the two leaders of that fieldwork team – Dimitrie Gusti and Henri Stahl – act as godfathers for the religious ceremony of his parents' wedding, but they also used his mother's house as a representative icon of the „archaic" village of Nereju in their grandiose project for an open-air *Museum of the Romanian Village*[4]. Just like many other houses from different regions of Romania, his mother's family house was dismembered and transported piece-by-piece, together with its contents, and then re-built in Bucharest. For the inauguration of the *Village Museum* in 1936, his parents were invited to Bucharest and lived for several weeks in the reconstructed house, participating as live exhibits in the overall display of „Romanian national culture". Transmitted along with other family stories, this experience could have provided a useful blueprint for Mihai's own resourceful creation of a live ethnographic exhibit in the 1970s.

The purpose as well as the intended audience for this temporary ethnographic performance is quite plain in Mihai's case ; however, these are not as easily discernible for the recent, more permanent museums. It is apparent, though, that they all deal, in one way or another, with outsider-oriented representations of „Vrancea" as a regional unity,

4. In effect, the two sociologists initiated and then acted as godfathers in the religious ceremony performed for the simultaneous wedding of a dozen couples from Nereju whose marital arrangements had not yet been officially sanctioned by the church. Gabriel Hanganu (1998) discusses similar practices of godparenthood in the second monographic campaign of the Sociology School at Drăguş in 1929. See also Stahl (1981).

working to materialize a history that is perceived to be „within" and a form of property that is usually expressed in intimate, sensory terms („our sense of property").

James Wertsch's (2002, 24) notion of a „contested distribution" of collective memory approximates best the intersection of personal and collective memories found in these museums. Their organization around objects marked by the traces of the events or persons they memorialize also suggests the importance of what Wertsch (2002, 25) calls the distribution of agency between „agents and the cultural tools they employ to think, remember and carry out other forms of action". Wertsch's perspective is particularly useful for analyzing the role of material objects in the mediation of memory, especially when such objects are configured in a museum genre shared by the community as a resource for representation. My only reserve concerns Wertsch's instrumental understanding of objects (or texts, for that matter), as tools deprived of intrinsic possibilities of intervention. I would follow here Bruno Latour's argument for the reconceptualization of social institutions as „collectives" of humans and artifacts, what he calls „object institutions" (1999, 192), in which material objects figure as active players in the mediation of social agency as well as Alfred Gell's (1998) treatment of artifacts as actors capable of instantiating the agency of their creators or wielders.

Museums, which were imagined since the mid-19th century as „object lessons" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, 395 ; Yates 2003, xi-xvii), are exemplary spaces for investigating this continuous entanglement between subjects and objects. Their material collections allow for the recognition of the ways in which humans bind themselves to non-human agents to produce new kinds of collectives and to precipitate the formation of hybrid – or, „non-modern" in Latour's terminology (1993) – networks and channels for the generation and circulation of memories.

„The museum of our ancestors" : collecting and performing

It is one thing, however, when ethnography is inscribed in books and displayed behind glass, at a remove in space, time, and language from the site described. It is quite another when people themselves are the medium of ethnographic representation, when they perform themselves, whether at home to tourists or at worlds' fairs, homeland entertainments, or folklife festivals – when they become living signs of themselves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, 387-88).

„Why don't you come to see my museum ? I have a museum at home", said the man from Bârseşti whom I had stopped to ask about the way to a monument raised in 1904 by the „Great Vrancea Assembly" in memory of King Stephen the Great. Decidedly curious, I follow him down the deserted road and we enter a courtyard where two women peel potatoes sitting on the grass, while two small boys play hide-and-seek. Past the courtyard, we enter the animal sheds, scattering the frightened chickens and ducks. „Here it is ! The Museum of Our Ancestors ! " says the man, pointing to a dusty shack covered by an army tarpaulin :

I have gathered all the old objects that I could find. Look, I have swords from the Independence War [1877], iron clubs from Stephen the Great's war [15th century], pistols, and there, look, there it is Ion Vrânceanul, dressed in our traditional costume. These here are our old musical instruments – panpipe, flute, bagpipe – there, on the shelves, are the clay pots that we used to eat in, in the back there's a wooden loom, that big thing there is the wooden comb for hemp, because we used to wear hemp shirts, not these flimsy cotton things...

Through this ostensible verbosity, the collection comes to life ; it speaks and sings amidst the children's giggles and the noisy chickens.

Marin, a former tractor-driver and the owner of the museum, turns his collection literally alive by playing the different musical instruments and demonstrating the uses of various objects, be it weapons or wooden domestic instruments. There is an explicitly performative dimension to his self-presentation through the museum and the simultaneous presentation of the museum through his own acting. Invoking his involvement in the village musical and dance team, he constructs a detailed ethnographic demonstration of „Vrancea's" past way of life, using himself as a semiotic object, an anchor point for the historical and aesthetic consistency of the material collection.

