

## **Beyond the Horniman Museum**

### **History, heritage and craftsmanship in the collection of Romanian artefacts**

PhD Thesis

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I hereby certify that, except when explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

## **Abstract**

This thesis provides an exploration and critique of the Horniman Museum's Romanian collection of folk art through an investigation of the front stage and back stage of the collection. Firstly, the museum's holdings are unpacked through archival study of the events that led to their collection, including the cultural exchanges of the 1950s and the myriad institutional and personal encounters that informed their collection and original display. Investigation of the historical context of the objects' arrival in London reveals the importance of their performance on the Cold War cultural stage, where acts of exhibiting and giving away folk art across the Iron Curtain became a pretext for building diplomatic relations and creating particular representations of the state. A second form of backstage is explored through a series of ethnographic encounters that generate insights into the afterlives of the art forms represented in the Horniman Museum collection by bringing these objects into dialogue with contemporary craft makers in Romania. Whilst in the context of the museum, the folk art collection appears as a homogenous set of traditional things, in the context of contemporary Romania, different art forms have undergone very divergent histories and hold very different social and economic value and significance. Focusing on the contemporary flourishing of pottery-making and neglect of textile production in Romania today sheds light on the various ways idioms of tradition and modernity, work and heritage are understood in the local context as well as lending insights into transformations in material environments, techniques of making, life histories, and the spaces in which crafts are situated.

An exploration of the past lives and afterlives of craft objects held in the Horniman museum offers a window onto the diversity of modes of production and meaning-making that co-exist in Romania and the embedded historical relations and specific social, economic and political milieus in which different art forms have developed and become valorised. This combination of archival and ethnographic research provides a means of locating the Horniman collection in time and space whilst at the same time recognising the dynamic and ever-changing nature of craft production in Romania. The thesis highlights both the limitations of folk art and heritage discourses within the museum and their contemporary relevance and reinvention beyond the museum.

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## List of acronyms

AHRS	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BRFA	British Rumanian Friendship Association
CAP	Agricultural Production Cooperative
DEX	Romanian Explicatory Dictionary
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IRRCS	The Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries
LCC	London County Council
RCI	Romanian Cultural Institute
UCECOM	National Union of Handicraft Cooperatives
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VOKS	All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries in the Soviet Union

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months in the Horniman Museum's Study Collection Centre documenting the artefacts for fieldwork. Alexandra's grasp of visual methods and technical skills helped to make the photographic and visual archive-based groundwork smooth and efficient. Throughout the course of years in the field, our pathways crossed in relation to insights and physical locations, as we were living and working in libraries and archives in close proximity to one another. Many thanks for these encounters that made the solitary process of PhD research more sociable and inspiring.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 The question of the Horniman Museum collection**

The museum is not an enclosed container for inert objects – it is a launching place for anthropological adventures into the past, and indeed, the future. To study a museum is to study an endless, endlessly shifting assortment of people and things. Its possibilities are infinite.

(Gosden, Larson and Petch 2007: 5)

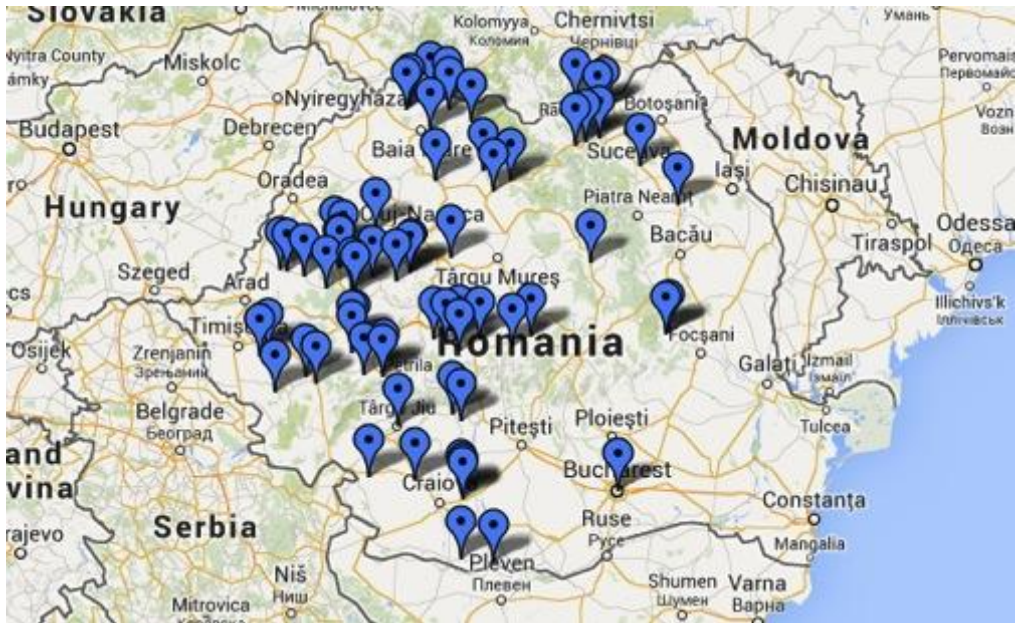
Museum artefacts are material remnants and markers of the past, containing broader truths about the focal issues of history and material culture. Exploring the front stage of a collection's coming into being provides an understanding of the institutional and social setting of its composition and exhibition-making processes. Investigating the back stage beyond the storeroom, discovering the practices surrounding the making of collections and the meanings of objects in their places of origin, allows an understanding of the role of artefacts in human encounters, local histories and everyday lives.

This study takes the Horniman Museum in London as its launching place. The thesis will follow the historical and contemporary trajectories of the museum's 1957 collection of Romanian folk art. Why select this collection for an ethnographic study? At first, the set of objects appears not very different from several other compositions of similar vernacular artefacts held in the museum stores, alongside artefacts, from the former Yugoslavia, Poland and further destinations, such as Mongolia and China. However, a look into the database shows that within the body of the museum holdings of over 1000 items from Romania, the collection occupies a unique place. In contrast to many other artefacts that have been gathered together in the course of the years through several donations and field acquisitions, this collection is a systematic aggregation accessioned through a set of particular circumstances in the 1950s. It includes over 350 artefacts, many of which are composed of several parts.

The material consists of everyday objects, including household textiles, examples of dress, ceramics, furniture, kitchen utensils and tools. Some artefacts such as carved chests, are highly decorated, while others including knives, pottery and weaving tools appear more mundane. Every artefact has been very well documented by the Romanian collectors



and is accompanied by an individual record file with rich information. The wide spread of the material becomes evident when tracing the collection's provenance (see **Fig. 1.1**). This assemblage includes an arrangement of material traces from a multiplicity of places, people and material contexts.



**Fig. 1.1** Map showing the source locations of artefacts belonging to the 1957 collection

Despite the richness of information on the individual objects provided by the documentation material, this project arose from a sense of the unknown. The information given was simultaneously informative and lacking in terms of providing insight into the history of the collection. It was unclear how such an aggregation of objects from a former *Eastern Bloc* country became part of the Horniman Museum in the 1950s. The kind of knowledge about local agency and material culture of the past and today that could be gained through the investigation of this collection was also unknown.

Continuing the museum's historical legacy of curatorial fieldwork, Fiona Kerlogue, the Horniman Museum Keeper of Anthropology, approached Goldsmiths College with questions about the collection. Having gained the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding, two collaborative doctoral awards shared between the Horniman Museum and Goldsmiths College were set up to gain a deeper understanding of the material held in London. These two pathways were aimed at producing new insights about the artefacts in order to enrich the perspective offered by the 1950s records. The project description identified that both doctoral students should study

the relationship between objects which become frozen in time, (classified and catalogued within a museum), and their counterparts some of which continue to be made and used in the source regions, others of which fall from use or are reintroduced as folk art or tourist commodities.

The primary aims of my research were threefold. Firstly, it aimed to provide an account of the historical processes and transactions through which the collection started its museum career. This involved tracing the history of the collection, the events that led to its purchase, export and the journey that the artefacts made between their place of production and their subsequent destination in the Horniman Museum. The social and human history of the collection and the study of everyday life in Romania provided a context for this historical study. Secondly, from the curatorial perspective, the project was a unique possibility to connect the museum with the named producers and users of the artefacts through information provided by the object sheets. The research brief included information about visual repatriation in the context of folk artists and their descendants in rural Romania. With an almost 60-year distance from the collection's acquisition, there was a sense of the timely character of the project, perhaps the last opportunity for direct engagement with the collection. Lastly, according to the project outline, my doctoral award included an involvement in curating an exhibition of the Romanian collection, to take place at the Horniman Museum in 2014, informed by the theoretical and ethnographic insights generated through the research. In this light, some research activities were linked to the exhibition-making process: to inform the museum about the possible new avenues for interpreting and displaying this material.

Alexandra's role was defined as tracing the biographies of the objects through time and space. Her exploration of this collection was also embedded in her positionality as an anthropologist 'at home' investigating the relationship between memory and the various regimes of value through which objects were passing when moving back and forth between various spaces of cultural production, including villages<sup>1</sup>, houses of culture, museums, folk performances and television studios (Urdea 2015).

The collaborative nature of this research exerted a distinctive and advantageous impact on the project. It provided an opportunity to create a dialogical space of knowledge production between our research pathways but also academic anthropology, museum

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<sup>1</sup> The villages included in the project were Vrâncioaia, Muncei, Vrâncioaia, Poiana and Mândra

practice and the interpretative space of collection provenance. In a wider sense, resonating with Thomas (2010), it was a laboratory of the museum as method, reflecting on forms of knowledge underpinning the interpretation of the collection in the 1950s and the stories and questions posed by it today (ibid.: 7).

## 1.2 Methodological considerations



Fig. 1.2 Individual object file of the Horniman Museum collection (left)



Fig. 1.3 Layers of museum labels stitched to the objects (right)

A mediatory approach to museum and anthropological methodology questions disciplinary boundaries and is focused on the process of method finding as a way of exploring its relational qualities and bringing action, materiality and social entanglements back to the collection. Weaving the thread of collection stories through fieldwork and investigation of the divergent histories of the assemblage is an exercise often formed of particularistic voices, fragmentary encounters and archival illuminations as well as cul-de-sacs. It sometimes bounces back to the starting points, source locations and object descriptions, cutting across narratives and plots. In the process of research, these lines of insight are brought back, blended and reassembled like elements of a complex meshwork.

Tracing a collection of over 350 artefacts from a large number of locations posed a problem of ethnographic selectivity. In this context, the field has been constructed as a

multi-sited ethnography following the objects' paths, museum presences and oral narratives collected in the places of the collection's origin (Amit 2003, Falzon 2009, Marcus 1995). In this study I adopted the method of tracing the memoryscapes related to the fragments of this collection. For Basu (2013a: 116), memoryscapes constitute

the multiplicity of different forms of remembering: those that are intentional and communicable through language, narrative or material form, as well as those which are unintentional and 'inherently non-narrative', such as embodied forms of memory.

Basu outlined how the multi-sited approach of following dispersed objects, people, aesthetic forms, narratives or types of records allows an investigation of elements constituting pluralistic memoryscapes and related connections (ibid.: 118).

Vested in the dialogue about and around the collection's images and objects, my study framed the field of inquiry as a series of encounters and led to a partial and situational methodology, linked to the narratives that arose from conversations with a plethora of respondents in the field. These narratives were interwoven with the images and files discussed, generating incidental networks built around the recollections. The snowball effect that accompanied this project resonated with the experience of Vokes (2013) in East Africa, the process of inquiry resembling an uneven, messy rhizomatic network (ibid.: 28). Fieldwork punctuated by conversations around the museum material led to numerous revelatory incidents (Fernandez 1986), unfolding new meanings, traces and threads connecting participants and sites.

The resulting garment of context and content, far from covering a homogenous body of knowledge, aims to generate a particular fabric of significance, one that renders the stitches of 'method finding' visible and that brings the threads coming from the places of the collection's origin back to the core structure of this meshwork. The methodological problem serves as a way to open other areas of discussion concerning the values invested in particular methods, the relevance of particular types of knowledge and the conditions of their production.

### 1.2.1. Archives as an opening into other stories

This thesis was initiated by an investigation of the written and visual documentation of the collection's museum representation and movement to the United Kingdom. The particularly detailed information on the artefacts provided by the Romanian museum was a valuable point of departure, bringing initial factual knowledge about the objects' characteristics, their origin and acquisition process. At the same time, this information opened the study to the problematic of the value and selectivity of written records. The uneven documentation of the process of collecting was an opening into unconsidered aspects of the artefact acquisition and classification within the museum.

The premise of combining history and anthropology has long been identified as a methodological and epistemological conundrum (Thomas 1963, Thomas 1996, Evans-Pritchard 1964, Fabian 1983, Cohn 1980, Tarlo 2003), even more so today as we conduct research in "an era of unprecedented concern with preserving and restoring the past" (Rowlands 2002:105). As archives have become privileged sites of critique, studies have investigated written records, museums and collections as ways of being in history and relating to the past. A body of literature has developed around the theme of archives as cultural vehicles shaping knowledge through the organised practices of materialisation and dematerialisation, remembering and forgetting, selectivity and classification, identity-building and cleansing rituals (Antze and Lambek 1996, Bloch 1998, Crane 2000, Derrida 1995, Maleuvre 1999, Nora 1989, Stoler 2009). The above studies have pointed out was that ethnographic museum archives could shed light on regulatory practices and mnemonic technologies that codify, classify and typify cultural artefacts according to documentation systems and object catalogues. This unclear, omnipresent phenomenon of archiving transforms things so they can become patterned and ambiguous, contingent and classificatory, simultaneously disorderly and monolithic.

The historical research for the thesis was grounded in the archives of the Horniman Museum, London Metropolitan Archives and national and regional archives in Romania. Documentary study in Bucharest focused on the archives of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant and the collections of the National Archives on the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (*Institutul Român pentru Relații Culturale cu Străinătatea*, hereafter IRRCS) and Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party. I

also visited regional archives in the cities of Sibiu and Râmnicu Vâlcea. I consulted a plethora of records including annual and exhibition reports, minutes, correspondence, conference papers, bulletins, publicity material and policy recommendations on the organisation and running of the cultural exchanges. Regarding the organisation and the international activities of the IRRCS in the 1950s, I investigated the files on Great Britain and France and the Romanian Worker's Party departments of Propaganda and Agitation and External Relations, held in Bucharest. The records of the Horniman Museum consisted of a good deal of information about the journey of the collection and correspondence between Otto Samson, the London curator, and the president of IRRCS. It was particularly illuminating to gain access to the private records of Otto Samson acquired by the Horniman Museum after my return from fieldwork. This collection of private letters, notes and photographs provides a sense of Samson's personality, interests and powerful networking skills that made him a particularly active collector for the Horniman Museum. In order to understand the nuances of the collecting process on the Romanian side, I conducted a series of interviews with curators, past and present, of the former Museum of Folk Art in Bucharest and various professionals working in the Romanian heritage sector or conducting ethnological research under socialism. The investigation of publications on folklore and folk art provided a background to identify the interpretative frameworks that guided the forms of museum representation in Romania and Britain.

The surviving records of the Horniman Museum 'Folk Art in Rumania' exhibition and its precedents in the 1950s provide insights into the relational character of the collection, its interpretation and exhibition process. I framed this encounter with the archive in light of critical studies of the ethnography of exchanges (Thomas 1991), raw histories (Edwards 2001) and critical events (Das 1995 and Tarlo 2003). As Thomas suggested, historical enquiry allows events, actions and wider social situations to be explored in their political context. In this context, situating the collection within the particularities of cultural exchanges and their longer dynamics provides us with a frame of understanding the corresponding social groups, asymmetries and political as well as cultural transformations (Thomas 1991: 9). The events within these exchanges were framed as historical instances when traditional categories were redefined, new political actors arose and unusual modes of action came into being (Das 1995). The aim of such ethnography is to provide a view into a moment of intense social and political dynamism

when numerous actors are being brought into interaction, illuminating the social and material relations that underpin the transactions and points of contact.

Moreover, archival holdings were useful in reconstructing the visual and textual modes of representation framing rural material culture and the rubrics of classification that delineated the scholarly categories of artefact interpretation and the complex “histories of appropriation and recontextualisation” (Thomas 1991: 9). The Horniman Museum archive represents the way this institution assimilated the unique national Romanian collection into its standard classificatory divisions, based on categories set up by both Romanian and British ethnography. It is illuminative of the ways material culture conforms to or transgresses museological categories. In this sense, archival research posed a move beyond the evidentiary description of pre-given documentation and its homogenising rubrics to serve as a basis for critical analysis.

Rather than studying archives as things, Edwards suggested, we should investigate them as circuits and transactions, revisiting the social biography of the material. In this context, the materiality of archives represents fluid performances of documents, objects and images. I adopted this position in looking through archival holdings as inscriptions of contested histories and multiple forms of practice. Following Edwards, such study

requires the exploration of the structuring of forms of accession, the processes of collecting and description, contexts of collecting and use and the range of social practices associated with them at a historically specific level, if we are to understand the histories embedded within the homogenised disciplinary archive ... Such a position is also necessary if we are to understand the micro-exchanges that make up the ‘archive’, where the ‘anthropological archive’ emerges as an accumulation of micro-relationships in which objects are involved (Edwards 2001: 29).

This insight was particularly illuminating in reading through the collection and exhibition material. On the one hand, the archive contained information on the macro mechanisms of the state that appropriated rural material culture as folk art for politicised exhibition making and the facilitation of international relations. On the other hand, through the reading of curatorial notes, correspondence and tracing of curatorial movements, I was able to map the micro-relationships that played a significant role in the formation of the collection. This perspective made use of traces of curatorial interests and personal interactions during the collecting trips.

Following the notes in the margins of documents as contrapuntal intrusions “against the sober formulaics of officialese” (Stoler 2009: 2), I sought to identify the backstage of collecting, exhibiting and classifying artefacts. Considering the ethnographic and personal spaces of the records breaks down the archive into a more human endeavour; a palimpsest rich in multiple encounters with various nuances and fractures. Ann Stoler argued that by looking at the historicity and instability of archival processes it is possible to grasp the uneven pulse of the archive, its silences and “the steady and feverish rhythms of repeated incantations, formulae and frames” (Stoler 2009: 35). This reflection proved useful in thinking about my experience of the Museum of Romanian Peasant archives (the former Museum of Folk Art).<sup>2</sup> The few records of the artefacts assembled for the Horniman Museum collection were short notes in the register books with crossed out sections of the holdings representing acquisitions for cultural exchanges. Looking carefully at the removal and erasure of the traces of the collection movement as well as unevenly assembled or neglected material are parts of the social biography of the objects just as eye opening as what has been preserved and recorded (Forty and Küchler 1999).

Exploring voices from the other side of the Iron Curtain brought interesting insights and interpretations beyond the main script that found refuge in the records. Studying visitors’ views allowed me to contextualise the reception of curatorial strategies of presenting and displaying material culture. Critical attention to these impressions, recorded by the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (IRRCS), gave me an understanding of the fluidity of things and interpretations beyond their instrumental functions. Tracing archival lines was not an act of factual reconstruction. As Stoler suggested, the texture of the archive is uneven and “oral and vernacular histories cut across the strictures of archival production and refigure the archival terrain” (Stoler 2009: 34).

In this study, attending to the voice of the curator of the socialist Museum of Folk Art challenged the conventional narrative. Looking at the messiness and fluidity of the records was an interesting step in rethinking the knowledge, value and cultural significance of folk art in museums and working towards a methodological reconceptualisation of the Horniman Museum collection for the ethnographic encounter.

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of the tumultuous history of the museum and its archives, see Nicolescu (2014a).





**Fig. 1.4** Unwrapping the Romanian collection at the Horniman Museum stores

### **1.2.2 Probing apprenticeship as a method**

The materiality of the collection prompted me to consider the times, spaces and processes through which the artefacts came into being in their place of origin and in the 1950s exhibition. Since anthropology identified that things can have their own biographies (Gosden and Marshall 1999, Kopytoff 1986), one of the key considerations of this thesis has been the changing career of the artefacts in the process of production, exchange, museum appropriation and post-museum afterlife. Of particular relevance was the notion of unfixed museum artefacts in the process of gathering histories. As Gosden and Knowles argued:

The physical circumstances of the object change continuously, but so also do its sets of significances as it accumulates a history. It is possible, when records are made, to reconstruct this history, which carries with it the lives of those involved with the object. An object is best viewed as indicative of process, rather than static relations, and this process is on-going in the museum as elsewhere, so that there is a series of continuous social relations surrounding the object connecting ‘field’ and ‘museum’ (Gosden and Knowles 2001: 4-5).

Considering these dynamics, the stages of the museum objects’ unfolding histories are reconstructed in a series of settings including archives, villages, households, markets, workshops and a sequence of exhibition spaces.

In order to delve into the continuity of social relations in which artefacts are embedded, this research sets out to initiate an ethnographic encounter. The search for the ethnographic context of the collection is nested in two case studies of folk art production from which the 1957 Horniman Museum collection was acquired. It explored the crafts through following the responses to artefacts and narratives about ways of making them. In this context, I tape-recorded oral histories of the respondents in Viştea, Horezu and the curator of the Folk Art Museum in Bucharest. Using material metaphors as a means to elicit stories and uncover their resonance with historical and biographical contexts (Ferme 2001, Hoskins 1998) proved essential for the understanding of the relations of curatorial encounter, the circulation of objects and their relationships with everyday material culture.

Anthropological scholarship has developed a rich literature about the relationship between memory and material objects, bodies, lived experience of history and critical events as well as issues of commemoration, practice, marginality and personhood (see reviews by Carsten 2008, Pine and de Pina Cabral 2013, Rowlands 1993). Significant work on ‘material memory’ (Kwint, Breward and Aynsley 1999, Hallam and Hockey 2001) has explored issues of evocation and reflected on the acts of memory-making and the shaping of collective and personal processes of memorisation in the museum context (Crane 2000, Davison 2005).

With this theoretical complexity in mind, I was led by my collection-related field encounters in Romania and focused my analysis on memory processes as narratives of the self (see review by Witeska-Młynarczyk 2014). In this context, I consider the life histories of my research participants as a form of silhouette “honest about its incompleteness, yet striving to faithfulness around the edges where relatively dispassionate accuracy is possible” (Zeitlyn 2008: 159). Considering the lines of the silhouettes emerging in the narratives of change and rupture allowed me to investigate the relationships between the memory of the past, practice and identity – the making of the craftsman. This perspective allowed me to explore how the ‘history-in-person’ (Holland and Lave 2009: 4) emerges through narratives where:

On the one hand, history is brought to the present moment of local time/space in the body/minds of actors ... On the other hand, history is brought to the present through political and economic forces and cultural imaginaries that shape conflictual practices in and between institutions and collective activities.

In this framework, embodied subjectivities telling of the the struggles of the past are conceptualised as being mediated in daily practice and considered within institutional, social and historical contexts. Thinking about how stories about histories-in-person and the museum collection had been told and what had been left out, I have turned to the theme of incorporation of practice into narratives concerning objects, practices and life histories (Ricoeur 1980). The tales that emerged in formal and informal interview settings gave me a sense of nuanced personal temporal landmarks and periodisations. As things and interwoven life stories uncovered local historicities, I was able to reflect on the absences and avoidances in the genre of telling the lives of the respondents, craftspeople and museum curators (Haukanes 2005).

Rejecting notions of culture and materiality as discrete, static and homogenous, this study drew on the insights of the ethnography of the particular (Abu-Lughod 1991), focusing on the practitioners engaged in textile and pottery production. In the exploration of weaving and domestic textiles, I carried out research in the village of Viştea, a site of provenance of the largest subset of the Horniman Museum's Romanian holdings. Facing the discontinuity of practice in that location, I collected the oral narratives of the surviving generation of practitioners. These responses, often narrating craftsmanship as obsolete and undesirable, were a challenge to lay perceptions around values of folk art and hierarchies between tradition and modernity.

The heterogeneous afterlives of crafts related to the Horniman Museum collection were investigated through the ethnography of pottery production. In the last part of the thesis, I explore the landscape of pottery production based on three folk art centres renowned for the craft – Radauți, Marginea and Horezu as well as various contemporary folk art fairs. Specifically, Horezu was an ideal site for rethinking continuities and ruptures in the production of this craft as, during my fieldwork period, this site was nominated for the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Conversations in the pottery workshops gave me an understanding of the techniques and everyday labour of those involved in the production of the craft. By following potters in their routine of modelling, decorating and firing I learnt about the quotidian aspects of practice, the operational sequence of making and the ways workmanship was conceptualised as a meaningful activity. This research documented a point in the history of the craft, illuminating the developments that affected the everyday lives of the craftsmen.

Following two centres of folk art in northern Romania, Marginea and Radauți, and various potters encountered in fairs across the country, this ethnographic study was conducted amongst institutional and individual actors of the contemporary folk art world. I conducted formal and informal interviews with folk artists, curators, ethnographers, market stall owners, vendors and tourist office employees.

Learning and discussion about technique and craftsmanship has become an entry point and a significant methodological tool throughout this study. Michael Coy's edited volume constitutes a contemporary benchmark for the anthropological study of apprenticeship by providing a set of comparable ethnographic descriptions of apprenticeship systems in a range of cultures and examining in depth the idea of practice-based learning as an anthropological field method. Coy (1989) argued that as a research tool apprenticeship is particularly suited for anthropology, producing a body of research from the inside out and interrogating situated knowledge. (Coy 1989: 112). This method engages with issues of positionality, shifting the power relationship in the field and enabling embodied understanding. Jean Lave considered the application of apprenticeship as part of critical ethnographic practice, centred on the examination of the sufficiency of conventional theoretical frameworks and institutional settings in which they were developed. For Lave (Lave 1993: 156):

learning to act on the basis of any craft, and for that matter, any problematic, requires to come to inhabit the practice and its conceptions of the world.

The apprenticeship method turns ethnographic praxis into an object of research, unpacking the political underpinnings of theoretical orthodoxies and received wisdom about cultural practice (ibid.: 147). Coy's and Lave's reflections proved particularly applicable in the study of Viștea textiles and weaving as a form of embodied knowledge and socially and morally situated practice, as illustrated in Chapters 6 and 7.

Thinking about the collection through apprenticeship was a useful frame in the understanding issues of expertise, the materiality of the artefacts and the construction of identity through practice (Dilley 1989; Kondo 1990). In this context, I found numerous ethnographies helpful for data analysis. Through two selected examples of apprenticeship-based studies, I will discuss the specific themes of apprentice ethnography pertinent to this thesis.

Portisch's (2010) study of Kazakh felt carpet production in western Mongolia explored craft practice as the interplay of innovation and repetition. With scarce tools and materials, these craftswomen apply improvisational strategies with 'things to hand'. The practice is embedded both in the continuum of traditional skills and ever-changing sphere of modification of actions, movements and attitudes. In this sense, creative practice results in constant changes of the fashions, techniques and styles of the pieces. Everyday pedagogies of felt-making technique start from early life, when children follow daily tasks within the household and observe activities in the yurt, progressively gaining the skill of assessing quality through fingertip touch. This reflexive embodied practice links to the complexity of the pattern – materials and embodied recognitions define the design of the object. For Portisch, to be fluent in craftsmanship is to be capable "to hold several orientations in mind at once" (Portisch 2010: 74). In the context of method, Portisch noted that apprenticeship allowed her to grasp the learning environment of the craft. As Portisch (*ibid.*: 64) puts it:

By learning the craft myself, I was gradually able to engage other women in more meaningful conversations and exchanges by virtue of sharing a set of abilities and activities with them. Moreover, I was able to reflect on my own learning process as a means to 'learning about learning'.

Although the pedagogical techniques necessary to acquire fluency in weaving are outside the scope of this thesis, I have found Portisch's reflections on learning useful in the context of research in the village of Viştea. By gaining hands-on knowledge about the production of textiles and handpicked patterns in weaving, I was able to engage in a wider range of conversations, an entry point for discussions about the technicalities of the patterns, the movements in the loom and distribution of designs but also about the Viştea weavers' views about good workmanship and moral practice, demonstrated in Chapter 6.

Apprenticeship methods and conversations about tools and techniques bring insights about the social embeddedness of craft and various representations of technique and innovation. Venkatesan's (2010) study of mat-weavers in Pattamadai, South India illustrated the ambivalence inherent in the status of craft. Materially embedded apprenticeship research and discussions over work with craftswomen enabled Venkatesan to engage with local knowledge about the everyday experience of work. Thinking through the experience of labour was crucial to this thesis as narratives of the hardships of craft production became key to research among Viştea weavers. The apprentice method thus

enabled me to consider the craftswomen's haptic knowledge and to explore how local evaluations of craftsmanship contrast with the visual and textual representations of this activity (*see* Chapter 6).

Engaging in the conversations with the craft practitioners from a novice's perspective allowed me to reconsider the problematic asymmetrical relationship between the curator/academic/heritage expert and residents of the village. This learning experience brought a different insight into the ways of knowing about how artefacts are constructed and evaluated in the local context. Museum studies represent a rich body of literature on the critique of politics of representation and debates on giving voice to unheard communities (Basu 2011, Clifford 1997, Knell 2004, Kreps 2003). In some contexts, craft apprenticeship is a relevant methodology in museum ethnography and a gateway to local knowledge beyond museum-based visual preconceptions. The application of labour and technique-oriented research methods reframes the collections in a practice-based context and makes the unheard voices of the makers apparent. According to Tim Ingold, anthropology is a craft with "intimate relations with the tools and materials of the trade". (Ingold 2008: 84) and this project has developed as a form of knowledge exchange, incorporating the expertise of the craftsman. If the museum is a method (Thomas 2010), apprenticeship research allows the institutional knowledge to be suspended and other possible insights and relationships of knowledge production enabled.

Apprenticeship research, just as any other method of anthropological fieldwork, has its constraints in terms of applicability within a given social context. As this process of skill acquisition is deeply embedded in the social fabric, not all settings lend themselves to be explored through this method. Herzfeld (2004) provides a striking critique of the power relationships and hierarchies involved in Cretan apprenticeship and suggest that the social selves of the apprentices are at times developed in spite of the master. The questions of conflict, competition and the acquisition or non-acquisition of craft skills became key to my fieldwork in the pottery centres. Initially, I intended to undertake pottery lessons with the Horezu craftsmen. Soon, however, I discovered that the apprenticeship-based approach was problematic in terms of its agonistic and scripted nature. Firstly, the Horezu pottery workshops were becoming part of the burgeoning tourist industry and potters were teaching the craft to foreign guests travelled to ethnographic museums for craft demonstrations. Teaching craft was a performative activity related to their heritage status

and several potters competed with each other over who would provide such services. Secondly, these lessons were often heavily reliant on a designated enactment of the learning process. In this context, the selected potters provided an artificial environment in which they exhibited their identity through the performance of craft. Retrospectively, I believe that fieldwork with a broader spectrum of practitioners was made possible through my rejection of apprenticeship in Horezu and its antagonistic implications.

### **1.2.3 The necessity of fieldwork and its challenges**

Recent studies have demonstrated the productivity of fieldwork in reassessing museum collections, reworking histories and sharing curatorial authority with multiple communities (Brown and Peers 2003, Bell 2010, Golding and Modest 2013, Payne 2006). These dialogical initiatives of reflexive museology (Bell 2012) expose museum ethnographers to various challenges related to fieldwork positionality and reflexivity. In this section I discuss the key issues pertinent to my relationships with research participants in Romania. Throughout my project, questions of nationality, gender, living arrangements, movement and my museum-based status became both a productive and limiting backdrop for my research activities.

Having lived in the United Kingdom for five years before I began working on this project, including a whole course of university education, I call London my home and cannot say that on a daily basis I have a strong sense of being Polish. During my fieldwork in Romania, it was interesting to discover that my Polishness was a key parameter in relationships in the field, specifically in the context of the studies of the Romanian collector of the Museum of Folk Art and the women in Viştea. Despite having learnt Romanian during a year-long grammar course in London, on arrival in Bucharest I felt that I could barely say even a few clichéd phrases. Therefore, in the first months of research I focused on archival studies, took another course and my command of spoken Romanian slowly progressed. Three months later, I was able to understand most conversations and make myself understood in incorrect Romanian. There are a number of similar words and grammatical structures in Romanian and Polish and I found to my satisfaction that these links made learning the vocabulary more accessible. In this period, my Polish proved useful in conversations with the last surviving collector of the 1957 Horniman Museum collection.

At the outset of the project, during the first research trip to Romania with Alexandra Urdea (my project partner), we arranged a meeting with the 90-year-old Jadwiga in her Bucharest apartment. We entered the house equipped with the images made in the museum stores to learn about the collection's provenance. At the end of that session, I noticed that some of the religious images in her room were Catholic, among which was a small reproduction of Mother Mary of Czestochowa, a well-known Polish religious icon. Asked if she was aware of the Polish provenance of the image, she replied that she was a Pole from the Bucovina region and switched from Romanian to immaculate Polish with a strong accent of the Eastern Borderlands. The following year, when I came back to Romania for fieldwork, this Polish connection became pivotal to my relationship with Jadwiga. She was very pleased about being able to speak her native language and most of the interviews and life-history recordings were conducted in Polish, to my great benefit at the time. Throughout the interviewing period, Jadwiga made comparisons between socialist Romania and Poland, giving me a sense of how coercive the regime was during Stalinism and in the Ceaușescu period.<sup>3</sup> She was pleased to hear stories about how Polish cities transformed after socialism and what life in Silesia, the region of my origin, was like during my childhood. These connections and exchanges of stories created an intimate space of dialogue and transformed the interviews into an unexpected bonding experience. I would come to her house on a regular basis for a coffee and look through images, catalogues and her own collection of folk art and learn a great deal from this erudite resource and her compelling and tumultuous life history.

Another key factor of having Polish descent beneficial for this study, was the commonality of socialist experience projected by a number of research participants throughout the project. Born in 1984, I have a vague memory of childhood in socialist Poland, the conditions of scarcity and political repressions. I recollect instances of queuing for food or receiving packages of clothes, sweets and canned food sent from family members in Western Germany, but these flashes of memory do not relate to a coherent experience of life in the Polish People's Republic. My interviewees made repeated remarks about the similarities and differences between the Polish and Romanian regimes and strategies of post 1989 transformation. This sense of projected relationship allowed them to speak more openly about the ways they experienced the historical shifts.

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the period of Romanian politics from 1965 under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu, and specifically its neo-Stalinist character between 1974 and 1989 (Georgescu 1991).



Somehow, Poland is strongly associated with a transitional success story, the ability to recharge the system and make social, economic and political transformation work. Often my respondents shared nostalgic stories about the Ceaușescu period when Poles visited the country, how developed Romania was in the 1980s and their views on the economic decline in their own country since. On other occasions, I was told about the activities of the Romanian Workers' Party, the militia and the extreme poverty experienced in the late period of Nicolae Ceaușescu's government. This positioned insider-outsider status (Halstead 2001) within the socialist experience was an enabling device in the sharing of stories and discussing their commonalities and variants.

In addition to national and socialist identity parameters, my conversations and relationships in the field were also highly dependent on my living arrangements. The challenge of positionality was strongly demonstrated in this context. My accommodation in the village of Viștea was arranged through the Sibiu museum director who contacted a person from the village, enabling me to stay in the house of his mother and grandmother. I experienced outstanding hospitality from this impoverished family and tried, as much as possible, to reciprocate financially through rent payments, small gifts and cooking. By living with these elderly people, I gained access to a number of respondents from their social network who often just stopped by at our house for tea as part of their daily business. In a small place like Viștea, news spreads quickly and most neighbours were helpful in pointing me to their mothers, aunts or grandmothers who might have some knowledge about the collection or history of weaving in this area. This experience of intimacy and familiarity was particularly rewarding at the end of the stay, when my 89-year-old host called me her granddaughter, making leaving quite emotional.

The work on the second case study was a completely different experience. The first challenge occurred during my first trip to Horezu for the annual pottery market. When I informed the potters about my potential research in the town I received a plethora of lodging offers, complete with reasons for not taking the other options. The potters perceived me as a person linked both to the West (Silvermann 2000) and a metropolitan museum with powers to make extensive acquisitions or hand out invitations for museum demonstrations in London. Furthermore, as renting a room to a scholar was perceived as a source of prestige and self-promotion, I found myself in a dilemma about favouritism when choosing a host. Locating myself in one house, I felt, would produce a bias with

effects on the field relationships. During the second trip, I packed my backpack, took a coach to Horezu and rented a room in private tourist accommodation. On the way from the bus station I visited the town tourist office, explaining the reasons for my arrival and asking about the list of potters in the area. At that point, the tourist office had already been informed about this project and proposed that I would be given accommodation in the various tourist facilities around the town. Initially, I was grateful for the tourist office's hospitality. Visiting the potters' houses, I had an impression that the genuine character of the "live-in" experience was problematic, as the potters' domestic space served a commercial purpose and potters had in the past provided "authentic" tourist experiences of learning the craft. The house and studio of the potter as a site of display and tourist performance is discussed in Chapter 7.

Apart from accommodation and nationality, gender status became a significant part of the field situation. My positioning as an unmarried woman in her late twenties travelling without a car was a source of confusion and, especially among the potters it was repeatedly jokingly suggested that I should find a husband in Romania and stay in the country. This status, although uncomfortable in the beginning, gave my presence a lighter feel than that of a scholar. In comparison, craftsmen's interactions with museum experts often were of a more formal character, whereas I had a slightly ambivalent and more approachable status as the "girl from Poland". These gendered labels that produced sexual innuendos and curiosity from the side of women and men, and would have probably been more evident if I had decided to stay at a particular household.

One ambiguous gender-related situation occurred at the beginning of my stay in Horezu when I interviewed one of the descendants of the famous folk artists, who lived in France. It was specifically suggested that I should initiate contact with him, as he represented craftsmanship of the highest quality and would not stay in the country for long. The next day, after a series of confusing phone calls and text messages we met in a café and had a dinner together. As I was new in the town, he proposed to walk me back to the hotel and we socialised in the restaurant till later in the evening. As the conversation moved to personal topics, I started to feel uncomfortable and left to go to my room. The next day, on the way to the potters' workshops, I stopped by the tourist office where I heard that I had a good time with the potter and was asked where I would work today. That situation taught me that some encounters with male participants might be read in

ambiguous ways and that there was a sense of control the tourist office wanted to maintain. Facing these dilemmas, I decided to disassociate myself from the tourist office or their suggested interviewees. If I continued that strong relationship I would have interviewed only their designated potters and never have worked with the employees of the former cooperative which the tourist office saw as an irrelevant connection for the study of folk art. Contact with the tourist office was regained when I left Horezu but never did we agree on the ways I conducted this study. I see this attempt to influence my research as a way to maintain the best possible image of the pottery centre, a sentiment that I respect and try to express in my ethnographic analysis.

My position in the field was related to my status as a museum-based ethnographer. Fieldwork in the village of Viştea was initiated by an inquiry about the previous owners of the museum objects that immediately situated me in the sphere of institutional researchers. On my arrival in the village, I was advised to discuss the Horniman Museum documentation and images with the school director, the priest's wife and the teacher's son. These initial recommendations of channels of knowledge about the village through local elites demonstrated the standard procedures of curatorial fieldwork, and the ways knowledge about the village was passed to outsiders.

Under socialism, museum field trips were organised with local authorities, elites or the commune's Party cadres, who then often suggested to the curators the relevant folk artist or traditional craftsman. These official repositories of local knowledge and the ways things were made in the past acted both as a point of entry and a way out, by sending folk representatives to regional and national festivals, museum exhibitions and, in special cases, events abroad. My repeated refusal to contact the village elites was a source of confusion, even to the point of questioning the value of the material based on discussions with elderly women. I was advised to contact a journalist who grew up in the village, now living in Bucharest, for her expertise about folklore and local custom. Interestingly, the issue of my working methods became less significant when I became known as an associate of Sorin, who used to work in the local ethnographic museum. That link with a local person, educated in the relevant field, acted as knowledge collateral. It was a guarantee that proper knowledge would be extracted and, beyond mere conversations, I had access to academic sources about authentic culture. The presence of the academic world in Viştea was always manifested in brief visits from collectors or historians. The

asymmetries within these networks with specialists were often locally negotiated and contested, posing challenges to my fieldwork.

One of the emblematic examples of such negotiations was the issue of access to the village monograph, written by a resident of Viştea. Before my first reading session, the villagers pointed out that the chronicle was a mystery to most residents of Viştea. Mr Radu, the son of the local historian and author of the monograph, was reluctant to take this text out of his library. It was well known that Radu was possessive about the work of his father and several villagers expressed their discontent: they were never presented with its content. Whereas for them the monograph was a form of community property, for Radu the book constituted his father's masterpiece. He argued that other people were just interested in consuming its content without having to do the necessary labour of knowledge and investigation.