Figure 1. *Marin, creator of the Museum of Our Ancestors, playing a flute next to the mannequin of Ion Vrânceanul, the quintessential figure of the native Vrâncean* (Bârseşti, 2003)

The rationalized and compartmentalized presentation of artifacts characteristic of Romanian historical or ethnographic museums is replaced by a *Wundercammer*-like display of hundreds of various objects, pertaining to different registers of formality, and crammed so that no corner of the former chicken shed remains unoccupied. Fragments of regional history are embodied in various weapons, which are presented as relics of the 15th century war carried by Vrancea's peasants in support of King Stephen the Great, a legendary event that marks a point of origin in the genealogy of Vrancea as a regional unity based on communal ownership, to the extent that it resulted in a „permanent and irrevocable" donation of the seven local mountains to the inhabitants of the region and to their descendents (Hârnea, 1930; 1972; Stahl, 1939). The everyday life of „the ancestors" is illustrated copiously through whole shelves of pottery, wooden looms and grinders, kitchen tools, and so forth. Dozens of traditional local costumes are folded carelessly on the upper shelves of the shed. At the center of the museum, there is the figure of Ion Vrânceanul, a mannequin dressed in a male shepherd's garb, which Marin pats affectionately on the back, while explaining the name and role of each clothing item. In a corner, and slightly isolated from the rest of the collection, is a miniature reconstruction of the house belonging to Marin's mother. He indicates it as an emblematic representation of „the traditional Vrâncean house".

Figure 2. *The Museum of Our Ancestors*
(Bârseşti, 2003, photograph by the author).

Although overwhelming in its multiplicity and diversity, Marin's collection presents the beginnings of some attempts at organization and categorization. Most of the objects are classified according to their uses – domestic tools occupy their own corner and the same goes for musical instruments, weaponry or pottery – and are even identified through handwritten labels, pinned somewhat precariously to the shelves of the shed. The most explicit separation, though, is that between „the museum" and „the exhibition", which occupies a lower shelf on the right of the structure and represents a sort of precursor to the more institutionalized „gift shop" of public museums. While the museum contains worn and „authentic" things that can be clearly identified as indexical traces of the past – each of them can be validated through an individual biography that elucidates their local origin, pointing to their previous owners or to their participation in a famous event of Vrancea's history – the smaller exhibition is made up of recently manufactured objects that participate in an extra-local tourist industry and are often commercialized at local fairs or in urban specialized stores. In Marin's own explanation, the possibility of commodification marks an absolute difference between the authenticity of the museum and the second-order copies of the exhibition – „these treasures here I would never part with; these new things here are for sale, so that I can also make some money".

Despite these inchoate signs of classification „the Museum of Our Ancestors" does not attempt to present a coherent and/or chronologically organized version of Vrancea's history and culture. It does not yet offer a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, nor does it exercise a „strong cognitive control" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, 390) over the objects through long labels, charts and diagrams or booklets and catalogues[5]. What this museum does, though,

5. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Marin's projects for the future indicate a preference for increasing institutionalization. He complained of his conflicts with the mayor of Bârseşti, who did not allow him to put up a street sign for the museum, and expressed his intention to find a more adequate and public space and to engage in a publicity campaign (eventually by inviting the Romanian television and press).

is to bring material objects together, binding each of them to a representation of „Vrancea" as a cultural and historical unity, a distinctive region with its own „personality" – symbolized most powerfully, as Marin suggested, in the life-size, realistic figure of „Ion Vrânceanul". In this sense, „the Museum of Our Ancestors" illustrates quite well what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991, 388) calls „the art of the metonym" : a figure of representation in which „the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be recreated". In it, one can easily discern the future shape of a local ethnographic museum, open for tourists' visits, educational programs or the forays of other passing anthropologists.

Genealogy, politics and the senses in the „personal museum"

[S]he to whom the collection belongs, belongs also to the collection (Maleuvre 1999, 97).

„Have you seen Tanti Sanda's museum ? " asks the mayor of Nereju, only a day after I arrived in the village and talked to him about my research. „You *must* go and see it, just tell her that I sent you ! " Intrigued by the urgency of his tone, I decided that the next day I would visit Tanti Sanda, a seventy-three year old widow. After I called several times at the wooden gate of her house, she came outside and listened to my presentation. She agreed to meet me several days later, saying that she needed to be prepared. The actual visit began pleasantly, with her asking questions about me (where do I come from, what sort of family, where do I study, and so forth) and then listening politely to my explanations and reasons for coming to Nereju. Equally politely, she ignored my remarks about „the museum". The discussion continued thus for about an hour and then it slowly turned into a more consistent oral history interview about her life and family. After another three hours of talking we stopped and ate a brief meal and drank her „special" plum brandy with honey. By this time, I had almost lost hope of seeing her famous museum and even began thinking I might have misunderstood the mayor's indications. But, as I was preparing to take my leave, she suddenly got up, smiled and announced that now it was time to see the museum.

The one-room „personal museum" is located in a different, more secluded part of the house. Formerly a customary „guest room" or „dowry room", it is a strange place, made up of distinctive layers of history, and yet, kept out of time. It is the place where Sanda keeps the dowry of her grandmother, mother and herself ; the dowry includes the handmade carpets, rugs, linen, pillows and clothing that the wife brings with her upon marriage, not only as an expression of shared wealth, but also as a sign of her domestic skills. The room is thus made up of family tissue (both literally and figuratively) : the walls, the floor, the tables and the two beds are thoroughly covered in such richly colored fabrics of feminine labor. Except for her two young granddaughters who visit her sometimes during the summer, nobody is allowed to sleep in the room and the windows are covered so that no light or dust will slip in. On the walls there are photographs and portraits of several generations of family members.

Tanti Sanda pointed to the artifacts in the room, relating their individual or collective biographies. Most of the wall and floor carpets were cherished heirlooms passed down from her mother or grandmother. Others, such as the embroidered pillows scattered on the beds, were part of Sanda's own legacy to her son and they bore his name, sewn in delicate red letters. She patted each of the pillows fondly and caressed the soft texture of the wall carpets, inviting me to imitate her gestures and feel the texture of the fabrics.

Figure 3. *Tanti Sanda in her personal museum*
(Nereju, 2003, photograph by the author)

Touching gently the table-cover woven from fragile hemp threads, she explained the lengthy and difficult process of preparing and weaving hemp fiber. „Feel the softness", she said, noting with regret that nobody works with hemp anymore. She then summoned me to the wooden dowry chest placed in a corner of the room, and asked me to put on a beautifully embroidered blouse woven from flax threads (part of the local costume), almost identical to the one she was wearing over the heavy and long black skirt decorated with colorful beads. After I was thus re-presented in the register of the museum, we sat on one of the beds and Tanti Sanda continued the detailed stories of the objects inhabiting her „personal museum".

The inscription of Sanda's personal memories onto the space of her museum room underlines the contrast noted above between the early modern sensibility of the private collection and the modern museum. In her study of Renaissance cabinets of humanist scholars, Paula Findlen (2000) discusses the significance of personal emotion in fostering the collections that can serve as modes of commemoration for both things and their owners. „The memory of the owner is thus part of what is communicated to the audience – they interact not only with the contents of the collection, but with the collector himself via the collection" (Crane, 2000, 10)[6]. Sanda's personal museum embodies not only her own memory but also that of previous generations in her family : her mother and grandmother are thus commemorated through their hand--woven carpets, while the photographs of her father, mother and grandfather are hung together in a single wooden frame.

However, this is not simply a normatively celebratory display of kinship, but rather the nostalgic commemoration of an interrupted genealogy (see also Mauad 2002). Sanda has become the custodian of everything that has remained of her family and a guardian of memories that need to be preserved as well as of memories that need to be lost. Nothing in the museum speaks directly of her only child, a priest who lives now in a different county. Sanda refuses to acknowledge him as her son because he divorced his first wife and left his two girls in order to re-marry soon afterwards. Sanda, whose own father had been a priest, considers that divorce is a deeply immoral act for a member of the Orthodox Church and has thus excluded her son from the family genealogy, while still keeping in contact with his first „legitimate"

6. Similarly, Didier Maleuvre (1999, 99) notes on the early cabinets of curiosities owned by European noblemen : „In the Kunstcammer, the collector stands in the midst of art : he shows that the space of art can be inhabited, that it is immediate to the human world. No invisible wall cordons off the subject from the artwork".

wife and the two granddaughters. The only objects reminding her of her son are the two pillows inscribed with his name : their presence in the museum speaks of both exclusion and loss, because, ordinarily, they should have been transmitted as gifts, decorating his own house rather than that of his mother.

An even more thorough material absence is that of Sanda's former husband, who divorced her in the mid 1960's after returning from the labor camp where he had spent almost 13 years. However, as a nameless „he", the husband was very much present in Sanda's oral recollections. Soon after the birth of their son, the husband became involved in the local movement of anti-communist resistance, eventually becoming one of the main participants of the *chermeză*, the 1950 revolt in Nereju. Outraged by the intention of the communist state to nationalize their communally owned forests, several hundred people from Nereju as well as from other villages in Vrancea decided to take arms and establish resistance groups in the mountains. One night in June 1950, during a particularly large meeting in a forest clearing, they were surprised by several troops of the police and the Securitate : almost a dozen were executed on the spot, while many others were imprisoned or sent to labor camps. Sanda herself was interrogated several times at the county headquarters of the Securitate and had to live several months in house arrest with her parents and her son. Nobody was allowed to visit them and they could not leave the house and, thus, they nearly starved. Moreover, agents of the Securitate came to confiscate the belongings of her husband, but, in fact, they managed to take also her parents' domestic animals as well as many of their and Sanda's things : „they took so many beautiful things, a wooden chest from my grandmother, my mother's embroidered skirts, and a bed cover, and other things also..."[7]