He claimed that he was particularly suspicious about the predatory scholars, intent on misusing the labour invested in this work to build their own careers. Having heard stories of previous visits of urban historians and their attempts to extract information from the monograph, I confirmed that my intentions were beyond 'stealing' information about village history. Having outlined the scope of my study, under the condition of reading the text in his house, Radu agreed to present the monograph to be used to provide a general context for my study. This slowly built trust was a prerequisite for the exchange of local knowledge. For Radu, it was only through gaining control over the narrative that offered sufficient guarantee that facts and memories would not be lost in translation, in the process of institutionalisation or claims of authorship. The village monograph, written by a local resident, was an alternative to the numerous academic publications on this area that, since the 1920s was repeatedly studied without acknowledgement of the local community perspective. Radu's repeated refusal to give away local knowledge to specialists was a symptomatic response to the continuous flow of objects and cultural texts from the village to the capital. The visiting ethnographers, historians, folklorists and other experts on peasant life would use local knowledge for own interpretations and institutional uses, often disconnected from the local context. Drawing from Edwards (2001), the mutual realisation that "collections require a human centre" (Edwards 2001: 28) is a requirement in rethinking conflicts and the inequalities of this knowledge economy.

Being in a multi-sited fieldwork setting poses concerns regarding being in the field and mobility. Movement, in a very physical sense, can be both an opportunity for inquiry and a cause of dilemma, bringing insight into the social field and relationships in the research setting. Manoeuvring through space became topical in various parts of my fieldwork, illuminating the ways movement was conceptualised in various locations. The most prominent example of this issue was how to travel, whether to take a walk, a bike ride, bus trip or a car. Given my previous experience in London, where walking is a common way to move through the city, I was quite surprised that both in the village of Viştea and in Horezu it was not seen as an acceptable way of traversing space.

When I started my fieldwork in Viştea, a village of six streets spread out on a mile-long distance, my host was concerned about my potential discomfort through having to walk everywhere. She was even more surprised that, as a university student, I did not own a car even in London, and each time I set out to go to the town, she would offer to contact neighbours to give me a lift or drive me to my destination. Her guest having to walk was a sign of poor hospitality and a lack of responsibility for my safety and wellbeing. We finally reached a consensus by arranging a bicycle that would allow me to cross the distance without the hazards of pedestrianism, and I was sent to her sister-in-law to borrow her bicycle. The encounter of the bike loan proved essential to my fieldwork and through her I was able to contact a range of new respondents. My host did not maintain good relationships with the sister and considered her social network as lacking value and inadequate for my study. Contacting the sister on my own would be out of the question, both ethically debatable and disrespectful to my host. In this context, the bicycle served as an icebreaker and a starting point for gaining access to this part of the village, without compromising existing connections. The bicycle not only provided a legitimate mean of transport through the space of the village, facilitating “thinking in movement” (Sheets-Johnstone 1999) but also became a legitimate ground for communication and sociability. At the same time, I learnt, it was not the object itself, but its uses and deployments that carried meanings crucial for the research process.

In Horezu, the question of walking and cycling took a different course. Every day I walked from my accommodation to the Potters Street and was known as the ‘Polish girl’ who walks. Often on my way up to the Potters Street, a car would stop to offer me a ride to this part of town. This was often the customary local way of travelling and many of

these car drivers were surprised after stopping, having mistaken me for a neighbour's family member or someone living in that part of Horezu. Also, walking was a source of surprising confrontations with the residents of Potters Street that I had not initially considered for my study. I conducted walking interviews (Jones *et al*, 2008) through chance encounters, for example in meeting Mrs Andrea. This 90-year-old woman sitting in front of her house provided me with invaluable information on the potter family that sold a range of tools to the museum. In this sense, walking proved to be an activity that facilitated new threads of enquiry in reassembling the collection's history and opened novel ways of approaching the field.

In contrast, cycling in Horezu had the opposite effect to the Viştea experience of epistemological opportunity. I decided to use the town's bicycle service, offered through the tourist office and learnt that leaving the bicycle in an unexpected place, would lead to its being confiscated and taken back to the owner - with questions about my reasons for being present in the location. My movement by bicycle was a source of speculation, specifically regarding my choice of respondents or sites for exploration. The sight of my bicycle in front of the house of an inappropriate potter rendered the tourist office doubtful about my insight into the fieldsite. By cycling to unusual types of informants, I crossed their boundary of what was seen as the social field of inquiry in the theme of studying the "heritage" of Horezu. Finally, I abandoned the idea of cycling completely and regained the autonomy of pursuing my own choice of respondents, beyond the suggested sources. Walking and cycling were sites of improvisation in the social field, involving various rhythms of contact and conflict, bringing together, generating means of communication and at times, distancing and closing paths of contact. In this sense, as a research approach, it resembled the notion that in various ways "social relations are paced on the ground" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 1) and need careful consideration in the process of navigating, negotiating and learning the ways through and across the field sites.

### **1.3 In search of contexts**

The next section discusses the main areas of literature salient to this project, focusing on the key issues that run through this thesis. It frames the thesis within the literatures dealing with the ethnography of material culture, critical museology and heritage. Although this is by no means an exhaustive review, as all contexts emerging in the course of the thesis

cannot be encompassed within the space of this chapter, it aims to delineate relevant works that lie at the heart of the analysis.

### **1.3.1 Crafts, skills and techniques**

The idea of rethinking the artefacts is central to this thesis, and comes replete with an underpinning assertion that the application of concepts of craftsmanship, skill and technique broadens the understanding of the collection beyond the rubric of geographically-bound and static folk art. Here, I discuss the uses of the term craft and its possible limitations in the understanding of the collection's material culture.

In this context, I found Adamson's (2007) concerns concerning the critical study of the idea of craft in relation to other forms of cultural practice particularly useful. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of craft has functioned as a scheme of set procedures, materials and processes, supplemental to artworks. The notion of the materiality of craft is often juxtaposed with that of 'opticality' and aestheticism normally reserved for fine arts. Crafts are often linked to pre-industrial Arcadian imageries, characterised by a sense of pastoral, rural and amateurish status. There is ambivalence in craft's utopian character and non-industrial ideal types often are associated with the regionalisation of production and idioms of pastoral asylum. According to Glenn Adamson, the inferiority of the concept of craft in relation to art is prevalent in Euro-American academic discourses.

The supposed inferiority of crafts and materials posed questions about social inequalities. Parker's (1996) investigation of the role of embroidery in the constructions of gender explored the historical categorisations of this craft and showed how it generated ideologies and moral attributes signifying both practice and personhood. As the hierarchy classifying arts and crafts is embedded in the representations of practice, Parker argued, working with the thread was perceived as an achievement linked to naturalised ideals of womanhood and specific models of domesticity and cultural values (1996: 5). In Parker's evaluation, practice is interlinked with both the identity of the maker and the location where a particular type of work was executed. Gender symbolism is central to textile production, which is a predominantly feminine occupation across many societies: it is an occupation capable of evoking female power and also of marking inequalities (Schneider and Weiner: 1989). Reflections on these aesthetic hierarchies shed light on the position of

gender and status in folk art and on the ways that conceptual frames categorise the producers of objects and cultural expressions. Adamson's and Parker's discussions on craft status were relevant to my exploration of textile production in Viştea (Chapter 6).

Another useful context stemming from Adamson's research was the use of the notion of skill, as in the academic context the craft world is perceived as a "ghetto of technique" (Adamson 2007: 71). Just as art is conceptualised as a free play of ideas divorced from the knowledge of materials and processes, craft is often depicted as mere mechanical skill and unreflective workmanship. To move beyond these conceptual limitations, I see Adamson's definition of craft (ibid: 4) as applicable to this study. For Adamson, craft is a:

way of doing things is a process, an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action, existing in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people.

For Sennett (2008), craft is "the desire to do a job well for its own sake" (Sennett 2008: 9) and should be studied through the focus on the development of skill, understood as a progression from bodily practice to technical understanding with the hand and its movement as the main channels of learning. Using the Kantian metaphor of the hand as the window to the mind, Sennett argued that the 'intelligent hand' of the craftsman leads the practice of rhythmic skill. Repetitiveness facilitates creative processes through prehension and truthfulness, coordination and cooperation; it promotes the ability to create with minimum force and increases the ability to concentrate. Sennett's approach acknowledges the under-represented skill of repair and a craftsman's relationship with tools as she organises the experience of making (ibid.: 213). Apparently mundane activities of repair and repetitive rhythm involve improvisation, reflective use of tools and technology and conscious engagement with the limits of the material and equipment. As all craftsmen share the "experimental rhythm of problem solving and problem finding" (ibid.: 26), there is a connection between hand and head in skill development, quality-led motivation for good work, balance of 'getting things right' and 'getting things done' as well as tool proficiency. Defined as an activity of value in its own right, craftsmanship is mostly delineated by the notion of experience, representing "the special human condition of being engaged" (ibid.: 20).



In a significant critique of the romantic trope of engagement in the theoretical approaches to craft, Yarrow (2014) notes that theoretical attention to detachment and distance can inform a new approach to the connections between makers, materials and technologies. Yarrow's ethnographic account of stonemasons in Glasgow explored the empirical complexities through which detachment emerges and is conceptualised and given value in a particular context. This study offered a dialectical perspective beyond the ideal of craftsmanship as integrative skilled practice to acknowledge both proximity and distance in making. This analytical openness, attentive to the relational context of specific crafts and their orientations, prompted me to recognise the unacknowledged aspects of potters' labour as well as themes of textile practice that have been discarded and detached from daily life in rural Romania (Chapters 6 and 7).

Skilled practice involves creativity that occurs in the course of social and cultural process, in the nexus of relationships through "bringing forth the persons situated in it" (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 7). Anthropological approaches have suggested that beyond the notion of the gifted individual, creative processes and improvisational actions are socially embedded, intertwined with the practice of reproduction, the variation of existing forms and "situated enactments" (ibid.: 19). Stressing connections and continuities, anthropological studies have moved outside the vernacular discourse of repetitive tradition and individual creativity to bring out concerns addressing the continuity, flow and dynamics of social life and material practice. Imagining creativity as social capacity, Demian and Wastell (2007: 119) argue that innovations are recontextualisations of practice, systems of beliefs or forms of knowledge, and a means of generating discontinuity. In recognising the need to rethink the conventional metaphors of creativity, and to de-naturalise its underlying premise as autonomous expression opposed to continuity and authenticity, they propose that both acts of distinctiveness and appropriation (of forms and contexts) are corresponding factors of creative action. These definitions of craftsmanship and creativity allowed me to adopt an approach capable of transcending the idiom of the mastery of repetitive technical action, and to think through the workmanship of those who engage in folk art production today, in particular those who

transgress the categories of Romania's traditional ethnographic areas<sup>4</sup> (*zona etnografică*) or production centres (Chapter 8).

Several anthropological studies have considered aspects of craft production, focusing on the craft's entanglement with religion, kinship, economics and history. Goddard (1996) elaborates on Marxist studies of production processes. More recently, Ingold (2000), has examined the process and technologies related to objects, and Kùchler and Miller (2005) and Tarlo (2010) have shown how cultural and personal meanings are invested in commodities.

For Ingold (2000), crafts are framed as socially situated forms of practice. The practice is strongly linked to the idiom of skill that I hereafter define as a "total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment" (ibid.: 353). In this view, the skill of the craftsman is embedded in the social field, generating a synergic sphere of practice, materials and tools (ibid.: 352). Focusing on the specificities of skilled practice, Ingold proposed to view a task as "any practical operation, carried out by a skilled agent in an environment, as part of his or her normal business of life." (ibid.: 195). In this context, technical action is immersed in the current of practices that generates taskscapes, "an array of related activities" (ibid..) with their rhythms, movements and cycles. Its rhythmic and interrelated character creates a sense of belonging within a wider community and specific locality. For Ingold, the taskscape is related to the idiom of social temporality through the relationships and forms of mutual involvement in the process of performing tasks. This mode of social time is structured rhythmically through the interwoven domain of various tasks resonating with the wider environment. The model of craft performed in the social embeddedness and temporality of the taskscape proved useful in the analysis of Horezu pottery. Considering the rhythms of the workshop, the temporality of life histories and the wider environment of the spatial practices of the potters, I argue that the performance of pottery occurs in the interdependent domain of tasks and skills (Chapter 7).

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<sup>4</sup> Romanian scholarship considers folk art as representative of ethnographic areas (*zone etnografice*), defined as territories displaying common ethnographic characteristics. The defining factors of an ethnographic area include settlements' types, occupations, traditional dress, livelihood and spirituality (Stoica and Petrescu 1997: 495).

A useful way of rethinking craftsmanship and skill emerged through consideration of the production process. Following the premise of Lemonnier's (1986) anthropology of techniques, observing the technical variants in making materials and creating designs might reveal social realities behind the praxeological. Discontinuities in material environments often stand for a wider context,

which generally leads to revealing pertinent links between a technical phenomenon and factors of social order. Better still, the irregularity observed in technical behaviour sometimes points toward sociocultural differences, which have hitherto escaped observation (Lemonnier 1986: 155).

Thinking about shifting material environments, Pierre Lemonnier asserted that techniques are related to social representations which have effects on technical action and forms by which we classify raw material in technical process (ibid.: 159). Identifying and exploring technological choices, from style to function, to physical action, allows a wider view of the social milieu in which these occur. Drawing from Leroi-Gourhan's notion of the role of favourable milieu in incorporating, dismissing and retaining innovations (as well as artefacts and new technical operations), Lemonnier argued that all of these have to be understood within the realm of technical knowledge, which encompasses "know-how, manual skills, procedures, but also ... a set of cultural representations of reality." (ibid.: 154). As knowledge is deeply related to social representations, physical and material effects are obtained through such socially embedded perceptions of materials and ways of doing things (ibid.: 14). As technical acts express such non-technological logic, they illuminate issues of status, identity, economy, politics, pre-existing representations of material culture and local self-conceptualisations through craftsmanship. Thinking through local interpretations of innovation or novelty, Lemonnier argued, enables us to explore the arbitrariness, meaning and continuities and discontinuities of material culture. Changes, discoveries of new ideas, breaks in the established routine or gestures of borrowing, occur in the social context, that is within a relationship with the common or traditionally established ways things are made (ibid.: 21). For Lemonnier, the anthropological question of how innovation is embedded in the cultural meanings of techniques can be explored through interpreting 'secondary' technical traits (ibid.: 25). In this thesis, such technical considerations were particularly applicable in discussions about weaving and pottery, as the narratives about tooling and patterns opened up a space in which to analyse the social representations of being a craftsperson. These discussions also

facilitated my evaluation of transformations in material culture and hierarchies of workmanship and skill (Chapters 5, 6, 7).

Issues around the skills themselves and the conditions under which knowledge is transmitted and valued are pivotal parts of this study. The relationship between the duration of material culture and cultural transmission can take a range of forms as Rowlands has shown (1993). Drawing from Kuchler's (2002) ethnography of Malanggan carvings, Rowlands pointed to the process of transmission embedded in decomposition and lack of physical duration. Some forms of material practice,

cannot function as aide memoire and are thus not made with a view towards the past, but towards the future ... They do not embody memories of past events but have themselves become embodied memories; objectified and condensed as a thing. Disposed or destroyed objects are remembered for themselves, not for what they might have stood for in terms of remembered pasts. (Rowlands 1993: 147).

In this framework, the absence of objects and the erosion of craft skills have a generative capacity in the reproduction of values as illustrated by the case of textile crafts in Viştea (discussed in Chapter 6).

Being a craftsperson is embedded in idioms of sociality and subjectivity and creates a fundamental component of self-identification within a wider environment. Using craftsmen's biographies I analyse the storytelling of identity construction, a theme I explore in the empirical analysis in Chapters 6 and 7. Following Kondo's (1990: 234) assertion that self-images of present-day artisans are constructed within a cultural and historical narrative field, I looked through the makers' autobiographical accounts and their perceptions of practice and craft periodisation.

In this context, Ricoeur's (1980: 177) argument on the incorporation of action within the "course of things, the temporal guides provided by the chain of meaning" was useful for the analysis of data collected in Horezu. The narrative is a generative frame for action, a plot for on-going practice and self-interpretation. For Ricoeur, narrativity gives a structure to temporality (ibid.: 169), and transforms practice and temporality into public qualities, making them measurable. Narrativity acts as a means that enables events to gain linear character and become intelligible. As events are organised into a story, they are being defined by their contribution to the unfolding of the plot and participation in

narrative time (ibid.: 171). Following from these concerns, the narratives of skill and learning were important factors in grasping the projected identities of potters and their modes of self-conceptualisation as skilled practitioners. They were key to identifying the significance of the relationships between life events as elements of a storyline of craft mastery. This plot, as I illustrate in Chapters 7 and 8, structured the inclusion or exclusion of specific events and experiences in order to produce particular meanings. Acknowledging both personal narratives and the wider context of story-telling I looked at “the way narrative activities play out in everyday practice to both produce coherence and reveal difference” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998: 165). This perspective allowed me to explore the craft’s ‘story-in-use’ and to grasp the ways in which the conspicuous manner of telling lives had been linked to a biographical plot for a representation of the self and to express social distance amongst makers.

### **1.3.2 Materiality and cultural practice**

There is an extensive anthropological scholarship on material culture, encompassing a wide-ranging field (see Basu 2013b, Buchli 2002, Hicks and Beaudry 2010, Tilley *et al.* 2006) Here, I consider the key themes that have proved essential in analysing data and fieldwork experience in Viştea, Horezu, and pottery fairs and workshops. Questions of materiality as an essential part of cultural practice were fundamental to this thesis, specifically in the analysis of the contemporary responses to the collection material and issues concerning local perceptions of space, social change and artefact production.

One line of inquiry in the ethnographic study of the Horniman Museum material was an exploration of the collection’s artefacts beyond formal and aesthetic parameters. In the research of the domestic textiles in the village of Viştea, I considered the assemblages of decorative textiles in terms of the relationships between things and persons. Rather than viewing these compositions as materialisations of continuity in a peasant society (Gudeman and Riviera 1990), I focused on the understanding of technical virtuosity and the efficacy of objects. Gell considered artefact production as a technology of enchantment where “the power of art objects stems from the technical processes they

objectively embody” (Gell 1992: 44)<sup>5</sup>. Objects have the stimulating capacity to generate responses and carry the makers’ intentionality, acting upon persons. Gell asserted that artefacts (and their assemblages, as I present in Chapter 5) distribute the producers’ efficacy, acting as the substitutes for their makers. The idiom of material culture as an extension of the body and distributed personhood framed the understanding of local responses to the Horniman Museum artefacts in the context of textile arrangements in the traditional domestic space (Chapter 5).

Domesticity has been a profound theme in anthropological analysis (Buchli 2013). With the house’s central role in the understanding of the society, the structure of the home has been explored as a reflection of symbolic devices, cosmologies or social hierarchies in various ethnographic contexts (Bourdieu 1990, Bloch 1995, Hugh-Jones 1985). Following Levi-Strauss, studies considered the house as a “corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth” (Levi-Strauss 1983: 174) and explored the relations between the fabric of social organisation, local identity and shifting idioms of household in relation to extra-village categories, such as religious institutions or the state (Pine 1996). Given the linkages between social fabric and material cultures, scholars of dynamic processes which rule the house in periods of change, revealed how the physical form of the dwelling and objects within and around the household bring insights into how social categories and local identities were maintained, contested and transformed. Domesticity provides a useful framework to explore historical transformations in the material environment, shedding light on constructions of personhood, formation and sustenance of relationships and values. Examination of households provides insights into the perceptions of history and modernity made by those who construct and arrange interiors. Some helpful examples were studies of socialism through the impact of modern projects on the daily lives of societies subject to these transformations (Humphrey 1974, Buchli 1999). Ethnographies of change, such as Drazin’s work on interiors in Romania, were key to the understanding of highly debated transition and constructions of the past. Drazin’s work in Suceava, northern Romania illustrated how modernity, order and progress were linked to the space of the home and the transformation of actors through “the work of cleaning, establishing a feeling of cleanliness, amounts to a progressive and

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, looking at the effect on viewers of the Triobrand carving, Gell argued ‘*the canoe-board is not dazzling as a physical object, but as a display of artistry*’ (ibid.: 46) with a power stemming from the manufacture appearing impressive and perceived as magical.

gradual reinterpretation of the past” (Drazin 2002: 103). Historical changes were mediated through everyday acts transforming the immediate material environment and rejecting particular elements of the domestic space. These studies of symbolic constructions and negotiations of the vernacular provided me with a context for considering social practices and normative schema in which Horniman Museum objects were used as part of the everyday material culture. Through conversations about the ‘old house’, a space to which the residents of the village assigned the Horniman Museum objects, I analysed how the local respondents perceived this material through cross-references between bodies and houses. The shifting materiality of the household with naked interiors and the neglect of artefacts of the kind the Horniman Museum collection represents, were explored as frames of local evaluations of historical transformation and moral personhood (Chapter 5 and 6).

Themes explored in Drazin’s ethnography pose broader questions about material culture and modernity, applicable to this study. As “anthropology was born partially as a response to the encounter of ‘modernity’ with the ‘non-modern’” (Macfarlane 2012), numerous studies set out to interpret this ubiquitous term through critical ethnographies of the West, investigations of indigenisation processes and recognition of the plural nature of the modern phenomenon (Appadurai 1996, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Inda and Rosaldo 2002, Eglund and Leach 2000, Knauft 2002, Latour 1993, Miller 1995, Rabinow 1989, Rofel 1999, Sahlins 2000). Similarly, against the characterisation of modernity as a general trait, Miller revealed its specificity through local appropriations of its models in the material cultural practice (Miller 1994). In this framework, consumption is considered as the main vehicle of this specificity and goods are being given meaning and become situated in the symbolic struggles on the local level, fashioning a sense of identity (ibid.: 319).

The study of modernity and the material world has been applied to the Cold War Eastern Europe (Buck-Morss 2000, Crowley and Reid 2000). Bringing together a range of case studies from East German plastics, Bulgarian veiling practices to Polish department stores, the studies lifted the Iron Curtain: exploring consumerism, socialist modernity and the relationships between people and things in the 1950s and 1960s, a perspective I found helpful in discussing the ‘undressed’ house in the Viştea case study (Chapter 5). Looking beyond clichés regarding the Soviet Bloc and in the aftermath of socialism, the material culture perspective offered a novel take on the objects of everyday life as the front of

ideological struggles and prescribed values as well as revealing multiple complexities, subjectivities, attitudes, meanings and negotiations (Bartlett 2010, Fehérváry 2002, Gerasimova 2002, Humphrey 1995, Kotkin 1995, Pine 2002, Reid 2002). Moving beyond the totalitarian paradigm, the sites of private life, consumption and aesthetics were explored. At the same time, the political imaginary of the new material culture of mass-produced commodities was key to the understanding of everyday socialist materialities (Cooke 1997).

In this context, taking the 1950s collection trip as a starting point of historical exploration, the studies of Cold War cultures proved particularly relevant for this thesis. The delivery of modern standards was a pivotal preoccupation of the Cold War, an ideological struggle to deliver the best possible material modernity (Crowley and Pavitt 2008, Fehérváry 2009, Verdery 1996). As modernity is visibility (Rowlands 2011), this warfare of representations was often presented through images, objects and displays, including exhibitions on the other side of the Iron Curtain, as explored through the history of the 1950s Romanian exhibitions in Britain in Chapter 3 of this thesis. (Buck-Morss 2000, Romijn, Scott-Smith and Segal 2012, Reid 2010).



### 1.3.3 Folk art, politics and heritage

With a view to restudying a folk art collection, this research focuses on the critical consideration of its value as heritage. Although heritage has been often thought to be the modernity's other, for Huyssen (2003), it is precisely historicism that rules modernity through numerous cultural practices and material expressions, from omnipresent projects of preservation, restoration, creation of museums, literature of memoirs and confessions to trends in daily lifestyle such as retro fashion. In this thesis, I draw on the tandem of modernity and preservation of tradition through scholarly and heritage practices (Herzfeld 2004, Nora 1989, Smith 2006, Trigger 2006). Modernity imagines itself in a temporal contradiction with memory practices, "a process which structures identity and prevents anomie implied by too much freedom by encouraging localised rediscoveries of heritage within a secure sense of cultural space and time" (Rowlands 1995: 24) and produces historical erasures.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, heritage has often been related to political frameworks, connoting the identity of the modern state through the legitimising models of 'national heritage' or a 'body of folkways' (Davison 2008: 31). These essentialist and territory-based sensibilities have often framed perspectives on heritage and 'cultural patrimony' (Basu 2011: 28). In Romania, folklore has served as a means to sustain the modern state. Kligman's (1988) ethnography of Northern Romania under socialism explored the reproduction of the state and nationalist discourse through folklore and cultural heritage. Kligman noted that in Ceaușescu's Romania,

folklore is viewed as a viable modality through which the specificities of a national heritage may be constituted and communicated. Folklore and traditions serve as cultural signs of difference that represent nationalist ideology and mystify the 'other'. Hence, 'socialist culture' from the perspective of cultural ideologues attempts to articulate various levels of identity – individual, regional, national – by reifying a complex of concepts that constitute a national cultural identity constructed in 'familial' terms. *Patrie* (fatherland or nation) is the symbolic family of people. Through this symbolic construction of an encompassing context, the state legitimises itself and, in the process, encourages the transformation of peasants into Rumanians (Kligman 1988: 258).

Of particular relevance for this study vested in the 1950s is an exploration of the relationship between post-war state socialism and folklore in Romania. Bubociu (1966),

reviewing the history of Romanian folklore studies, exposed its persistent entanglement with politics through the early intermingling with German romantic *Volkskunde* and of the interwar monographic school of Dimitrie Gusti, postulating the idiom of the ‘science of the nation’. In the 1950s, folklore and ethnography became framed in the idiom of Soviet ideas on rural life and its projected futures. Ethnography and ‘material folklore’ were stifled by Marxist interpretations and didacticism (Bubociu 1966: 304) and research was conducted under ideological influence. Interdisciplinary fieldwork was not possible, with villages in the process of collectivisation, expelled wealthy peasants and researchers controlled by the local authorities. In addition, the 1950s was a period of growth of the ethnographic expertise in regional production, resembling documentation trips in the spirit of *Volkskunde* (e.g. compiling folk ballads and gathering typologies on the regional patterns and ethnographic areas) with little direct interaction between researcher and informant (Hedeşan 2008: 26). Following the post-1948 Sovietisation of culture, the sociology departments in Romania were closed and scholars of the discipline were forced to seek employment in departments of ethnography, art history or folk art (Ionescu-Gura 2005, Rostas 2000). As ethnography and social research were restricted, other scholars became New Folklore specialists, often entangled with political idioms of cultural activism and the Soviet idiom of folklore studies, creating ‘new’ folk poetry and songs “to acknowledge the popularity, among the masses, of the political actions taken by the authorities” (Eretescu 2008: 47). The combination of modernity, heritage and folkways reached its peak, as the experts were set to mediate both the interpretation of the past as well as the production of folk futures.

The critique of intellectual life in socialist Romania and the practices of its cultural elites by Verdery (1991) provided a wide overview of the issues of identity, contested images of the nation and their workings in the politics of institutionalised cultural practice. This exhaustive historical investigation showed how scholarship in history, ethnography and philosophy was implicated in national ideologies, struggles in political legitimation and authority. Culture and the idioms of cultural origins were instrumentalised in these various political performances framing debates about the peasantry and its role in the nation state. Reflecting on cultural production under socialism, Verdery demonstrated that intellectuals were at once threatening and desirable,

as occupying the space of legitimation, a space of vital concern to bureaucracy needing performance and compliance from its subjects. All intellectuals work with the symbolic means that form subjectivities; their talents are essential to power (ibid.: 88).

Symbolic capital, knowledge and cultural production were incorporated into the socialist motor accumulating ‘allocative power’. Building on this scholarship, I investigated the use of Romanian ‘folk art’ exhibitions as elite-led attempts to legitimise modernisation and interfaces of the national and political imageries (Chapter 3). Considering Verdery’s (1991) reflection on how cultural practices receive a stamp of authentication via the values of interconnected credibility, representativeness of artistic excellence, I have investigated the bottom-up practices of self-legitimation amongst the contemporary folk potters (Chapter 7).

Herzfeld’s studies of Greek folklore proved a useful comparative study, showing a parallel example of the ideologies of folk heritage as strategies of the nation-state to gain historical legitimation. Herzfeld noted that since the early days of folklore studies, nationalist European folklorists claimed “the right to edit texts to suit their view of the national culture” (Herzfeld 2004: 198). Folk culture served the political means of building national identity and European status of Greek people, constructed by elites on the principle of cultural continuity. (Herzfeld 1982). Among Cretan artisans, Herzfeld recognised a double-edged phenomenon of nationalisation, globalisation and commodification of tradition with an elevation of artisans as carriers of universal, ancient values. These practitioners are glorified and marginalised, regarded as an unprofessional labour force and valuable repositories of the past (Herzfeld 2004). In Greece, where similarly to the case of Romanian potters (Chapter 8 of this thesis), artisans become part of museum displays presenting ancient techniques, the act of becoming a living museum is a strategy against obliteration and further marginalisation. As the particular enters the global stage of local heritage preservation, the idiom of tradition is defined by the ideas of modernity and universal value (ibid.: 19). In this hidden logic of interconnected local and global, traditional and modern, the global hierarchy of value is manifested through reification of culture.

Artisans become reified as cultural monuments embodying heritage, excluded from “the modernist vision and its practical advantages” (ibid.: 20). This dependency is manifested in workshops and through persons, as reproductions of dominant discourses

are correlated with the making of ‘stereotypical selves’ (ibid.: 28). Herzfeld suggested that unmarking modernity in the discourses of tradition deserves attention (ibid.: 33) as in the global hierarchy of value, inequalities and marginalities are generated through discursive and bodily practices, affecting craft practitioners. As, through the commodification and rationalisation of folklore, material practices entered books and museums, they became disconnected from the everyday embodied materiality (ibid.: 198). Herzfeld further suggested that as ideas spread to society, the increasingly educated masses themselves learnt to be rational and modern. These reflections were useful in framing the context of the loss of value that became part of my research of textiles in Viştea. The marginalisation of this craft and disembodiment, seen as beneficial for the surviving makers, were intermeshed with the notions of modernity and values, as discussed in Chapter 6.

In various settings, material culture has been recognised as a site of the nation’s performance, materialising its stories and continuities (Anderson 1991, Boswell and Evans (eds) 1999, Díaz-Andreu and Champion, 1996, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Lowenthal 1985, Meskell, 1998, Wright, 1985). The relations of heritage pervade these regionalised constructions of history and identity at the same time marking broader global processes of managing the material past. The critical heritage scholarship investigated numerous cases of such micro-macro connections through studies of global discourses of UNESCO and ICOMOS, Western principles of conservation, various conventions and charters as well as the connections with another modern phenomenon, international tourism (Boniface and Fowler 1993, Butler 2007, Chambers 2009, Eriksen 2003, Joy 2012, Labadi and Long 2010). The global heritage imagination, aimed at transgressing national boundaries, has projected universalistic ideas of value, commonality and shared humanity but also extrapolated the constructions of national heritage along with sanitised, safe histories and infrastructures regulating the past and future (Harrison and Hitchcock 2005, Hewison 1987, De Jong and Rowlands 2007, Urry 1995).

Traditions and heritage are selective (Williams 1963), far from neutral or uniform, and constitute both common spaces and spheres of dispute and discord (Ashworth and Tunbridge 1996, Holtorf 2006, Macdonald 2009, Scott 1999). In response to various critiques of the reification of culture and its colonial and imperial roots, as well as marginalisation of regions devoid of monumental material heritage, new categorisations of value have been developed encompassing landscapes, people, oral expressions,

ceremonies, crafts and performance. In 2003, following thirty years of debates and using Japanese and Korean models of heritage protection (Akagawa and Smith 2009), UNESCO developed the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Convention was designed to embed heritage protection in a more flexible, inclusive and holistic framework and formed basis for new heritage programmes and instruments of listing and protection of the non-material (Alivizatou 2012). Within the growing landscape of intangible heritage, some of the newly arising concerns were issues of commodification and metacultural production for economic and tourist purposes, political uses of nominations and the reification or even fossilisation of the intangible (Brown 2005, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, Nas 2002). Other critiques concerned the problems of new salvage agendas, implementation of the nominations, community involvement and the politics of authenticity (Akagawa and Smith, 2009, Bendix, Eggert and Peselmann 2012, de Jong 2007, Kreps 2003). These debates were a backbone for my understanding of Horezu craftsmanship in the changing heritage-scapes of this site and its recent nomination as the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Chapter 7).

Alivizatou (2012), in her recent review of museum articulations of intangible heritage, provided a helpful context in the understanding of the various models of practice beyond the fixed preservationist and salvage agendas. Of particular relevance to this thesis was Alivizatou's examination of how intangible heritage was framed at the Horniman Museum. Exploring the permanent and temporary exhibitions, she noted a problematic emptiness in terms of people and cultural practitioners. In the Horniman Museum, intangible heritage was interpreted as a new category of museum object acquisition, situating this museological perspective within problematically fossilised and fixed representations. Another concern stemmed from the museum's work with source and local communities. Alivizatou's study offers a critical perspective on the ways in which the incorporation of intangible heritage is being mediated, pointing to the inequalities produced by such enterprise. In this context,

The combination of curatorial and academically grounded knowledge with personal interpretations by community members emerges as a key museological discourse of the Horniman, much in line with the current trends of inclusion. There is little doubt, however, as to who is ultimately in charge of the exhibition content and narrative ... intangible heritage is mostly

interpreted as something external to the museum's first point of call (Alivizatou 2012: 157).

This somewhat polemical point is useful in thinking about the secondary value of intangible heritage in relation to the institution's key object-based focus. It was a salient aspect for the consideration of the perspective of craft practitioners as co-creators of meaning in the museum. The objective of the reassessment of this collection stemmed from the need to take the voice and the knowledge of the maker seriously and install it within the core of museum interpretation (Chapters 6,7,8).

### **1.3.4 Museum artefacts, knowledge and expertise**

Museum objects are good to think with, drawing attention to the complex character of artefacts as vehicles of meaning, representation and 'cultural fragments' (Bennet 1995, Coombes 1994, Hooper- Greenhill 1992, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Karp and Lavine 1991, Pearce 1994). Following reflections on cultural heritage as an invention and act of faith (Lowenthal 1985), critical museum studies are useful in rethinking the notion of museum-based folk patrimony with relation to identity, ideology, knowledge networks, performance and the relationship between tradition and change. At the same time, debates considered questions about the nature of authenticity in the context of objects and persons (Jones 2010, Jones and Yarrow 2013, Kingston 1999, Reisinger and Steiner 2006a, Reisinger and Steiner 2006b)

This thesis was driven by the contributions of the studies initiated by new museology debates (Vergo 1989) that revealed that the museum model, established throughout European history, favoured particular identities and carried specific social and political concepts, generating institutions embedded in distinct power relations. The archetype of the public museum, it was suggested, was a ritual of citizenship, a disciplinary institution with encyclopaedic claims for the classification of culture, knowledge, artefacts and social groups (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, Bennet 1995, Duncan 1995). Studies of the relationships that museum collections are part of, in particular post-colonial critiques (Ames 1994, Clifford 1997, Karp and Lavine, 1991, Thomas 1991), brought to light concerns of the unequal character of identity representation in museums, highlighting issues of low public participation in heritage interpretation, unheard perspectives of the originating community and the neglect of shared interpretive authorship. At the same time, indigenous agency in

the formation of collections received due recognition in scholarly debates on museums (see discussion: Byrne *et al* 2011).

A number of critiques of museological discourses drew attention to the problematic character of ethnographic objects as representative fragments of a given culture. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in museum installations, objects serve as metonyms or indexes replacing these broader entities with specific holistic cultural models projected onto them (1998: 388). At the same time, museum displays often fail to provide a frame of reference for the artefacts, exercising a strong cognitive control over the visitor. As a result, museum expositions result in amorphous accumulations of arbitrary, fragmentary narratives, offering imagined geographical and historical entities. In order to respond to the critiques of the new museum theory, it was essential for museum practitioners to reconsider their public role and institutional authority in relation to their audiences and surrounding communities. One of such models of reworking these relationships was Clifford's (1997) appeal to transform museums into contact zones in which collections would be part of an on-going historical, political and moral relationship between the culture that produced the objects, and the members of another culture who came to view them. The contact zone was envisioned as a space of re-contextualisation, collaboration and transculturation, wherein members of community groups selectively used museum material to invent new forms of interpretation.

Bell (2003) argued that working with museum material in the places of collections' origins

creates space wherein the host community, researcher and holding institution can revisit and rework intersecting histories as they are embodied and displayed by their various by-products. In returning photographs taken by our anthropological ancestors to their ancestors, both the fieldworker and host community can re-engage in dialogues that begun a long time ago: dialogues ... which have remained unfinished (ibid.: 120).

The profusion of visual and digital repatriation projects demonstrates a growing interest in revisiting museum collections by returning to the community. These undertakings often advocate community empowerment for a museum model conceptualised as a dialogic project of knowledge sharing and representation (Basu 2011, Bouquet 2012, Brown and Peers 2003, Geismar and Herle 2010, Golding and Modest 2013). The knowledge gained is frequently a basis for exhibitions or revisions of collections.

Recent new critical perspectives on museums and communities, however, have pointed out the inequalities of the engagements implied by the plethora of museum collaborative projects (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008, Waterton and Watson 2011) as well as the challenges posed by the paradigm of the contact zone (Dibley 2005, Onciul 2012). Among the plethora of problematic issues of such initiatives in museum ethnography, I will focus on the notion of the relationship between the museum and the source communities.

Within the principles of new museology, it is frequently argued that museums should embrace interpretive capacities of source communities in a way that allows co-ownership of knowledge, builds community-based control mechanisms and fosters partnerships, empowerment and collaboration (Peers and Brown 2003). Also called ‘originating communities’, they often framed as historical groups from which the collections were acquired and include their contemporary descendants (Peers and Brown 2003:2). Watson (2007) defines community as a group with a ‘sense of belonging’ and identity by association and participation. That identity is relational and dependent on the sense of self and ‘others’, formed with relation to a number of factors from shared historical or cultural experiences, specialist knowledge, demographic/socio-economic indicators or factors such as age, gender, nation or region. Crooke (2008) reviews a range of definitions of the ‘community’ concept, pointing to its processual, contextual and political dimensions and the multiplicity of ends and purposes it can be assigned.

In the context of this research, the applicability of the notion of source community appears limited. Given the composition of the 1957 Romanian collection, it was unclear whether such community would be construed as a composition of local groups, gendered practitioners of folk art or users of objects in a particular area. Would it be a geographically divided peasantry? Do the descendants of the collection donors consist of a homogenous, correspondent static group? Who would speak for such a community or sequence of communities almost seventy years after the collection acquisition? Facing the above, I argue that the framework of ‘source community’ does not provide a relevant understanding for an ethnographer revisiting this collection.



Firstly, such project presents a risk of reification of the notion of community and thus reinforcement of the museum authority as a representational actor speaking for a specific community's needs, comforts or activities etc. (see Simpson 1996). The assertion of communities as bounded, stable and fixed social bodies underpinning the museum at the service of a community underplays the lived experience of complex attachments and power relations between people as well as fluid "encounters in which cultures, identities and skills are acquired and used" (Karp 1992: 4). Secondly, it would support the notion of the ethnographic present of folk art and would continue to frame research participants as members of people fixed to an area, situated in their 'ethnographic zones'.

In the Romanian context, this organicist imagination of a collective, unified subject has to be recognized as a deeply problematic political project (Mihăilescu and Naumescu 2008). For Basu (2013), the simplistic approach to source community is erroneous as it reinforces "a static isomorphism between people, place, and (material) culture" (2013b: 9). Although Basu's critique of the use of the source community is vested in West Africa, it is relevant here in its emphasis on fluidity, change, renegotiation and the ongoing reworking of identities and boundaries. Thirdly, the assertion of a two way model of museum-community engagement flattens the ethnographic encounter with multiple research participants as representative of the social body of the community, masking the dynamics of voices and experiences. Lastly, as this research investigates everyday objects considered locally as discarded and irrelevant to the descendants of the 'originating community' today, it is unclear whose story would these objects narrate. Urdea (2015) complicates the idea of source community as applied to this collection through a comparative study of Romanian local museums. For Urdea, source communities constitute "unstable entities that maintain connections beyond the local" (Urdea 2015: 297). Rather than chasing an abstract source community, we should acknowledge complex claims over identity and locality as well as multiple engagements with objects on the ground.