Sanda's tone when reminiscing about her former husband is an interesting mixture of pity, resentment and contempt. She tells with sorrow of her visits to the labor camp (very far from Nereju, in the lowlands of Southern Romania) and of how he had changed there. She resented his transformation and the fact that he „betrayed" her by going to live with another woman after he returned from the camp[8]. But the overwhelming tone of her recollection is one of contempt for the failed project of resistance in which her husband had engaged. „You see, they were waiting for the Americans, that's why they all ran into the forest with guns and everything. But, of course, the Americans never came and things stayed the same or they got worse for some of us". She points out the naivety of their political project, extolling, at the same time, the attitude of her parents, who „refused to have anything to do with politics", and tried to continue their old way of life despite the incursion of the communist state. Even now, she asserts, „politics is useless" because „we got our forests back and yet, there are only quarrels and conflicts going on ! People should reconcile now".

While it is conceivable that, given different circumstances, Tanti Sanda's museum could have been organized around her husband's project of political resistance[9],

7. In Sanda's memory, this time of loss and sorrow is closely identified with the previous arrival of Soviet soldiers during WWII – they had also taken things and food and devastated the house (Sanda and her parents had gone into hiding and only her grandfather guarded the family house)
8. Sanda recalls with amusement and a certain pride how she disguised herself as a man and followed her husband's new lover, beating her up. After a while, her anger subsided and she could accept the idea of separation.
9. This particular representational choice belongs, in fact, to her former husband. After 1989, he published a poetry volume, titled *Tears of Memory*, which includes the poems he wrote in prison and in the labor camp as well as more recent epical creations that relate the 1950 revolt in Nereju to other ownership struggles from Vrancea's past (in particular, the 1801-1816 lawsuit against the Moldavian boyar Roznovanu).

what grounds and validates her collection is a more felicitous, but similarly politically charged, encounter, which is embodied in a particular photographic artifact. Her whole presentation of the museum gravitated towards a table at the center of the room, where she keeps an old magazine from 1927 – *Illustrated Romania* – which has been obviously touched and handled a lot. The magazine contains pictures taken by the ethnographer Henri Stahl of houses and people from Nereju. The captions under the photographs, written in French and English, are quite general („village house" or „domestic interior"), but someone has corrected their neutrality. Names of people and places have been added in pencil writing by Sanda's grandfather, himself a noted informant of the ethnographer.

As soon as Tanti Sanda picks up the magazine, it opens to a particular photograph : it is a 1927 image of the very room we are in. Sanda points to the photograph without making any commentary and, as I follow her gaze around the room, I see that almost nothing has changed in its arrangement ; it is as if the present was suddenly telescoped into the past. The wordless presentation of this photograph re-frames Sanda's personal museum as an immobilized slice of temporality : the mimetic continuity of the material configuration seems to act as a form of compensation for the present tragedy of her interrupted genealogy. However, as her previous recollections of the 1927 anthropological campaign and of her grandfather's close relationship to Henri Stahl indicate, there is an additional layer of meaning. The 1927 photograph – itself an ethnographic object that imparts the same quality to the room that it represents – acts as a document of authenticity. It is clear that Sanda has deliberately strived to maintain her museum in the same form that it had been captured by the lens of the ethnographer, keeping it, thus, out of time and beyond the usual „vicissitudes to which material signs are prone" (Keane, 1997, 31). The ostensible centrality of the photograph points to its special status as a piece of evidence, a document that validates, while, at the same time, encapsulating Sanda's project for a personal museum.

Figure 4. *On the left : photograph taken in 1927 by Henri Stahl and published in the magazine „Illustrated Romania". The magazine caption says „the house of a Nerej family" ; Sanda's grandfather added in pencil writing the exact name of the family. On the right : partial view of the same room in 2003* (photograph by the author)

In contrast to the classical model of the museum, developed since the late 19th century as an antiseptic space predicated on the separation between the visitor and the artifacts on display, Sanda's personal museum encourages familiarity, closeness and active participation. It is a realm of social intimacy that reflects the early modern origins of the museum as private collection, situated ambivalently on the boundary between private

and public space (Crane, 2000 ; Elsner and Cardinal, 1994). The restrictions that characterize standard museum behavior since the late 19th century – silence, interdiction of eating or free mobility (Maleuvre, 1999, 101-3) – are best captured in the exclusive relation between the visitor and the objects, which are enclosed by velvet ropes, frames or glass cases. The significance of this intransitive relation can hardly be underestimated ; as Susan Stewart (1999, 28) argues, the institution of the museum can be seen as „an elaborately ritualized practice of refraining from touch" or as an effective sensory technology through which „the contagious magic of touch is replaced by the sympathetic magic of visual representation" (Stewart, 1999, 30).