Basu (2011) invites us to use migration metaphors to think about ethnographic museums and collections as transnational and relational entities. For Basu, collections are brought together by complex historical forces and transactions, often resembling diaspora communities, "belonging neither 'here' nor 'there', but materialising a kind of 'double consciousness' in a space between" (2011: 5). Similarly, Thomas (2013) pointed out that "museums with ethnographic collections are evidently not products of communities but

relationships, biographies and transactions, of networks of remarkably heterogeneous kinds, involving people from here and there”. Thomas’ and Basu’s dynamic and relational understanding of the museum collections is a basis for more relevant grasp of the nature of the Romanian collection. The objects’ rootedness does not occur in a homogenous community, but in an assemblage of historical circumstances, relations and movements of objects and people. My research aims to account on this multiplicity to rework the static paradigm of rural material culture in Romania.

At the same time, this project acknowledges that museums are institutions with continuous relationships and responsibilities toward those peoples with whom their histories are intertwined and whose cultural artefacts populate their stores and displays. This notion of curatorial responsibility, stemming from the literature about collaborative museum practice was significant for the design of my ethnographic engagement. Within recent critiques, museums and their collections were explored as parts of complex social and material networks; they were resituated as embedded in a nexus of political and historical forces connecting places, people and things (Gosden, Larson and Petch 2007, Harrison 2013, Larson, Petch and Zeitlyn 2007, Thomas 1991).

#### **1.4 How to follow the story told by the collection: thesis outline**

In addressing the research questions stipulated by the project and led by the course of my independent research, this thesis falls into three parts. Part I offers a description of the historical context of the 1957 Horniman Museum collection (Chapters 2 and 3), Part II is concerned with the artefacts from the village of Viştea in Southern Transylvania (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) and Part III presents contemporary perspectives on the collection of Romanian ceramics (Chapters 7 and 8).

In this introductory **Chapter 1**, I introduced the collection, the premise of the project and the design of this study. Focusing on the methodology and the scope of this thesis, I presented the focal issues pertinent to the ethnographic and collection-based study of the archives and craftsmanship. I also discussed the literature relevant to the main themes of the study focusing on the themes of folklore, heritage and politics, modernity and tradition, as well as research on museum artefacts as expressions of crafts practice and material culture.

The first part of this thesis provides the insights gained from the historical records of the collection. **Chapter 2** addresses the history of the 1957 Horniman Museum Romanian folk art assemblage in the light of the history of discursive practices and international encounters. It looks at the findings of the archival study to investigate how the collection material became part of the holdings in a London museum during the Cold War. **Chapter 3** is rooted in the encounter with the Bucharest curator and the object documentation held at the Horniman Museum in London. Following the archival and biographical thread, it provides a socio-historical perspective on the collection, documentation and exhibition process and considers the archives as multi-layered traces of the fragmented and often contrasting story of the museum material.

The second part of the thesis moves to the description of the insights gained from the ethnographic research conducted in 2012. **Chapter 4** examines the context of collecting objects from Viştea, Făgăraş District, South Transylvania. Based on local responses to the images of the museum artefacts, I locate the collecting event in the context of the agrarian reform of the 1950s.

**Chapter 5** follows the Viştea collection through the historical role of the artefacts in the museum and the domestic environment. Firstly, it outlines how vernacular objects were presented in Romanian museums to explore the local representational frames salient to this collection. Secondly, it examines how 70 years ago the Vişteans constructed and restructured their immediate surroundings. In the context of historical storms and social transformations that affected the area, it outlines modifications that have occurred over the century in the household. Exploring change in domestic material culture on the local level, it provides insights into the ways in which the household is used to mediate local narratives about the past and modernity. It argues that local conceptions of display are in contrast with the museological discourses and need to be brought to the fore of reinterpretation.

Following on from the home environment of the Viştea collection artefacts, **Chapter 6** examines the production of textiles used in the household display, exploring the role of domestic crafts across time. During fieldwork in Viştea, hierarchies of material cultures and domesticity became very explicit in discussions about craftsmanship. Focusing on the surviving generation of weavers, I describe the changing world of cottage production, skill

and consumption of fabrics. I trace the recent decline of weaving in the village, situating the Horniman Museum collection in the current local understandings of material culture. Exploring the historical dynamics of local representations of value, I argue for the significance of material factors in museum interpretation, advocating reassessment of the collection within the shifting perceptions on craft practice and personhood in the village.

Rather than a unified and timeless phenomenon of rural production, the Horniman Museum collection represents various types of craftsmanship that, depending on the context, might today be either obsolete or flourishing. In order to provide an account for the contrasting afterlives of the collection and craft practice in Romania, the third part of the thesis addresses the findings from fieldwork with folk potters. The two chapters, vested in various pottery centres, propose to reconsider the ceramic collections through the complex histories and relationships in which the craft practice is embedded.

**Chapter 7** of the thesis investigates the case of the vibrant Horezu pottery centre from which the Horniman Museum obtained the tools of the 1950s potter. Tracing the Horniman Museum artefacts back to the descendants of the donors and conducting photo elicitation with contemporary potters enables nuanced perspectives on the pottery collection. In 2012, this pottery centre was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and is widely seen as one of the emblematic sites of traditional craft production. Interpretations of the site by scholarly and heritage institutions fail to acknowledge the influence of socialism on the centre, when the pottery's heritage was redefined and brought into practice through the creation of state cooperatives, craft fairs and exhibitionary practices. The last part of the chapter situates the work of the potter within the wider forces of new heritage infrastructures and practices on the ground. Folk pottery production emerges as a heterogeneous taskscape involving negotiations of meanings and identities as well as spatial, narrative and material practice.

The 1957 Horniman Museum collection consists of over a 100 ceramic objects, collected from various folk pottery centres across the country. These artefacts represent a multitude of relationships and material and social contexts. Examining the ceramic assemblage, **Chapter 8** explores the afterlife of the 1950s folk pottery collection through an ethnographic encounter with contemporary Romanian makers. In the first part, I trace museum artefacts from two locations in northern Romania to explore their story and these

folk pottery centres within the transforming political economy of craft knowledge. In the second part, I consider the perspectives of practitioners in present-day Romania on the artefacts and techniques. The voices of these often overlooked practitioners serve as a backdrop for reassessing the museum material.

The goal of the concluding **Chapter 9** is to synthesise historical and ethnographic knowledge about the Horniman Museum's Romanian collection history and ethnography. I impart my fieldwork experience with the makers of the objects and their descendants, as well as with contemporary craft practitioners. According to the findings of this study, folk art material is reassessed in dialogue with the expertise of contemporary craftspeople. The final part looks at the possibilities and limits of such research to enrich debates in the Horniman Museum and suggests areas for future development.

**PART I:**

**SITUATING THE COLLECTION**

## Chapter 2: The handsome gift

The generous gift from the IRRCS of a collection of examples of Romanian folk art has been received with great pleasure by the Council's Horniman Museum. The collection will form a most valuable addition to the museum's exhibits and I have been asked to convey to you the Council's warm appreciation of this handsome gift

Excerpt from a Letter to Prof. Michail Roşianu, (Chairman of the IRRCS) from O. Hart (Clerk of the LCC), 26 October 1956.

### 2.1 Introduction

Some objects are perfect gifts. This chapter discusses the creation of a gift for the Horniman Museum and presents the historical contours of exchanges that activated the movement of what became museum objects. In order to explore the constitution and deposition of the collection assemblage (Byrne *et al* 2011, Harrison 2013) in London, I trace the context in which the set of museum objects was positioned. The first part of this chapter draws a silhouette of the London curator, Otto Samson. It describes his personal motivations and the visit to an exhibition that triggered the process of the collection's acquisition. The second part explores the context of Romanian exhibitions in Britain prior to the 1957 Horniman Museum show and unpacks the secret of the generosity of the collection-gift. The critical reading of documents, images and displays, allows us to explore the original moment that mobilised Samson's interest, with an attempt to position it within the representational practices and histories of exhibiting Romanian folk art in Britain. It is argued that the collection was constituted within the nexus of specifically post-war exhibition practices and relationships framing things, ideas and people.

### 2.2 Collecting from exhibitions: Otto Samson and the Horniman Museum

Dr Samson, who was really rather fond of children, tended to avoid contact with them and was regarded ... as being a remote and rather an awesome figure, one to be avoided at all costs. They realised that he had a position of great importance and a title to match, but did not always get the title right. One small lad announced the

Doctor's arrival ... 'The Creator's coming'. When I told this Dr Samson, he thought this was quite funny

Tony Gore, the Horniman Museum teacher-in-charge, 1958 – 1965.

This section explores how the Horniman Museum collection is partly a product of the predilections and preferences of Otto Samson, the London curator and the creator of the Horniman Museum's postwar collecting practice. I present the context of his academic background, curatorial practice and passions within which the composition of artefacts can be understood.

Samson's academic career began in the Hamburg's law faculty. His doctorate, 'Max Stirner and the state', on the radical individualist anarchist philosopher, aptly demonstrated Samson's autonomous intellectual tendencies. After his doctoral studies, Samson entered the museum profession through the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology. Under the supervision of Georg Thilenius, Samson's activities were rooted in the German *Volkskunde*, the diffusionist tradition and the monographic activities of the Hamburg's Colonial Institute. Thilenius's team short-term expeditions conducted

extensive rather than intensive research; that is, they were to investigate as many places as possible in the time period available, rather than spending long periods of time in a particular region (Buschmann 2009: 80)

In 1931, Samson set off for his first field expedition to China and collected widely in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Beijing and Taishan and in Shandong and Shaanxi provinces. He acquired a unique composition of objects, showing interest in various aspects of material culture, including ritual objects, folk art and craft artefacts.<sup>6</sup> Samson's broad interests in material culture, technology and museology were demonstrated in a discussion on the representation of China in ethnographic museum (Samson 1945). This critical piece questioned the prevalent institutional interpretations of Chinese art, representing artefacts either as curiosities (or 'oddities') or archaeological specimens. Samson problematised the selectiveness of museum collections and pointed to their

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<sup>6</sup> The collection included, among the others, '*shadow puppets, two large sets of items associated with weddings and funerals and a wide range of artefacts, folk arts and artisans' tools*' (Swallow 1989: 6).



limited representativeness.<sup>7</sup> He proposed that the ethnographic museum should engage in ‘proper ethnography’, by displaying artefacts telling stories about social life, customs and work or focusing on unrepresented regions that too deserved a place in the museum. This short but evocative paper pre-empted his emphasis on collection growth and reaching out to regions that fell outside the museum frame.

Although Samson’s work was anchored in the German academic currents of its time, these collections were not merely instrumental products of such theoretical orientations. As Gingrich observed,

During the 1920s, speculative theorizing by the emerging large schools of cultural morphology and historical diffusionism became so influential that serious professional doubts were raised by many of those who did not support these orientations wholeheartedly. Hamburg anthropologist Thilenius, for instance, complained in a letter to Franz Boas about this “somewhat dense theoretical atmosphere” when recommending his student Günter Wagner— as an alternative— for fieldwork training under Boas’s supervision (Gingrich 2005: 108)

In the context of Thilenius’ scepticism over theoretically-led fieldwork and Samson’s own anarchist academic background and reflexive awareness, his research and museum acquisitions need to be framed as both expressions of individual fieldwork predilections (Shelton 2011) and as a by-product of the anthropology’s museum period rooted in the European ethnographic tradition (Gingrich 2005, Stocking 1985).

In 1933, due to the anti-Semitic political climate in Germany, Samson was dismissed from the museum on the basis of his Jewish origins and, having to flee the Nazi threat, settled in London. He immediately re-entered museum circles through Charles Seligman. Seligman and Morant suggested that Samson retrained in physical anthropology and, consequently, Samson’s first job in England was in a research project on human remains from Sudan, conducted at the University College London’s Galton Laboratory. During this post, he co-authored an article on racial classifications and Franz Boas’ anthropomorphic measurements of Jewish migrants in New York, an ironic project for a Jewish refugee in the 1930s (Barkan 1994: 161).

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<sup>7</sup> Writing about these exhibitions, he argued that they neither ‘*represented China nor Chinese culture in its entirety. One realises that this is not their aim*’. He concluded with a rhetorical question - *Where shall it be represented?*’ (Samson 1945: 67)

In 1935, Samson became a recipient of the Tweedie Fellowship in Edinburgh. Samson's field research in Punjab and Darjeeling resulted in an extensive acquisitifon trip across Tibet, India and Burma. Between 1935 and 1937, he worked in field collecting for the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Burma and Orissa (Shelton 2001: 214). Travelling across India, he acquired miscellaneous material in Upper Burma, investigating Chinese influences in the region. This diffusionist study framed the village as a place of contact and a market location, and constituted a pioneering departure from previous monographs of the area that largely focused on local communities as discrete social units (Swallow 1989: 20). A unique collection of domestic, agricultural and harvesting items,<sup>8</sup> and artefacts relating to local crafts, resulted from this approach.<sup>9</sup>

On returning to London, Samson worked in the British museum's Department of Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography, the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and the Royal Anthropological Institute library. In September 1947, he was appointed as the curator of the Horniman Museum.



**Fig. 2.1** 'Surrey House Museum: Oriental Saloon', 1891 (left) Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

**Fig. 2.2** Opening ceremony in Forest Hill, 1901 (right) Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

The Horniman Museum originated in 1890 when Frederic Horniman, the Victorian tea trader, opened his house-based collection to the public. Following the collector's bequest, in 1901 the Horniman Museum was established in a new location in Forest Hill, becoming a public institution under the administration of the London County Council (hereafter LCC). The first advisory curator, Alfred Haddon, curated the collections in the line of Victorian anthropology (Shelton 2001: 209), resulting in comparative exhibitions presenting stages in the development of material cultures. In the Haddon's period (1902 –

<sup>8</sup> He collected ploughs, yokes, cattle handling bells, ornaments, harnesses, horns, baskets, containers, kitchen tools, ropes, weapons, traps etc.

<sup>9</sup> Items such as rope, hat, cloth and shoemaking, carpentry, basketry, silversmiths' and potters' tools

1905) and those of his successors, H.S. Harrison (the first resident curator, 1904 – 1937) and L.W. G. Malcolm (1937–1947), the museum was curated by natural scientists linked to the Cambridge evolutionary anthropology school, with an intention to create an educational institution focused on the evolution of the animal and plant kingdoms, including ethnography and archaeology of the human race (2001: 211). These anthropologists negotiated popular and scientific notions of culture and race in order to provide ‘education for all’ (Coombes 1994). Within this imperialist framework, ethnographic collections denoted ‘the evolutionary status of different societies and provided a tantalizing glimpse into Western society’s own “prehistoric” past’ (Basu 2013b: 372). This progressivist interpretative framework for ethnographic collections was key to the early twentieth century anthropological project until its post-Malinowskian functionalist turn. According to Basu,

‘the definitive closure of the era of museum anthropology came with the functionalist revolution of Bronisław Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in the 1920s, and its associated emphases on social structure and the method of participant-observation ... Malinowski was keen to distance himself and his new school of social anthropology from what he (1930: 408) characterized as “antiquarian anthropology,” with its institutional base in the museum. He (1935: 460) inveighed against what he regarded as the “purely technical enthusiasm” of the museum ethnologists, dismissing their “fetishistic reverence” for material culture as “scientifically sterile.”’ (2013b: 373)

Despite anthropology’s abandonment of evolutionary paradigm, ‘Haddon and his evolutionary followers’ (Shelton 2003: 183) continued a 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian approach at the Horniman Museum until the Second World War. During the war, the museum was used as a store and finally closed during the bombing of London.

Upon joining in 1947, Otto Samson brought new elements to the practice of the institution, dividing the departments of ethnography and musical instruments (ibid.: 206), encouraging systematic curatorial fieldwork and focusing on material culture and art (ibid.: 210). Known for his encyclopaedic knowledge,<sup>10</sup> Samson developed European collections,<sup>11</sup> pioneered recreational activities in the museum and promoted public

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<sup>10</sup> According to Robin Place, the first museum assistant teacher in the post-war period (1949 – 1952), ‘*Dr Otto Samson was a man of personal charm who could be quite terrifying if crossed. He had an enormously wide knowledge of anthropological material.* In: Horniman Teachers 1949 – 1978, Horniman Museum and Gardens Archives.

<sup>11</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, these personal connections led to acquisitions from Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, France, Scandinavia, Switzerland,

accessibility. Importantly, under Samson's directorship between the late 1940s and 1965, the Horniman Museum established a number of institutional networks and personal contacts with museums across Europe and overseas.<sup>12</sup>

Samson transformed himself from a fieldwork-based collector in the 1930s, into a museum ethnographer, making acquisitions on the basis of personal interests motivated by exhibition visits. Samson's passion for museums, personal taste and anthropological knowledge was mirrored in a collecting practice inspired by exhibitions rather than fieldwork. This passionate interest is well illustrated by Samson's own impressions, such as one from a walk around the State Ethnographical Museum in Amsterdam during the 1956 International Council of Museums (ICOM) Conference:

[T]here is a rich and interesting collection which proved so fascinating that we overstayed our allotted time, so we were told by a busload of irate colleagues, waiting, unknown to us, outside (Samson 1956: 148).

Samson's directorship over the Horniman Museum was a unique phenomenon within the British museum practice of the time. This injection of European ethnology, fieldwork dynamism and collection growth significantly transformed the institution and its international reputation. As Shelton suggested,

his influence on the Horniman, despite sometimes tense relations with its governing body, was enormous; again reorienting and revitalising its established networks and its sources of acquisition, to say nothing of its focus, which now turned away from evolution to material culture to art (Shelton 2001: 213).

This refocusing of the material was also evident in the physical arrangement of the museum artifacts. Below are examples of Horniman Museum displays under Samson's curatorship from 1956, directly before the Romanian exhibition. These museum cases illustrate a curatorial interest in domestic tools and crafts, abandoning the paradigm of evolutionist typologies.

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Czechoslovakia, Holland, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Yugoslavia (Swallow 1989).

<sup>12</sup> By the 1950s, Samson had already established links with the Department of the University of Zurich (1951), Museum fur Volkeskunde in Basle (1953), National Folk Art Museum in Bucharest (1954), Polish Cultural Institute in London (1956), Musee de l'Homme in Paris (1968) (Shelton 2001: 214).



**Fig. 2.3** The loom and textile-making tools, 1956 (right). Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.



**Fig. 2.4** Pottery display in 1956, Horniman Museum (left). Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

As Shelton suggested, Samson's work was characterised by a unique ability to reorient institutional networks and generate acquisition opportunities. In the 1950s, for example, following the exhibition visits at the Commonwealth Institute and Polish Cultural Institute, Samson initiated various institutional connections. He made acquisitions of masks from Switzerland (1953) and Cyprus (1959) and created a collection of Polish material through diplomatic networks. The Romanian collection was an outcome of a similar interest derived from a museum visit, followed up through the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (hereafter IRRCS). In the introduction to the 'Folk Art in Romania' exhibition catalogue, we read about Samson's original interest in Romanian material culture:

A colourful exhibition of Rumanian<sup>13</sup> Folk Art was held in London in 1954. At the time there was no possibility of obtaining any specimens there displayed for the Museum, as this was a travelling exhibition. However, the request for specimens was not forgotten, and in 1955 an invitation came from the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries for me to visit their country to see the museums there and to see the folk-art in its own setting. In the Museum of Folk Art in Bucharest an interesting collection of material had already been assembled for presentation to the Horniman Museum (Samson 1957: 2).

The Romanian folk art collection was unique in terms of size, content and value, becoming a turning point within the context on the museum's focus on regional specificity and celebration of craftsmanship of a European country, generally neglected by the West (Rodriguez 2001: 93). Samson, aware of the significance of this material, included suggestions for the acquisition according to his own curatorial interest. In the catalogue, we read that he was "invited to indicate lacunae in this collection and suggest additions" (Samson 1957: 2).

I hope that this short context of Samson's biography and museum practice demonstrated the significant impact of the individual curator on the patterns of museum acquisition and collection growth. In this light, the 1957 Romanian collection has to be understood, to some extent, as an outcome of the curator's personal curatorial interests as well as the interpretative frameworks and wider relations in which Samson operated.

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<sup>13</sup> In the 1950s sources „Romania” was usually spelled „Rumania”, at times appearing as “Roumania”. The author uses spelling as it appeared in the original form. It is interesting to note that spelling had a political connotation. Whereas “Romania” implied connections with Rome (and therefore, the West), “Rumania” linked the country to Byzantium (the East) (see: Wixman 1988: 167, White 2000:124).



**Fig. 2.5** The “Folk Art in Rumania” exhibition opening held on 2nd May 1957. Otto Samson (right) with the representatives of the LCC and the Romanian legation (left).

### **2.3 The collection as cultural diplomacy: Romanian folk art displays in the 1950s**

Otto Samson’s interest was only part of the story in the nexus of persons, institutions and events that led to the construction of this set of museum objects. The following section explores the scene of the collection-making process (O’Hanlon 2000: 8), counterbalancing the individual focus by a stress on the wider relationships that made this collection possible.

In a photograph taken during the opening of the Horniman Museum ‘Folk Art in Rumania’ exhibition, we can see three men on a bench; Otto Samson and the representatives of the LCC and the Romanian diplomatic mission. They are shown in a semi-relaxed conversation, surrounded by artefacts representing a cottage interior. These institutional actors seem to occupy the staged, rural setting at ease, in an almost theatrical pose. The photograph expresses an ambivalent intersection between the rural and the

elitist, the vernacular and the institutional. The image shows the main agents in the network facilitating the donation of the collection – the Romanian and British authorities and the curator of the Horniman Museum. It represents a moment of opening and captures an event embedded within the process of intersecting histories of contacts. I will now consider the historical setting in which such interactions took place.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Iron Curtain, as Winston Churchill called it in 1946, descended across the continent. In 1947, when Otto Samson became the curator of the Horniman Museum, Romania was in the aftermath of Soviet occupation, in the midst of events that entirely transformed the country. Under the new regime, the country turned eastwards culturally and politically. (Deletant 2000: 8, also see: Ionescu-Gura 2005, Tismaneanu 2003, Vasile 2011)

The newly installed socialist government meant that the state joined the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain and engaged in a Cold War with the West with a cultural aspect. The Romanian socialist state engaged in various activities of delegitimising ‘anti-Soviet propaganda’, withdrawing Western publications from circulation, organising purges on pro-Western intellectuals, reforming the higher education system in the spirit of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and introducing Russian as a compulsory language in secondary schooling, amongst others. In 1948 the Communist Party abolished the structures of the pre-war Romanian Academy, expelled or prosecuted ‘bourgeois’ professors, banned books and started extensive control of publishing activities.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1950, it was decided that all western cultural institutes, defined as ‘information offices’ and ‘sites of propaganda’ would be closed, followed by arrests of their attendants (Deletant 2000). During the Cold War, contacts between London and Bucharest shifted in their form and political context. Romanian-organised International events and related cultural diplomacy were run by the Institute for Universal Culture, from 1951 transformed into the IRRCS<sup>14</sup> under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Cultural policy and foreign relations became part of the centralised planned economy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (IRRCS) was modelled on the Soviet institution VOKS (All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries).

<sup>15</sup> Recent research suggested that in this setting, “each cultural project and invitation of Western intellectuals and scientists had to be approved beforehand by the party leadership. In the same way the economy was planned, cultural relations with the foreign countries were also coordinated” (Vasile 2009: 137).



Becoming a tool in political propaganda, IRRCS activities followed the Soviet agenda, dividing its activities into separate actions targeting socialist and capitalist states. Between 1949 and 1956, the IRRCS forged partnerships with 58 countries, both from the socialist and capitalist world (*tari capitaliste*). As institutions in Romania promoted “intense cultural contacts with Western “progressive”, communist-oriented intellectuals” (Vasile 2009: 138), a number of pro-socialist friendship societies emerged in support of cultural and political links with various countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The IRRCS has organised its cultural and scientific actions through a vast network of satellite associations; developing organisations in 44 countries in 1954.<sup>16</sup> All IRRCS operations were divided into language-based subsections: English, German, Spanish, French etc., with subunits related to the type of cultural programme.

Exhibitions were part of the ‘visual propaganda’ actions (*propaganda vizuala*) and formed a significant part of the agenda.<sup>17</sup> Other tasks of the Institute included the coordination and organisation of the traffic of guests between the countries, creation and dissemination of visual and written material for the friendship societies (photography files, policy information, press, brochures, socialist literature) and ‘cultural actions’ at home and organisation of international visits. The Institute also carefully managed the exchanges of ‘men of science and culture’ visiting the country. For instance, Romanian guests paying a visit to a Western country had separate files in the IRRCS with their résumé indicating their political stance and family history. Each journey abroad had to have written permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>18</sup>

The IRRCS coordinated cultural diplomacy on British soil through the partnership with the British Rumanian Friendship Association (hereafter BRFA). In 1950, following the first visit to Bucharest commemorating the anniversary of the Great October Socialist

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<sup>16</sup> The list represents the vast extent of activities and networks: USRR, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, China, Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Great Britain, USA, Iceland, Canada, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, Japan, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Bolivia, Madagascar and Australia.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in the annual report of 1955 in the *capitalist countries*, there are five spheres of the Institute’s activity related to visual propaganda which took the form of an art exhibition in France, a folk art exhibition in Denmark, a theatre exhibition in Luxembourg, a book exhibition in England and a philatelist exhibition in Austria and Argentina.

<sup>18</sup> Rejections were frequent and politically motivated, for example in the 1954 reports found a case of rejection of a medical doctor planning to go on a conference. The rationale was based on his bourgeois family member.

Revolution, Glynn Evans, the secretary of the BRFA, wrote to the Institute of Universal Culture in Bucharest:

I echo your remarks regarding closer cooperation and we can only pledge ourselves to do our utmost to cement that friendship between our two peoples and strengthen our fight to maintain peace in the world confident in the fact that the leadership in the struggle for peace is in the hands of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

According to the annual report of the BRFA, in 1954 the organisation admitted over 600 members with around 450 in London. Established in 1948, it cooperated with the Daily Worker magazine and had its own publication, the BRFA bulletin. Examining the contents of the bulletins from the 1950s, they emerged as propaganda tools, focusing on the social revolution in Romania, development of the country's Five-Year Plan, *Stakhanovism*<sup>20</sup> among Romanian workers and presenting reports on members' 'eye-opening' visits to the Romanian People's Republic.

The association strived to popularise the achievements of the Romanian state,<sup>21</sup> foster peaceful cooperation between nations and fight the hostility towards the People's Republic through activism and the recruitment of new members. In the 1955 IRRCS "Report on the Activities of the BRFA", written for the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is stated that the association was based on the members and affiliates of the British Communist Party or the trade unions. In the same year, the organisation established a committee for the organisation of cultural events. With frozen diplomatic relations, the exchange networks between Britain and Romania became possible exclusively through the combination of satellite organisations in the Western world. Heritage and cultural activities were managed, produced and circulated within the new political economy of 'peaceful exchanges'.

The opening of the 1957 Rumanian Folk Art exhibition has to be understood in the context of the isolationist climate of early 1950s. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the image in **Fig. 2.5** acts as a visual document of the encounters between the competing dream worlds, separated by the Iron Curtain (Buck-Morss 2000, Romijn, Scott-Smith and Segal 2012). This photograph was taken in the period when contacts between the East and

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<sup>19</sup> Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale [hereinafter ANIC], Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 342/1950, doc. 310.

<sup>20</sup> Named after the Soviet miner, Stakhanov, it was a system of industrial shock-work, emphasising over-achievement in the factory and output beyond production norms.

<sup>21</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 338/41.

West were limited to elites and ‘cultural exchanges’, sustaining the peaceful coexistence of conflicting worlds. The next part aims at providing a glimpse on the genealogy of these operations in the early 1950s, as well as the historically contingent relations that made the Horniman Museum encounter of the 1957 collection and exhibition possible.

### **2.3.1 First contact: folk art bazaars**

Since the establishment of the BRFA, heritage and folk artefacts were used to seal new relationships. The IRRCS sent folk art alongside propaganda material as foreign gifts for festivities and bazaars organised for the members of the friends’ associations. Material from rural Romania was initially presented alongside industrially produced artefacts. Bazaar inventories consisted of idiosyncratic combinations of objects. For example, in 1952 there were 37 items sent, including a set of traditional carpets, ceramic objects and baskets, alongside cigarette boxes, national flags, paper knives, calendars, smoking sets and drawings with socialist iconography and national symbols. The BRFA also organised a number of displays in members’ houses and short-term exhibitions in its headquarters in London.

The growing interest in heritage artefacts was soon noted by the IRRCS and, slowly, boxes sent to BRFA were filled with more typological collections: embroideries, costumes, folk art<sup>22</sup> or ‘craft-folk-art’ objects. In the report from 1952-1953<sup>23</sup>, there is a mention of three cases of ‘craft-folk-art’ material received from Bucharest’ presented at the Secretary’s house for friends and neighbours. Another IRRCS loan, a set of embroideries and dolls, was shown in a house in Croydon and on two-day shows at the Blind Headquarters, the Indian Mejlis Mela organisation hall and at a Daily Worker’s bazaar. There were also numerous ad hoc display events in meeting halls and the households of organisation members in London, Leeds and Newcastle. Yet in most cases, they were dispatched to Britain to celebrate state occasions<sup>24</sup> and BRFA community events.

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<sup>22</sup> The first mention of ‘folk artefact’ exchange between the organisations was included in a letter from January 1953, from Mihail Macavei, (IRRCS director) to the BRFA:

we would like to know if we can send you Rumanian popular art things for bazaars and if it was possible for you to open an exhibition in London or in other city this year.

<sup>23</sup> ANIC Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 345.

<sup>24</sup> The largest collections were sent for the Liberation Day (23 August 1944, commemorating the entry of Red Army) and the proclamation of Romania People’s Republic (30 December 1947).



**Fig. 2.6** Socialist historiography and ritual time – Romanian commemorations in the BRFA bulletin

**Fig. 2.7** The importance of delegations of ‘men of science and culture’ – exchanges of British intellectuals, scientists, artists, politicians and presentation of their changing perceptions on Romania during public events, BRFA bulletin, 1951 (right)

Building an activist community in Britain by celebrating Soviet commemorations and international visits were important emphases of the IRRCS’ propaganda. For example, 23 August and 30 December were pivotal occasions for the Romanian People’s Republic’s state building rituals, staged as mass events in the country and exported to several friendship societies. These events served as markers of the successful process of the new society in the making. Those BRFA members who attended these celebrations in Bucharest were to report back to the BRFA as *peace delegates* to share the discovery of the realities of the other side of the Iron Curtain.

The socialist celebrations generated a cycle of events for a new community. As Lane suggested, Soviet rituals deployed a range of symbolic devices, including “objects, activities, body movements, persons, relationships, events, spatial units, words and sounds” (Lane 1981: 192). In the London context, exporting the fragments of a new ritual temporality to the other side of the Iron Curtain was mediated through exhibitions and bazaars. The combinations of artefacts, were considered representative of ‘the people’, illustrating the communalist theme and the new vision of society. In this field of reference,

Hammer and Sickle, Tricolour Banner, peasant blouse or pot, illustrated several ‘aspects of the Romanian People’s Republic’.<sup>25</sup>

Material culture displayed in bazaars was a showcase of socialist Romania, objects of ‘craft-folk-arts’ serving as collective signs with a connection to significant socialist historical events and the labouring masses. The rhythm of socialist temporality constructed a new frame of reference and alliances between objects, integrating the sets in the context of material manifestations of this successful history. In the next section, I will trace the changing frame of reference concerning folk art in the 1952 exhibition, in order to illustrate how objects were exported to make claims about the Romanian history and modernity.

### **2.3.2 A new world in the making**

The first major exhibition organised by the BRFA and IRRCS was entitled ‘Rumanian Exhibition. Achievements of the Rumanian People’s Republic’ and took place in 1952 in London and Leeds.<sup>26</sup> It was part of the wider exhibition-making activities of the Institute and a series of displays on the diplomatic agenda to popularise the “realisations of the Romanian People’s Republic in the capitalist countries”. That year, IRRCS adopted a “new method of propaganda” by setting “vitrines of photomontage with folk art objects” and “organising documentary, art and folk art exhibitions”.<sup>27</sup> The main theme of the exhibitions was the Five-Year-Plan and the process of building socialism with folk artefacts illustrating the modernisation projects.

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<sup>25</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 67.

<sup>26</sup> It took place between 29<sup>th</sup> December and 19<sup>th</sup> January 1952 in R. W. S. Galleries, 26 Conduit Street in London and then moved to Leeds. The travelling show, exhibited in Leeds in February 1952, followed directly an exhibition of folk art in Stockholm that took place between 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> November that year (ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 1, file no. 15), exemplifying a unified ‘visual propaganda’ strategy of the Institute.

<sup>27</sup> In the Annual Plan for the Propaganda Section we read that the main aims of the department was setting up new Friendship Associations, exhibitions and intensifying the activities of the existing groups (ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 7 pp. 35). That year, there was series of ten exhibitions located in Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Holland, Italy and Sweden (ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 15 pp. 365). At the same time, fifteen ‘capitalist countries’ received sets of artefacts for the bazaars of 23<sup>rd</sup> of August and 30<sup>th</sup> December.



Fig. 2.8 A poster of the 1952 Exhibition in the BRFA bulletin

For a visitor to the 1952 exhibition, the first panel to be seen would have been an image of political figures<sup>28</sup> with the following inscription: “The Rumanian People’s Republic is the fatherland of all who work by hand and brain”. The show proceeded with a panel entitled: “The Past Full of Misery”, that laid out the conditions of life under the ‘bourgeois-feudal regime’ and a short history of the pre-war struggle against class exploitation, using examples of mining and railway workers’ strikes. The historical framework for the show was initiated by the events of the Soviet entry into Romania (23 August 1944) represented as liberation from fascism. The historical thread continued through the installation of the Romanian People’s Republic and the successful removal of “the monarchy, the pillar of the exploiting classes and of imperialism”. The overthrow of the king was represented as a dawn of the new Romania.

The new era of planned economy was illustrated through panels on nationalisation, electrification, the collectivisation of agriculture, the construction of the Danube Black Sea Canal and the ‘Soviet help’ in the setting up of Sovroms, the Romanian-Soviet enterprises. This panel was illustrated by an example of Sovromtractor and Stakhanovite

<sup>28</sup> Petru Groza, the prime minister and C. I. Parhon, the President of the National Assembly.

factory workers. As the new era continued, the visitor would move through a set of displays representing new social services and cultural development of the socialist state, including education, medical care, worker holiday schemes, the development of the cinema industry, sports and the rise of living standards. A separate panel on the cultural revolution and peace was accompanied by images of workers signing appeals against American imperialist aggression in Korea.



**Fig. 2.9** The 1952 exhibition panel, quoting the prime minister Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej:

For the first time in history, following the historic victory of world importance won by the Soviet Union in the Second World War, the Rumanian People obtained its freedom and became the master of its destiny. The sentiment of deep gratitude towards our great liberator – the Soviet Union – permeated the conscience of every Rumanian patriot.

The state plan was scientifically proven. The exhibition was abundant in visual evidence of development, displaying graphics, statistics, architectural sketches and construction plans and photographs of masses working and building socialism. In the Stalinist visual framework, the temporality of Five-Year Plans, Buck-Morss (2000) noted, was one of acceleration: it was a race against time in order to catch up and overtake the West. The Stalinist, modern future was represented by a series of prognoses on the realisation of the plan in 1955 (**Fig. 2.11** and **Fig. 2.12**). The ‘Electrification’ panel epitomised the future-oriented framework:



The plan for the electrification and the utilisation of the water resources will lead to the great prosperity of the Romanian People's Republic. It is therefore the cause of the working class, the cause of the men of science and the progressive intelligentsia, the cause of all who love this country.



**Fig. 2.10** Exhibition panel on Cultural Revolution exemplifying the development of cultural activities in the country: houses of culture, libraries, artistic teams, dances, theatres and choirs.



**Fig. 2.11** Statistical prognosis of the success of the state planned economy, BRFA bulletin (left)



**Fig. 2.12** Peasants in a traditional interior enjoying the benefits of electrification, BRFA bulletin (right)



The panel represented the scientific credentials of this forthcoming success:

By the end of 1955 the installed electric power will be 1.700.000 kW. In 1955, the consumption of electric energy will increase by 200% per inhabitant. By the end of 1955, the total production in the electrotechnical industry will increase by 385% compared to 1950.

Let us take an imaginary walk in the exhibition space with the BRFA reviewer:

The rest of the exhibition, which consists of examples of peasant folk art, attractively shown in glass-covered cases, is the most colourful section of the whole show. Here we can see the wonderful national costumes, the richly embroidered blouses and woven skirts, the decorated leather belts and sheepskin jerkins, and the colourful aprons, which are still worn today in Rumanian villages. These and the decorated pottery in traditional designs and the examples of woodcarving are examples of what is rightly claimed to be the richest folk tradition in Europe. This popular art is immensely alive and it rounds off the whole exhibition in a way which clearly shows that the Rumanian people have a tradition of culture which they have preserved through years of oppression and which now, in the new inspiring conditions of Socialism, will continue its development into the future (Carpenter 1952:4).

As illustrated in the above description, visitors were presented with the modernity and the future of the Romanian state before moving on to the folk art section. In this spatial arrangement, folk art acted in harmony with modernity, as an emblem of people's creativity present throughout history and in the progressive People's Republic. In this unitary narrative, the rural artefacts were representative of both the peasantry exploited by feudalism (old era) and the emancipated peasant-workers enjoying the new material world.



**Fig. 2.13** Wooden stands with images of 'peasant workers', 1952 (right)

**Fig. 2.14** Peasant costumes display in 1952. In comparison to the previous section of the exhibition, the folk art space had little text (left)

### 2.3.3 Too few things, too much future - reading the visitor book

The 1952 display was a showcase of the way Romania wanted itself to be seen, premised on the concept of socialist progress in the Stalinist spirit. This mass ‘cultural action’ was an opportunity to demonstrate the development of the Five Year Plan and was intended to act as ‘visual propaganda’.

In a report on the London and Leeds exhibitions by the president of the BRFA, it was pointed out that there was general agreement that the exhibitions were well arranged and designed and, as one visitor pointed out, constituted a revealing “pleasure to look behind the Iron Curtain”. Visitors’ responses were recorded in the comments’ book and included in a self-critical review by the British Romanian Friendship Association sent to IRRCS headquarters in Bucharest.<sup>29</sup>

Studying comments’ books as archival records poses limitations regarding representativeness (Reid 2008). Archival materials on public responses cannot by any means, be seen as a representative reflection of viewers’ opinions, neither can one assess their sincerity, examine what type of visitors wrote them or how they engaged with the artefacts on display. The evidence given by the visitors’ comments tells a fragmented story of public response, including agendas, visit motivations, or the particularities of the exhibition’s effect on specific categories of viewers. At the same time, this limited resource can offer insights concerning public perceptions of the opposite side of the Iron Curtain, showing the contrast between the intentions of the exhibition makers and the visitors’ interpretations. Tracking the visitors’ attitudes, we can evaluate the exhibition’s impact and “success” in conveying the intended message.

While several viewers wrote that the displays were attractive and aesthetic, there were numerous negative comments about the lack of information on the historical context of Romania prior to 1944. The London audience recognised the lack of contextualisation beyond the unitary theme as a pivotal drawback of the exhibition. It was emphasised that the exhibition represented an example of “crude propaganda in faulty English” carrying “meagre” content. Visitors noted that incorrectly written captions made the photographs appear absurd. One example was an image with children enjoying state-sponsored summer

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<sup>29</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 338, pp.198-202.

camps described as: “children are sent to the colonies”. However, most critics expressed concerns that there were too few artefacts on display. There were several comments about insufficient material and:

“Too little of the products of Rumania shown – just a few vases, a few dresses (costumes), a little folk art. There should have been more of the lovely embroidery work, and there should have been displayed products such as the food, wine, tobacco, musical instruments – something shown about the road and rail transport. Of the actual display there was no indication what district the vases, dresses, carpets came from and what district the costumes are worn.”