In Sanda's museum these processes are reversed : the visitor is asked to engage in the spatial immediacy of tactile perception, to feel the texture of fabrics, to take her time, to sit and to listen. In this sense, the museum expands beyond the spatial boundaries of the room and the visible material collection : it consists also of a collection of sensory experiences through which memories become compellingly tangible. Eating honey from a honeycomb brought from the beehives that Sanda inherited from her father, hearing the low and soft tone of her voice as she recounts her childhood memories, invited to see and touch the surrounding fabrics, the visitor is inevitably immersed into a peculiar space of memory. In this sense, the personal museum exemplifies what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) has termed the „synaesthetic" dimension – the fusion of all the senses into a unified bodily experience (see also Hecht, 2001, 129 ; Stewart, 1999, 32) – by means of which bodies and things become simultaneous agents of sense impression. Acting through such affective technologies that deny the separation between subjects and objects, the personal museum engages in an elaborate process of overpersuasion. Through the fusion of objects, emotions and senses (Hecht, 2001 ; Seremetakis, 1994), it becomes a mechanism for the creation of „allies" (Latour, 1990) – people willing to believe in, and entities fashioned to support, a particular version of local culture.

However, the presence of the 1927 photograph as the most prized item of the collection suggests that the museum expands also beyond the intimate space of family genealogy. While in a sense the photograph *is* part of family genealogy – incorporated through the friendship between Sanda's grandfather and Henri Stahl – it is also the trace of a felicitous encounter between the locality of Nereju and the representatives of national social science who had come „all the way from Bucharest just to study our village". It establishes thus the status of Nereju as a worthy object of study, which had benefited in the past from respectful scientific attention. By doing so, it also provides the model for an equally respectful relation between Nereju and the current political center.

For the present mayor, as for many other villagers from Nereju, the 1927 monographic campaign undertaken by the Sociology School is the object of local pride and fond memories. I suspect that this positive imagine, together with his appreciation for the emotional power of Tanti Sanda's museum, made the mayor insist on having various party officials, county and national bureaucrats, representatives of the World Bank or French tourists who came to Nereju as visitors to her home. From this point of view, the presentation of her museum as „personal", as a promise of intimacy, is part of its attraction, but also a misrepresentation of the ways in which it has become collectivized as a significant component of the local evidentiary economy. It is thus, a complex space that holds both the promise for a ritualized encounter with the authentic communal past *and* for an unmediated relation to the sentiments and memories that define familial domesticity.

Past and presence : the „true portrait" of Popa Şerban[10]

The face is the evidence that makes evidence possible (Taussig 1999, 224).

In Năruja, a village located at the center of Vrancea County, one can easily spot the usual Community Center (*Cămin Cultural*) that the socialist regime created in practically all the Romanian villages. One thing, though, is different about this Community Center : it does not bear the name of the village (as many of them do) but that of Popa Şerban. I was visiting Năruja to look for the cross that the people of Vrancea had built in 1932 in memory of Popa Şerban and two other local leaders who had helped win the 19th century trial against boyar Roznovanu. „The Great Trial of Vrancea" or „the Great Fire" (*Focul cel Mare*), as it is poetically invoked in local legends, had united several hundred notables from all over Vrancea who managed to pool together an impressive amount of resources (material and symbolic) in order to deny the proprietary claims made by boyar Iordache Ruset Roznovanu and the Moldavian princes Constantin Ipsilanti and Alexandru Moruzi (Stahl, 1939 ; Constantinescu Mirceşti, 1965). For the fifteen years that this conflict lasted (1801-1816), Vrancea became an estate administered by boyar Roznovanu, while its free communal villages were taxed just like the *corvée* ones, with the peasants on the way to becoming *de facto* serfs of the boyar.

Local narratives insist that what was at stake, then, was not simply the resolution of a property conflict, but the defense of a particular way of life, or more precisely, the protection of Vrancea's autonomy and freedom in the face of state transgression. „It is due to them [Popa Şerban and the other two Vrâncean delegates] that we are today free masters of our lands", says the *Call to Vrânceni* to attend the consecration of priest Şerban's memorial cross on 28 August 1932 :

> *This day will be the great holiday of Vrancea, when, all gathered together, the small and the great, the young and the old, at the cross raised for priest Şerban, we will live a moment of pious memory for those who were : the liberators of our land. The voice of the forests freed from the hands of the boyar calls you ! The voice of the ancestors, who, after winning the trial went to priest Şerban's house and promised, on oath, that they and their children would never forget him, calls you ! Be thus worthy of the ancestral word ! [Emphasis and capitalization in the original document]*[11]

After showing me this 1932 document, Vasile, the director of the Community Center named after Popa Şerban, insisted that I should see „the special history room" where „all those interested can come and see the priest himself". The room is extremely small, but all the space – the walls, the table, and the two glass cupboards – is taken up by a marvelous collection of seemingly unrelated objects. Posted on two large panels on the wall, there are dozens of old photographs,