Typically, the visitor felt a need for more craft objects on display but also looked for more detailed information about the local specificity of the material presented. Another visitor stated: “Show us more next time” as this was “a fine exhibition but too simple, too many photos and not enough things like the beautiful carpets”. This common sentiment about the scarcity of artefacts was often related to the problem of the progressive theme framing the exhibition:

“The growth should have been shown not only by photographs but real things. Even if only a sculpture or painting by the moderns, more craft work and folk art. A few musical instruments, a model of the diesel or other engines now being made in Rumania, even if some ball bearings on a tray. These things are being produced now for the first time. This could then be stressed.”

The concern for and need for more ‘real things’ was emphasised in the BRFA report sent to Bucharest:

“The criticism made above, I agree with to a large extent, especially that there is not enough things and the contrast between the past and the present. The statistics show too much of the future. Rumania can show enough of what it has achieved in the very short period the Republic has been in being.”

In this context, viewers’ comments alongside the BRFA report carried a strong critical message for the exhibition designers in Bucharest. These negative evaluations demonstrated that the exhibition provoked strong reactions and constituted a site of friction. Visitors’ feedback subverted the storyline of the exhibition, revealing how the show performed outside its intended representation of socialism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013: 168).

The lack of propaganda ‘success’ and Western criticism were only a part of the problems faced by the 1952 exhibition organisers. Another more tangible concern was the

lack of permission to exhibit. For example, despite several attempts to show the exhibition in Manchester and Liverpool, the BRFA did not manage to secure space for displays. Similarly, in Italy an exhibition was closed down because of its politically radical character.

Public opinion was a key site of the Cold War's cultural front. In the context of the public reception, the exhibition became a contested site of the Cold War 'others', illustrating the Western reactions on the projections of utopian socialist modernity. It was pointed out that the Cold War was a struggle of representations (Crowley and Pavitt 2008) and

a confrontation, but also a negotiation and accommodation between competing images of modernity and the good life, which were propagated by the 'two camps' of socialism and capitalism. (Reid 2010: 4).

Modernity imagined by this exhibition was linked to the temporal scale of history-as-progress (Buck-Morss 2000). The viewers' responses revealed that it was not a convincing frame for the London public who misread the educational purpose and looked for real things, stating that 'statistics show too much of the future'. Somehow, the vanguard socialist temporality, displayed in panels with numerous spelling mistakes, became a caricature of itself outside its ideological context, leaving the public to focus on the section containing 'traditional artefacts'.

Studying visitors was part of standard practice in the Soviet context, in order to improve the effectiveness of propaganda efforts (Reid 2010: 40). The voices collected for the visitor book revealed both the lack of agreement with what was seen as propaganda and British expectations of what an exhibition should be of and look like. As these visitors' reactions were collected and reported back to Bucharest, the misreading of the exhibition became apparent to the IRRCS and informed the constructions of the following shows, affecting their spatial arrangement, installation within specific settings, selection of artefacts and display scenarios.

By focusing on the different curatorial strategies of the 1954 exhibition, my next section reveals the dynamism and performativity of the folk art displays in Britain. Through the comparison of the 1952 and 1954 exhibitions, I will illustrate how folk art

material was reimagined in the continuing struggle of Romanian self-representations in 1950s Britain.

### 2.3.4 Modern folk art

As noted previously, walking through the rooms of the exhibition organised by the IRRCS and BRFA in 1954 triggered Otto Samson's interest and consequently led to the acquisition of the Romanian folk art collection for the Horniman Museum. Let us follow Otto Samson's steps in the space by revisiting the IRRCS's archival documentation. We start by looking at the opening panel, accompanied by images of rural and industrial workers and images of political leaders.<sup>30</sup>

“In the Rumanian People's Republic the treasures of popular art are turned into account on an unprecedented scale thanks to the support granted by the State of People's Democracy. Continuing the tradition handed down from generation to generation, the popular men of art continuously enrich the artistic creation of the people.”

Looking through the display plans and photographs, just as in 1952, there was a strong emphasis on the presentation of socialist modernity.<sup>31</sup> New to the 1954 show, compared with 1952, was a template presenting these modernising technologies as beneficial for the peasantry and workers, such as panels emphasising the ‘material plenty’ of the socialist state. A further modification was bringing into context historical elements, including the unique creative legacy of peasantry and the richness of pre-socialist material culture and rural craftsmanship. For example, Otto Samson could admire the “Appreciation of Popular Art” panel that demonstrated the state's efforts in promoting folk art and ‘people's culture’ by building museums, houses of culture and state cooperatives for the production of folk art. He could be interested in the costumes on display, divided by ethnographic areas (*zone etnografice*) and emphasising the aesthetic qualities of the objects. The exhibition cases with traditional clothing were accompanied by lively images of dance ensembles and “grand artistic mass manifestations”.

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<sup>30</sup> Petru Groza, the head of the Romanian Workers Party, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the prime minister.

<sup>31</sup> The 1954 Exhibition displayed the mechanisation of agriculture through emphasis on productivity in a panel entitled ‘Plenty’. The success of the socialist model was illustrated by sections on ‘Rising Living Standards’ exemplified by electrification of the countryside, rational redistribution of goods and provision of social and medical services.



**Fig. 2.15** Romanian fabrics with images of the phases of textile production, 1954 exhibition, London (left)

**Fig. 2.16** Displays of peasant dress, London 1954(right)



**Fig. 2.17** Agricultural tools shown alongside photographs of modern farming technologies, London 1954 (left)

**Fig. 2.18** Glass cases representing the main centres of Romanian folk pottery, London 1954 (right)

Walking to the next part of the exhibition he would be presented with the ‘artistic aspect’ of peasant vernacular architecture. The panel stated:

“The elements of architecture and decoration utilised in building a peasant’s house attest to the richness and variety of the artistic forms created by popular masters in wood, brick and stone.”

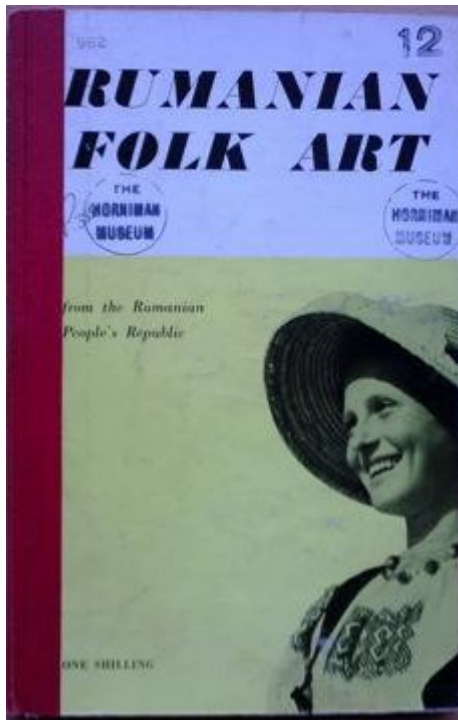
He would perhaps admire the photographs of traditional architectonic detail such as carved gates and cottage interiors. One such image showed a room from Viştea de Sus, a village key to the Horniman Museum collection. Throughout the exhibition, built heritage was represented by displays of historical architecture, described as carrying “harmonious proportions and beautiful details that attest to the mastery of the popular builders, creators of these artistic values”. Historical buildings, including churches and monasteries of the Bucovina region, were framed as architectural treasures and presented as inspiration for

new designs. Demonstrating this correspondence of forms, the visitor was presented with plans of emblematic projects of Socialist Neo-classicism and constructivism, with peak realisations in the form of the 1950s socialist realist Spark House, the opera building in Bucharest or the Romanian pavilion at the Moscow Exhibition of Architecture. The last parts of the exhibition featured pottery and woodcraft. Craft production was explored by highlighting the progressive framework where “ornamental patterns ... made by craftsmen cooperatives and of the works of plastic artists draw their inspiration of the priceless art of the people”. The final panel presented a message of peace delivered by the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

From this reconstructed visit to the exhibition, it is interesting to explore the differences between the 1952 and 1954 exhibitions. Although the emphasis was still placed on the modernisation project, the propaganda of Romanian progress was reduced to four panels, a significant limitation in comparison to the 1952 show. Responding to previous concerns, there were more things on display. Rather than illustrating the future of the country through traditional artefacts, folk art was presented as a separate category. Firstly, it was arranged typologically, dividing the artefacts into costume, architecture, ceramics and woodcraft and presenting regional variations of forms and decoration. Secondly, the display acknowledged the regional diversity of material expressions with labels indicating the provenance of the objects and ethnographic areas represented. The information provided offered greater detail and displays emphasised master craftsmanship, the creativity of ‘the popular men of art’ and the aesthetic values of artefacts.

In contrast to the 1952 exhibition rejecting the feudal past, the 1954 show exemplified an extended historical perspective, visually acknowledging the pre-war past and material culture as valuable and relevant to the understanding of contemporary Romania. The incorporation of history through the manifestations of the past (including religious artefacts) marked a significant shift in the IRRCS’s propaganda and exhibition-making practices. In contrast to the 1952 exhibition, with its defined historical starting point of liberation by the Red Army in 1944, in the 1954 exhibition we get a sense of pre-socialist prehistory and heritage as privileged sites of inspiration for modernity. By including these materialities, the interpretation emphasised harmony, continuity and support for creativity, painting a self-portrait of the progressive state as the inclusive patron of all folk art. In 1954, the template shifted from the former triumphalist view of

the People's Republic to a presentation of the material culture created by the popular men of arts. The sub-narrative of modernity was displayed through new themes of quality of life and socialist consumerism ('Plenty' and 'Rising Living Standards' panels) foreshadowing broader rhetoric of the de-Stalinisation period with the Khrushchev-era visions of universal abundance and comfort (Crowley and Reid 2000: 12).



**Fig. 2.19** Cover page of the exhibition catalogue, 1954 (left)



**Fig. 2.20** Images of interiors, exhibition catalogue, 1954 (right)

This holistic composition of old and new was embedded in longer traditions of Romanian representational practices. Popescu (2010) demonstrated the Romanian drive to become modern had been embedded in a longer trope with roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural policy and state-building practices. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian modernity under construction was a 'polymorphous concept' on the country's cultural map (Popescu 2010: 12), a joined territory combining drives toward westernisation and strong relationship with national tradition and 'the Romanian soul'.

This double-sided discourse was driving intellectual debates of the period and penetrating different spheres of cultural production including architecture, literature, fine art and exhibition design. The overlapping ideas of 'national identity', 'rural tradition' and 'modern living' were exemplified by museum-making practices. The material culture of



the Romanian ‘rural civilization’ became core to the emblematic national museum in Bucharest (Demetrescu 2010, Badica and Nicolescu 2007) and was exported abroad through the Romanian pavilions for World Fairs in the 1920s and 1930s (Demetrescu 2010: 162). Romania’s participation in the international exhibitions has been, since 1867, an occasion to represent these faces of modernity,

progress, which they promoted by means of the most advanced experiments and tradition, often in pastiche form, reduced to décor capable of throwing into sharper relief the discourse of modernity (Popescu 2011: 160).

When, in 1947, the country turned to the Soviet east, its modern project was pushed in the socialist direction, accelerating in a Stalinist spirit. Even though this political imagery announced a radical break with the past, even in the 1950s fragments of ‘traditional-modern-national’ frameworks of modernity started to resurface and be used for export in the form of ‘visual propaganda’ exhibitions. In 1954, against the grain of Marxist historiography, there is a strong return of the narrative of interrelated temporalities, where authentic, specifically Romanian traditions and innovations benefit the nation ... or, in the 1950s the working people. The 1954 exhibition carried a fragment of that trope, combining international spheres of modernisation (here, in the Stalinist frame) with the representational tradition of the interwar. The 1954 exhibition was a manifestation of recycled ideas and undercurrent continuities within the vanguard socialist state cultural policy.

At the same time, the 1954 exhibition embodied a specifically post-war figure of materiality. In the conditions of building socialism, the idiom of ‘peasant creativity’ was appropriated by the state. Folk art traditions and craftsmanship became “a national question for the socialist Romanian society” (Horşia and Petrescu 1972: 69). As we read in the 1954 exhibition catalogue, creative peasant workers

are people of prestige now, and their arts are honoured, as they never were before. The tenacious conservatism of the past is being transformed into a flood of new folk creation and experiment, with new forms being born, and old taking on new content (Folk Art in Rumania 1956: 7).

The state encouraged current craft practice and secured its future by creating new means of production – a centrally run system of craft cooperatives to salvage this cultural activity:

The making of peasant clothes was declining fast. At present, however, thanks in part to the formation of village garment – making cooperatives in the Rumanian People’s Republic, there has been a considerable revival in the use of traditional costume styles, and in the creation of new decorative patterns. (ibid.: 11).

Folk art was increasingly mediated by the state, overlooked by experts, turning it into a hybrid between tradition and modernity. In this context, the progressive state was to transform folk art into design. Design was one of the most significant aspects of the Cold War rhetoric, carrying ideological visions and manifesting materialised modernity on both sides of the Curtain. (Crowley and Pavitt 2008: 14). In the 1954 exhibition context, design served as a link between temporalities, mediating between the past and the coming socialist future and allowing ‘catching up with the West’ in harmony with Romania’s national historical legacy. The discourse of scientific design allowed the modern building to be linked to historical wooden sacral architecture. For example, one of the panels in the 1954 exhibition provides the following caption:

“The new architecture of the Romanian People’s Republic, which draws its inspiration from the treasures of the national architecture, is achieving buildings designed to cope with the ever growing and living demands of the working people.”

In a similar harmony, we read from the exhibition panels, the craftsmen employed by state cooperatives could draw from peasant folk creativity. The state was a master designer and a specialist overlooking the process and enabling the makers to embrace the new notion of creativity, using traditional design prototypes with new machinery.

As the BRFA engaged with the British public attending the 1952 exhibition, interpretative themes were made and remade in the act of international encounter, leading to modification of the means of conveying their message. The 1954 exhibition, compared to the 1952 show, demonstrated a shift in the curatorial practice of the IRRCS, actively responding to unexpected readings of the British public and proposing a modified visual rendering of history and materiality. It was a testing ground for exchanging ideas and forms of representation, echoing a particular moment in the Cold War’s visual history. At the same time, the 1952 and 1954 exhibitions were acts of propaganda with a strong Soviet imprint. They were modelled on similar practices of exhibition making across the Soviet Union and its satellites, with the typical rendering of temporality (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006: 356).

Analysing the 1949 Stalin Birthday Gifts Exhibition, Ssorin-Chaikov showed how exhibitions projected a particular “teleology of socialism, which reads the present from the point of view of the future.” (2006: 358). This notion of Stalinist timelessness is useful in understanding the 1954 exhibition and its incorporation of historical content. In this light, the inclusion of a new repertoire of objects, historical artefacts and sites could be interpreted as reinforcing the idiom of the timeless modernity of the socialist state and the models of life and materiality it had set out to promote. It was a totalising vision, a temporal framework of past and present harmonised for its imagery in creating a socialist future for all people. All types of material culture, all elements of history could be incorporated in this narrative of “time that eclipses present into its historical end” (2006: 371), in the 1954 display with folk art and modern objects side by side.

In the 1954 exhibition this holistic message was intended at those who, if convinced by this vision, could pass it to other sections of society. The exhibition was an opportunity to showcase the potential of the socialist gift of modernity (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013: 183) for the Western elites. This strategy had been inspired by the model Soviet institution of cultural diplomacy, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries in the Soviet Union (VOKS) that provided structural and operational contours for the IRRCS. In 1926, Olga Kameneva, the driving force behind VOKS, wrote: “the intelligentsia in bourgeois countries plays a dominant role” (David-Fox 2012: 37). It is within this context that we can better understand Otto Samson’s presence at the exhibition and its significance in terms of diplomatic relations and IRRCS actions of gift-giving.

### **2.3.5 Serious attention**

Otto Samson’s visit to the exhibition held at the Royal Hotel was not a coincidence. On 15 March 1954, the BRFA sent a letter inviting the curator to be involved in the Sponsorship Committee of leading anthropologists, folklorists, archaeologists and public figures related to the folk art exhibition of a “serious and important compilation”<sup>32</sup> shown previously in Paris, Helsinki and Vienna. The exchange of correspondence between Glyn Evans (BRFA) and the curator illustrated the significance of Samson’s expertise for the organisation of the exhibition. As the Horniman Museum curator’s response to the call

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from Glyn Evans to Otto Samson, Horniman Museum Archives, 15th March 1954 Arc/Hmg/Exh/1957/001.

came quite late, the BRFA proposed that Otto Samson would assist in the opening. Otto Samson was also offered the possibility of a loan of material to the Horniman Museum. He was sent photographs of the forthcoming exhibition setup and was invited to examine the artefacts before their display as,

it is quite understood that no one can act in the dark in a matter of this sort ... we had no clear idea as to the scope and importance of the Exhibition. Since these now appear to make it something quite special in its field, we are most anxious for it to receive serious attention.<sup>33</sup>

Around 3,000 people, mostly students and academics, viewed the London exhibition at the Royal Hotel in Woburn Place between 24 April and 20 May 1954.<sup>34</sup> The catalogue, written by Albert L. Lloyd and Henry G. A. Hughes, was sold in 1,000 copies. The text of the catalogue adopted a scholarly style and divided the artefacts into typological examples of costume, architecture, textiles and embroidery and musical instruments. There was no mention of the political setting in post-war Romania. By creating a catalogue for the 1954 exhibition in Britain, the BRFA overcame the problem of the IRRCS's inadequate English, which had been heavily criticised in the context of the 1952 exhibition.

The BRFA also acknowledged the significance of a new type of visitor, the expert viewer. One example of the focus on attracting an educated audience is a letter from the BRFA to Bucharest, regarding a review of the 1954 exhibition in the British journal "Pottery Quarterly". In this correspondence, dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1954, the secretary of the BRFA appealed to the Institute:

We most urgently require serious factual and scholarly answers to the enclosed questionnaire on the Romanian folk ceramics ... A detailed criticism of the lack of documentary material of sufficient detail and scholarship on all sections of the Exhibition will follow in due course. Meanwhile, we hope you will learn from the enclosed questionnaire the extent of professional and specialist interest in the Exhibition, and also realise that, unless better informed by you, we are totally unable to turn this interest into good account.<sup>35</sup>

Reporting on the London exhibition, the BRFA praised its scientific, specialist character, appreciated by "competent personalities".<sup>36</sup> The success of the exhibition, the

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from Glyn Evans to Otto Samson, Horniman Museum Archives, 8th April 1954 Arc/Hmg/Exh/1957/001.

<sup>34</sup> The BRFA reports Oct. 1953 – Sept. 1954.

<sup>35</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 351, p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 342, p. 203.

BRFA report suggests, illustrated the potential of extending the scope of cultural actions amongst specialist and academic circles.<sup>37</sup> Serious attention to their voices and provision of ‘sufficient detail and scholarship’ were key to these audiences. Their feedback influenced modifications in the exhibitions prepared for other audiences. For example, in a letter to the BRFA, Mihail Roşianu, the IRRCS chairman, advised the 1954 exhibition material to be sent back to Bucharest for amendments before its redisplay in Denmark.<sup>38</sup> The involvement of Otto Samson marked the success of the BRFA strategy. In October 1955, Samson visited Romania with a group of ‘men of culture and science’, suggesting a ‘major exhibition’ of Romanian material in London.<sup>39</sup>

The historical background of the Horniman Museum collection of Romanian folk art revealed much about exhibition practice of the period. In the 1950s, Romanian exhibitions emerged in a nexus of representational transactions. The story of the 1952 and 1954 Romanian exhibitions in the UK shows that these preceding exhibits can be conceptualised as a sequence of encounters, leading to visual rearrangements. Compared to the 1952 exhibition, the 1954 display represented a conceptual return to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century models of framing peasantry, tradition and rural life as prime resources for modernity. Reading through the 1954 panels, displayed photographs and the exhibition catalogue, devoid of explicit political messages, it is clear that cultural practice abroad turned back in time and looked for ‘competent’ and ‘scholarly’ role models for representation in the interwar period. At the same time, folk art became framed as a progressive, state-sponsored form of creation, a notion linking the traditional artefact with the contemporary needs of a modern society and transforming the rural material object into an object of design.

Folk art was a legitimate fragment of material culture to perform that function – in the past made by the labouring collective, quintessentially non-bourgeois, linked to the nationalist sensitivity and ‘the Romanian soul’. As we read in the catalogue, it participated in an all-encompassing project of appropriation by:

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<sup>37</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 342, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 351, p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 342, p. 117.

Samson’s proposal was recorded in the minutes of a meeting with the president of IRRCS, 19.10.1955.

promoting, directing and developing the assets of folk art, rightfully considering them the original and authentic expression of the people's force of creation. The large towns of the Rumanian People's Republic, richly endowed museums have been opened and organised according to the most up-to-date methods, offering to the public the possibility of becoming acquainted with large part of our inheritance of peasant art. Numerous exhibitions organised at home and abroad popularise the treasures of Rumanian art.

Showcasing Romanian folk art was a medium through which the newly established socialist state aimed to display its past and future on the opposite side of the Iron Curtain. Following the story of the 1952 and 1954 exhibitions, the Horniman Museum collection was an outcome of the relationships of diplomacy and exchange created by the cultural politics of its time.

## 2.4 Interpreting the generous gift

The particularity of the 1957 collection stems from its character as a gift, the first of its kind in the context of post-war British-Romanian relationships.<sup>40</sup> It resulted from exchange practices designed to enchant, embedded within a political mosaic of aesthetic fragments playing a role in the spectacle of the Cold War.

The problem of reciprocity has captivated the attention of anthropologists, who have outlined the role of exchange in generating and maintaining social relations. In my discussion, I will focus on the political relationships embedded in gift-giving<sup>41</sup>. Several studies focused on the notion of tension, asymmetry and temporality of exchange (Bourdieu 1990, Gregory 1982, for detailed discussion about exchange see: Graeber 2001, Mauss 1990 [1925], Sahlins 1972, Weiner 1992). Thomas (1991) points out that exchange is a political process,

one in which wider relationships are expressed and negotiated in a personal encounter. Hence the particular characteristics of transactions at once reflect and constitute social relationships between both groups and individuals (ibid.: 7).

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<sup>40</sup> Following the Horniman Museum collection, in 1957, the IRRCS presented a smaller collection to a museum in Brighton. (ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 365). The IRRCS director's letter to the curator exemplifies the institution's altruism: "*we learned that you are interested in receiving a gift consisting mainly of Rumanian folk art for your museum. In the case you are likely to receive this gift for showing it in a permanent stall, we can send you some Rumanian stuff of folk art.*"

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion on gift and commodity related to this collection, see Urdea 2015.

For Sahlins (1972), exchange creates relationships of solidarity and acts as social glue, at the same time generating tensions or making “the social fact of sides” apparent. It is an in-between relation where material flows express various positions on the spectrum of social distance, ranging from generalised reciprocity (altruistic, sharing-oriented and free) to negative reciprocity, a type of exchange based on the principle of maximising one’s assets at the expense of the other party in haggling, theft, war etc. at the same time, gift exchange plays a significant role in the process of peace-keeping, settling conflicts and minimising hostilities (Sahlins 1972: 221).

Thomas’ and Sahlins’ insights allow us to use the practices of exchange as a lens through which we can interrogate the nature of political relationships between the sides. Graeber examines the moral logic of such exchange, arguing that

What is at stake is not an exact equivalence—even if there were some way to measure it—but a back- and-forth process tending towards equivalence. Each side tries to outdo the other, but it’s easier to break the thing off when both consider the outcome more or less even. A similar tension exists with the exchange of material goods. Often there is an element of competition; but both sides keep accounts (Graeber 2010: 8)

Exchange can be convivial, playful or competitive. It constitutes a complex relationship, a political process of ongoing practices and moving things back and forth.

This discussion of gift-giving and politics brings a valuable insight into the initiating moment of giving away the 1957 collection and its ongoing political nature. The generous act of offering was a political act of securing a representation of Romania in Britain. The Maussian observation that things exchanged maintain something of the giver is of a particular relevance here. In 1957, the gift was designed to be a mirror image of Romania, a self-representation state and its people. It was embedded in the political visual propaganda and created a debt – the museum was obligated to show the Romanian collection to the public. At the moment of acceptance by the museum, the gift was a political victory in the game of Cold War cultural diplomacy.

The Romanian material was not deposited in the Horniman Museum store by accident. Rather, the body of this collection was born into a particular milieu, typical for international exchanges of its time. It was a product of transnational museological

relationality (Basu 2011) and an apogee of the contingent relationships and exchanges of the 1950s.

Ssorin-Chaikov's (2006) study of gifts to Stalin provides a context for interpreting reciprocity in the 1950s socialist contexts and related idioms of widespread international altruism. Gifts assembled for Stalin were embedded in the models of public gift economy and global diplomatic culture of the Cold War (ibid.: 357). According to Ssorin-Chaikov, in the socialist visions of modernity, time collapses to present a 'realised' vision of the future. The past and the future are represented as one. At the same time, this temporality of the 'rushed leap forward' is often characterised by a 'house-of-cards effect'. As Ssorin-Chaikov suggested,

in relation to modernity, this public gift economy constitutes a mirror in which the totality of relationships are ... simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (ibid.).

Looking at an exhibition of gifts to Stalin in 1949, Ssorin-Chaikov evoked several cases of perishable or decomposed gifts. Through the vulnerability of objects, the metaphor of projected timelessness proved fragile (ibid.: 371). One of the symptomatic metaphors of that fragility was the story of Valerii Agranovskii's childhood visit to the Moscow confectionery factory in the 1930s. Walking along the corridor, one of the children in his group knocked down a chocolate Stalin bust in front of the factory director's office. When the director rushed out and noticed the damage, he reacted with horror and ordered the children to eat the remains immediately. All of the pieces of crushed Stalin were eagerly consumed, leaving no crumb remaining as evidence of the blasphemy (ibid.: 358). This metaphor of disintegration provides a context for understanding of the interpretative vulnerability that characterised the Romanian folk art displays in Britain in 1952. The totalised meaning of the exhibitions, combining the past with the future, when confronted with visitors abroad, proved just as perishable and consternation-causing as the broken chocolate bust of Stalin. Objects, once put in motion and into interaction with the Cold War 'other', started to gain unexpected meanings, overgrowing the neat and contained message designed by the IRRCS. Following the 1952 visitor's book, by crossing the Iron Curtain, the emblematic representation came to be exposed to multiple viewpoints beyond the initial script, becoming a thing-less caricature.



In the case of the Horniman Museum collection, the interpretative power was handed over to the British expertise to avoid this house-of-cards effect. The decision of the Romanian authorities to present the material to the London museum was a gesture within a knowledge economy and the politics of location. Holding a permanent place in a reputable British heritage institution gave the presence of Romanian artefacts legitimacy and secured stable fixed space in a physical sense within the scientifically authoritative institutional space and amongst the specialists and audiences the Institute intended to appeal to. By giving the collection away, the IRRCS received a guarantee of an ongoing 'serious' interest in Romania.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the historical context in which the 1957 Horniman Museum collection of folk art emerged. It was argued that the collection's coming into being was an outcome of the interest and predilections of the London curator. At the same time, it has to be understood in the spaces, imageries and visual economies of the Cold War era. Ethnographic collections constitute a significant means by which knowledge of other places and people is constructed and codified. As we have seen, the presence of the collection gift in the Horniman Museum was embedded in a specific diplomatic project aiming to export a representational image of Romania to the West. The historical analysis demonstrated that the collection was both an ideological tool of the time and a site of negotiations between the partners of the East-West cultural exchanges.

Buck-Morss (2000) imagined the end of the Cold War as a moment of a crumbling dreamworld and a catastrophic breakdown of history, producing a landscape of scattered images. In the post-Cold War world, the rush for modernity and the thread of constant progress is broken and the utopia turns into ruins. In navigating through this landscape:

only partial interpretations of these images are possible... But they may be helpful if they illuminate patches of the past that seem to have a charge of energy about them precisely because the dominant narrative does not connect them seamlessly to the present. The historical particulars might then be free to enter into different constellations of meaning (Buck-Morss 2000: 68).

Working our way through the rubble of representations and bringing the traces up close, provides us new opportunities for interpretation. Such rearrangement of historical

traces and seemingly out-dated images and objects is concerned with how things “appear in retrospect” in order to destabilise the set-in-stone meanings and to make a critical space for re-appropriation (ibid.: 97).

Whilst in the space of the 1950s museum, the folk art collection appeared as a unified composition, seventy years later the assemblage seems less intact. In the next chapter, I examine the elements of the historical records of the collection, arguing that in the post-Cold War context, the gift of the Horniman Museum collection loses its homogenous nature, becoming a multifarious assemblage and illuminative rubble of traces.

## **Chapter 3: The making of the Romanian fragment**

Fragmentation is vital to the production of the museum both as a space of posited meaning and as a space for abstraction ... exhibitions do for the life world what the life world cannot do for itself. They bring together specimens and artifacts never found in the same place at the same time and show relationships that cannot otherwise be seen

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 2.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explored the context of Cold War gift-giving in which the collection came into being. In this chapter I move on to discuss the content of that gift. What sort of gift was it? Of what objects and under what logic was it composed? What stories can it tell if we read between the lines of official archives, examine what happened in the Romanian museum at the time and speak to those involved in the acquisition of the collection?

In the following sections, I will explore the fragments that constituted the gift. These scattered things and images provide insights on the complex material histories (Stahl 2010) beyond the unitary ‘dreamworld’ of representations. Firstly, I investigate the backstage of the 1957 Horniman Museum via the Folk Art Museum in Bucharest, evoking the context of the exhibition practices and the memories of the surviving collector. Secondly, I provide a critical account of a selection of visual and written records of the ‘Folk Art in Romania’ exhibition at the Horniman Museum. Bringing these fragments together into a new constellation demonstrates the unique character of the set of objects that were deposited in London. At the same time, it represents tensions within and between different institutional frameworks and personal agendas. These are stories that require going beyond the objects’ front stage and their classificatory labels.

### 3.2 A particular collection

In August 1956, the folk art collection reached British customs. The cargo consisted of 31 cases of objects and several boxes of documentation. A year after Otto Samson's visit to Bucharest, a letter from the clerk of the London County Council, dated 26 October 1956, confirming that the collection had arrived safely in Britain and would be "displayed as a coherent whole to enable visitors to appreciate it fully".<sup>42</sup> Reading through the correspondence, it becomes apparent that, during his visit in Bucharest, it was Otto Samson who had proposed a permanent display of the Romanian material.<sup>43</sup> On 26 July 1956, during a meeting of the LCC Education committee, it was decided that the collection would be displayed in the newly renovated South Hall for three months. The opening night, 2 May 1957, was attended by a number of ambassadors from the Soviet bloc and institutional guests, mostly from the heritage sector. With an opening speech by the Romanian minister, M. Nicolae Corcinschi, the collection was officially presented as gift to the museum. Initially scheduled for twelve weeks, due to its success, the exhibition was extended till the end of December 1957. The Romanian diplomatic mission showed continuing interest in the project till the end of the show. On a January Saturday morning, the Romanian Minister and the First Secretary of the Legation arrived unexpectedly at the closed museum and walked through the displays as they were packed away.<sup>44</sup>

The correspondence between Otto Samson, the LCC and the IRRCS suggested that the curator was not informed about the exact content of the boxes before their arrival in Britain and mainly used the documentation sent with it as to structure the 1957 exhibition.<sup>45</sup> The exhibition combined artefacts with images and folk music recordings sent by the Institute. These were brought together by Samson without the direct involvement of Romanian museum specialists and assembled with the help of the LCC architect and the use of BRFA, who provided image-holding stands.

The themes of the Horniman Museum Romanian exhibition were envisioned through displays with minimum written content in modern geometrical compositions on

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<sup>42</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 359, pp. 86.

<sup>43</sup> ANIC, Fond IRRCS 1774, Structura 2, file no. 342, pp. 103.

<sup>44</sup> A note from the Education Officer, 7th January 1954 Arc/Hmg/Exh/1957/001.

<sup>45</sup> In a letter, dated 22. August 1956, Samson suggested opening date for December 1956 and appreciated IRRCS's suggestion to have somebody sent from Romania to assist in the display of the exhibition.

white or black backgrounds. Reading from the brochure, exhibition plans and photographs of displays, the exhibition was divided into sections on ceramics, textiles, woodcraft, Easter eggs, musical instruments, and religious icons. Detailed information was provided on the tools, techniques of making, regional specificities, as well as ethnic and historical variation. Most artefacts were presented in display cases in typological sets, bringing together cooking utensils, carpenters' tools, a potter's wheel and pots, carrying bags, distaffs, spindles, pieces of peasant furnishings, barrels, panpipes, flutes, bagpipes, lutes, embroidered shirts and sheepskin jackets etc. Some larger objects, such as the loom or the potter's wheel were presented in the middle of the hall. Lastly, there were two reconstructions of cottage interiors and an open space displaying regional costumes.



**Fig. 3.1.** The 'Folk Art in Rumania' exhibition entrance (left)

**Fig. 3.2.** The loom and South Transylvania interior display, Horniman Museum, 1957 (right)

As we can see, the display of the Horniman Museum collection constituted a clear departure from earlier 1950s forms of presenting Romanian folk art in Britain. Visual and written interpretation of the Horniman Museum collection represented a significant curatorial and institutional transformation within the practices of the IRRCS cultural exchange programs. There was a clear shift from the overt propaganda presented during the 1952 and 1954 exhibitions. Instead, the narrative focused on typological assemblages of ethnographic regions and folk art. For example, there were two dioramas of peasant interiors and an extended textile display with a set of mannequins representing costumes from various regions, including ethnic minorities. Alongside the changed visual means of representation, there was a shift in the curatorial process and project management. Rather than being filtered through the BRFA or the IRRCS, this exhibition developed as a direct partnership between two museums. In this movement away from cultural diplomacy, knowledge about the collection was built within a specialist environment of museum

curators, without the direct interpretative interventions of cultural agencies. Instead, the curatorial framework and layouts can be traced to the ways of collecting and displaying objects in the Romanian museum context.

### 3.3 Bucharest origins: exhibiting progressive tradition

The objects of the Horniman Museum collection are in part phantoms of their origins in the Museum of Folk Art in Bucharest. In 1955, Otto Samson visited the museum, an encounter that left him:

impressed by the tasteful arrangement, the instructive labelling and the many photographs showing the processes of craftsmen. In Rumania folk art is still very much alive and contemporary artists are given space in the museum (Samson 1960: 131).

Samson's visit took place just a year after a major refurbishment and significant reorganisation of the institution. In 1954, the former building of the Museum of Folk Art was transformed into the Lenin-Stalin Museum and all folk art collections were moved to the neo-Classical Știrbei Palace, nationalised in 1948. The Folk Art Museum catalogue described the new principles of exhibition practice based on 'scientific rigour' with historical and typological representations based on materialist historiography (Banașeanu 1957:5). The museum's mission statement was focused on its cultural and educational role of valorising popular creativity (*creație*), based on its holdings of 25,000 ethnographic objects 'with artistic character' (ibid.: 8). The museum was conceptualised as a 'living organism', facilitating the flourishing of folk art through research and public presentation 'from advanced scientific positions'. For this purpose, the museum maintained relationships with experts, specialist museums and institutions in the country and abroad, exchanging objects, publications and images.



**Fig. 3.3.** Museum of Folk Art display, museum catalogue, 1957

In Știrbei Palace, the displays were designed to illustrate the richness, creativity and importance of folk art in the history and life of the people. Archaeological material represented the artistic creativity and techniques characteristic of the era of “primitive slavery and pre-feudalism” (ibid.: 5). According to the catalogue, the feudal period was illustrated by the emergence of the new means of production, an increase in trade and specialisation that enabled folk creativity. Here, qualitative changes and evolutionary developments were represented through the examples of specialised settlements and craft centres, introducing the ethnographic regions concept discussed in the first chapter.

This focus on regional specificity became the theme of the following eight rooms, based on typological presentations of textiles, ceramics, metal, leather and wood. The historical theme presented the capitalist social order as an era when folk art became commercialised, nationalist, and ‘reactionary’. These traits degraded its character, leading to “hybrid forms of production” (ibid.: 7). The last parts of the permanent exhibition illustrated how “socialism under construction” facilitated good conditions for the development of folk art to “continue in new ways, superior to the old artistic traditions of our country” (ibid.). The displays presented the intersection of traditional folk art and design through objects made by state cooperatives. They demonstrated the new function of folk art as one of the most important areas of ‘popular’ creative expression. Finally, the display aimed to present the significance of folk art in the building of socialism, highlighting the potential directions of artistic practice to “capitalise on people’s creative genius” in order to “build progressive traditions.” (ibid.). Reading from the catalogue, the museum told stories of folk art through the idiom of emblematic centres, aesthetic examples and techniques of folk creativity, in relationship with the historiographical line of interpretation required by the political climate of sovietised Romania.

In the Bucharest museum, scientific history was a backdrop for a standardised exhibition model representing social transformation and cultural evolution. This was based on the Morgan and Engels-derived tripartite model aimed at educating peasants into workers (Nicolescu 2014b). In fact, the curators (*muzeografi*) often did not carry forward the scientific message and the materialised display departed from the dogmatic historicism outlined in the catalogue. For example, the rooms exemplifying the ancient past and the socialist future were transformed into spaces for temporary exhibitions (Nicolescu 2014b: 43). Whereas the fixed tripartite temporal frame was “feared” and “avoided” by the

muzeografi, the artefacts were ‘trustworthy’, “ready to be assembled and re-assembled anytime” (ibid.: 44). The actually existing interpretive framework focused on materials and labour, serving the purpose of socialist didacticism. Thus,

the material consistency of objects on display as well as the means of constructing exhibitions (glass cases, labels, panoplies, rooms) was believed to facilitate learning and understanding. ... the message was believed to be transmitted more effectively because of this immersion in the museum’s space/discourse, which by force was spatial and consequently material. This is another reason to understand and explain the role of neat displays, clean glass cases, white walls in rectangular spaces, what can be labelled as constructivist aesthetics of the display (ibid.: 47).

The impression made by the tasteful constructivist arrangement of the Folk Art Museum on Otto Samson influenced the creation of the Horniman Museum display. The modernist atmosphere of the Horniman Museum exhibition “Folk Art in Rumania” bears a resemblance to the Bucharest exhibition practices. Although devoid of the didactic content that framed folk artefacts in Bucharest, the Horniman Museum exhibition retained its interpretative context through the narrative of ethnographic areas and the division of artefacts into forms of production (pottery, textiles, woodcraft etc.).

### **3.4 Feverish things – on the collecting rush and limitless resources**

Following Otto Samson’s visit to Bucharest, the IRRCS commissioned the Museum of Folk Art to acquire a representative collection of folk art and a six-person team was sent to the countryside to purchase the artefacts. Collecting, documenting and exhibiting folk art for export were key activities of the museum at that time. Between 1949 and 1957, the institution contributed to fifty international exhibitions (Banaşeanu 1957: 9). In Romanian socialist ethnographic practice:

campaigns of scientific researches aimed at turning to account folk art are initiated, contests and exhibitions are being organised, specialist journals, albums and monographic studies are being published, folk art objects are intensely collected for museums (Horşia and Petrescu 1972: 69).

In 2012, Jadwiga Formagiu was the last surviving curator of the Folk Art Museum team commissioned to gather objects for the Horniman Museum acquisition. During a series of interviews, she reminisced about the complex relationships between the Romanian museum, the IRRCS and the central authorities. Her narrative uncovers the



tensions within and between different institutional frameworks and personal agendas. At the same time, the voice of the curator provides an alternative perspective on the museum's practice. During our first meetings, it was interesting to learn about Jadwiga's opposition to the prevailing view that museum work under socialism was entirely politicised. In contrast, she explained, there was some room to manoeuvre, as folk art was relatively apolitical and aesthetically powerful:

“Folk art was very good for international exhibitions because there was no need for propaganda. These objects themselves, woodwork, ceramics, dress were admired; it was sufficient.”

During the interviews in 2012, Jadwiga mentioned that her 1950s work was dependent on ministerial funding. The curatorial diary was often created ad hoc as a product of constant demands from the government. As Jadwiga reminisced:

“The ministry always needed something, for example through establishing relationships with a museum abroad that was interested in exchange. We had to respond to that invitation and these activities defined our schedule”.

Typically, she explained, collecting was based on group field trips, each curator working within their expertise in textiles, ceramics, traditional architecture etc. Collections were commissioned by state authorities who would allocate funds for international exhibitions and cultural exchanges. The museum team embarked on several journeys following repetitive requests from the central authorities. The curator pointed out that due to the urgent character of these field trips the wider context of the collected material culture was often neglected (Hedeşan 2008: 25). She made a clear distinction between acquisition trips for exchanges and ethnological fieldwork. In her words:

Our museum did not conduct research but we received funding for acquisitions for other museums. On that occasion, while visiting a village for the purpose of ‘shopping’ we conducted studies but research in itself was not funded.

MB: So you did not have the chance to stay longer in one place?

Jadwiga: It was difficult under the circumstances. Rarely were we able to establish a good rapport with the mayor to get good accommodation...

MB: For those foreign exhibitions, were you only focused on collecting or were you also responsible for what the exhibition looked like?

Jadwiga: The director encouraged us to create thematic collections. When we brought objects back from the field, we organised exhibitions about the new acquisitions in Bucharest ... Often, prior to the Party dignitaries' international travels, we were sent abroad with a 'general' folk exhibition related to the venue given for use. Sometimes a member of the museum staff visited the site prior to the exhibition in order to think about the show in a specific location.

Mostly, however, exhibitions were created without plan and with short notice. The curator was successful in the rushed mounting of exhibitions in such locations and took part in several international projects. Often our conversations turned to Jadwiga's foreign work, revealing the mechanisms of political monitoring that accompanied exhibition making across the Romanian border. In her words:

“I was told to pay close attention while being abroad. The museum *securist*<sup>46</sup> advised me: ‘If you are told to make a statement, please write it down in two or three copies, including one for me. He said that those who were very *Party-oriented* in the embassies could ... that it was easy to change a comma here and there [and alter the meaning of a statement]. He trusted us ... everything depended on who you dealt with.”

Any member of staff with connections abroad, especially in the West, was seen as a potential threat and their correspondence was closely monitored, as the curator asserted:

“The *securist* knew that I was writing letters to Poland and Germany and the contents of what I was writing. I never included anything offensive to anybody ... but they did read everything.”

The political pressures of international work were best exemplified through the story of the folk art exhibition in Athens. During the preparatory process, a Greek official approached Jadwiga, informing her that the Soviet ambassador was interested in viewing the exhibition. Although she clearly stated that the displays were not ready for viewing, the ambassador walked into the exhibition room. She remembered that he was concerned about the potential anti-Russian content:

“The ambassador told me he would leave Greece that day. To my surprise, he was the first one who appeared on the opening! ... I informed the consulate about that Soviet man, asking what does this ambassador wish; he visited the day before and was meant to leave the same evening ... I then realised what

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<sup>46</sup> Referring to the Securitate officer, member of the secret police reporting on the activities of the institution.

the reasoning behind the ambassador's concern was – at the entrance of the exhibition, we placed regional maps from the period prior to the establishment of the Soviet Union. The maps demonstrated Soviet territories as part of Greater Romania. The ambassador was unsure about these representations even though it was outside the scope of my exhibition!”

Thinking about her professional practice during socialism, the curator recalled several challenges of working with the socialist authorities and political pressures encountered throughout the exhibition-making process.

The problematic, unequal relationship between the Museum of Folk Art and the state, presented in the curator's narrative, also becomes apparent in relation to the museum's holdings. In the correspondence between the museum director and the IRRCS, dated 18 January 1957, we learn about the museum director's frustration related to the repetitive loss of collections, used in exchanges and cultural diplomacy. The director wrote about the museum's inability to fulfil the Institute's demand for 'representative objects' for folk art exhibitions in Germany, Italy and Sweden as a number of artefacts were lost and damaged during the organisation of the exhibition in Austria. He pointed out that this was a recurring issue, leading to a significant loss of the most important pieces from the museum's holdings. Although the museum acknowledged the significance of the IRRCS mission, the director appealed for the use of the Institute's own collections or for the improvement of collection management. The letter concluded with an urgent call for return of artefacts from collections sent to Bulgaria, Italy, China and Vietnam. The museum should not be treated as a limitless resource.

In the context of the institutional conflict between the museum and the IRRCS, the Horniman Museum collection had little detrimental effect for the museum compared to the collections in the travelling exhibitions. Most of the composition was specifically collected (or 'shopped') in the field on the IRRCS request, with a view to forming a permanent loan. At the same time, according to the documentation, an additional number of objects were sourced from the museum's and the IRRCS's deposits. Scattered and fragmentary museum archives indicate that these objects became part of the IRRCS holdings without information on the criteria of their selection or transactional arrangements related to these transfers. In the 1950s, the museum was subject to transformation, state pressures and increasing demands from the IRRCS that affected museum collections and the working patterns of the curators. At the same time, the 1950s

curator observed in one of the interviews, it created an opportunity structure for other acquisitions. Often, during these field trips for the IRRCS, the museum experts would buy objects for the Bucharest museum ‘on the side’, economising on the spending for international collections.

The IRRCS, as the sole agent in cultural diplomacy and management of Romanian heritage for export, used a variety of almost limitless resources in the construction of the event programme. As shown in the previous sections, it operated through friendship societies deploying a wide scope of activities of cultural action – private displays, publications, international visits, exhibitions, concerts and performing dance ensembles. In this centralised model of cultural policy, institutions within the country served as repositories of artefacts and human resources used for activities managed by the Institute, often subject to top-down pressures of participating in the IRRCS programme. Museums were collecting and exhibiting under the conditions of the socialist culture of rush (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006: 359). This tempo of constant foreign projects created a milieu that “allowed the gift giving to be as if spontaneous”, even if it was actually forced and obligatory (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006: 363). The Folk Art Museum was locked in these relationships of obligation and played a supplementary role in the organisation of diplomatic activity.

Artefacts were often sources of frictions and disputes within these transfers. These conflicts reflect the often-complex inter-institutional negotiations of the 1950s political milieu. The Folk Art Museum employees were required to operate in a highly politicised climate. The level of collecting urgency for international exhibitions was beyond the curators’ control, their mission as keepers of objects or their own perspectives on museum practice. The Horniman Museum collection is an example of these *ad hoc* commissions and hierarchical relationships between the Museum of Folk Art and the IRRCS. It illustrates the conditions of work of those who navigated these circumstances, carrying out the labour of representative collecting and carving out small selections for the holdings of the museum.

In some contexts, reciprocity is a balancing act of giving, taking and keeping things out of circulation. According to Weiner (1992), the pressure to give away is embedded in the desire to keep certain artefacts. Such things removed out of reciprocal relationships are

inalienable possessions, artefacts “imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners which are not easy to give away” (ibid: 6). Thinking through the notion of keeping-while-giving and the related classification of alienable and inalienable possessions allows us to explore the curatorial strategies of collection management prevalent in the 1950s the Museum’s of Folk Art. For the curators, museum collections were seen as inalienable possessions that were to be protected from circulation in the international exhibitions. Facing external pressure from the IRRCs, the museum professionals engaged in feverish acquisitions for the cultural exchanges. Firstly, acquiring new material allowed the museum’s holdings to be protected from international redistribution. Secondly, the acquisition trips constituted an opportunity for keeping some of the collected artefacts to enrich the museum’s holdings. Through the strategy of collecting and sending away, the curators fulfilled their political commitments and remained ‘keepers’ of objects, true to their sense of professional conduct.

### **3.5 Things in encounter: the curator’s story**

Weiner noted that artefacts considered as inalienable carry an aspect of the person’s identity and thus become more difficult to be given away. In this section, I will consider whether objects acquired through rushed ‘shopping trips’ carried traces of their collectors’ journeys, intentions and biographies. The Horniman Museum collection documented an encounter and material flows between rural Romania and the museum collectors, transforming the point of contact into a tangible archived material. Although my initial intention behind contacting the surviving curator was to explore the story of collecting for the Horniman Museum in 1956, soon our conversations moved on to interesting biographical areas. Discussions anchored in the collection’s photographs evolved into a complex narrative, unravelling the role of personal parameters in framing professional practice and contextualising artefacts. In bringing this backstage to light, I seek to highlight some of the often-overlooked contexts significant for the collection’s genealogy.

During conversations with Jadwiga, we often made imaginary journeys to Cernaui, the lost land of her childhood. When she was born in 1923, northern Bucovina, then in Moldova province, was part of the Romanian state. During the Second World War it was annexed by the Soviet Union, a territorial transformation authorised by the 1947 Paris peace treaty. Shifting borders in the post-war period resulted in mass movements of the

population. In 1945, Jadwiga's family was ordered to leave their house within 24 hours. She often described her homeland, the family house with its opulent garden of colourful flowers for which Bucovina was renowned and which were lost when she and her mother were placed on day the last train south to territories that remained Romanian. She evoked the moment of reaching Bucharest railway station where Jadwiga and her mother were met by their uncle. He looked with horror at the two small pieces of luggage they had brought with them and asked what had happened to their property. Her mother replied: "This is all that we have now".

This dramatic loss of valuables was a formative experience for Jadwiga, an event to which she returned several times during our conversations:

"If you have to leave the house within 24 hours, what do you take with you? We took the documents... If I had to abandon the house now, would I take my flowers?"

It was interesting to discover that her sense of displacement and recurring nostalgia for lush Bucovina was reflected in Jadwiga's career route in museum curatorship. Unable to return to her homeland, she made several journeys to northwestern Romania for field collecting and assisting in the establishment of the open-air museums in Sighetu Marmătiei, the Maramureş Region and the city of Suceava in southern Bucovina, the fragment of the region that remained on the Romanian side of the border. The memory of loss and her diasporan identity framed her perspective on the artefacts brought from the field in significant ways. This approach was welcomed by the director, who himself was part of this diaspora and published a monograph about the ethnographic area of the Bucovina region (Banaşeanu 1975). His work, too, carried aspects of nostalgic reengagement with homeland.

Jadwiga's work can be seen as related to a symbolic process of re-acquiring lost possessions and remaking connections with the region. Her professional dedication suggests a personal investment in rescuing folk artefacts from obscurity and the consequences of change in the countryside. She compensated for the loss of her personal heritage through establishing collective national collections and making permanent all that had been wiped out. These intimate interactions with objects according to personal preferences were also related to Jadwiga's educational background. In 1953, she graduated from the Bucharest art school, which gave her a particular aesthetic approach to

folk art. For example, she could vividly remember specific objects collected many decades ago, being able to describe in great detail their colour shades, structures of lines, combinations of the 'counted thread' or 'the play of light on the patterns'. Based on aesthetic typologies, Jadwiga worked inductively, she claimed, from the object to theory:

“My conclusions are ... based on the objects ... When you have a piece of textile in front of you, you can talk separately about the embroidery on the shoulder, on the sleeve, the cut ... this is a true source of classification within which it is possible to make other descriptions.”

Jadwiga's book on dress, with her own drawings of shirt patterns, is widely used by Romanian ethnographers as an authoritative source of knowledge on folk dress. Her memories of writing the book on shirt classifications revealed the process of constructing typologies as a product of the museum rush:

“We didn't have time to work on publications ... we were busy cataloguing, describing and sorting out artefacts.”

The personal approach to the museum profession emerged not only through Jadwiga's responses to her encounters with collections but also in her memories of relationships with other museum professionals. Under socialism, networking and negotiation skills were a necessity, required both in affiliations with colleagues and with institutional partners. According to Jadwiga, Elena Secoşan, the curator coordinating the acquisition of the Horniman Museum material, mastered these tactics in the most profound manner. Following her career at the Museum of Folk Art, she moved from the museum to work exclusively with international exhibitions for the IRRCS. As Jadwiga recalled:

“Elena had relationships with people in the field that we, the younger museum employees, did not have ... She knew several rural locations very well and kept in touch with the peasants who were her acquaintances. She promised them things, gave them presents and this way, they looked for objects on her behalf.”

For the museum professionals, these ins and outs and personal tactics were essential for maintaining a degree of independence. For Jadwiga, several day-to-day negotiations were related to her life story and her father's politically incorrect past [during the Second World War he had been imprisoned in a Russian gulag]. For example, Party membership was often the basis for career progression. She claimed that she was never able to join the Communist Party as in order to be accepted one needed a guarantor. She

had nobody to provide that reference, as she did not have Party members in her social circle. She also recalled the difficulties in negotiating and contesting the political climate of the period:

“Sometimes, I was impolite to these people because it could not be constantly done their way. Once I was warned: ‘Things that are being said, can be also heard by some’ to which I replied: ‘I would prefer you listened to what I say, rather than extracting rumours!’ Afterwards, I had difficulty in obtaining permission for my publication.”

Jadwiga’s narrative about field collecting and exhibition-making centred on the interdependence of the personal, professional and political dimensions of work in a folk art museum under socialism. Her memories showed that the creation of museum collections and exhibitions in 1950s Romania was not one of following the grand narrative of the state cultural programme. On the contrary, it was often through personal circumstances and preferences, that the collection acquisitions and displays could be understood.

This exploration of museum practice reveals the understudied agendas of the collectors (O’Hanlon and Welsch 2000), demonstrating that objects acquired by the Folk Art Museum team were closely connected to those who purchased them in the villages. It is evident that the collecting rush of the Bucharest museum shopping trips for international exhibitions was both an outcome of the external conditions of the Cold War cultural exchanges and the curators’ individual approaches to museum work, their educational background, preferences for particular locations and established networks. This collection was constructed against the backdrop of international politics, rushed rhythms of socialist acquisitions and personal meaning-making strategies. The Bucharest side of the encounter represented a range of ways museum collections reflected the interplay of the idiosyncratic forces that constituted the limitations and opportunities provided for the museum professionals. The compositions of objects acquired for international museums were fragments of these forces and the intentionalities of the collectors.



### **3.6 Curious records: rereading the archive, re-visioning the display**

Once objects are classified, they are reduced to stiffened categories, erasing the nuances of their social entanglements. The neat rubrics of ethnographic museum records and documentation files often removed the lived contexts of things. I argue that by looking deeper into the construction of the files, it is possible to dig into traces of such contexts. Between classificatory categories, the records of the Horniman Museum collection emerge as a complex assemblage that could be broken down into fragments of intentionality and differentiated meanings (Edwards 2001:29).

Archives and museums are technologies of preservation, reflecting certain ways of ordering material culture, history and knowledge. They are collections of incomplete facts and ways of remembering and forgetting, often posing questions regarding the control, access and coherence of knowledge. The travelling records of the Horniman Museum collection spoke of the relational qualities of this archive. Documentation was integral to cultural exchanges generally and the Horniman Museum collection gift specifically; as much a participant as the objects themselves. As the objects left the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, information was erased from the Romanian museum register, translated into English and transferred to the London museum. These files were the official records of the collecting process and the basis of Otto Samson's interpretation of the artefacts for the Horniman Museum exhibition. At the same time, linking museums on the two sides of the Iron Curtain, they constituted a third space between different museological traditions, delineating spheres of knowledge and reflecting the ways objects were conceptualised in various institutional settings.

From the outset of this research, I was informed that the field collectors and employees of the Folk Art Museum in Bucharest, who coordinated the composition of the set, provided the Horniman Museum with extraordinary levels of interpretative material and scientific documentation. With impressive attention to detail, most files provide the Romanian museum's evidence number and the name of the person who collected the object or authored the piece of documentation. According to the documents, the majority of objects were acquired through field collecting (often the date of collection – 1955 or

1956 – is specified) with some objects obtained from the Bucharest’s Folk Art Museum or the IRRC permanent collections. The contents of these records represented the different notions of object classification held by the curators in Bucharest and in London.<sup>47</sup> In the Romanian museum, the standard practice of cataloguing was the creation of individual files on particular artefacts. The files were divided into numerous sections covering the origin, physical and functional descriptions, and the process of production of the artefact in question. An example of the level of detail of information is the file describing the potter’s comb (Object file 1957. 40): “when the pot is almost ready, the potter gently presses the sides with the comb to give the finishing touches. Used especially for bigger, rougher pots”.

Specific information was provided about the names of makers and sellers of the object, as well as the time required to produce the artefacts or the frequency of use. Other details concerned materials and techniques of production, well exemplified by the file on the wall textile from the village of Viştea (Object 1957.179), described as made by Maria Sandru with “multi-coloured geometrical designs on a red background arranged in a sequence of symmetrical lines, covering two thirds of the napkin”. According to the file, the textile was used for interior decoration; it required four days of weaving and was made with a combination of homespun white hemp and commercially obtained cotton thread. Finally, we learn from the file, the object was hand-woven in a two-thread pattern with designs finger-picked in the loom. There is a wealth of technical information on several artefacts. These files speak about the Bucharest’s curators’ multifarious focus on various technological, functional and aesthetic aspects of material culture, taking into account the materiality of the artefacts, the context of production, individual authorship and local provenance.

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<sup>47</sup> In the 1950s, objects in the Horniman Museum were classified using the typological system of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. (Teague 2001: 122).

## DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL FILE

1957 69

✓ No. L 3029

- 1) Name of object  
Literary: table  
Local: -
- 2) Origin  
Acquired by the R.P.R. Museum of Peasant Art in 1955, from Ioan Clonțea, Rumanian peasant, from the village of Viștea de Sus, District of Făgăraș, Region of Stalin.
- 3) Description  
Fourlegged table. The top of the table must be drawn aside to reach the drawer, which is really a box fixed underneath the table. The table legs are ornamented with notches.
- 4) Dimensions  
Height: 72 cm  
Length: 102 cm  
Width: 76 cm
- 5) Use  
Used for meals. Dry food is kept in the drawer.
- 6) Typological classification, frequency  
It is an old table model, with a fixed drawer which can be reached by drawing aside the table top. Formerly very common in this area, though it has now been replaced by modern tables.
- 7) Materials employed  
Firwood
- 8) Technique and tools  
Made with rudimentary carpentering tools, such as the axe, saw and chisel.
- 9) Time needed for making object - one day
- 10) Made at home
- 11) Place and date of confection  
Village of Viștea de Sus, District of Făgăraș, Region of Stalin, end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century.
- 12) Artisan  
Grandfather of the peasant seller, who died in 1920 at the age of 65.
- 13) State of object - in bad condition
- 14) File compiled by Elena Secoșan in May 1956

Fig. 3.4 Table documentation file, Viștea. Courtesy of the Horniman Muse

DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL FILE  
✓ NO. T 1894

1957. 190

- 1) Name of object  
Literary: pillow case  
Local: -
- 2) Origin  
Acquired by the R.P.R. Museum of Peasant Art in 1955, from Paraschiva Petrișor, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, from the village of Viștea de Jos, District of Făgăraș, Region of Stalin.
- 3) Description  
Oblong shape, open at one end to introduce pillow, while the ornamented opposite end forms "bottom part of the pillow". Groups of coloured stripes are horizontally arranged on the lower part of the pillow, while geometrical designs, worked in the loom and hand-picked, are inserted between the stripes. Multicoloured designs against a red background. The rest of the pillow is covered with small black and red stripes.
- 4) Dimensions  
Length: 80 cm  
Width : 52 cm
- 5) Use  
Two rows (4 pillows) of these ornamental pillows are placed on the bed, for purposes of embellishment. This custom, which was very common in the past, now reappears, only at festivals and weddings, when the peasant house assumes its traditional holiday aspect.
- 6) Typological classification, frequency  
Typical of the Făgăraș District, where this style of weaving is very common.
- 7) Materials employed  
Homespun: hemp thread  
Purchased: white cotton, coloured mercerized cotton.
- 8) Technique and tools  
Handwoven in 2 and 4 thread patterns.  
Decorative designs worked in the loom and hand picked.
- 9) Time needed for making object - 2 days
- 10) Made at home
- 11) Place and date of confection  
Village of Viștea de Jos, District of Făgăraș, Region of Stalin, 1908.
- 12) Artisan  
Paraschiva Petrișor, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, born in 1866
- 13) State of object - in good condition
- 14) File compiled by Elena Secoșan on 5 March 1956

Fig. 3.5 Pillow case documentation file, Viștea. Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

## DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL FILE

1957. 204

✓ No. T 1903

- 1) Name of object  
Literary: table cloth  
Local: "Masă pe culme"
- 2) Origin  
Acquired by the R.P.R. Museum of Peasant Art in 1955, from Maria Vulcan, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, from the village of Viştea de Sus, District of Făgăraş, Region of Stalin.
- 3) Description  
Oblong shape, composed of 2 pieces of material sewn together with "key" stitch. Coloured stripes at both ends, edged with designs picked by hand. A row of multicoloured hand picked designs in the centre of the group of stripes.
- 4) Dimensions  
Length: 167 cm  
Width: 95 cm
- 5) Use  
Interior decoration
- 6) Typological classification, frequency  
The table cloth spread over the ceiling tringle now forms part of interior decoration, according to the old custom of covering the tringle with various pieces of material or clothes. The "masa de culme" as it appears here, is typical of the Făgăraş district. Today it is mostly used to decorate old houses.
- 7) Materials employed  
Homespun hemp thread  
Purchased white and coloured cotton
- 8) Technique and tools  
Handwoven in 2 and 4 thread pattern.  
Decorative designs arranged in the loom and hand picked.
- 9) Time needed for making object - 4 days
- 10) Made at home
- 11) Place and date of confection  
Village of Viştea de Sus, Region of Stalin, District of Făgăraş, 1884
- 12) Artisan  
Maria Vulcan, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, born in 1864
- 13) State of object - in good condition
- 14) File compiled by Elena Secoşan on 2 March 1956

Fig. 3.6. Tablecloth documentation file, Viştea. Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

1957.271

DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL FILE

No. T 6273

- 1) Name of object  
Literary: Smock  
Local: -
- 2) Origin  
Acquired by the R.P.R. Museum of Peasant Art in 1955, from Maria Fulea, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, from the village of Săliște, District of Sibiu, Region of Stalin.
- 3) Description ( shape, ornaments, colour )  
Very wide smock, gathers round the neck sewn on a narrow band, fastening on one side. Very wide sleeve also gathered and sewn onto a narrow band; the lower part of the sleeve is usually turned up. Geometrical and floral designs embroidered on the narrow band at the neck and wrists, as well as in rows at the top of the sleeve. The white colour of the cotton predominates, the embroidered designs are worked out in brown, a little gold, red, green and blue.
- 4) Dimensions  
Length: 60 cm  
Width: 300 cm  
Length of sleeve: 92 cm  
Width: of sleeve: 156 cm
- 5) Use  
Forms part of peasant woman's costume.
- 6) Typological classification, frequency  
Typical of the local peasant costume, today worn only by old women.
- 7) Materials employed  
Purchased: cotton fabric, silk and gold thread for embroidery.
- 8) Technique and tools  
Cut out, sewn together and embroidered.
- 9) Time needed for making object - 10 days
- 10) Made at home
- 11) Place and date of confection  
Village of Săliște, District of Sibiu, Region of Stalin, about 1930.
- 12) Artisan  
Maria Fulea, peasant woman of Rumanian nationality, born in 1889.
- 13) State of object - in good condition
- 14) File compiled by I. Forwagiu on 23 April 1956

Fig. 3.7. Smock documentation file, Săliște. Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

## DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL FILE

1957.254 ix

√ No. T 6393

- 1) Name of object  
Literary: headveil (Brockeltuch)  
Local: Heldeach
- 2) Origin  
Acquired by the R.P.R. Museum of Peasant Art in 1956, from Maria Roth, of German nationality, from the village of Sura-Mică, District of Sibiu, Region of Stalin.
- 3) Description  
Oblong shape, designs at both ends; the end worn in front has a richer design, composed of a row of flowers, worked in black, beneath the name of the author and the date when it was made: "Von Susana Schuster 1881" (in gothic letters). Underneath the row of flowers, there are groups of red stripes, followed by a wavy line worked in black and gold thread.
- 4) Dimensions  
Length: 146 cm  
Width: 63 cm
- 5) Use  
Used as ornamental head-dress
- 6) Typological classification, frequency  
In this village, a fairly common article of Saxon peasant woman's costume. In the possession of almost every woman, either inherited or received as dowry
- 7) Materials employed  
Cotton, designs embroidered in black silk and gold thread
- 8) Technique and tools  
Crochet and "chain" stitching employed for floral design
- 9) Time needed for making object - 2 days
- 10) Made in village workshop
- 11) Place and date of confection  
Village of Sura-Mică, District of Sibiu, Region of Stalin
- 12) Artisan  
Susana Schuster, of German nationality, from the village of Sura-Mică, District of Sibiu, Region of Stalin
- 13) State of object - in good condition
- 14) File compiled by Silvia Zderciuc, May 1956

Fig. 3.8. Head veil documentation file, Sura Mica. Courtesy of the Horniman Museum.

A detailed look at the files provides an insight into curatorial experiences in the field. The collectors' notes recorded have the potential to open up the documentation to new readings of significant historical processes and the dynamics of vernacular material culture in rural 1950s Romania. For example, information about one of the woven pillowcases indicates that the pillowcase is "typical of the household weaving in the Făgăraş District, where this style of fabric is 'very common' and "two rows (four pillows) of these ornamental pillows are placed on the bed, for the purpose of embellishment". In contrast, the comments suggest temporality and transformation as we read that: "this custom, common in the past, now reappears, only at festivals and weddings, when the peasant house assumes its traditional holiday aspect" (**Fig. 3.5**).<sup>48</sup>

Another example the of disruption of the fixed descriptive model appears on the sheet documenting the accession of the table from Viştea (**Fig. 3.4**). The collector recorded it as a common everyday object in the region, in 1955 replaced by modern tables. She noted that whereas the furniture was made in 1955 "after modern models and systems, the textiles, pottery and the rest of the furniture is old ...this type of furniture is typical of that used at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century." These remarks indicate that particular artefacts were possibly made to order for the curator, signalling that in 1955 the peasant interior was already in flux and modern material coexisted with or had even replaced older furnishings. The typical tablecloth from Viştea, the comment suggested, at the time of the collection was "mostly used to decorate old houses" (**Fig. 3.6**). In a similar note on transformation, recorded in the village of Salişte, the "typical local peasant costume" was at the time of the acquisition "only worn by old women" (**Fig. 3.7**).

The palimpsest files enable alternative reading and the uncovering of nuanced contexts. They hint at hidden histories emerging from beyond museological preoccupations with representative and aestheticised folk artefacts. Looking for histories across the material, written and visual, repeatedly led me to one image displayed in the Horniman Museum exhibition. The photograph below shows objects collected in the village of Viştea, a chest, bench covered with a white cloth and a woven blanket, a chair and a wall rack decorated with plates, textiles, and a religious icon (**Fig. 3.9**).

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<sup>48</sup> The file also tells us that the textile was collected in 1955 from Paraschiva Petrisor, made at home in the course of two days with homespun hemp thread and cotton thread purchased in the market



These quotidian artefacts, chairs, racks, textiles obtained from the households, provoke questions on their role in the arrangement. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), ethnographic museums create ethnographic objects in the process of excision and reassembly. In this context,

fragments become ethnographic objects by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached. They are what they are by virtue of the disciplines that 'know' them, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves (ibid.: 2).

This reassembling of things in the new setting poses questions around the performance of knowledge, the art of detachment and fragmentation in the museum space (ibid.: 388). Museum poetics operate through metonymy and mimesis, using partiality to create a specific aura and generate a sense of 'realness'. This museum-based mimetic art is often exercised in the form of *in situ* approaches to composition with objects arranged as reconstructions of settings. These representational conventions, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggested, project ethnographic objects as parts of wholes, slices of the world inserted into the exhibition space through dioramas, ethnographic villages or period rooms. Such an *in situ* approach framed the display of Viştea's domestic space as an ethnographic assemblage, generating a mimetic representation of the peasant house and the ethnographic area of the district. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the rhetoric of *in situ* installations, even in its dazzlingly realistic form of a relocated room in a museum space, is not neutral. The textual approach to exhibition analysis proposed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett serves as a method to unpack the constellations of meaning inscribed in the display design as well and to investigate the unintended avenues of visual communication. The combination of things on display, including images, textual information, artefacts as well as spatial design creates a setting that builds representations (Lidchi 1997). Analysis of the elements can bring insights about the conventions of particular poetics as well as aspects rendered absent or invisible.



**Fig. 3.9.** Display of the Viștea collection, 1957, Horniman Museum

The display of the Viștea interior highlights the poetics of the fragment represented by the Horniman Museum exhibition. The peasant quotidian is reassembled as staged authenticity and “mounted in a hermetic aesthetic space” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 408). In this spectacle intended to evoke “the effect called the real world” (ibid.: 3), the everyday of the ‘others’ is to be looked at, becoming a curiosity. The intimate space of vernacular material culture becomes public and the ordinary is transformed into the exhibited and spectacular. In the middle of the Viștea room reconstruction, composed by Samson’s team on the basis of the model sent from Bucharest, we can see a mannequin dressed in a traditional costume (**Fig. 3.9**). The dress was collected in 1956 from the German speaking Saxons in the village of Șura Mica, around sixty kilometres from Viștea (Șura Mica documentation see: **Fig. 3.8**). This photograph of the museum display is particularly evocative, unravelling the complexity inherent in the collection’s composition.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Saxons were seen as fascist enemies of the state and suffered from land and property confiscations and deportations to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union. The Saxon costume would not be considered as a part of Romanian folk art just as a German-speaking woman was not an element of the peasantry within the new socialist state. The Șura Mica set was collected in 1956, a year

after most of the artefacts. Was there reluctance to send a Saxon costume to London? Or was the Saxon set one of the *lacunae* in the collection that Otto Samson suggested should be filled? Unfortunately there are no records of the correspondence between Samson and the Romanian partners regarding specific additions to the main body of the collection. However, we do know that when the Horniman Museum decided to redisplay the collection in 1984 in partnership with the Village Museum in Bucharest, the Saxon material became an object of contention.<sup>49</sup> For Teague (2004), the keeper of the Horniman Museum at the time, the 1984 exhibition focused on Romanian national and peasant stereotypes and served as a setting where nationalism was communicated. (Teague 2004: 163) In this space, Teague observed:

A source of a certain embarrassment about the Horniman Museum collection was that it contained strong elements from the Hungarian and German minorities present in Romania. Whilst this had been acceptable in 1957, in 1984 it was no longer 'politically correct' as far as the Ceauşescu regime was concerned (ibid.: 158).



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<sup>49</sup> Urdea (2015) provides a detailed discussion on the archival material in relation to the 1984 redisplay of the collection.

**Fig 3.10** An archival photograph of a young woman in Sura Mica

In the Viştea display, the spell of staged reality of the *in situ* installation is broken by layers of clothing; it is the Saxon costume that reveals the crack beneath the surface of mimetic utopian realism. Firstly, this fragment was irrelevant in terms of the interpretation frame of ethnographic area, as Saxons were never present in Viştea. Secondly, it was a break in the premise of scientific accuracy of the composition of the dress. Following a discussion with the curator of the Emil Sigerus Museum in Sibiu, I learnt that in Şura Mica, this occasional dress would be governed by strict rules, becoming a form of communication, indicating the woman's identity within the community. It was interesting to discover that in that village, long fabric elements of the headdress, on the Horniman Museum mannequin running loosely down the neck and the vest (*see Fig. 3.9*), would be part of a strictly prescribed bun composed with decorative hairpins, depending on the age or the status of the woman. The violet kerchief, held in the mannequin's hand, would be tied to a specific side of the skirt as a marker of her marital status. Lastly, the dress would contain several additional elements of jewellery that would be transmitted as heirlooms or bought from Sibiu craftsmen.

The Saxon dress on display in 1957 might have been an assemblage of pieces that belonged to five different women, an accidental composition of disassociated parts. Looking back at the display of the Şura Mica costume in the Viştea interior, it was a mimetically inaccurate combination, both in the way it failed to represent any specific woman and by the fact that it was placed in the interior of a region where the German-speaking ethnic group was historically absent. The exhibition image of the irrelevant incidental Saxon presence in the whitewashed room of Viştea is particularly evocative as it takes on new meanings within the historical context in which the diorama setting was constructed. According to Edwards (2001), photographs are random, theatrical, performative objects with the potential for their meanings to be modified in numerous ways. Thinking through what photographs reveal and conceal, Edwards suggested:

Their inclusiveness also has the potential to be unsettling. ... Through the photograph's points of fracture, the rawness, we can begin to register the possibility of a history that is no longer founded on traditional models of experience and reference (Edwards 2001: 6).

The image of the Viştea room with the Saxon dress in the Horniman Museum was revealing on multiple levels, raw and random, exemplifying the discrepancy between the accurate aestheticised domestic interior display and the painful living history of the peasantry and ethnic minorities of 1950s Romania. Photographs, supplementary notes, memories resurfacing within the palimpsest-like records, uncover nuanced contexts, reveal various points of contact in which the artefacts were embedded and hint at the complex relationships involved in collecting and displaying folk art. Such museum traces are never neutral.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the fragmentary traces of the acquisition, exhibition and documentation of the Horniman Museum collection. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) noted, the poetics of the museum are related to a particular politics of fragments. My reading of the archival records linked to this collection illustrates the ambivalences inherent in the material, posing questions about institutional templates for folk art and frameworks of knowledge production. The exploration of the archival records and oral history related to the collection sheds light on the context in which the collection was acquired, classified and contextualised. The various fractures and contestations, explored through the museum director's correspondence, the collector's memories and the critical reading of the documentation files and visual material, reveals the cracks in the composition of the collection as a 'coherent whole'.

In this chapter, I argued that the collection could not be contained within the macroscopic context of international diplomatic relations, political instrumentality and museum conventions of the time. Rather, it is vested in multiple agencies and embodies collectors' and curators' own agendas. It was observed that the historical study of collections could help to uncover the stories of those that were the subject of museum representation as well as the historical contingency of collecting (Elsner and Cardinal 1994, O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000). In this context, the fragments of the Horniman Museum collection were explored as carriers of complex material histories and "exhibits of those who make them" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 2).

Beyond the rubrics and ready-made assemblages, there is a world of meanings of the material outside the safety of the categories of folk art, the unified gift or a homogenous set. Marginal notes and miscellaneous photographs hint at undocumented themes of dispossession, modern transformation and the movement of people and things, suggesting that this material culture was acquired from a rapidly changing setting. Breaking down the gift into a series of encounters opens it up for the exploration of these dormant meanings and makes apparent a fluid constellation material culture.

**PART II:**

**REVISITING THE MUSEUM COLLECTION IN THE VILLAGE OF  
VIȘTEA DE SUS**

**Prologue**

In the following part of the thesis, I take the theme of encounter into the present by re-establishing connections between the objects in the Horniman Museum collection and their makers in the contexts from which they were collected. As Chapter 3 has suggested, the frenzy for collecting in 1950s Romania was such that the museum staff were charging from village to village on ‘shopping trips’ in search of material for display at home and abroad. In the process, the lives of the villagers who made the objects and the circumstances under which they were living became largely forgotten or at least subordinated to the logic of collection and display. Little can be gleaned from the objects and the labels in the museum of the turbulent social and economic changes taking place in Romania at the time the artefacts entered the museum. In the next chapters, I argue that it is only through ethnographic encounters with some of the people who sold objects to the collectors that we can better understand the social, political and economic significance of the Horniman Museum collection.

## Chapter 4: Shopping and coping: eliciting stories on the encounter



Fig. 4.1 Afternoon in Viştea de Sus

### 4.1 Introduction

The ethnographic encounter is, after all, but a moment in the historical unfolding of a field of relationships in which all parties are inevitably bound up (Ingold 1996: 163).

Ethnographic collections often emerge en-route, in a process of travel and crossing (Clifford 1997) that involves specific negotiated encounters. The focus of this chapter is the event of ‘shopping for collections’ in the village of Viştea in Southern Transylvania. In what follows, I discuss conversations with present-day Viştea residents about the elided historical and social circumstances that accompanied the collection’s coming into being. Considering the sale of the villagers’ belongings, I demonstrate that an understanding of the local perspective on the acquisition event brings new insights on the broader context of the collector’s visit and the encounter between the villagers and the museum specialist. A central issue here is the vital emic perspective that allows an uncovering of the traces of local agency incorporated into the collection.



## 4.2 About Viştea: a historical context

Viştea de Sus is a village in Braşov County, central Romania, located between the foothills of the Făgăraş Mountains and the river Olt. According to a local legend, the village was founded by Vista, a shepherdess who settled in the picturesque mountain valley. Viştea was first mentioned in writing in 1511 as part of a property belonging to the Romanian nobility along with the surrounding Făgăraş Land (or Olt Land), a border zone between the historical principalities of Transylvania (north) and Wallachia (south). Between 1688 and 1867, the region fell under the rule of the Austro-Habsburg Empire. In the period following 1867, it was administered by Hungarian landowners until World War I when it became part of the newly formed Greater Romania.

Shifting historical circumstances, the policies of the foreign powers controlling the region, the demographic situation in rural areas and peasant land distribution customs led to the region remaining underdeveloped in the post-feudal period (Kideckel 1993: 35). At the turn of the century, the region became a site of emigration to the United States and southern Romania (ibid.: 39). In Viştea, most departures took place between 1890s and the First World War, in 1914 reaching a significant number of 124 immigrants, about a third of the workforce. As noted by the local historian, this phenomenon was linked to economic hardship, the partition of property related to population growth, the avoidance of military service, the availability of passports and credits and, last but not least, the local notion of the American dream. (Şerban 1984: 75).

Between the World Wars agriculture remained the main occupation, based on the three-field system of grain cultivation (wheat, rye, oats, potatoes and corn), animal husbandry (oxen, buffalo, pigs horses and sheep) and horticulture. In particular, apple plantations situated in the foothills of Făgăraş Mountains were an important source of income. Several conversations with elderly residents confirmed the importance of the apple trade at the time: I was often told that houses were built with ‘cash from apples’. Other occupations alongside farming were seasonal and semi-professional crafts, including village carpenters, shoemakers, furriers and blacksmiths. A small Roma community lived at the outskirts of the village, in the hamlet of Viştişoara, and provided ad hoc craft services, mostly engaging in basketry and joinery. Goods were traded locally - agricultural produce and wood were sold during weekly markets in the city of Făgăraş and

cattle and pork markets in the surrounding villages (ibid.: 215). There were two shops in the village providing basic goods unobtainable through the subsistence economy; salt, gas, matches, tobacco, and cotton thread. The interwar period also brought the first signs of modernisation. Traditional wooden cottages were slowly replaced by new constructions, two or three-room brick houses with tiled roofs and larger sheds for animals (ibid.: 212). Other infrastructural developments in the village at the time included: river regulation, road construction and the establishment of a school, a village library and a house of culture.



**Fig. 4.2.** The city of City of Victoria (Victoria Comunismului) in a postcard (left)

**Fig. 4.3.** The chemical plant in the City of Victoria (right)

The Second World War had a profound impact on village life, due to army mobilisation and the construction of a German armament factory in Ucea. The plant was located only 4 km from Viştea and employed most men who were not part of military operations. As a result, agricultural work became increasingly feminised. The installation of state socialism after the Second World War brought to Viştea the industrialisation and nationalisation of the Romanian People's Republic's planned economy. The transformation was particularly evident in Ucea, transforming the factory into a large chemical plant (*combinatul chimic*), a Sovromchim within the Stalinist economic strategy of rural industrialisation. In 1949, the worker's colony, locally called *Red Ucea*, was developed into an emblematic socialist town, from 1954 named Victory of Communism (*Victoria Comunismului*). Under socialism, Viştea became subject to state agrarian reform.

The 'Moldovean' Collective Farm (*Cooperativa Agricola de Producție*, hereafter CAP) was established in Viştea in 1962, and operated until the 1990s. At the

outset, the collective consisted of around 60 horses, 50 buffalos and over 250 cows and sheep along with farming equipment (Șerban 1984: 221). The CAP introduced mechanised farming and new a division of labour, grouping villagers into teams, brigades and sections according to residency criteria. According to my respondents, every street-based team was required to fulfil a daily quota on the state farm. The socialist development project of Victoria, Făgăraș and other local towns transformed this profoundly agricultural region into a centre of heavy industry based on the burgeoning chemical sector. As in other parts of Romania, the process of rural industrial development had an effect on the villagers' relationship with the city, creating a new class of agricultural proletariat, 'weekend peasants' working in the surrounding factories (Cartwright 2001: 62). Peasant workers in Viștea found employment in the nearby chemical plant and often received training through the secondary school, based in the town of Victoria. Some villagers moved to the rapidly industrialising cities of Făgăraș, Brașov, Sibiu, Bucharest and others across Romania.

After the 1989 revolution, the state farm was dissolved as a part of a de-collectivisation policy and the Victoria chemical plant underwent privatisation. Contemporary Viștea represents a rich mosaic of small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs. Recently, there is also a noticeable increase in immigration to other European Union countries, mostly Spain, Italy and Austria.