10. This section is closely linked to a different chapter. The museum that I discuss here is a memorial not only for the rebel figure of the 19th century priest, but also for the figure of Simion Harnea, local notary, folklore collector and amateur historiographer whose writings in the 1920's circulated widely the stories of the priest's rebellion. His friendship and collaborations with Aurel Sava, local judge and another amateur historian and with the anthropologist Henri H. Stahl mark him as one of the central figures in the local movement of interwar amateur historiography. I am inspired by Herzfeld (1981) and Papailias (2005) in trying to make explicit the importance and effects of amateur historiography, which continues to be a central endeavor for local teachers and functionaries.
11. Document from the private collection of Vasile C., Naruja.

newspapers and leaflets, crumbling books, traditional goat skin masks, wooden household objects, a life-size dummy dressed in the local costume, and various old musical instruments.

As Susan Stewart puts it (1984, 153), within the classificatory scheme of collection, temporality is rendered spatial in a disturbing way – to account for that spatiality, one would have to engage in a „delirium of description", ultimately undermining the very reality of the place. Yet, this „special history room" is not the materialization of a preceding principle of classification, but rather the instantiation of a mimetic epistemology that strives towards dialogue – with the tourist, the potential anthropologist or the rarely touring politicians who might donate money for the local Community Center (as indeed happened here). The knowledge produced through this collection attempts, thus, to be mimetic in a double sense : both of the local historicity it purports to represent, and of the ideal code in which this needs to be rendered intelligible for outsiders. To the extent that the socialist state defined „local specificity" (*specificul local*) through such emblematic products as „the national costume" or traditional pottery (Karnoouh, 1990), then these are indispensable elements of the collection – a necessity that is also illustrated by the Museum of Our Ancestors, discussed above. They are powerful markers by means of which the magic of a singular place can be codified and thus communicated.

Nevertheless, Popa Şerban is utterly unknown outside Vrancea villages, being excluded from the national panoply of tradition, which features, otherwise, many figures of peasant resistance. In this sense, the small colored drawing, which the director triumphantly presented as the portrait of Popa Şerban, is one of the most ambiguous items of the collection and the embodiment of a slippery process of signification. Upon first seeing the carefully and brightly colored drawing, I ventured that someone (probably a talented local student) had tried to forge a likeness, mining the local postmemory for descriptive detail. But the director corrected me, saying that „we wanted to do everything right. We wanted to have a portrait of the priest and it better be a true one". He pointed to a small note glued to the wooden panel, which was typewritten in the same characters usually used by the police or the county courthouse. The note, titled „automatic portrait (*portret robot*) of Şerban Bălan", mimicked the format of an identification card, listing the discrete physiognomic features and personality traits of this historical character through particulars that Vasile had gathered from oral stories and a written collection of local legends[12].

After compiling this description, the director sent it to the Anti-Terrorist Brigade in Bucharest (a sub-unit of the General Police Department), where one of his former pupils, employed there, could actually create a „criminal portrait" or „identikit" of the person described, in this case a priest dead for more than 150 years. The brand new result, straight out of the Police headquarters in Bucharest, is hung in a wooden frame on the wall of the small room, its bright colors offsetting the older photographs and objects around. It is strangely dull at the same time, lacking the

12. The attempt to translate the poetical imprecision of local legends into the formulaic language of police science resulted into the following mixed description : the priest was a young man „from the lowly ranks of the Vrâncean people, whose pains and desires he had known as a child", with brown hair, „penetrating" eyes „blue as the summer sky", white skin and traits „full of majesty", a closely trimmed beard, the slender and agile body of a young girl, and with so much courage, honesty and intelligence that nobody could match him. The note also added that he dressed simply, being different from other „hulky" priests „with shady souls" and that he always wore his hair falling in waves over his shoulders. The mixture of external and internal traits here serves also to exemplify the difficulties of portraiture as a genre committed to an authentic and persistent representation of the whole person (Woodall, 1997).

nuances and the creases that turn something into an authentic „antique", a trace of the past. Yet, its aim is precisely to capture, as accurately as possible, an image from the past, evading through such mimetic excess (Taussig, 1993), a simple mechanism of referentiality.

Moreover, underlying the use of techniques of criminal identification, there is a particular scheme of memory at work here. Analyzing the development of a „memory of the state" in late 19th century France, Mark Matsuda (1996) focuses on the ways in which anatomy and physiognomy were turned into institutional mnemonic instruments by the nascent services of judiciary identity. The criminal portrait promoted by the French policeman and anthropometrist Alphonse Bertillon came into being as an attempt to create „irrefutable identity" by the decomposition of the human face into distinct traits, fragments and pieces : „Rather than considering the subject as a story, the fiche was a record of the subject as an arrangement of descriptive parts" (Matsuda, 1996, 136)[13]. In Matsuda's view, from this and other investigative techniques, such as the use of fingerprints, one can grasp the articulation of an immense taxonomy of remembrance, the memory of the state as a collection of documents, practices and institutions grounded in „the knowledge of the file" (1996, 121-2).