### **4.3 The monograph and the artefacts**

In *The Historian's Craft*, Marc Bloch asserted that historical research may be understood as a form of craftsmanship where

the variety of historical evidence is nearly infinite. Everything that man says or writes, everything that he makes, everything he touches can and ought to teach us about him (Bloch 1954: 66).

For Bloch, the master historian should be equipped with an extensive toolkit and demonstrate the skill of exploring the past via multiple routes. Following Bloch's guideline, I demonstrate that the discovery of a collection's history can take place through several directions and unconsidered sources. In what follows, I discuss a vignette from photo elicitation research emerging from an exploration of the Viștea's historical monograph. The dialogic encounter with images, objects and texts in the village

exemplifies the relevance of human histories in museum ethnography and the potential of revelatory incidents (Fernandez 1986) in collecting historical evidence on the collection's past and its local understandings.

In the summer evenings of 2012, I was reading the manuscript on Viştea's history in the house of Radu, the son of the village monographer. During these sessions, Radu sat next to me in an armchair accompanied by his two granddaughters. He was protecting the document from misuse (see Introduction) and explaining sections of the book. In return for his time and granting access to the manuscript, I acted as an English teacher for one of the granddaughters. As my gatekeeper and I gradually moved through the chapters of the monograph, we started to discover other threads in the Horniman Museum collection's story. One evening, I brought the photographs of the Viştea Horniman Museum collection to explain to Radu the particular topic of my research and the reason for my interest in the manuscript. Flicking through the images left on the table, Radu suddenly stopped at an image with the name of Paraschiva Vulcan and stated that it was his grandmother who sold the object to the Horniman Museum collection.

The photograph was a significant means of creating trust with the cautious caretaker of the monograph. It was interesting to discover how the flow of objects taken out of the attic opened a new relationship and generated chains of conversations about the past and the local understanding of the collection. Firstly, the discovery of a personal legacy in a museum collection evoked Radu's intimate stories about his family members, their lives in the United States and subsequent return to Romania. Secondly, it was an opportunity for reconnecting the image with objects kept at home. The same evening, I was shown several textiles made by Paraschiva (**Fig. 4.4.**) that later became part of Radu's mother's heirloom. These pieces included numerous decorative items resembling the objects of the Horniman Museum collection. Yet, an object of particular importance to Radu was a simple black woollen coat (see **Fig. 4.5.**). He explained that this moth-eaten piece of fabric and the museum artefacts represented his family history as wealthy, landowning peasants (*boiar*).

For Radu, textiles acted as visual symbols of identity: evidence attesting someone's heritage of belonging to one of the best households in the village and material expressions of rank differences within the village. The next day, I wrote in my field notes:

Radu enumerated all components of his grandmother's trousseau. He explained how, in the course of the wedding ceremony, the dowry chest was ritually moved from the bride's house to her new home and officially displayed in the new location.



**Fig. 4.4.** Family photograph of Paraschiva Vulcan, who sold textiles for the Horniman Museum collection (left)

**Fig. 4.5.** The monographer's son, Mr Radu, with a boyar coat (right)

The images of the museum material initiated dialogue about the role played by artefacts in facilitating the genealogical continuity and the status of the household. In the past, in peasant contexts across Eastern Europe, textiles in the trousseau were a source of wealth, an idiom of kinship and affinity and a symbol of a newly established relationship between domestic groups. As Makovicky (2007) pointed out in a similar case in Slovakia:

in traditional peasant society, the trousseau was representative of the economic and social standing of the bride's family ... The trousseau came to represent a woman's genealogical connection to the property and land of her family (Makovicky 2007: 300).

By the use of textiles in dowry (*zestre*), vernacular material culture was related to the wider context of the village's social organisation, based on the idiom of the household. Textiles of the trousseau were signs of local status and meaningful players in relationships between households, facilitating local hierarchies and connections within the community. These relations, as I explore in the following sections, were being fundamentally reshaped at the time of the collection acquisition.

During another of my monograph-reading sittings, I had an opportunity to discuss the Horniman Museum images with Radu's sister. When I explained the outline of my project, she told me that she vividly remembered the visit of the Museum of Folk Art

curator in 1955. She reminisced that this event was publicly announced during a Sunday mass. The priest explained the presence of a person collecting objects for a museum and encouraged the villagers to approach her. At the same time, this childhood memory was incomplete and my respondent was not aware that her grandmother responded to the appeal.

The exploration of Paraschiva's donation to the 1957 Horniman Museum collection reveals the potential of oral, material and visual sources in historical investigation (Bloch 1954) and exemplifies the value of photo elicitation in reconstructing a collection's history. The story also reveals the historical significance of the household as a mode of ordering the social world. It does not, however, tell us why Paraschiva Vulcan and other residents of Viștea invited the collector to their homes and sold parts of their heirlooms and dowries.



**Fig. 4.6.** Photo elicitation session. The lady in the middle is looking at Horniman Museum collection photographs while her mother shows me similar textiles woven by her at home. The lady on the right discusses the names of the donors of the collection

**Fig. 4.7.** Irina's guest room where she hosted the collector

## 4.4 Coping mechanisms

In what follows, I argue that the decisions to offer valuables to the Bucharest collector need to be contextualised within the historical setting of 1950s rural Romania. Drawing on conversations with the village elderly and the local perspectives on the event, I will illustrate the key narratives emerging from consulting the collection images and object files in the locality (**Fig. 4.6.**).

The memory of Irina, the collector's host and the wife of the local Orthodox priest threw interesting light upon the villagers' engagement with the collector. The photograph above (**Fig. 4.7.**) shows her guest room with a bed on which the collector slept while visiting the village in 1954. The priest's house was locally known as an open, hospitable space and provided accommodation for anyone who wished to stay in the village. In this context, Irina was the first person to be contacted by the visiting museum professional. She was pleased to provide accommodation for the guest and remembered the curator as an approachable, kind and elegant woman. She reminisced that the curator promised her assistance with her daughter's university application. In Stalinist Romania, she explained, children of clergymen were having difficulties in getting positions in higher education institutions and often were excluded from the application process. Establishing a relationship with the curator offered an opportunity to obtain a recommendation letter from a state employee, allowing her daughter to take part in the entry exams for a history degree course in Bucharest. In the end, the daughter decided to study Romanian literature in a local university and the recommendation letter was never written.

One afternoon, sitting with a group of women at Irina's garden, we recognised some objects from the collection photographs. This accidental discovery generated a revealing dialogue about the acquisition process. Eva, now in her late seventies, identified two images of artefacts sold for the collection and explained her reasons for the transaction. In 1954, she indicated, she had just got married and was in financial difficulty so, when the Bucharest museum curator appeared in the village, she decided to sell textiles belonging to her late mother-in-law. She narrated her decision as motivated by the necessity to pay her quota (*imposite*). From conversations with several women who knew the donors or themselves offered objects to the museum, it became clear that state obligations were an important factor in entering into the transaction.

Through photo elicitation, there was a clear pattern emerging from stories about the museum transactions. Firstly, in the course of the conversations about the photographs and museum files, my respondents suggested that several women selling objects were childless. I was explained that it was a significant factor for the decision to approach the curator as these women were in a financial difficulty, were often excluded from the traditional networks of kin support and did not have anybody to transfer their goods to. In Viştea, being unmarried or infertile carried the connotation of an unfulfilled life and an incomplete household. In consequence, the dowry objects of unmarried women were rendered valueless and inactive in the absence of the relationships they were initially aimed to facilitate.

Through transactions with the collector, handmade textiles, usually used in heirloom transfers, entered a new set of relationships. That these women offered such objects for sale might be interpreted as an act of riddance of valuables deemed out of circulation within the village. Engaging in the transaction was a way of exercising agency over this deactivated wealth devoid of its customary local use. At the same time, this context throws new light upon the constitution of the Viştea set as a collection of typical objects, as those artefacts were locally perceived as unrepresentative of the norm.

The second context of the sales explained the decisions of Paraschiva Vulcan, Eva and married women who sold their personal belongings to pay their *quota*. These decisions were symptomatic of the situation in the countryside at the time of the 1950s land reforms. Cartwright (2001) has provided a useful review of the history of Romanian land reforms and their social consequences. Land collectivisation is a key context of rural history post-1949 when the Party declared peasants' attachment to the land to be an obstacle to the construction of socialism and started a brutal nationalisation campaign. The peasant question was to be solved by instilling class war in the countryside for the elimination of wealthy peasants called *chiaburi*, the Romanian equivalent to Soviet kulaks. As Cartwright suggested, the rural population was divided into two distinct classes: the 'allies' and the 'enemies of the people' depending on the "peasant's relation to the means of production and their family background" (ibid.:68). Examining post-war collectivisation policy, he highlighted the issues of population displacement and the political project of social revolution in the countryside. For Cartwright, post-war agrarian



policies resulted in the transformation of peasants into workers, state seizure of private land<sup>50</sup> and the elimination of German and Jewish minorities.

Across Romania, peasants were recruited into collective farms by forceful persuasion, and through the repressive system of quotas before collectivisation was declared complete in 1962. By this time 93% of land was in a form of association. This policy often led to local protests against the repression of peasants, in Viştea resulting in the rise of the Făgăraş guerrilla movement. Participants of this spontaneous local uprising were imprisoned or sent to labour camps at the Danube-Black Sea Canal construction project (Brisca and Ciuceanu 2007, Catanuş and Roşke 2004).

During collectivisation, the relationship between peasants and their land and property underwent profound transformation. The state deployed various pedagogies and assaults on village social relations, breaking solidarities and disrupting communities. Propaganda tools, socialist contests, the evocation of Soviet models, the manipulation of language and other technologies of persuasion “had one express goal: that peasants would join the collectives ‘of their free will’” (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 369). Kligman and Verdery (2011) asserted that the 1950s land reform and transformation of rural property had a significant impact on cultural and social relationships. In particular, state seizures of property affected traditional notions of rural subjectivity. Personhood in the traditional Romanian village was embedded in social networks and material possessions (land, means of production, animals, household goods). Thus,

to have one’s household possessions – clothing, furniture, blankets, the woven rugs and embroidered towels wives and daughters produced as signs of family wealth for display, use, and dowry, and so forth – confiscated and carted through the village for all to see was cause of deep humiliation, accompanied by emotional pain and trauma ... The expropriation of land, livestock, and other possessions, then, was a fundamental blow to the person-ideal of possessing. It attacked the very meaning of ‘home’, ‘family’ and person for every peasant, but especially for wealthy ones, because these possessions were essential elements of being a *bun gospodar*, a good household manager – an image central to their identity. (ibid.: 98)

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<sup>50</sup> Including multiple consequences as peasants were banned from selling, dividing, leasing or mortgaging land without the permission of the Ministry of Agriculture. The process was under close monitoring and control over supply and distribution of produce, with compulsory quotas of income tax, in the push towards industrial employment and mechanisation of agriculture.

In this context, the political project of the 1950s distorted the main idioms of social life, undermining the ideals of personhood, fields of community reproduction, kin networks and notions of the good household (ibid.: 102).

Kideckel's ethnography (1993) provided a case study of the region adjacent to Viştea, demonstrating the effect of collectivisation on local relationships and notions of identity. The rural reform created antagonisms within the community and between the people and the state. According to Kideckel, rural labour was a social and collective effort and constituted a critical factor affecting every facet of community life, shaping the villager's, view of the state, property, and socialism itself. Collectivisation generated a new type of household with peasant-workers adopting mixed labour strategies, living in the village and working in factories around the area (ibid.: 91). As households were reorganised, so were social networks, creating new identities and a range of often-informal practices (ibid.: 103) and reconstructing the individuals engaging in those activities.

In this context, how did the burden of excessive taxation, the aforementioned *quotas*, relate to land reform? In 1949, the government of the Romanian People's Republic introduced a system of obligatory quotas for farm produce to be sold to the state, putting higher pressure on those who owned more land (Georgescu 1991: 235). In the quota system, peasants were to pay in-kind taxes based on their holdings, running up progressively according to their land possessions. The main functions of the 1952 – 1955 food quotas were the accumulation of food surpluses for industrialisation, provision of food for new urban workers, payment of war reparations to the Soviet Union, the motivation of peasants into collectives and increased production on their farms and facilitation of 'class war' in the countryside (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 114).

The local narratives of the collection's acquisition revealed the hardships related to the 1950s quota system. The history of selling personal belongings to the curator represents a means of repurposing material culture in the extraordinary time of the 1951-1955 Five-Year Plan. In Viştea, the period was remembered as a time of hunger and excessive demands of the state. The 1950s were told through stories of cruel and illogical policies, where almost all food produce had to be transported by horse and cart to state depots located away from the village, leaving people without food. In this context of extreme poverty, selling household artefacts to pay off excessive taxes was a tactic of the

Viştea residents to get by (Kotkin 1995, Scott 1998). Material culture was re-appropriated as a coping mechanism, a tactical bottom-up response to the events that shook the countryside during the period.

Several collection donors, such as Eva and Paraschiva, were labelled as ‘wealthy’ peasants and faced very high quotas. The resulting poverty led them to consider other ways of obtaining cash, including a sale of personal objects. According to Pine, “the legitimacy of the house stems partly from its capacity to endure, despite enormous changes and upheavals in the wider political economy” (Pine 1996: 445). Those who could not ensure the continuity of the household in the challenging circumstances of coercive installation of socialism in the village, decided to sell their belongings for cash.

Reflecting on Russia’s installation of a Stalinist command economy, Kotkin observed that the planned economy “resembled the allocation and mobilisation processes of the military, characterised by hyper centralisation, extreme rigidity and colossal waste and inefficiency” (Kotkin 1995: 31). Both in Russia and Romania, the objectives of building socialism in urban and rural contexts resulted in shortages and a lack of supplies. Populations under growing state pressures employed particular tactics to overcome the limitations of the regime. They struggled to create room to manoeuvre and generate possibilities within the restrictions imposed by the state. These spheres of navigation have been an insightful means of discovering everyday lived socialism

Petty manoeuvres and modest stratagems hold an essential clue, for in them the basic outlines of the new socialist society made themselves manifest... Socialism was not only built but lived by people-individuals with hopes, fears, a capacity for survival, and no small amount of inventiveness (ibid: 154).

The artefacts sold in the village and incorporated into museum collections performed a vital function in these survival tactics, deeply embedded in the setting of post-war agrarian reform. These circumstances, representing a historical point in the life of the community, pushed the Viştea residents to engage in the traffic of their household items. Through various journeys to museums in Bucharest, London and around the world these objects were progressively transformed into folk art, institutionalised and used to represent and exemplify the achievements of the socialist state in the international traffic of Cold War representations.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The arrival of the Folk Art Museum museum curator in Viştea in 1954 occurred at a perfect moment. Rushing to acquire the artefacts for the international collection, she was met with a particularly responsive community and was able to move through the village as if walking across a marketplace with houses-stalls full of charming things to acquire. In the following weeks, she gathered a vast set of objects and returned to Bucharest with suitcases packed with 100 artefacts, the largest part of the gift sent to London. This snapshot image brings into mind the Stakhanovite urge to over-fulfil the norm in the output of folk art acquisition.

Yet, the scene of collecting is “entangled with other ways of relating to objects” (Macdonald 2006: 81). These often contrasting constructions of value intersect at the moment of encounter. From the village perspective, the image of the collection event in a traditional rural community becomes ambiguous. Through exploring the question of local engagement in the process, this chapter unravels some of the unfolding relationships and negotiations between the villagers and the collector. The counter-narratives evoked in the process of photo elicitation were related to the moment of selling the artefacts to the curator and spoke of local agendas and acts of riddance. At the same time, memories of acquisition activated stories of scarcity and hardship and tactics of getting-by in the turbulent context of the 1950s agrarian reform.

In Viştea, the moment of the collection acquisition reflected the historical background of the profound changes in local livelihood and material culture. The divergent dynamics of institutional shopping and local coping, of the acquisition and its backstage, resurface in retrospect as a constellation of things and people situated very differently within the field of relationships in which the encounter took place (Ingold 1996). I argue that the narratives generated through photo elicitation can help to reshape our historical understanding of this collection. It is through giving the moment of acquisition a new presence that the museum material could now be placed in the context of more nuanced accounts, agendas, critical events (Das 1995) and the struggles and tactics of the local community.

## **Chapter 5: Dressing and undressing the house: perspectives on objects in space**

Man is surrounded by three layers, his skin, his clothing and walls, the building.

(Hundertwasser 1985)

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter it was shown that for the collector, the households in Viştea appeared to resemble market stalls, vessels containing possible acquisitions. Here I move on to provide an ethnographic and historical analysis of the spaces, which the collection artefacts inhabited before and during their museum careers. The chapter focuses on domestic objects within the museum space and the village household. Firstly, it is concerned with a historical description of the house within the sphere of Romanian museum practice. Secondly, it outlines the type of household specific to the 1950s focusing on the context of its material assemblage. Thirdly, it provides a local assessment of the shifting vernacular material culture and the manner in which the everyday domestic environment has been shaped and reconstituted. Finally, it explores the domestic interior within the wider spatial and temporal frameworks in which meanings are being constructed, negotiated and contested. It is argued that the understanding of the riddance of the collection artefacts within the context of the house assemblage in its various materialisations (as a display, a decorative system and a ruin) sheds light for their reinterpretation.

### **5.2 The house exhibited**

Museological studies often conceptualise the museum as a storehouse, as a

repository of memory, location of the collections that inform the basis of the national or cultural identity, of scientific knowledge and aesthetic value (Crane 2000: 4).

This part of the chapter provides the historical context for the understanding of the role of rural domesticity within the ‘Romanian storehouse’ as well as the sentiments attached to such material. Since the establishment of the first early 20<sup>th</sup> century museums

in Romania, peasant domestic spaces and the folk art of the vernacular environment have been important elements of exhibition making in the country's museum practice.

In 1907, the first public museum in Bucharest, the Museum of National Art, displayed rural architecture with a reconstruction of the house of master craftsman Mogoş. According to Popescu (2010), the museum acquired collections

with an aim of gradually creating a complete picture of Romanian folk architecture by region. The project, inspired by the open-air museum at Skansen (1891), was not to come to fruition. However, the idea was preserved, and in 1936 it finally came into being in the form of the Museum of the Romanian Village (ibid.: 39).

Painting the picture of the nation through an assemblage of traditional houses was key to that original moment of museum making, and since then, the peasant interior became key to the iconography of Romania within the country and outside its borders. In Romania, it played a central role in the renewal of applied and decorative arts (Popescu 2011: 18). At the same time, peasant architecture was at the fore of international exhibitions aiming at enhancing the country's self-image. One of the first representations abroad took place in 1911, when a replica of the Mogoş house became part of the Romanian Pavilion of the International Exhibition in Rome. Folkloric architecture was also a pivotal part of the designs of the pavilions exhibited in Barcelona (1929) and New York (1939) (Popescu 2010: 167).

The golden rules of showcasing Romanian peasant houses in museums were set during the interwar period by the exhibition practices of the Village Museum in Bucharest. This was an emblematic institution, an open-air museum formed of peasant houses dismantled in their original locations and reassembled in the capital. The creation of the scientifically oriented Museum of the Romanian Village was linked to the programme of the Bucharest sociological school, conducting monographic studies of rural locations across the country in the interwar period<sup>51</sup> (Radu 2007). For Dimitrie Gusti, the founder of the school, village monographs were the building blocks of a positive science of society, one that “must constitute itself as the science of the nation. It will determine for it the

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<sup>51</sup> The main sociological monographic campaigns of the Gusti's Romanian Social Institute were conducted in Goicea Mare (1925), Ruşetu (1926), Nerej (1927), Fundul Moldovei (1928), Drăguş (1929), Runcu (1930) and Cornova (1931) and through its photography and documentary films. circulated in press, academic conferences, publications of monographs, events organised in the villages, international and national exhibitions, the sociological fieldwork gained a significant public visibility and contributed to a specific image of the regions under study. (Rostas 2000: 85).

ethics and politics through which the people will find their true road to self-realisation” (Gusti 1940: 64). In the 1930s, Gusti acted as commissar general for the Romanian pavilions at the international exhibitions in Paris (1937) and New York (1939).<sup>52</sup>



**Fig. 5.1.** Professor Gusti’s team in Draguș, 1929 (left)

**Fig. 5.2.** Draguș interior displayed in the Village Museum in Bucharest (right)

The Gusti School and their monographic and exhibition-making activities have left a long-standing legacy on the conceptualisations of domestic space and local vernacular architecture in the Romanian museum practice. The image above (**Fig. 5.2.**) shows a peasant interior from the village of Draguș, the neighbouring village to Viștea and the site of one of the most successful “monographic campaigns” of the sociological school (Rostas 2000: 91). The Draguș household, brought back from the campaign and representing the ethnographic area of Fagaraș Land, has been on display since 1936 and continues to serve as an emblem of the Village Museum in Bucharest.

Since Gusti’s acquisition, the style of the Fagaraș district became key to the intellectual tradition of Romanian sociology, ethnography and museum work. Educated by the founding texts of the monographs and informed by the model of the Village Museum household, consecutive generations of social scientists and curators visited the area, exploring various aspects of the local custom and material folklore. As the archive of publications on this ethnographic area grew, museums were increasingly interested in obtaining artefacts from Fagaraș Land. In this way, the district became one of the most replicated in museum display and the circulation of peasant material culture in Romanian

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<sup>52</sup> The visual rhetoric of the 1939 exhibition presented a “rhetorically complex discourse” (Popescu 2011: 169), combining the modernist aspirations of the newly created Romanian state with interiors inspired by the folkloric style (ibid.: 172). In this pavilion, the modern shell protected the internal peasant soul.

ethnography. At the same time, as these artefacts made their way abroad amid the flows of folk art specimens, it stood for what was to be *the* Romanian peasant interior. Făgăraş Land became one of the primary homelands and emblematic places for sourcing folk art from rural communities.

The Arcadian spell casted by these artefacts is strongly present in text accompanying these representations, as we read in a catalogue on ‘Folk Art in Romania’ from 1956:

These interiors of peasant houses, so bright and picturesque, give one a feeling of comfort. Long years of experience have taught people to arrange the objects according to the requirements; as to the wealth of artistic elements employed in the decoration of the interior, it creates a charming and cosy atmosphere (Folk Art in Rumania 1956:9).

Under socialism, as open air museums were being set up in several towns, whole houses and various domestic items from numerous historical periods were brought to the Romanian cities for encyclopaedic and aestheticised displays of rural spaces. The 1959 catalogue of the Village Museum in Bucharest demonstrates that the experience of the museum is “a pleasant and exceptionally instructive stroll through the Rumanian rural landscape”. (Focşa 1959:10).

In a similar manner, Jadwiga, the Bucharest curator of the 1950s Museum of Folk Art, admired the aesthetic qualities of the cottages:

“in general, these house interiors are very hospitable. When you enter the house, the first thing you see is the bench covered with the colourful cloth; there are icons and pots on the wall ... it’s very pleasant.”

In this context, considering the house within 1950s exhibition practice, we are presented with encyclopaedic images of spaces with typical artefacts, interiors or sets of objects representing pristine villages within each ethnographic area. These recurring modes of organising and displaying collections were exported in exhibitions participating in cultural exchanges, creating a sentimental image of the rustic Romanian countryside and its vernacular architecture.

As this review demonstrated, the use of rural domestic space was intended to communicate specific meanings in Romanian museum practice. The cottage of the Făgăraş district remains a pivotal emblem of the national rural house within these aesthetic



categories, and modes of organisation and display. It is a quintessential part of the charm and didacticism of the Romanian ‘storehouse’. As I will show below, this interpretative frame does not represent the local views of this material culture.



**Fig. 5.3.** The house of Lisa in the “ASTRA” Museum of Traditional Folk Civilisation, Sibiu (left)

**Fig. 5.4.** The interior of the displayed house, Sibiu (right)

### 5.3 Viştea’s own model house

In contrast to the museum specialist, the residents of Viştea did not perceive their cottages as charming. On the first encounter in the village, my desire for knowledge about the objects in the traditional house was met with consternation. Why, my respondents asked, would I want to explore the museum collection through a few derelict households, locked away and rendered obsolete? Instead, I was set on a trip to the Sibiu open-air museum where I was to find a representative example of a house from the Făgăraş district.

The son of my host arranged a meeting with the former curator of the museum, responsible for transferring the dwelling to the museum and arranging its interpretation “as the monument of traditional vernacular technology, illustrating hemp processing”. Lisa, the source location of the house acquired for the museum 1998, is located at a distance of about 12 km from Viştea de Sus. The curator, himself from the area, relocated ‘the Lisa house’ after its owners decided to replace the structure with a modern building.

It was interesting to discover that the museum reconstruction was a collective effort – the interiors were recreated with the help of local residents and several Vişteans donated personal objects to enrich the display. The exhibited household is composed of the main building, a shed and a stable situated in the backyard. Traditionally, the living space was

called ‘the house’ (*casă*) and often contained a separate smaller backroom for storage (*cămăra*). This basic model was designed to accommodate one family unit (parents and their children) whereas other members of the extended family (the elderly) were located in a separate building opposite, called ‘the small house’ (*căsuță*).

The tour started with an explanation of the heating system, situated in the main room (*vatră în casă*) with a stove divided into the higher part (*vatră*) and cooking component (*plită*). The opposite corner of the room was reserved for the bed, typically covered with a red squared blanket (*țol*) woven by means of four shafts and pillows with decorative pillow cases decorated on one surface (on its ‘head’ - *la capăt* or ‘face’ – *față de perne*). The walls were covered with various types of homemade woven fabrics and icons. These religious images were produced outside the household, mostly obtained in the market from painters and vendors from local centres of glass icon painting such as Cîrțișoara, Arpaș and Făgăraș as well as in the area of the city of Brașov. They typically represented Jesus Christ, St. Mary (*Maică Domnului*), the Orthodox saints and the Fathers of the Church (*Părinții Bisericii*). Pottery served both as utility and a part of the décor. Plates (*blide*) were bought from traveling Hungarian potters from Odorhei and Korond (pottery craftsmanship did not develop in Făgăraș Land as there was no clay sufficient for production in the region). The luxurious, decorative ceramics were attached to a *blidar*, a wooden post along the top part of the wall and were used mostly for family gatherings and social occasions, mostly weddings. Hungarian oven tiles were also used to decorate the stove.

The curator pointed to the key traditional furnishings: the table, the bench and the chairs. Often, households with more family members were equipped with several wide benches (*canapea*), serving as beds for children. The table was covered with a white or colourful hemp tablecloth, depending on the occasion and character of the meal. Furniture was of a simple character, in some houses painted with floral ornaments in the peasant baroque style, based on the urban and Saxon models. Along with the pottery and icons, furniture was obtained from the outside, bought from a local carpenter. Additional parts of the house interior were the Roma-produced wicker cradle, hung above the bed, and a decorated chest. The curator pointed to the significance of the dowry chest the contents of which were produced by the mother and the bride-to-be. Chests contained textiles and

clothes, and were covered by blankets and pillows of similar decoration to one found on the bed.

The museum visit provided an opportunity for viewing domestic material culture in the local museological context and exploring the ‘affective weight’ of things for the curator (Harrison 2013). For my guide, the interior represented both the living conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century peasantry and the childhood memory of households present in his native village. My guide’s curatorial expertise was simultaneously linked to scholarly training and a sense of place and local identity. Similarly, the villagers perceived this representational model as an accurate depiction of the local house, more authentic than the remaining cottages in the village. The museum house in Sibiu was part of the local imaginary of their historical material culture, viewed as the authorised village heritage and a source of a shared local contribution to the representation of the material past.



**Fig. 5.5.** On the way to the Viştea Mare valley, outside Viştea (left)

**Fig. 5.6.** Main crossroads between Viştea de Sus and Viştea de Jos (right)

#### **5.4 Domestic space and the local aesthetics of display**

Returning from the trip to the Sibiu museum, my host expressed great satisfaction about my experience of the typical local old house. This was all I needed to know, she and her friends stated, for my museum work. There was nothing to see in the village, I heard, just some ruins. For my host, the few derelict cottages remaining in Viştea contrasted with the perfectly preserved museum building, appearing less authentic and, as she suggested, less useful for my inquiry.

The model building situated in the Sibiu museum became a significant point of reference when some villagers finally decided to open the doors of the remaining old dwellings. This section describes three cases of respondents' reflections on the traditional households. Revisiting Viştea with images of the Horniman Museum collection and 1957 exhibition elicited narratives about the structure of the house interior and the role of the artefacts within. The conversations below regarding domestic interiors provided useful insights on the understandings of everyday space and the shifting meanings of domestic material culture.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were 295 wooden houses in the village with only around 20 brick, stone or clay structures. In the 1930s, brick houses started to replace the cottages but in the 1950s the village dwellings were predominantly made of wood. The Horniman Museum collection artefacts were part of the quotidian material culture of the 1950s household, performing various functions in everyday lives of the Viştea residents. Irina had a vivid memory of the 1950s village:

“People started to modernise after the war, created houses made of brick... earlier, all houses were made of wood, decorated in an identical way. That was the custom. It was a hard life.”

The best-preserved buildings representing the traditional form of domestic environment are situated at the far edge of the village in the Viştea Mare valley, close to the foothills of the Făgăraş Mountains. The hamlet of Viştişoara is located around 4 km from the centre of Viştea and consists of around 20 houses along the road between Sâmbata de Sus Monastery and the town of Victoria. At present, only two or three families reside there throughout the year, the rest of the houses belonging to seasonal occupants. The two examples of remaining old houses in Viştişoara are still kept in an original condition as the elderly people who lived in them passed away only recently.

Mama Live's house represented an elaborate version of the traditional household, with two rooms and a cellar turned into an additional bedroom. Her home was built in the 1920s “from money brought by her husband from the United States”, a common example of interwar migration from the commune, another aspect of local history that does not feature in ethnographic museum displays. The organisation of the interior showed similarity with the model found in the Sibiu museum. The only sign of the wealth of the

returning emigrant was an additional room and cooking annex transformed into a bedroom.



**Fig. 5.7.** The front of Mama Livie house (left)



**Fig. 5.8.** Sorin and Mama Tave outside the house (right)



**Fig. 5.9.** *Chindeu* hanging adorning the icon

The furnishings of the house differed from the museum version in terms of the stylistic motives found in the textiles used for wall and bed decoration. Along with the regional red, grey and white ornaments there were pieces with other designs, such as the



blackish highly decorated wall hanging (*chindeu*), and a colourful cotton-made, long wall textile hung horizontally over the bed (*peretar*).

Mama Tave, a friend of the deceased owner, pointed me to family photos and religious images on the walls. She explained that the icons were always adorned either with one piece of textile, highly decorated at the ends, draped over the icon, or two pieces alongside it. This type of fabric (*chindeu*) would be referred to as having the ‘body’ (*cu trup*) or, in the case of the two pieces alongside the icon – ‘without the body’ (*fâra trup*). In the case of the lack a ‘body’, women would sometimes add another textile on top of the display, a rectangular hanging (*cârpa*) folded in a bow-shaped ‘butterfly’ (*fluture*). This system of icon ornamentation would also be applied to family photos, especially of those who worked in the United States. In the house, we could see displays of portraits of these foreign family members in their festive traditional dress and in front of their American houses and cars. She explained that the glass icon decoration would be used around lithographic or printed religious images. Under socialism, Mama Tave mentioned, most hand-painted glass icons were unfortunately sold to vendors and collectors visiting the village, as “people were not aware of their value”.



**Fig. 5.10.** Room with a typical textile composition of *peretar* (long piece horizontally placed behind the bed), *chindee* (longer items, adorning photographs, windows or icons) and *cârpe* (at the ceiling, with visible two red endings) (left)



**Fig. 5.11.** Room with a bench covered with the *tol* blanket, checked *peretar* and various *chindee*. The small bow-like pieces are called butterflies, adding a ‘body’ to the *chindee* (right)

Walking through the room, Mama Tave pointed to other combinations of textiles around the house, stating that all houses were characterised by a similar type of decoration. Before Christmas, the house would be dressed more elaborately in a fresh set of textiles of the same patterns. According to Mama Tave, decorative plates displayed on

the walls were exclusively used during festive meals, family occasions and religious celebrations. Although they looked elaborate and luxurious, she pointed out, “people were poor and often came with their own cutlery in their pockets to take part in these meals”. On a daily basis, family members often ate from the same plate.

Angela, the granddaughter of the house owner, herself residing in a modern building next door, mentioned that her grandmother was very specific about the exact layout of the furnishings. Each time she was cleaning her grandmother’s house, she would be criticised for rearranging textiles and placing objects in the



**Fig. 5.12.** As a homage to her grandmother’s craftsmanship, Angela’s grandmother’s textiles is kept in Angela’s house, Viștișoara (left)

**Fig. 5.13.** Mama Tave in the summer kitchen preparing preserves, Viștișoara (right)



**Fig. 5.14.** Interior of the small house in Viștișoara

“This is the way things were placed around the house” – Mama Tave explained when we entered the second building. This house in Viștișoara was in fact the ‘small house’ (*casuță*) built for the elderly opposite the main household. This structure consisted

of one room and a hall with a stove. The bed was covered with a chequered blanket (*strai*) and pillows with a decorative woven ‘face’ (*fața*) and a striped ‘body’ (*trup*). Icons and photographs on the walls were dressed with *chindeu* hangings, both with the upper ‘body’ and in the ‘butterfly’ assemblage (without the body). Pots were hung on the long beam at the top of the wall and although there were no textiles attached to it (due to the small size of the room), there were a couple of additional butterflies to cover the top of the wall space. Icons were exclusively lithographic or printed and represented less Orthodox depictions, such as a reproduction of the Last Supper or image of the Holy Family, some resembling Catholic imagery rather than Orthodox icons.

The last old house visited was situated in Viștea de Sus, belonging to the 81-year-old Mrs Codrea, who now lived on the opposite the road. This two-bedroom cottage (currently serving as storage) remained dressed (*casa îmbracata*). The rooms were characterised by a similar system of furnishings with a bed, a table, a bench and textile decoration on the walls. Pottery was not hung on the walls but stored in a kitchen cupboard. Examining the textiles, Mama Codrea pointed to the older hangings made by the owner’s mother, but pointed out that she created the majority of the pieces on the walls herself. The first room (see **Fig. 5.17.**) served as a kitchen. The central object in this space was a fridge, a present from her daughter who used to work in Austria. The second room appeared more traditional with a row of wall hangings and *chindeu* textiles adorning the images. The benches were painted light blue, creating a lively contrast with the colourful tablecloth.



**Fig. 5.15.** Mrs Codrea showing me into the house (left)



**Fig. 5.16.** The room in the cottage, used as storage. Here, left from the door, we can see two *chindeu*, a *peretar* and a set of *chindeu* “without the body” adorning the icon. *Cârpe* are situated typically in a row above the other components, hung in a way that both endings are visible. (right)



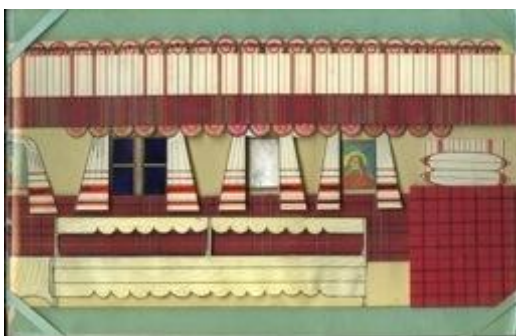


**Fig. 5** Refrigerator from Austria, *chindeu* 'with a body' adorning the icon and horizontal *cârpa* (left)

**Fig. 5.18.** The second room with a colourful tablecloth, hand-woven by Mrs Codrea in the new style. In the background, various images with *chindee without the body* and a long *cârpa* wall hanging on top (right)

Exploring the cottage 'ruins' in the village provided a context for resituating the museum artefacts and the objects around the old houses. The process of walking through the cottages in Viştea and Viştişoara activated several narratives relating to the past residents of these buildings and ways in which everyday material culture was organised and endowed with meaning. Through the stories of house arrangements, personal belongings and photographs, my guides generated narratives about the owners, their neighbours and family members. Pieces of furniture, photographs and styles of fabric decorations made the houses recognisable and attached to specific life histories. At the same time, during these visits it was repeatedly pointed out that most houses were decorated in a prescribed way. The house served both as a personal space and a marker of a specifically defined spatial organisation. During these 'ruin tours' (Boym 2010: 58), I recognised an emerging common feature of the cottage interiors. Repeatedly, the stories alluded to a sense of accuracy and a systematic approach given to the arrangement of the everyday objects.

### 5.4.1 Enchanting textiles: home decoration and agency



**Fig. 5.19.** A model of the Viștea display sent to the Horniman Museum by the Museum of Folk Art Bucharest, 1956 (left).

**Fig. 5.20.** House interior model for the 1984 redisplay in the Horniman Museum (right).

The systematic organisation of rural domestic interiors has been noted in Romanian ethnography with a range of studies resulting in regional and comparative monographs illuminating various types of peasant households (Iuga 2011, Stahl 1958, Stoica 1974). For Stoica, rural interiors express the complexities of historical change and general and particular cultural identities, revealing

on the one hand, the socio-economic conditions that gave rise to a certain arrangement and, on the other, the aesthetic conception of the community and the aesthetic sense – ultimately, the preferences – of the man or woman who arranged it (Stoica 1984: 39).

Recent ethnographic research has also provided illustrative case studies on the historical dynamism of the space and, in the case of northern Romania, the revival of the tradition of arrangement of the ‘good rooms’ (Avram 2004, Iuga 2010). Also framed as the ‘best room’, the cottage interior has been analysed through its function in the maintenance of intra-household networks and practices of hospitality (Posey 2005). This research complements the above insights by examining the Viștea assemblages through an anthropological lens. Here, I present a case of the production and transformation of interiors, related to complex local identities and the historical experiences of local respondents.

In 1955, the Horniman Museum was sent models of displays to represent the cottage interior in the exhibition space. I took the images (*see Fig.5.19*) for use in photo elicitation in order to evoke the perspectives of Viștea residents concerning the

organisation of the display. At first, the museum sketches appeared illegible and unfamiliar. The incomprehensibility of these visual models became a key point in thinking through issues of propositional and embedded forms of knowledge. Makovicky (2010) discussed a case of Slovak bobbin lace-makers, comparing the pedagogies of the village with the parameters of institutionalised discourses on the craft. She observed that:

while notation and diagrams act as rhetorical devices which help lace-makers articulate procedures and commands which are otherwise deeply embedded into bodily memory, they also render craft knowledge abstract by objectifying bodily practice (ibid.: 91).

The cases of notation and images of ‘representative’ room arrangements in Viştea are common in the way they recontextualise and disembodify daily forms of material practice. For the village elderly, the museum visuals became understandable when I redrew them in their presence, discussing what each of the elements stood for. This embodied re-enactment of the 1950s museum images gave us an opportunity to discuss the contents of the house and the museum display as well as to explore the local terminology of the house contents. Comparing the museum images with local impressions, I learnt about the omissions and misrepresentations of the museum material. As we sat in the yard, discussing and sketching room layouts, often my respondents interacted with the emerging drawing in bodily and tangible ways. The objects images gave my respondents “something to ‘hang’ their stories on” (Bell 2003: 119). In the course of the discussions, they were grouping together objects’ photographs from the pile, explaining their role within the composition. At times, they pointed to an element of the interior, chose an image from the collection or brought an object from their houses to show a good candidate for a potential display.

From the conversations, the specificity of the systematic organisation of the interiors became particularly evident in the case of textiles. Thinking through the conspicuous textile assemblages in the cottage interior allows the interrogation of their representative character for the household, their powers over visitors and the local perceptions on objects, their qualities and values. In the old house, fabrics covered the walls and the tables, forming a prescribed ensemble of objects marking the space. During the walks in the remaining old interiors and the drawing sessions, textiles were often described in language that related to body parts. It was interesting to note in these descriptions that tablecloths and pillowcases had ‘faces’ (*fața*), *chindeu* wall hangings

could be ‘with or without the body’ (*trup*). As pointed out by respondents in Viştea and Viştişoara, the old household used to be ‘beautified’ (*casa împodobita*) and ‘dressed’ (*casa îmbracata*) with icons, pottery and textiles as part of a woman’s responsibilities. The composition of textiles in the room was an act of adornment that produced a specific sensual effect on the visitor and demonstrated the impressive technical efficacy of a clean job, pattern making, the complexity of the design and the colourful richness of the motif. The interior, containing objects with body-like qualities, served as a symbol of domesticity and the materialisation of gendered skills to be presented to other members of the village by the hardworking housewife. Dressing the house through the visual assemblage of objects around the interior was an organic whole and a metaphor of the body of work by the woman who created it.

In Viştea, workmanship was inscribed in the décor and served as a marker of social status and position among other women. Exhibiting homemade objects around the house was related to displaying the skills of the good housewife (*buna gospodina*) as well as the capabilities and potential of the unmarried women. One of the stories about the use of interiors was of bachelors entering the household during the Christmas carol singing (*colinda*), when they were able to see the young girls at their homes showcasing the products of their labour. Crossing the threshold for that visit was a form of inspection of the quality of objects to judge the household management skills of the potential future wives. In this sense, the effect of the household display played a role in the creation of social relations; the outsiders were subject to the agency of the interior, enchanted by the skilled manufacture of the hangings and the opulent colourful displays of the rooms.

The architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser proclaimed the home as the man’s third skin. Anthropological research has demonstrated that built form is deeply related to issues of embodiment, providing opportunities for the analysis of the entanglement of the house, body and personhood, and exploration of the cultural idioms of such anthropomorphism (Buchli 2013). In particular, Gell (1998) provides a useful context for the exploration of bodily entanglements between the craftswomen and the old houses in Viştea. Exploring the relationships between the person and material culture, Gell argued that:

a person and a person’s mind ... consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material

objects, traces and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself long after biological death (Gell 1998: 222–23).

For Gell, material objects are immersed in a social-relational matrix (ibid.: 7) with a capacity to act as social agents. In this context, the mastery of arranging textiles in the domestic sphere of the old house could be interpreted as acting on behalf of the makers. The virtuoso displays of Viştea were a materialisation of personal qualities and rendered recognisable the craftswomen's personhood and status. By acting visually on the visitors, these assemblages were part of the 'spread' of the craftswomen outside the boundaries of their bodies. In Viştea, old domestic space was an anthropomorphisation of work and status. These textiles and the craftsmanship of their displays acted as persons, took on the attributes of their makers, their skill and body of work. Thus, the bodies of interiors were embedded in the social production of the persons and acted as their materialised ambassadors. Gell argued that

art works are never just singular entities, they are members of categories of art works, and their significance is crucially affected by the relations that exist between them ... a culturally or historically specific art production system (ibid.: 153).

Within the system materialised in the old house in Viştea, the mediatory role of the artefacts (ibid.: 7) was linked to the relationships that constituted the social standing of the household. As mentioned previously, local respondents generated conceptions of family and good household based on the quality of the domestic assemblage. The interiors were set out to captivate and create an impressive effect through their display, signifying the social position of the domestic group. In the context of the old house, objects were made with virtuosity of craftsmanship and accurate arrangement, generating a composite display that had an impact and performing vital functions in the life of the person and the local social group. Gell's perspective allows us to think about objects as persons and vice versa. Through the style of the interior assemblages and the objects that were constitutive of these compositions, it is possible to explore the qualities of people that created them as well as the powers and significance given to artefacts by their makers.

## 5.4.2 Undressing the house

Soft furnishings, often perceived as ephemeral detail and as a gendered domain, are enmeshed in the social production of the everyday, generating a range of spatial effects and pointing to complex normative contexts (Humphrey 1974, McNeil 1994, Petty 2012). As discussed above, at the point of the collection acquisition in Viştea, women were interior decorators of a particular kind, creating soft furnishings and dressing the house in an elaborate and systemic manner. Since then, however, these assemblages have been unmade and the houses have become undressed.

The question remains: If the dressed domestic interiors were extensions of their makers' bodies, what were the forces that led to their stripping off and how are these processes understood in the village today?

The following discussion focuses on Viştea's changing vernacular environment and practice of arrangement and display. In anthropology, the domestic sphere has often been portrayed as a particular cosmology (Bourdieu 1990, Bloch 1995, Hugh-Jones 1985, Miller 2008). Ethnographies have demonstrated how households marked a sense of continuity, growing, enduring change and transcending time (Makovicky 2007, Pine 1996). In contrast, the investigation of the Viştean domestic interior provides a local story of a particular microcosm undergoing transformation. It is through an understanding of discontinuity that we can grasp the local meanings of the 'old house' and the Viştean material held in the Horniman Museum.

The historical changes in local house designs were recorded in the village monograph. Şerban (1984) observed that vernacular architecture in Viştea evolved from the form of a wooden cottage, through a house made of wood and stone, a house with a porch (*privar*) to a contemporary brick house. As noted, the early renovations of wooden houses in the interwar period were made possible by the resources of returning immigrants and small-scale trade (e.g. apple sales). The major transformation, however, took place under socialism. After the initial shock of the collectivisation campaign and state quotas (see Chapter 4), socialist industrialisation provided new opportunities. The numerous factories springing up in the region marked an increase in salaried occupations and access to state shops. These industrial jobs were locally perceived as beneficial and resulted in

the modernisation of domestic spaces in the Făgăraş district. The form of brick houses, developed under socialism, transformed spaces of everyday life and equipped the households with additional material culture. New houses gained modern kitchens, bathrooms and additional bedrooms. They were furnished with socialist cabinets, mass produced wall units or elaborate furniture made to order, according to the taste of the owner.

The elderly women I visited did not continue to dress their homes with homemade textiles in a systematic way. Some people continued to keep one or two butterfly-type or *chindeu* fabrics above a wall image or ceramic but walls were otherwise naked (*perete goale*). A homemade blanket spread on the bed or a tablecloth were isolated cases of traditional decoration within a fully modernised space. For the residents of Viştea, decorative textiles were rejected as old (*batrâneşti*) [belonging to the elderly] and undesirable in their new interiors. On the whole, they were replaced by industrially produced elements of interior decoration.

In 2012, Viştea-based conceptions of life in the wooden cottage were strongly related to narratives of underdevelopment, aging, uncivilised simplicity and a backward way of life. These ideas were deeply embedded in the processes of historical transformation in this area and the flow of ‘new’, ‘civilised’ material culture that transformed the community and meanings attached to ‘old’ objects. These house-based perspectives on the artefacts and spaces were a powerful testimony of situated views. Gosden noted that in the studies of material culture,

periods of change are important in bringing out the relationships between people and their object worlds, looking at that strands of continuities in the requirements objects have of people, as well as the changes (Gosden 2005: 193).

In this context, discussing the period of the 1950s was particularly interesting in evoking the material transformations that occurred in the village. From a historical distance, houses without fabrics and handmade soft furnishings were perceived as more comfortable. As in numerous domestic settings, the newness and the hygiene of the domestic space, lack of moths, dirt and dust, were narrated as part of normality and newly acquired modernity (Buchli 1999, Drazin 2002, Fehérváry 2002, Humphrey 2002). Brick or concrete were building materials indicating a sense of progress (for a comparative case

in India see: Tarlo 1999: 238). The atmosphere of new possibilities was narrated through the ‘naked interior’ of the home, its modern surfaces and life-enhancing appliances. For several respondents, the industrial boom brought progress leading to comfort and enhancement of the quality of life. I was told that by starting to work in industry, the villagers were able to construct a livelihood disconnected from the hardships of the past.

Naked walls were a natural decorative scheme for the improved brick houses. New domestic interiors did not require clothes and, as residents of Viştea moved out of their wooden cottages into new brick buildings, there was no need for the spectacle of virtuosity embodied by the interior decoration of the house. Rather than a romanticised, aesthetic dwelling full of folk art, as represented in the Romanian ‘museum storehouse’, they viewed these spaces as obsolete ruins. Modernity entered and settled down in the village. During visual repatriation sessions in Viştea, the museum objects in photographs I presented were understood as belonging to a different space and time, locked away in the old house (*casa veche*).

## 5.5 On houses, displays and ruins

Let us imagine the village encountered by the folk art collector in 1954. Although visited on previous shopping trips, it must have appeared to the museum curator as a different place. In the morning, looking through the window, she witnessed the buses taking the peasants to the factories, women driving tractors or walking back from cooperative shops with plastics and chemicals. This vignette of the folk art curator residing in the priest’s cottage, observing the smoke rising from Victoria’s furnaces and covering the mountain valleys evokes a sense of change, a loss of tradition amid trampling modernity.

Space evokes a sense of time of varying qualities. The notion of the chronotope provides a context for reflecting about space, time and material culture in Viştea. As Bakhtin (1981) pointed out, it is possible to generate a chronotope (time-space), where

spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh ... likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history (ibid.: 84).



The connectedness of time-space as a particular entity in Viştea can be illustrated by the position of the village. It is situated between two spatialised temporalities: those of the village of Draguş and the city of Victoria. The first point of reference relates to the museological chronotope and emblematic folk space. There is Draguş at a 4-kilometre distance, narrating the locality as the space of the rural present perfect and timeless material culture. Objects from Draguş and the surrounding areas, including Viştea, have long communicated encyclopaedic and aesthetic understandings of the Romanian peasantry. This space-time casts a spell: a charm of peasant creativity and national identity. This emblematic and pleasant location lured collectors and museum ethnographers in search of acquisitions. Located in close proximity to Draguş, Viştea has also become a collectors' destination to be documented and sourced for heritage uses. The village house occupied a central position in this chronotope and was often imagined as a microcosm of pristine qualities in an Arcadia unspoiled by modernisation.

A contrasting evocation comes to mind as one moves in the direction of the city of Victoria, the embodiment of history-as-progress. Taking a four-kilometre walk southwest, one enters the symbolic realisation of the purest socialist city in Romania. On the advent of its construction in the 1950s around the worker's colony of the "Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin" Sovrom chemical plant, it was the first workers' city without churches, based on the principles of socialist modernity and rational urban planning. The name of the city in the 1950s, the Victory of Communism, embodies the "socialist future-oriented chronotope" (Ssorin – Chaikov 2013: 183), a pioneer space representing accelerated qualities of time and the peak of the teleological goals of communism. The village of Viştea seems somewhat spread between temporalities, sitting in the middle of the contrasting chronotopes.

Another quality of time-space emerges from the responses of the villagers. In 2012, they were unlocking their old houses covered in cobwebs and overgrown with ivy. This is the story of the 1950s, connoting narratives about the process of transformation, of unmaking everyday space. There were memories of stripping down and regenerating the interior, interlinked with the somewhat axiological transition from underdevelopment to modernity. It was a story of escape from drudgery and hard times to the era of modern comfort. Following Bakhtin, every chronotope constitutes an axiological sphere, endowing time and space with particular qualities and values. The mundane acts of remaking

domestic space and rearranging objects symbolised the shifting perceptions of time associated with the spatial and material form of the house.

The local narratives related to arrangements of space in the derelict houses within the village unravelled the richness of the Viştea's own chronotope. The simultaneous temporalities, revealed during our ruin walks, oscillated between snapshots of biographical memory, genealogical history, but also the past times of daily practice, historical events and mundane memorable incidents. At the end of the story, the houses could be locked away once again.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, Boym suggested, is characterised by ruinophilia. In this historically distinctive moment, our gaze at the ruins is unclear and affected by nostalgia, rendering the object elusive, as “the nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space”. (Boym 2010: 59). The chronotope of ruins collapses time into the simultaneous longing for the past and the imagination of the future. For Kirschenblatt - Gimblett, ruins and ethnographic objects are similar materialisations of the poetics of detachment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 388).

In local terms, the remaining cottages were envisioned as different type of ruin. Rather than “enchanted, desolate spaces” (Stoler 2013: 12) in need of preservation, the old house was rendered absent, left to crumble away. Sealed like a container and left for slow ruination; the space did not lend itself to being penetrated, visited or publicly presented. A corresponding detachment of ruins and ethnographic objects appears in the villagers' perception of the Sibiu museum. The house in the ethnographic museum was kept at a distance, in a similar mode of detachment to the village's crumbling cottages. The recollection of the quotidian material of the past thus occurred at a safe, comfortable distance, allowing the transmission of knowledge when one chose to do so (Küchler 2002). The villagers' sporadic visits to the museum allowed a sufficient level of this recollection. The museum acted as a safe zone for the household, capable of generating unburdened versions of the domestic space-time and materiality it represented.

James Clifford argued for historical detail to be situated in relationship to a chronotope, “a fictional setting where historically specific relations of power become visible and certain stories can take place” (Clifford 1988: 236). Depending on the context and its position in the political and social topography, the house assemblage occupied

different settings, revealing a range of relationships between place, time, material culture and people. Rather than simultaneous possibilities, some stories were privileged over others, affecting not only a sense of telling the past but also the frameworks in which material cultures were experienced and understood. In dialogue with the villagers, the old houses emerged as complex material environments with divergent values.

The voices collected in response to the Horniman Museum material and old houses in the village tell a story of a transforming perception of everyday material culture. Seen in this light, it is necessary to consider the Horniman Museum collection as linked to the process of riddance. The collector entered the village in the period when the residents had already begun to empty their houses and reconstitute their material culture for the uncluttered space of modern life. It was an encounter situated in a particular moment of change that allowed the intersecting agendas of the acquiring collector and the villagers undressing their houses.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to provide a reassessment of the Viştea collection of household artefacts in the context of the house and the museum. Moving through a series of spaces, I argued that objects need to be understood in the diverse settings in which they were situated. This was demonstrated through an evocation of exhibition practices, local responses about traditional domestic material culture and the composition of artefacts in the old house. At the same time, it was outlined that since the time of the collection acquisition, vernacular material culture has been fundamentally reshaped. Accounting for this radical transformation is a necessary step in the understanding of the forces of making and acting on the everyday domestic environment. This perspective allows consideration of the wider spatial and temporal frameworks in which objects are embedded.

Museums are not neutral vessels to be filled with objects. As Bell (2012) suggested, they are compilations of space and time that generate particular teleological narratives (Bell 2012: 71). The responses collected during the photo elicitation encounter in the village suggested understandings that were in contrast with “folk art” teleology. The artefacts acquired by the curator activated counter-narratives to the sentimental view of the traditional vernacular material culture that often characterised Romanian museum practice.

The local stories of the households, displays and ruins present an alternative close-up perspective on the collection's material culture, offering the potential for a more insightful representation in the museum environment.

## **Chapter 6: Stories behind the threads: on the erosion of weaving skills in Viştea**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Before these domestic objects were acquired from their homes by collectors, reassembled and arranged in the Horniman Museum exhibition space, they constituted key aspects of the labour rhythms within the households.

The aim of this chapter is to consider the relevance of the process of production and the changing role of domestic crafts in order to reinterpret the museum textile collection from Viştea. This tale of textile production told by the surviving weavers is an attempt to activate a technically-oriented perspective on the museum material. Firstly, the narratives of craftspeople bring an understanding of the changing environment of cottage production. Exploring the craftsmanship and consumption of domestic fabrics unravels the dynamics of the local processes, uses and meanings of objects. At the same time, tracing the recent decline in textile craftsmanship allows us to situate the Horniman Museum collection beyond the static 1950s framework of folk art. It provides insights into local interpretations of material practice and recent shifts in the perceptions of craft and personhood.

### **6.2 Textile production and the Horniman Museum exhibition**

“These embroideries, textiles are very pretty and artistic. I wondered sometimes how an illiterate peasant woman could create such (...) patterns and extraordinary, sophisticated combinations of colour.”

Interview with the Folk Art Museum collector, Research Diary Entry, Bucharest, March 2012

When I sat in the collector’s flat in Bucharest, listening to Jadwiga’s stories, it was intriguing to hear about the skilful women weaving and embroidering textiles who she had encountered during her field collecting. Jadwiga, as an art school graduate, often emphasised the aesthetic talents of the villages and the creative spirit of the producers of folk textiles. The Bucharest collector of the Horniman Museum collection was part of a

longer tradition of those enchanted by Romanian fabrics.



**Fig. 6.1** Visitors looking at the loom, exhibition opening at the Horniman Museum, 1957 (left)

**Fig. 6.2** Viştea's tablecloth measured and photographed in the Horniman Museum's storage offsite facility SCC, 2012 (right)

Walter Benjamin observed that book collectors become enchanted by their possessions, locking

individual items within a magic circle in which they are frozen as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the previous ownership – for a true collector, the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopaedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object (Benjamin 1968: 60).

Benjamin's metaphor of the kaleidoscopic composition of magic and encyclopaedia, enchantment and knowledge in the act of collecting is a useful frame to think about the relationship between the elites and the producers of folk art in Romania. In tandem with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe-wide Romantic rediscovery of rural traditions (Posey 2005: 203), at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century folk art had a prominent place in the imagination of Romanian specialists and urban elites. Since then, peasant traditions have cast a spell on several members of the royal family,<sup>53</sup> artists, museum curators and private collectors. In

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<sup>53</sup> *At the beginning of the 20th century, Carmen Sylva, Queen Maria and various aristocrats were involved in craft revival movement, setting up women societies to foster the development of textile industry and peasant crafts. The embroideries made by "Concordia" and "Furnica" Society were presented in fashion houses in London and Paris, "Tesatoarea" Society promoted silkworm culture in Romania. Under the influence of Queen Maria, various peasant artefacts and products of the craft societies (from embroidery, tapestries and costumes) were shown in the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1867, 1889 and 1900. In 1912, the Queen made an exhibition on "Women in Art and Crafts" in Berlin, showcasing Romanian textiles ("The Royals: Queen Elizabeth", 2014).*

the interwar and the socialist period, folk art became elevated to the status of national art<sup>54</sup> and museums participated in this state-led, institutionalised discourse of enchantment and aesthetic appropriation.



**Fig. 6.3** Illustration from the collector's publication on costume, Bucharest 2012 (left).

**Fig. 6.4** Representation of a woman weaving in 19<sup>th</sup> century painting by Nicolae Grigorescu (right).

The analogy between the magical power of objects and their technical efficacy provides a way of looking at specific qualities of textiles as museum artefacts. For Gell (1998), the captivating characteristics of art objects are often based on the spectator's inability to conceptualise how to make such artefacts (ibid.: 69). They entrap the spectator due to their technical virtuosity, embodying an "essentially indecipherable agency" (ibid.: 71). The way Jadwiga and other collectors perceived these artefacts was linked to a captivating puzzle of how peasant women were capable of making art. This enchantment of folk artefacts framed the ways material culture was documented in scholarly terms, valued and acquired for the urban audiences of folk art and ethnographic museums. The Folk Art Museum's practice worked to grasp as fully as possible the magic of the peasant skill in a scientific manner, establishing a body of knowledge with a corresponding repertoire of artefacts to represent the techniques and formal models of these artefacts and the ethnographic areas with which they were associated.

When Otto Samson decided to exhibit Romanian folk art in the Horniman Museum, he was equipped by the Bucharest Folk Art Museum and the IRRCS with a

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<sup>54</sup> In this model, folk art was socialist with a national form and creativity of the people was to be promoted, improved and made uniform to legitimate the power of the state and its formula of *native socialism* (Popescu 2002: 16).

range of resources on weaving and spinning, including a collection of photographs with peasant women at work. These images were partly archival photographs of Romanian sociological campaigns from the 1920s and 1930s and partly material produced after the Second World War, depicting smiling peasant women in the phases of fabric production. The same images circulated in various state-produced folk art catalogues and material sent to friendship associations across the world, disseminating knowledge about the continuity of authentic traditions. Otto Samson's interpretation of textile making focused on the variety of tools, their functions and materials, as described in the catalogue of the textile making tools:

The industry and skill of peasant women is apparent in the wealth of embroidery bestowed on the bed linen. Every girl, helped by her family, made her own dowry in the past and all women used the spindle and distaff for spinning, and the weaving loom and other weaving implements here exhibited (Samson 1957: 5).

Drawing on the images of the exhibition material and artefacts from the Viştea collection, this chapter revisits textile making since the 1950s through the archival material of the 1957 collection. I argue that conversations about the process of making enable us to move away from the romanticised image of folk art and textile production and allows us to decipher the process through which objects emerge, are shaped by and shape people.

### **6.3 The fabric of knowledge: weaving apprenticeship**

“It’s through the thread” repeated Mama Live with a look of frustration. She could not understand what I needed to know about the textile patterns of the museum objects and similar pieces taken out of her drawers. This sense of lack of communication was mutual; Mama Live’s words were not comprehensible to me either. I was ignorant about the difference between *over or through the thread*, expecting an explanation of the significance or the particular names of the various patterns. Were these images of Horniman Museum objects useless, my language skills too weak to ask the right questions, was it a completely wrong line of inquiry or was I experiencing a methodological cul-de-sac in my photo elicitation technique? The look of the woman, who had dedicated a whole afternoon to sitting with me and sorting out the pictures of the Horniman Museum Viştea collection, was justified ... my questions about textiles were unfamiliar and I had little



knowledge about fabrics. It was a moment of ethnographic insight. As it was impossible to grasp the explanations of the photographs without knowing the local terms for techniques, I came to the realisation that my research questions required a different type of expertise. This misunderstanding led me to choose to learn how to weave.

As weaving was not practiced in the village, I decided to search for another location with a demonstration of the loom in action. The opportunity came in the city of Sibiu from a conversation about the Saxon costume with one of the curators in the Centre of Culture and Dialogue “Friedrich Teutsch”, run by the local Evangelical Church. The centre’s director was a neighbour and friend of Maria and suggested I asked her about the weaving patterns. Maria is an elderly woman who runs the Sebastian Hann souvenir shop in the town of Cişnădie situated next to the Saxon fortified church, the town’s main tourist attraction. When I told Maria that I wanted to know more about techniques, she looked at me critically through her pair of broken glasses held together with Sellotape and judged that I needed more practice. So could I then learn it on the loom? The same day I was accepted on a crash course, provided that I was serious about learning. I was told to come the next day with an exercise book without wasting Maria’s time, as she was busy completing an important consignment.

My apprenticeship at Sebastian Hann involved setting up the loom and learning traditional Romanian weaving techniques. When I arrived in her workshop on the second day, Maria was weaving in the back room and listening to the radio. She proceeded with teaching immediately. During the first sessions, she taught me about the parts of the handloom, drawing images of the tools in my book and taking over my voice recorder to provide me with more material that I was supposed to revise in the evenings. In the next days, this formal style of learning was abandoned as Maria received a commission from Germany and started to work on a Saxon-style tablecloth for the new client. Our lessons moved to pattern weaving with a ‘pick-up stick’<sup>55</sup>. Maria showed me how to set up the sticks for a bird pattern and instructed me to pick up the right sticks while she was weaving.

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<sup>55</sup> The pick-up stick is placed behind the heddle to pick-up a selection of slot warps. Acting as a third shaft, it allows the weaver to make more textured patterns.



**Fig. 6.5** Weaver's knot, Maria showing me how to tackle mistakes (left)

**Fig. 6.6** Setting up the pattern with a 'pick-up stick' (right)

In the following days with Maria I learned how to make a section of the plain weave. The main challenge was to coordinate the sequence of pressing the right pedals whilst passing the shuttle through the thread. Maria had demonstrated the basic moves and sometimes left to go to the front of the shop to attend to tourists while I was assigned a task and continued on my own. She only visited the loom area to inspect my work, or on my request when I repeatedly made mistakes with the sequence despite counting out loud and working at an extremely slow pace. Maria was a firm but patient teacher, telling me that I could only learn through work and handling mistakes and suspecting that they were caused by my left-handedness. After a few days, I was more confident in my rhythm of work, was shown how to fix the weaving errors and beat the weft evenly to create a fabric of the right texture and square form. Once I grasped the rhythm and found the right position in which to sit, my body adjusted to the loom and the work became less tiresome. The last part of the apprenticeship involved setting up and warping the loom for a textile made with four shafts, an activity demanding mathematical precision, a perfect eye for detail and good feel of the thread 'in the fingers' to create the right pressure to avoid the warp thread breaking. This pressure, she emphasised, depended on the material (thread quality), and I was not expected to fully understand these differences. She pointed out that these subtle tactile judgements required years of experience of handling the materials and, as in other parts of the process, the mastery of self-correction techniques.

Maria found my presence beneficial, as I became an additional person in the shop, giving her an opportunity to go out to the market or for a walk with her grandchild during lunch breaks. Moreover, she was inspired to learn some English words to use when

talking to tourists. We would speak in a combination of Romanian, German and English, often openly talking about our families, local gossip, the job situation in Poland and Romania or life in London. Maria often told me that weaving was particularly hard work and the right feel in the hand was the most important part of learning and understanding this demanding craft.

During my time in Sebastian Hann I learnt that making sense of textiles from the perspective of weavers involves a grasp of the texture, rhythm and mathematical precision involved in the process. Textile production required the mastery of the tools and materials in a sequence of technical choices and adjustments. It was an on-going interplay of attentive regular sequences and creative acts of generating patterns. This practice-based exploration of textiles allowed me to recognise the unconsidered aspects of fabric production and the significance of tacit knowledge, ‘the feel’ required to engage with the object.

Practice-based learning experience reveals the logic of the ethnographic endeavour. As anthropologists are novices in most research settings (Jenkins 1994), apprenticeship is a more culturally relevant form of participant observation as it is based on existing institutions of learning (Coy 1989). The physicality of that engagement made me think about the use of sensory ethnographic techniques. Apprenticeship learning is a form of sensorial “emplaced engagement with the practices and identities one seeks to understand” (Pink 2009: 72). Pink suggested that it is a self-conscious and reflexive exercise of learning about learning, creating relationships between senses, experiences, systems of value and discourses.

Marchand (2009, 2010) suggested that crafts, among other skilled activities, are transmitted in the form of cognitive and tacit knowledge based on mimesis, embodied observation and repetition, cultivating the eye and the ear. As practitioners communicate, transmit and negotiate expertise beyond language, Marchand (2008) argued for a reconsideration of the notion of intelligence beyond the linguistic. For Ingold (2000), several forms of knowledge and technical skills are transmitted through the relationships of embodied experience in a shared environment between practitioners (Ingold 2000: 37). Therefore it is relevant for ethnographers to build up knowledge about social phenomena

by engaging in the activity within a particular learning environment. Memory can be linked to the

ways in which specific competencies are built into the bodily *modus operandi* through repeated trials. In human societies, this is the essence of learning by apprenticeship. Our everyday lives call for the employment of countless skills, in moving about, using tools, ... acquired through long and sometimes arduous practice. By and large, the work of memory in the performance of such tasks is concealed behind their smooth and successful accomplishment.” (Ingold 1996: 163).

Only by knowing the tasks involved in that *modus operandi* could these memories be unlocked and brought into light through asking the right questions. My sessions in Maria’s *atelier* provided a number of insights about the techniques and skills involved in the making of cloth. Although these limited hours at the loom were merely an introductory engagement with the weaver’s expertise, they significantly enhanced my understanding of the process and texture of fabric. Most importantly, I was able to engage with the tacit knowledge of the weaver and to frame research questions in ways that were familiar to my respondents. Equipped with this knowledge through experience, I returned to Viştea and found myself able to have different types of conversations about the images of textiles from the Horniman Museum collection and about local textile production and weavers’ interpretations of the artefacts.

#### **6.4 Technically speaking: on the art of making**

During my first stay in Viştea I was perceived as a museum researcher (*muzeograf*) looking for artefacts and was repeatedly shown ‘old pieces’ that should be of interest to me. Women were opening their dusty chests, looking through the very few pieces they had decided to keep, taking them out and arranging them on their beds and tables in a museum-like way. These discoveries gave me a taste of what was hidden away in the immaculate modern living rooms and how these women conceptualised the presence of a museum professional in the village. My second stay brought another set of insights, not only because it became apparent to my respondents that I was not in search of museum acquisitions, but also as I then knew what kind of questions could be asked about the technique. Having tried weaving myself, I was able to discuss issues around patterns, shapes, materials and textures from a practical perspective. This is when other fabrics emerged from the cupboards. The responses below of the Viştean craftswomen about

techniques, patterns, lines and shapes of textiles reveal local perceptions about textiles and historical change. In the 1950s, when the Horniman Museum collection was assembled, textile production was still a significant part of Viştea's cottage industry. All fabrics were made by women within the household including clothes, bags for storing agricultural produce and for carrying food to the field, as well as towels, blankets and decorative textiles for interior decoration. Textiles were produced in the cycle of the year, from raw material up to the decorative stage in the weaving process. For making textiles, women used flax, hemp and wool.

Using the example of hemp, I will now present local narratives related to the process of making fabrics at the time. The plants were grown in the village and required a sequence of operations before they were transformed into yarn. Yarn was a source of much work for women, as men would only help by transporting the stalks with a cart from the fields.

First, vegetal fibres were planted, grown, weeded and collected from the fields. As Anna reminisced:

“After being pulled out of the ground (not cut), the stalks were chopped and taken to ‘*balta*’ [water containers on the borders of the village made specifically for this purpose]. They were pulled together into bundles (*manuşa*), placed into the tank, covered with stones and flushed with running water for days. Once the inner stalks had retted, the plants would be taken home to dry. In the next phase, we removed the leaves from the stalks and broke the woody core with a comb (*meliţa*) ensuring that we did not cause damage to the fibres.”

The next step was to beat the outer fibres with special wooden tools (*meliţa*) and card them with various sizes of hackling combs (*raghilă*). This phase involved long series of breaking, scutching, separating the fibres from the bark and straw, removing the resin and smoothening them to reach a finer quality of material for spinning.



**Fig. 6.7** Spinning demonstration, Horniman Museum archives (left)

**Fig. 6.8** Spindle before Mama Codrea's demonstration in Viştea, 2012 (right)

This photograph from Northern Romania (**Fig. 6.7.**) of a young woman demonstrating hand spinning technique was sent to the Horniman Museum along with the 1957 collection. Women in Viştea used similar simple distaffs and only one or two had spinning wheels brought from the United States. Homemade distaffs were mostly simple improvised sticks. More decorative, carved distaffs would often be a gift to the spinner by a male family member or a boy interested in the girl. Hand spinning required control, coordination and confidence. The distaff was held in the left hand. With the right hand, the craftswoman drew out fibres from the distaff, twisted them in one direction between two fingers and wound them on the whirling spindle.

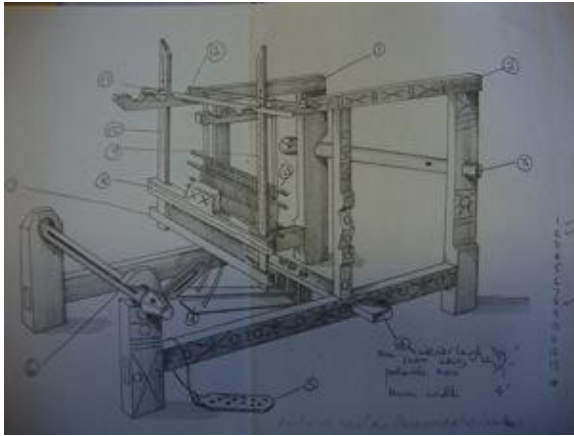
Yarn was spun after the day's work in the field and in spare time. Spinning was also an opportunity for social gatherings; women met in the evenings for late night sittings (*şezatoare*) in one of the houses. On occasions, there were mutual help sittings (*claca*) of group labour for women in need. Mama Live mentioned the pleasant atmosphere of the sittings with hours of singing, gossiping, dancing, story-telling, courting and joking. As Mama Eva recalled, these occasions were the "discos of their generation". The host organising the spinning session would also invite other villagers, and a number of weavers told me they met their future husbands this way. The social role of these nocturnal sittings was key to the everyday life of the village, recalling the well-described case of early modern spinning bees in Germany and their entanglements of idioms of custom, work, kinship and sexuality (Medick 1984). The *şezatoare* evenings were social events expressing relatedness, work and leisure. The public character of these work environments allowed the scrutinisation of the rhythm and quality of others' work. Some weavers

recalled that performance during the sittings established the status and good name of women.

At the same time, the sittings served as occasions for learning for the young spinners who were receiving guidance from the experienced women. Growing up in Viştea involved participation in various learning environments within the family and neighbourhood, as children were engaged in specific phases of thread preparation, spinning or weaving as a part of the daily tasks. My Viştea respondents recalled that as children they were constantly exposed to the rhythmical sound of the loom in the room, as their mothers were often weaving by candlelight throughout the night. For Mr Lupu, the memory of his mother strongly connoted the powerful sound of weaving at night, the shape of her shadow at the loom as he was lying in bed, trying to fall asleep. The children would observe the processes of fabric production, sit down next to their relatives, helping with a small job, weaving the simplest form of cloth for a while or assisting in setting up or warping the loom. The tacit knowledge of textile production was gained in the domestic environment, transmitted from the older generation of women, by means of observation and hands-on learning. There was always work to be done and it was considered inappropriate to sit doing nothing. While ‘resting’, Mama Tave was working on the loom a little or stitching together pieces of wall hanging or a woven bag to be used in the field. Running a good household involved a constant rhythm of activities in the house and the field, food preparation and making and repairing items for the household.



**Fig.6.9** Sezatoare in Draguş documented during the monographic campaign, 1929



**Fig.6.10** Treadle loom, 1957 Horniman Museum collection archive (left)

**Fig.6.11** Disused loom parts in an empty cottage, Viștea, 2012 (right)

The loom was made at home or by the village joiner and set up during the winter. Smaller parts, such as wooden shuttles (*suveici*) and reeds (*vatala*) could be purchased in the local town market or from traders periodically visiting the village. Proper preparation and accurate warping of the loom was the key to success and involved precise knowledge of the size and materials used for the piece to be woven. Ideally there would be at least two people engaged in the activity and members of family would help with this crucial phase of work. Depending on the type of textile, the weaver arranged the warp (*urzeală*) in two or four shafts (*ițe*). Weaving with two shafts was suitable for most wall hangings, shirts and aprons; a tabby weave of four shafts was mostly used to make blankets (*țol*), trousers and coats. Patterns and decorative motifs were handpicked in the loom (*alesătură*). The weavers spoke of two techniques of fingerpicking: either over (*printre fire*) or through the thread (*peste fire*). This image from the Horniman Museum archive illustrates this technique (**Fig.6.12**), where the weaver selects a fixed number of threads and passes coloured weft through the group. Most of the textile patterns collected for the museum in the 1954 were fingerpicked and locally called ‘flowers’ (*florile*), irrespective of their shapes.





**Fig.6.12** Picking patterns through the thread, Horniman Museum collection archive, 1957 (left)



**Fig.6.13** Learning about picking the basic *ajur* pattern, Sebastian Hann, Cişnadie, 2012 (right)

Viştea women's memories of textile production illustrate the considerable burden of labour and high levels of skill required for the production of textiles. These household tasks were integrated into a wider context of women's responsibilities and generated the rhythm of everyday life. They constituted a form of gendered knowledge linked to the mode of livelihood and practice. Most women were expected to have familiarised themselves with the whole cycle of textile production by the end of their schooling, around the age of fourteen. Having completed formal education, girls were given increased responsibilities in the domestic sphere. Some girls would be taken out of school to work in the household at an earlier age, as Mama Tave recalled, at the age of eleven, she had left school to work and these activities were her only trade (*meserie*). The following section discusses the memories of performing this trade, making and assessing decorative patterns in cloth production in Viştea. It focuses on how women communicated and expressed embodied knowledge, local notions of creativity and technical innovation.

## 6.5 Designs, creativity and local style



**Fig. 6.14** *Peretar* wall hanging from the 1957 Horniman Museum collection (left)



**Fig. 6.15** *Chindeu* wall hanging, Horniman Museum collection (right)

During my stay in Viştea, I often sat with a group of women in their lush gardens listening to tales triggered by the photographs of the Horniman Museum collection of textiles. As we discussed images and their counterparts in the village I learnt that the museum pieces belonged to the previous, old generation (*batrâneşti*). My respondents pointed out that the museum-based types of wall hangings with ‘flower’ and ‘eye’ patterns (which in fact constituted a range of green, blue, yellow or white geometrical and floral designs) were very easy to make. Discussing patterns with Mrs Balescu, a locally respected weaver, now 88 years old:

“MB: How do you know which ones are older?

Mrs Balescu: It depends on the motif but these are clearly old. Gradually they became more loaded with more pronounced motifs. Look, it is the same kind of work, but much more intense ...

MB: What colours were used?

Mrs Balescu: There was not so much variation: it depends on the design. In the beginning, there were mostly finger-picked blue and red patterns.”

Most women, critical of the old designs of their mothers and grandmothers, similar to the Horniman Museum artefacts, wanted to show me their pieces, explaining how their generation found sophisticated new types of patterns. The designs they found more aesthetically pleasing were intricately woven lines of ornamental shapes in wide regular sections, symmetrically arranged and more pronounced in colour and graphic detail. They explained that the main structure of the decorative schemes was similar to the older pieces, for example the wall hanging was also divided into three sections, ornamental symmetrical decorations on the sides and plain weave in middle part of the piece. The patterns, however, they emphasised, were much more complex in

workmanship. They explained that these innovative designs were not noted down, women tended to work on a piece by looking at another textile object or later, using pattern books. Often new designs, made by one of the weavers or taken from a pattern book, would be shared with others, but some women were reluctant to give them away. New patterns were still generally called ‘flowers’, irrespective of the actual shapes and only when discussed in technical terms would they be referred to in mathematical terminology. The weavers often described how to pick thread for the eye designs (*ochii*), count it before picking up a rhombus or trapezoid or what thickness of thread produced the best visual effect. While we inspected the newer pieces kept in Viştea homes, the women explained that as the patterns became more diverse they were still different from designs found only in specific locations. The identity of the patterns was flexible and reappeared across the villages of the region. At the same time, there were some villages that produced their own identifiable designs, such as Draguş, the neighbouring village.



**Fig.6.16** Mama Codrea presenting her collection of *old pieces*, 2012 (left)

**Fig.6.17** Mama Tave with a piece representing the new bird patterns (right)



**Fig. 6.18** Mama Codrea comparing the colours of *new pieces (top)* to the *old models (bottom)*, Viştea, 2012 (left)

**Fig.6.19** The *new floral pattern* (right)

According to Mrs Balescu, a weaver held in high esteem in the village, designs and techniques were subject to gradual evolution, as every generation developed their own style. The newer style of my octogenarian respondents was linked to new materials and chemical dyes that brought the opportunity, as they argued, for “chromatic improvements”, producing brighter colours and being quicker to use. In addition, in the 1950s and 1960s, women from Viştea began to purchase cotton from the cooperative shop in the city of Victoria. In their view, cotton was a stronger material and it allowed them to produce fabrics combining homemade hemp with commercial cotton. As craftswomen had access to cash through their newly established salaried jobs, they were able to afford mass-produced thread, saving a considerable amount of time on processing raw material.

In addition, instead of making fingerpicked designs, women started using the pick-up stick technique, an innovation that created more complex and symmetrical designs. From the craftswomen’s perspective, this new opportunity allowed them to develop more sophisticated decorative skills and transcend the abilities of their mothers and grandmothers. The conversations about the historical dynamics of designs and weaving techniques reveal the craftswomen’s views on innovation and technical choices in textile production. These local concepts about patterns present an alternative logic to the curatorial view in which patterns are understood as repositories of cultural heritage and the particular aesthetics of the local style. Although Romanian museum and ethnographic scholarship produced a rich body of knowledge about local patterns and typologies of craftsmanship, any technical innovation outside these categories has often been overlooked. The museum curators I spoke to saw the newer forms of production as kitsch and some form of contamination of authenticity. Modification was treated as a threat to the traditional character of crafts or regional identity. Craftswomen’s views on objects were contrasting to the curatorial praise of the pure, authentic and traditional. For the weavers, fabric designs were a continuous interplay of technical choices, creativity and experiential proficiency.

For Viştean women, the simplicity illustrated by the pieces woven in the past did not carry values of traditional heritage. On the contrary, they considered their own stylistic innovations superior as these connoted a sense of experimentation, technical pride and the higher status of the craftsperson. The weavers operated in a dialogue with received forms of craftsmanship and their own “virtuosic performances” (Gell 1998: 95) of new

patterns. In their view, old forms of textiles, such as those from the Horniman Museum collection, constituted a starting point rather than a fixed repertoire of models to be copied further through the process of cross-generational craft transmission. Their perspective reflected that of Ingold (2001) where skilled practice emerges beyond mechanical repetition and reproduction of a fixed corpus of knowledge and designs. For Ingold, “the continuity of tradition in skilled practice is a function not of the transmission of rules and representations but of the coordination of perception and action” (Ingold 2001: 20). The craftswomen of Viştea constructed a local sense of craft excellence in the process of evolving practice and engagement with materials, techniques and aesthetic categories of patterns. Their view on heritage was one of dynamic cultural production deeply situated in both the present and in the past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995).

## **6.6 Producing folk art: Cottage industry and socialism**

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, folk art in socialist exhibition practice has often linked the locality or the ethnographic area to the nation-state. The narratives on the composition of national identity were exemplified through the emblematic material culture produced in the Romanian countryside.