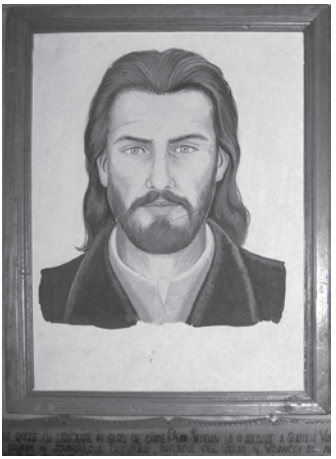

Figure 5. *The „true portrait" of Popa Şerban* (Naruja, 2005, photograph by the author)

However, in producing the criminal portrait of Popa Şerban, the mnemonic apparatus of the state served not its own cataloguing purposes, but the mimetic sensibility of a historically attuned locale[14]. In this case, the precision of criminal identification works to further the project of local identity – an identity that needs to render itself identifiable or legible in order to gain recognition[15]. One could say that just as the mechanical „guarantees objectivity" in the case of the photograph (Barthes, 1977, 44), here the state acts as a guarantor of the accuracy of the portrait, reinforcing its credibility[16]. To a pessimistic

13. Simon Cole (2001, 32-59) situates the work of Bertillon and specifically his *portrait parlé* in the larger context of 19th century developments in criminology and anthropometry. For a discussion of the „true to life" portrait as a means of identification in early-modern Europe, see Valentin Groebner (2007, 31-64).
14. The irony is that the judicial agents of the early 19th century Moldavian Principality would have certainly appealed to such techniques of criminal investigation in order to apprehend the „rebel" priest, had these been available to them at the time.
15. „To recall a name or a face, individuals search personal memory ; for the state, accumulation of documents and images form part of a series of practices which involve specially trained photographers, measurement experts, and pathologists, charged with the task of arranging descriptions, clues, and correlations, ultimately collapsing the distinction between «identity» and «identification»" (Matsuda, 1996, 122-3).
16. I am inspired here by Roland Barthes's (1981, 76) discussion of the photographic referent : „not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph". For an extensive discussion and historicization of the notion of mechanical objectivity, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (1992).

observer it might seem as if the illusion of objectivity intervenes brutally in the intimate workings of local historicity, consuming temporal distance in a large and hurried swallow. But the process by means of which the character of pastness is abolished is also one that brings distance into focus, transforming the portrait into an authentic image of the past. By literally retracing the local narrative contours onto a face, the priest's criminal portrait points to a way of reckoning with time ; it unfolds while, at the same time, crossing temporal distance. If one renounces „the vocabulary of reference" when considering the persistence of the past into the present (Ricoeur, 1988, 158), it is possible to understand this temporal distance as a form of mediation.

The importance of mediation becomes clearer if one considers the criminal portrait of Popa Şerban not only from the perspective of its mode of production – the identikit techniques of modern police – but also from the point of view of the effect it seeks to achieve. As Vasile mentioned, his intention was to obtain a „true portrait" of the priest, and not just any likeness. Why is extreme verisimilitude more important than the expressiveness or other aesthetic qualities of the portrait ? In an excellent study of images produced before the era of „Art", Hans Belting (1994, 49) discusses a category of images named *acheiropoietic* („not made by hand"). The widespread medieval legend of Christ's „true portrait" (Belting, 1994, 58) was related to such unpainted and therefore especially authentic images „that came into being either through a divine miracle or by direct contact with the body they reproduced" (Belting, 1994, 53 ; see also Schwartz 1996 ; Tamen, 2001). Because representational identity rested on an ontological relation between likeness and model, the early portraits of saints derived their power from the claim of an unmediated relation to the historical referent, becoming thus symbols of actual presence :

> *Priority was given not to the art itself or to the artist's invention but to the utmost verisimilitude. This attitude takes us to the heart of the early use of images. The beholder was in touch with the real presence in, and healing power of, the image. These could be guaranteed, however, only by an exact match between likeness and original, the intervention of the artists being unwanted* (Belting, 1994, 53).

While I do not intend to suggest here that Vasile's creation of a „true portrait" of priest Şerban was inspired from the early modern theory of icons, the question of presence that is implicit in the production of extreme verisimilitude is, I think, highly pertinent. Just as the 1932 religious consecration of Priest Şerban's cross by a gathering of all the priests from Vrancea served to propagate him as a moral person-ideal, the capture of his „true" face through the techniques of modern criminology continues the work of consecrating or validating the authenticity of his persona. This mode of validation is based on the claim of presence, pointing to the ways in which the portrait-object „assumes the guise of a subject, and begins to organize discourses and practices" (Yates, 2003, 33). It is, in short, a way of reinforcing the continuing relevance of the priest's figure, whose role in the 1816 trial serves even now as a model of articulating and making sense of ownership conflicts[17]. The „true" face of the priest is thus a supreme form of evidence, the relic of a past that continues to be present,

17. Besides recurrent invocations of this trial in everyday conversations, I can also point to more suggestive examples as that of the brother of the mayor of Nereju, who identifies with the figure of Priest Şerban and takes him as an ideal model for action. His invocation of the priest is not just a rhetorical figure, but it is also grounded in explicit historical comparison : „At the time of the trial with boyar Roznovanu we had to deal with a single invader. The only difference now is that there are more of them ! ".

mediating memory and constructing truth-value. It is ultimately ironic that the institution of the Community Center, used as a means for the propagation of socialist ideology until 1989, becomes the vehicle for this unabashed veneration of Popa Şerban's successful project of state opposition.

Conclusion

> *For me, history cannot be a book. Books, you read and then you forget, or, most often, you don't even read. (...) I speak of the history within, the history in me, in us, of the feelings that we have and of the pride that keeps us, like water lilies, on the surface of time. I want to believe that each man of this land is possessed by HISTORY as by an undying oath...*
> (Olteanu, 1988, 64-5, author's emphasis)

This image of an embodied history that possesses its possessors comes from Traian Olteanu (1988, 65), a local poet whose only novel extols the resistance of Vrancea peasants under German occupation in WWI, and I use it as shorthand for the many ways in which the villagers I spoke with emphasized their special relationship with history[18] – a relationship that visibly blurs the analytical separation between memory and history. Every mention of their „extraordinary sense of property" is a gesture towards the specificity of Vrancea as a place imbued with history, serving to articulate an apparently seamless identity among its inhabitants. It is certainly significant that sensory intimacy with property is not presented as the monopoly of a single village (i.e. Nereju), but as a shared characteristic of the whole region. Thus, what seems to underpin this „extraordinary" ability to feel property is the memory of Vrancea as an autonomous and unitary historical actor (as in „the whole of Vrancea rose up against boyar Roznovanu" or „the whole of Vrancea fought against the communists").

Villagers can thus lay claim to such a sense of property precisely because they actively share a local history. This is not only about a past that is inscribed onto the local landscape and that can thus be read and re-read, but also about the productivity of place, the way in which it continuously radiates and exudes historical „evidence" : old documents might be unburied from one's garden, the letters of an 18th century monk are hidden behind the earth stove, or an old photograph of a village wedding organized by two famous sociologists is carefully taken from the dowry chest.

Part of this place-specific historical productivity, the unusual museums discussed in this article are potent signs of a newly emerging middle ground translating the, otherwise incommunicable, reverberations of „the history within". They perform the difficult work of materializing a relation of immanence, exemplified both in the image of internal history and sensory property. By means of complex „object lessons" this intangible relation is *shown* (not explained) : both in the case of Tanti Sanda's 1927 photograph of her dowry room and in that of Popa Şerban's „true portrait", the rapport between signifier and signified is governed precisely by such a relation of immanence rather than transcendence. The strategic use of such artifacts enables individuals such as Marin, Sanda and Vasile to collectivize their personal memory projects, binding them to communal references and experiences. A tentative conclusion suggests that the materializations of memory in these museums are also attempts

18. Although it is presented as an embodied quality (for instance, „our love for history"), this historical sensibility surfaces in the intermediary spaces discussed in this article as well as in various practices : keen memories of local events that are weighted with social use, well known legends and stories, locally sponsored monuments, an intense concern with the material traces of the past (old documents, objects, photographs, buildings) and, in some cases, awareness of historical and ethnographic scholarship of the region.

at codifying somehow the image of locality, at radicalizing its presentation in a way that renders it legible for state authority without having to translate it in the latter's terms.

The part these museums play in the local evidentiary economy – the production of proofs for these elusive ideas of history and property – is not wholly original. Peasants from Vrancea County have had a long history of evidence accumulation : it was not difficult for the sociologists, anthropologists and historians of the late 1920s to find here rich collections of documents dating from the 15th century (Constantinescu-Mirceşti & Stahl 1929 ; Sava 1929 ; Sava 1931). Such documents acted (and were made to act) as incontestable proofs throughout the conflicts over legal ownership of the 18th and 19th century. However, once the struggle for the realization of ownership is moved on the extra-legal and slippery terrain of cultural recognition, more complex forms of representation replace legal proofs. These hybrid museums, combining various genres and techniques – from the ethnographic exhibition to the modern technology of criminal identification – can produce representations that are powerful enough to challenge the legalistic interpretation of communal property and, at the same time, sufficiently elusive to permit the continuous re-shaping of property norms according to locally defined needs and aims. Their skillful blurring of the boundaries between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the traditional and the modern, memory and history, subject and object, sentiment and evidence guarantees their persuasive appeal for the official and unofficial outsiders who might have a say in the creation of „Vrancea" as object of ownership and cultural representation.

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