But how did the rural producers of museum artefacts interpret the idea of folk art and what role did the memory of experience of making play in their narratives?

From the local perspective, folk art (*arta populara*) referred to a type of production nested in a particular historical moment. This textile-work produced under socialism, under-represented by museum ethnographers, shows how the historical changes in the area reframed the production of textiles.

The National Union of Handicraft Cooperatives (*Uniunea Națională a Cooperăției Meșteșugărești*, hereafter UCECOM), established in 1951, was a central institution overseeing handicraft. Resulting from the Decision of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party of 1953 on the perfecting of handicraft activity, the Romanian People’s Republic paid significant attention to folk art and the preservation of tradition. (Horșia and Petrescu 1972: 69). UCECOM aimed to preserve and develop crafts through the establishment of local cooperatives, organisation of craft competitions, and the

creation of an export market, retail outlets across the country and craft education in rural communities (Taylor 1997: 55-57).

Under the influence of UCECOM, vernacular crafts, once belonging to cottage industries, became appropriated by the ever-growing system of cooperatives producing “objects of genuine folk art, new products, turning to account traditional elements and objects of modern decorative art” (ibid.: 75). Folk art became incorporated into the domains of the state and what had been a small-scale cottage industry gained a new modern role within the socialist economy. Horșia and Petrescu (1972) described the growing significance of the field in an evocative manner, stating that under socialism:

folk art and the production of artistic handicrafts no longer represent the idyllic concern of sociologists, ethnographers or artists but is an important coordinate of the contemporary environment, a social objective attained within economic life, depending on its efficiency and weight for the national income ... Specialty cadres are guiding and controlling the whole activity, with a view to maintaining the genuine character of folk art as well as to turning to account traditional elements for both useful and decorative products (ibid.: 74).

Studies of the relationships between socialist institutions and the production of folk artefacts in Romania and Bulgaria have considered the pivotal role of the state in the reification of cultural practices and the transformation of folk art production for political means (Kanefff 2004, Kligman 1988). Folk production was a prime resource for a new socialist culture, therefore to keep it sterile and pure it was to be controlled by the state and produced on command (Zemcovskij *et al* 1997: 6). Under Stalinism, the ‘genuine’ and ‘autochthone’ (Mihăilescu 2007) character of folklore included folk art and craft production, and in a similar way to Polish crafts in the 1950s, the artefact was fetishised within the cultural framework of the socialist working class and its ‘authentic culture’ (Crowley 1998: 75). Rural production went hand in hand with socialist modernity and crafts were “the material focal point for a new political identity, which was simultaneously national and socialist by nature” (Makovicky 2010: 52). Through the activities of state bodies,<sup>56</sup> material culture and craft knowledge previously linked to the cottage and the local community travelled outside the countryside, becoming increasingly recontextualised (Kanefff, 2004). Designs were subject to control by UCECOM, who

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<sup>56</sup> The recontextualisation of crafts was facilitated by UCECOM, the socialist handicraft schooling, exhibition practices and public performances on a national scale.

legitimised particular aspects of tradition, developed patterns and invented ‘modern’ urban craft objects (Taylor 1997: 59). The modernisation of craft production had a profound effect on textile making and the recontextualisation of domestic fabrics in Viştea. From the late 1960s, around 20 craftswomen in the village made textiles on command in a form of outwork for the Braşov Cooperative. In making folk art, weavers were drawing from pattern guidelines provided by the commissioning party. They remembered the regular visits of the “elegant city women” bringing materials and exemplary pieces to be reproduced, collected from the manufacturing households and sold in the state shops around the country. Women who worked as weavers for the cooperative system kept a few textiles produced in that period and presented me with examples of their cooperative work. In their words, these objects belonged to a separate linguistic and material category of folk art (*arta populara*) without any connotations of aesthetic or traditional value. For the weavers, folk art was different in shape, predominantly ‘red and easy to make’, compared to the pieces produced for the household. These red textiles were made for the outside and rarely entered the category of items constituting the decorative structure of the interiors. Few villagers would display these pieces in their homes. As Taylor noted, this phenomenon of two-level production was present across Romania as the local craft makers simultaneously created ‘artistically correct’ objects for the state and different goods for domestic use (ibid.)

Red textiles did not deserve attention and were often marginalised during the conversations with the weavers. These objects were part of a broader set of practices characteristic of the everyday life in Viştea under socialism. The weavers emphasised that the production of these pieces and their work for the cooperative were means of gaining extra income and reaching the minimum number of years of work for a full state pension. In addition, economising with materials that were provided by the cooperative for the production of commissions allowed the weavers to make additional pieces on the side for own use or for sale in the village. Mama Tave, Mama Live and Mama Codrea were three of the most active folk art producers in the village, working on the commissions of UCECOM and often producing other textiles for sale.





**Fig. 6.20** Mama Live showing the red *folk art* napkin (left piece) and the *old model* (right piece), Viştea, 2012 (left)

**Fig. 6.21** Mama Evuţa presenting textiles made by her, holding the *folk art* piece, Viştea 2012 (right)

**Fig.6.22** Mama Tave showing the red *folk art* textile of her production, Viştea 2012 (bottom)

Several respondents recalled the socialist period through memories of speculation and local barter, emphasising that work at the collective farm (CAP) gave many residents of Viştea an opportunity to take away food from the farm and exchange it for various goods. They traded food produce, decorative textiles, embroideries or traditional dress sold from the makers' homes or in the area of the chemical plant. Sales were organised by word of mouth, using family or neighbourhood contacts as well as contacts in the city of Victoria. The clientele of the chemical plant were looking for craft objects, eggs, homemade spirits or vegetables grown in the back garden. This informal economy generated flows of goods that became a regular part of life under socialism. It constituted a wide range of interlinked activities of work, trade and networking.



Mama Tave recalled that she had nominally been employed by the collective farm (CAP) but rather than focusing on “fulfilling her quota of hours”, she prioritised folk art and labour in the second economy with the production of milk, plum brandy and vegetables in her garden. In addition, she was in demand for baking and cooking at village weddings. These village-wide celebrations at times demanded, ‘carrying away’ the goods from the collective. The instances of stealing from the CAP or avoiding work in the farm were rendered invisible by a system of favours between the peasants and administrators of the state farm. For example, Mama Live avoided work at the CAP through focusing on her career as a folk singer. For years, she participated in state folkloric festivals and was occupied by travels. Her lack of time for the state farm was sufficiently mitigated by her role as a national folk artist. Textile work was one of such forms of negotiated relationships with the state. Understanding the craftsmanship of the period requires the acknowledgment of craft labour under socialism within a range of informal activities. Several studies of the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Russia have documented similar complex patterns of networks and second economies developed under socialism (Fitzpatrick 1999, Firlit and Chłopecki 1992, Hessler 1996, Ledeneva 1998, Stewart 1998). These forms of practice allowed adaptation to the imposed conditions and ‘muddling through’ the complex ideologically saturated landscape of daily life (Heintz 2006: 88). Production for commercial purposes on private plots, theft from the farm and other black market transactions common among Romanian rural communities, were built into the socialist economy of shortage and resulted in particular socialist consumption practices (Crowley and Reid 2010, Verdery 1996). Skills in creating networks of favours, through obtaining goods and objects “became a way of constituting selfhood”, a process of politicised consumption key to the identity resulting from the structures and limitations of the planned economy (Verdery 1996: 27). Kideckel’s (1993) ethnography demonstrated that second economy practices created village-wide reciprocity and affected gender roles across the Făgăraş region. Collectivisation transformed labour and created new models of household and workmanship. Under socialism, women were to play a threefold role: as the main labour force of collective farming, in child rearing and in performing household tasks (Kideckel 1993: 65). As men became the main labour force of the growing socialist heavy industry, agriculture became increasingly feminised.<sup>57</sup> Although large parts of the rural communities (both men and women) left agriculture for factories, they continued to

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<sup>57</sup> In 1973, only 16.7 per cent of Romanian women worked in industry.

live in the village (ibid.: 91). This model of a peasant-worker household was common in Viştea from the 1950s; the villagers could easily reach the chemical plant in the city of Victoria and factories around the city of Făgăraş by public transport. The new role of women was a source of the growth of their power in the second economy, within the community and in the household. They acted as producers for state cooperatives and private plots, had access to knowledge of networks and goods, and they increased their control over flows of the latter (ibid.: 127). Such was the case of the Viştean weavers, gaining local respect and a privileged position producing craft objects and circulating them along with agricultural goods and services across local networks in the village and Victoria. The case of Viştea textile production under socialism unravels the local mechanisms of the recontextualisation of domestic crafts. Narratives about the red textiles reflected the weavers' attitudes to the *red state* that was to be engaged with a sense of suspicion. Textiles made for UCECOM were treated by the weavers as a separate class of artefacts, exclusively referred to as *folk art or red things*, artefacts of low value. Crafts produced for the state reflected the 'actually existing' work ethics of socialism, as Heintz (2006) pointed out, where the ideological idiom of work was often questioned in daily performance and

the socialist work ethic ... in practice takes on a mechanical form: it is asserted but not believed (Heintz 2006: 95).

In Viştea, this attitude applied to state-commissioned craftwork where red socialist folk art was made promptly, with minimum material input and workmanship. Some women in Viştea, who worked in heavy industry or socialist administration, became the new customers of the weavers. As women's lives gradually became modernised through their incorporation into the state-run labour force, they did not have disposable time for craft production. Self-making textile decoration thus became less popular. My hostess Aurelia, now in her sixties, recalled that as a trained chemical laboratory technician, she never had the time or the necessary patience to make furnishings so most of the blankets and napkins for decorating her home were purchased from her folk art producing neighbours. In this context, handmade textiles that once were part of the family legacy and marker of the household became the occupation of the small group of makers operating in the second economy.

To conclude this section, from the late 1950s, there was a shift from cottage industry to crafts production for socialist markets (state sector and second economy).

Increasingly, woven textiles were circulated outside the house. They were transformed into commodities and gifts used in transactions with the state and within local informal practices. In the first case, the emergence of *new* patterns was linked to the pattern repertoire produced for UCECOM's Braşov Cooperative. These were predominantly used mechanically to produce pieces with minimum material and labour, with the remaining thread in personal commissions for local second economy. At the same time, the weavers were creating a vast range of new and complex compositions that required the new shed rod technique, new dyes and, as I was told, more reliable cotton thread. Such patterns were related to creative choices, inspirations drawn from magazines, pieces seen in the state shops and facilitated by new opportunities emerging from a range of chemically dyed threads. For my respondents, these pieces were viewed as the most valuable as they represented a high degree of technical complexity. The notion of *value* was strongly embedded in the *modus operandi*, technique and entrepreneurial ability of women to gain raw material.

As presented above, not all Viştean woven objects were perceived as equivalent. On the contrary, they formed classes of things that constituted a complex spectrum of local value and practice. Some seemed significant and time-consuming while others were treated with indifference. Thinking about the value of cloth, Weiner (1992) investigates the context of weaving as women's wealth and a form of exchange. Viştean perceptions on cloth artefacts resonate with Weiner's (1992) notion of keeping-while-giving, the process of meeting economic and political demands through simultaneous strategies of giving away and keeping treasured possessions. For Weiner, cloth often constitutes inalienable wealth, objects not easy to give away.

In the challenging context of the 1950s, cloth was deployed to serve as means of getting by. Viştean women, responding to the pressures of the collectivising state, began a new type of cloth production, specifically made for exchange. These 'red things' were considered less valuable, alienable and easy to sell or give back to the commissioning Cooperative. Textiles connoted a spectrum of values ranging from insignificant simple pieces to artefacts made and presented with pride, to be displayed at home. These local understandings demonstrated the particular agency of the weavers. The whole spectrum of artefacts constituted the political domain of cloth, some being used to discharge state obligations and others constituting a sense of identity of the craftsperson and her family status.

Discussing the importance of cloth, the weavers represented views contrasting with the material categories of authenticity represented by museum specialists (Jones 2010, Reisinger and Steiner 2006a). The traditional fabrics of previous generations were conceptualised as technically weak and lacking creativity. Both the traditional old pieces and state-based designs were perceived as sub-standard work. Textiles made in Viştea were central to their subversive activities, empowering the makers in these transactions and relationships. In the next section, I trace a different set of values invested in artefacts and textile work. I argue that the changing practices and normative categories of material culture are located in narratives about personhood, technical choices and change.

## 6.7 The marginalisation of crafts, materiality and the self

An excellent wife who can find? ...  
She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands...  
Her lamp does not go out at night.  
She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle...  
She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Prov. 31: 10-27 (New International Version)

Proverbs and oral traditions often present textile production and housework as indicators of personhood. One example of such a story inspired by folk sources was the Romanian tale of two step-sisters. It starts with a trip to the village sitting (*şezatoare*), where the beautiful hardworking girl spins throughout the night as her stepsister dances with the boys. On the way home, the virtuous girl is convinced by her stepsister to give up the products of her work and, coming home empty-handed, is evicted from the house. She embarks on a journey involving multiple incidents, including helping a wounded dog, clearing a fountain, pruning a tree and serving in the house of the ‘goddess of Sunday’. Having proved her skills, she is brought into a room full of decorated chests and told to choose one for herself. Out of modesty, she takes the oldest, smallest and ugliest box. When she returns home and opens the chest, she discovers a large number of livestock jumping out of it and bringing her wealth. This story of rewarding work and humility contrasts with the journey of her idle step-sister, who undergoing the same quest, performs the tasks in an inappropriate way and choosing a lavish, encrusted, large chest meets a very different destiny. As she opens the chest, she discovers only a host of dragons. (Kremnitz and Percival 1885: 130 - 139)

This folk tale vignette encapsulates a number of stories about the value of modest hard work present in 1950s Viștea. The belief that the industrious woman runs the house with the spindle (*Femeia harnică ține casa cu fusul*) was a metaphor describing the weavers at the time. Flicking through photographs of the Horniman Museum collection, the craftswomen were checking the image for the name of the maker, to trace the person back to the right household<sup>58</sup> and evoke narratives about her family and work. Often I would sit in the afternoon on a bench in front of one of the houses with a group of women and listen to tales about making embroideries while caring for four children and managing households with large fields and stock. Praising industriousness, there were narratives of immaculate patterns woven by old women who could not see well or large pieces made through laborious handpicking.

I was repeatedly told that people in the area around Făgăraș Mountains were more hardworking in comparison to other regions due to the severe mountainous conditions and poor soil. This construction of identity was present throughout from the level of the individual, to the household and to the wider community. Such a cultural ideal was noted in Kideckel's (1993) ethnography of the region in which Viștea is situated. The communities of the Făgăraș Land tended to elevate labour to a key symbol of their region. The term hardworking (*harnic/harnică*) was widely used as a moral characteristic through which women constituted others. Through language distinguishing hard work from idleness, my respondents expressed their constructions of gender and craft practice.

Echoing Kligman and Verdery's (2011) note on pre-socialist Romania, the relationship of networks, possessions and industriousness were the pivotal traits of rural personhood, key to self-respect and a good name within the community. In this context, being a person meant

to be deeply embedded in social relations, to own things of value, and to work hard, controlling one's work process; this meant exercising agency and initiative, through autonomous self-direction (ibid.: 101).

Posey (2005) provided an ethnographic example of the ideal of hard work in Câmpești in northern Romania, where the householder was required to demonstrate a range of

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<sup>58</sup> There was a practical difficulty in discussing the donors of the objects. Firstly, there are limited numbers of family names in the village. Secondly, most women are known by their local pseudonyms rather than names. One of the typical examples was the name of Paraschiva Vulcan who was only known as Mama Chive.

qualities. Being a good *gospodin/gospodina* meant that the householder was hardworking, moderate, respectful and clever (Posey 2005: 161-172).

In numerous peasant communities gender was enacted through labour, the upkeep of the house and conspicuous production for the domestic environment (Pine 2000). In making textiles for their homes, women enacted the core markers of their identity as a hardworking person – patience, skilfulness; strive for cleanliness in their work. Values were invested in textiles and the feminine ideal was manifested through the dignity of labour and the stillness of the woman at the loom. This work was invisible, hidden in the night and presented proudly through the pleasing structure of household displays.

My respondents emphasised that at the time of the collection acquisition, the notion of being a good householder was embedded in the mastery of house management. Perfecting the production of textiles from raw material to intricate decoration was pivotal to that ideal: homemade fabrics and their compositions on display constituted the key normative standard. Good work was embodied in craftsmanship; in high sophistication of design, the quality of the pieces and the intricacy of their patterns.

According to the Romanian Explicatory Dictionary (DEX), in various contexts *harnică* can denote the following traits: “active, hardworking, tireless, indefatigable, industrious, diligent, worthy, zealous, laborious (rare) worker, ascetic, sleepless, capable, competent, prepared, equipped, experienced, tested, trained, skilled, valuable and worthy”. Looking through the range of synonyms within this definition, there are ambivalent categories present, constituting a spectrum of ideas from valuable skills to repetitive toil. These normative ambivalences appeared in my notes on the narratives of the 1957 collection of photographs and textiles kept in homes.

Following my interviews with the craftswomen about their work, I identified that labour connoted positive values of complex workmanship, denoting the hardworking individual capable of creating a good household. It also meant the pleasure of making, creativity and a sense of achievement. Textile work in the past, I was told, generated valuable dowries and provided useful objects that allowed the women to overcome scarcity. At the same time, the craftswomen spoke of the time when textiles were produced at home as an uncivilised period and one of hard times. This was time-consuming and unnecessary toil, binding them to the house. Some mentioned that all

nights spent at the loom were a waste of time and these pieces had just been produced for moths.

Such ambivalent narratives were often expressed in our discussions about the museum objects. At first, my visit triggered their need to take fabrics out of the chests, bring the materialised memories into the light and proudly display their virtuosic performances and their status as hardworking women. At the same time, artefacts from the Horniman Museum collection evoked bittersweet memories of restrictive and exhausting bodily practices. Looking at the objects and photographs, they narrated labour that had been off-stage in evaluating these virtuosic performances (Gell 1998: 95). The collection of images and domestic textiles triggered various responses about the interpretation of the past, showed how objects could be placed in the centre of stories of embodied values and sensorial interpretations of history. One example of the ambivalent narratives of hard work took place during a walk in one of the old houses. In one of the cottage rooms with Mama Codrea, while I was praising the pattern of the wall hanging, she smiled and stated that making such time-consuming objects was mad. For several elderly craftswomen of Viştea, the pieces carried negative connotations of madness (*nebunie*). For many, this model of livelihood was uncivilised, as people did not realise that “things could be done differently and lived in the dark ages”. The language of underdevelopment was often presented in terms of lack of knowledge and in laborious activities that now seemed a waste of time. In these responses, the activities of the past appeared as an era of mindless toil and lacking practical intelligence.

Another set of connotations in these discussions was linked to a visceral sense of discomfort. During the photo elicitation meetings, the makers’ body acted as a “site for memories made materially accessible” (Herzfeld 2004: 26). For the weavers in Viştea, the experience of making textiles was vividly linked to the embodied hardships of the lengthy processes of soaking in icy water, retting, beating, combing fibres and the long nights of spinning.

Mama Tave once said jokingly that if she had known that hemp was a narcotic, they would have used its anaesthetic qualities for work. Venkatesan (2010) demonstrated the significance of the engagement with bodily practice in the understanding of craft values. Her study of Pattamadai mat-weavers in India investigated the visceral perception of

labour and discomforts of craftwork. In the weavers' narratives, the discussions of physical pain that accompanied the hours at the loom signalled a wider problematic of craft production and the status of craft makers limited by the closed microcosm of the household, correlated with a sense of financial insecurity. In a similar manner, conversations with Viştean women about their bodily practice tell us about the closed domestic context in which their work was executed. Tackling the 'materiality' of raw materials (hemp, flax) was recalled as a source of backwardness and many of the weavers of Viştea had an aversion to the burden of yarn preparation.

Materials mattered to the surviving generation of women who had mastered the craft of textile production from raw material to decorative weaving. This visceral understanding of the textiles by their makers provides insights into the transition of the material world, work and value under socialism. In the 1960s, cooperative shops in Viştea and Victoria started selling cotton thread, dyes and cloth. The villagers' new purchasing powers gained through waged jobs and second economy activities, were accompanied by consumer opportunities provided by the state shops. The opportunity to use industrially produced thread simplified textile production. At the same time, the introduction of ready-made materials and tools reconstructed the patterns of daily practice, learning environments and a value system linked to the shaping of material environment.

In the 1950s and 1960s, as women moved from domestic production to work outside the household, their notion of valuable labour shifted to other forms of practice. In a similar case in the Polish Highlands, Pine (2000) explored how Górale women under socialism interacted with the outside through work and how labour was a prime form of their expression of personhood. The transformation of practice has moved from work within the household to one *for* the house (Pine 2000: 96) and "the rituals of the house have also shifted, from conspicuous house-based production to conspicuous consumption/purchase" (ibid.: 97). Pine demonstrated how, circulating outside, women carried a double or triple burden of farm, domestic and waged labour. In the case of Viştean craftswomen, shifts in the gendered constructions of personhood were linked with such exposure to the 'outside' and to new materials.

Returning to Posey's (2005) notes on combined values in Câmpeni,



Physical labour (*munca*) and being hard-working (*harnic*) is at the heart of this ideal. As one woman put it ‘If a person is not hard-working, then all their other good qualities are for nothing’.

A good *gospodar* should be clever (*deștept* also meaning mindful and able). This is described by villagers as practical knowledge and common sense as opposed to the kind of intelligence that leads to academic success ... Specifically, it related to being able to do things with one’s hands, requiring mental application as well as dexterity and the visible, tangible results of this ability (Posey 2005: 162).

Under socialism, the Viștea weavers maintained the ideal of the clever and dexterous *femeiă harnică*. This notion shifted to new types of activities, such as a successful performance in the second economy, involving skills in gaining access to scarce resources, maximising profits from farming in private plots or making fabrics for sale through recycling the thread from UCECOM supplies. One example was the previously mentioned production of *red pieces* with minimal means and the textiles made with the leftovers sold on the side. They were materialised metaphors of the ideal of a new feminine refinement, combining virtuosity, physical dexterity, subversive tactics and an ability to forge new social networks. They enabled women to operate outside the house in a skilful manner.

Visiting Viștea today, we discover that nobody makes woven textiles in the village. Over the last 30 years, as more types of fabrics have become available for purchase; the craft tradition has diminished. The past experiences of work as constant toil and limited opportunities are contrasted with the life the weavers want for their children, modern, advanced and comfortable. Mama Tave is a frequent visitor to the second-hand shops in Brașov. She shows me one of her last purchases – two woollen blankets bought for a bargain prize of 20 Lei (the equivalent of £5). The possibility of avoiding many hours of work required to make such a piece for her constitutes the meaning of modernity. This more comfortable option is preferred and one that she would not choose to turn back from. Seen in this light, the rejection of craftsmanship was a clever technical choice (Lemonnier 1993), related to the visceral materiality of the fibres. For the weavers, new materials (cotton or synthetic thread) were metaphors of emancipation and practical intelligence.

Thinking about irregularities in material culture as variants allows an exploration of “their sociocultural context, which generally leads to revealing pertinent links between a technical phenomenon and factors of social order” (Lemonnier 1986: 155). This understanding of craft discontinuity points to the social representation of weaving in its

historical context. The narratives of the transition were linked to the local representations of modernity, comfort and the valuation of material culture. For the women, the acceptance of modernity was embedded in freedom from bodily discomfort.

The tales of the weavers throw light upon their adjustment to major historical transformations and material histories, with textiles as vehicles of agency. In Viştea, as a certain model of household and workmanship were becoming obsolete a different type of person manipulated and appropriated new materials to reshape the naked domestic interior.

Revisiting museum artefacts offers insights into the social biographies of changing material worlds. The absence of these textiles serves as a material representation of changing values gone modern. Like craft learning, the unmaking of skills is a creative choice attached to the construction of self. Kuchler asserted that in some forms of material practice, the acts of destruction are of processual and generative nature, linked to the “material markers of identity” (Kuchler 2002: 188). The case of Viştean textiles illustrates that both objects and forms of material practice, such as the ‘death’ of textile skill, participate in the regenerative economy of memory. This craftsmanship served as a metaphor for axiological categories that were in a dynamic relationship with the wider historical and social context. Whereas abandoning craftsmanship was a release from one form of material practice, the interlinked categories of value and the self continued. The case of textile production, discontinued in this area, shows that the material environment is interwoven with narratives of modernity, embodied morality, ideals of gendered labour and creative forms of engagement with social change.

## 6.8 Conclusion

Aesthetic responses, Gell argued, occur in specific social contexts and therefore cannot “be invoked to explain the very manifold types of attachment between people and things” (Gell 1998: 82). The issues of ocularcentricity and logocentricity have been subject to critiques of the western hierarchies of knowledge production and their disciplinary renderings (Dudley 2013, Grimshaw 2001, Jay 1993, Levin 1993). Recent critiques of these conceptualisations pointed to epistemological reductionism and visual bias, a “stumbling block for understanding of the full interactions with material culture” (Edwards *et al* 2006: 8). In particular, museum understandings favoured visual and textual conceptions of objects, different from the sensory perception of the community of origin (Edwards *et al* 2006). These frameworks “have long privileged a certain hierarchy of sensual knowledge regarding the home, based primarily on visualised formal data” (Buchli 2010: 513).

This chapter demonstrated that the domestic textiles of Viştea, collected as folk art, needed to be reconceptualised beyond such visualist abstractions and aesthetic appreciation (Gell 1998). Seen in this light, I argued that a better sense of this material could be achieved by the opening of the sensuous and technical entanglements of objects. In the Viştea case, I demonstrated that local conceptions of textiles differed from the 1950s curatorial view on folk artefacts as enchanting objects made by ‘folk artists’ or ‘the people’, be it the peasantry of Romania or the community of any given ethnographic area. The museum objects were locally perceived as predominantly attached to values indexical to the community, from individual women to households and family groups. Objects and people were interconnected with a wider sphere of practices and axiological frameworks, constituting spaces in which persons emerged. At the same time, these arrangements of objects, things, activities and meanings were not fixed. As I explored through the changing patterns and practices, these objects were embedded in dynamic relationships between historical processes, personhood and values.

Local conceptions of the textile collection differed from the tendencies of 1950s museology to aestheticise and stabilise folk art. Rather than representing charming material culture, the traditional textiles were seen as remnants of a past that was supposed to be discarded and worked through. The weavers saw in the wall hangings their own

labour and “uncivilised life”. In 2012, the responses from the local community allow us to consider the possibility of reconceptualising eroding skills and to recognise that sometimes objects grow old and die out. The particular logic of their demise is constructed within a specific set of values and is situated beyond the concept of material loss. By acknowledging this understanding of the Viştean material, we can start to consider ways of bringing local agency back into museum interpretation and fully understand the dynamics of social representations linking people, values and things.

**PART III:**

**CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON FOLK POTTERY  
COLLECTIONS**

**Prologue**

The Horniman Museum collection is idiosyncratic and eclectic, being made with elements of various origins and divergent historical trajectories. These fragments, although collected to convey a message of wholeness and cohesion, now serve to demonstrate the forked paths of the material world. The artefacts of the rich Horniman Museum assemblage do not tell a single tale of eroding skills and fading material cultures. Although some of them have faded into obscurity, many others have been kept alive and have undergone a remarkable transformation and regeneration at the local level. By exploring the stories of the makers of the artefacts, evoking the emic experience of material history, it is possible to get ‘behind’ the museum displays to reveal what the artefacts can tell us of the complex histories and social relationships they embody.

This third part of the thesis concerns ceramic objects from the collection, highlighting the vitality of material practice related to some of these museum artefacts. Drawing on the significant pottery material forming part of the 1957 Horniman Museum collection, the two chapters of part III demonstrate narratives about museum objects and craftsmanship in today’s Romania. Read together, they serve to bring a nuanced understanding of the Horniman Museum holdings, to review their value within the local context. These values and narratives play a pivotal role in the lives of the potters as well as the objects.

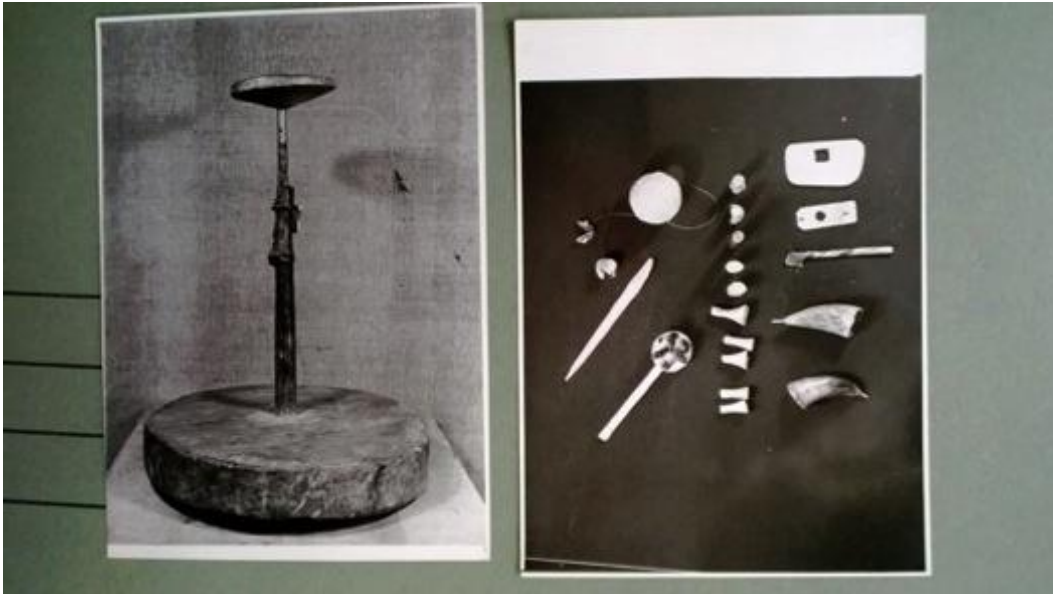
## Chapter 7: Intimate temporalities

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the case of Horezu pottery in relationship with craft continuity, history and heritage. In the context of the collection, I examine how pottery makers draw on craft models of the past to develop practice and craft identities today. By bringing the museum artefacts back into the workshop, I demonstrate the stories that objects can tell about the temporalities and taskscapes of contemporary potters and evoke the emic experience of material history. Examining how practitioners mediate, appropriate and negotiate the frameworks of practice becomes a way to rethink this craft in the museum.

The vibrancy of folk pottery in present-day Romania becomes apparent the moment one enters the country. In the Bucharest Otopeni airport shop, one encounters a jumble of traditional shirts, wooden spoons and clay pots. These souvenirs can be collected and taken home as gifts. Others are kept as sentimental reminders of the journey, evoking the chronotope of Romania experienced, a place where genuine traditions have a strong and lively presence. The souvenir represents this sense of continuity and participates in the process of exporting narratives about Romania. Pottery occupies a significant place in the airport's souvenir stall. Ceramic folk art is a particularly potent fragment of material culture, both for present-day souvenir buyers and for the antecedent collectors of folk art. In 1956, over 100 ceramic artefacts were shipped to the Horniman Museum as part of the collection to stand for and be displayed as the country's ancient craft, illustrating its stylistic richness in post-war Romania (Samson 1957: 24).

Although the present-day Horezu folk pottery centre is situated in a town of only 6,800 residents, it makes a particularly strong first impression. On entry, as one crosses the outskirts of the town, there is a long line of colourful stalls at the roadside, followed by information on various accommodation sites and signs pointing to the tourist information centre and Olari, Potters Street. The visibility of pottery is evident at once, as local bowls embellish the facades of blocks of flats, potters' houses, stalls and signposts. This is the capital of Romanian ceramics



**Fig. 7.1** The potter's wheel in a 1950s photograph. (left)

**Fig. 7.2** A collection of the potter's tools including brushes, stamps, decoration horns and wires (right)



**Fig.7.3** The potter's wheel in the Horniman Museum stores, 2011



**Fig.7.4** The Horezu plates, documented for the museum digital catalogue, 2011

## 7.2 Discarded tools: On Horezu histories and presences

During one of my first visits to Horezu in the springtime, I took images of the Horniman Museum's Horezu artefacts in an attempt to explore the story of their acquisition. Having identified the name of the seller via object documentation in the museum, it was surprising to discover in Horezu that none of several potters could direct me to the relevant family. It was only by chance, during a conversation with a stranger in the street, that I was shown the house of Pavel, the son of the collection donor.

During an interview, Pavel mentioned that his father had been a potter, but left the trade for woodcraft. In the post-war period his father had been employed by an engineer in a project to restore the local monastery and was able to “work with stone, wood and clay”. The son did not have any recollection of the curator’s visit to the area. He speculated that his father must have sold his tools to the museum employee as a result of his decision to abandon the craft. The acquisition was embedded in this process of intentional riddance and redefinition of working practice.

That people were leaving the trade at the time was confirmed in conversation with the oldest potter of Horezu, married in the year of the Horniman Museum acquisition. In the 1950s, she reminisced: “Potters were switching to salaried jobs in the town”. She explained that it was not possible to make a living from ceramic production, making pots had become a disrespected occupation and the craft was in decline. This vignette about the marginalisation of practice symbolised by discarded tools sold to the Horniman Museum, does not correspond with current received wisdom on the timeframes of craftsmanship in Horezu. I will explore this history in the next section of the chapter.

### **7.3 Heritage timeframes**

There are multiple stories of the genealogy of Horezu ceramics, varying in degrees of continuity and discontinuity. One version is that the craft tradition has been embedded in an undocumented past, tracing the origins to the ancient art of Dacian or Roman settlements (Folk Art in Rumania 1956).

The recent curatorial and heritage-based understanding of this craft history identifies its origin within the centuries’ old Brancovean heritage of the nearby monastery, currently a UNESCO World Heritage site.<sup>59</sup> This version is best expressed through an excerpt from the application documentation preceding the designation of Horezu on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2012:

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<sup>59</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century, Prince Constantin Brancoveanu, built a monastery in Romani, next to Hurez (as Horezu was known at the time), bringing craftsmen to the area. Barbu Slatineanu, the pioneering figure of Romanian pottery studies, mentioned that the Brancoveanu era could be viewed as the ‘renaissance of arts’ with various influences from Persian, Turkish and Byzantine ceramics (Slatineanu 1938: 96). In this period, craftsmanship flourished around aristocratic residences, boyar courts and monasteries producing excellent ‘semi-luxurious’ (ibid.: 99) pottery imitating foreign models (ibid., 98). Potters settled in a hillside a few kilometres from the monastery in a Potters (Olari) hamlet, above the market town, producing these excellent ceramics since then.



The production of traditional ceramics of Horezu has retained its specific style for 300 years. It is unique, and highly characteristic ... and is produced only in the administrative territory of Horezu (Petrica 2011: 2).

Key to this story is a plot of undisturbed continuity of material form and intangible craft knowledge, as illustrated by the UNESCO nomination:

Practiced for centuries, pottery is an activity that has never ceased to exist in Horezu. This craft tradition and its development throughout the ages have marked the identity of the local people, the local community recognising in this element of the heritage a part of its spiritual heritage (ibid.: 5).

The characteristics that led to Horezu being awarded the designation of intangible heritage of outstanding universal value stem from three main principles: continuation of ‘ancient’ forms of craftsmanship, linear traditions of knowledge transmission among the craftsmen and the continuity of exquisite patterns distinguishing these pots from those of other production centres. However, a closer look at the historical context enables a critical examination of Horezu craft’s recent past and reveals ruptures in the storyline of continuity.

Iancu and Tesar (2008) argue that the first mentions of the decline of handicrafts can be traced to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and concerns expressed by Romanian elites linked to the ideas of the Romanian early modernist National Art and to Arts and Crafts movements. According to a prominent early 20<sup>th</sup> century collector of Romanian pottery, due to the detrimental effect of ‘new materials’, in the 1930s beauty and the art of decoration were, to a large extent, forgotten and he noted difficulties in finding artefacts in Horezu (Slatineanu 1938: 98). This romantic trope of the disappearing noble craftsman guided urban collectors to explore the workshops of the local makers

Indeed, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pottery was a seasonal activity, practiced alongside agriculture (Petrescu and Stahl 1958). The work pattern was related to specific periods of intensified demand, such as on market days or festivities of the liturgical year including traditional alms giving, offerings and feasts for dead relatives (*praznic*) and celebrations of remembrance in the springtime and autumn (*moșii de vară, moșii de iarnă*). Within this cycle, pottery production was part of the household economy and coexisted with other occupations. This pattern was exemplified by the case of the seller of

the pottery tools acquired by the Horniman Museum. Pavel's father was a characteristic case of his time, a pottery maker with versatile skills juggling ceramics with other trades.

The Horniman Museum collection consists of four pieces from Horezu from that period. According to the documentation, these objects were collected at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and looking at the images of the artefacts, a number of potters remarked that they represented “a previous stage in the evolution of the craft”. They pointed out the limited chromatics and designs of the pieces. The visual differences between the artefacts produced during first half of the century and their counterparts from the post-war period relate to the historical shifts that had a profound effect on the forms of skilled practice in Horezu.

The elderly potters emphasised that the Horezu style as we know it today developed under socialism, in the 1950s and 1960s, through the activities of a few folk artists (*creatori populari*) who reinvented the historical Brancoveanu style with a new local character. This group established decorative schemes, technique and local symbols, leading to the evolution of folk pottery in the town. During our conversations, a number of elderly respondents claimed the patterns to be of their own invention and offered stories of competition and design ‘theft’. One ceramicist claimed that her husband created the renowned representation of fighting roosters as a comment on the competition between the main potters.

This discourse of claims and counterclaims was a common theme in discussions about Horezu pottery's origins and individual points of entry into the craft. Another example was a story about a potter, who not only came from a family without craft traditions, but who also became an exquisite decorator by stealing her father's and husband's patterns. The storyteller invited me to a small private museum behind her workshop to show how her family had developed most of the patterns used today by the copyists. The collection was an impressive combination of pieces, ranging from the standard Horezu-style plates, objects made with stamp decoration, figurines, tea sets of varying chromatics and intricately painted large plates with landscapes, dancers, portraits of the Turks and motifs taken from peasant dress. In her view, her family could claim sole authorship of most of the ornamental schemes.



**Fig. 7.5** Examples of discontinued forms (left)



**Fig.7.6** Examples of discontinued decorations (right)

Another story of origins emerged from a conversation with a local curator of ethnography.<sup>60</sup> In the 1960s, she reminisced, quality pottery was still scarce and the only valuable acquisitions were odd pieces kept by households. She aimed to obtain a collection for a newly established local ethnographic museum and the institution commissioned a potter to create ceramics for display. The curator mentioned that just as with the donor of the Horniman Museum's potter's wheel, this maker had left the profession at the time in order to work in a furniture factory. Through the commission, the potter built a kiln to be installed in the museum, produced over a 100 pieces to be sold in the museum shop and assisted the curator in acquiring older pieces from his family members. This story demonstrates how the process of museum collecting facilitated the re-enactment of the craft.

Although it is difficult to assess the extent to which heritage institutions triggered the rejuvenation of this pottery, the narratives suggest a stimulating impact of collecting practices in the aesthetic development of the practitioners. A potter, who had worked with museums under socialism, remembered that folk artists demonstrating artistic talent were respected and free to create. She recalled a number of exhibitions in Romanian cities and abroad, where her artwork was presented to the broader public. At the same time, the state would organise a range of competitions for folk artists in various locations and award medals to the best to further encourage their work. Her husband became a member of the

<sup>60</sup> Between 1960 and 1967, the curator worked in the setting up of the regional ethnographic museum in Râmnicu Vâlcea, the area adjacent to Horezu.

Romanian Academy of Arts and would publicly share his expertise through various public craft demonstrations.

In 1971, the first 'Rooster of Horezu' fair was set up as a market and national competition, becoming part of the 'Song to Romania' (*Cîntarea României*) festival. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, *Cîntarea României* assembled a range of cultural expressions into folklore festival on a grand scale that engaged cultural institutions on local and state levels. The festival formed a key part of the national cultural policy at the time and resulted in the homogenization and institutionalization of the cultural domain (Kligman 198, Mihăilescu 2008; see Urdea 2015 for a discussion of the 1957 collection in relation to the festival and folk performance).

Craftsmen participated in socialist pottery contests and created increasingly decorative ceramics. The socialist folk art scene fostered creativity within the authorised heritage of state performances and institutional frameworks. The review articles of the annual fair printed in the Romanian daily newspaper *Orizont* from the 1970s and 1980s suggest that separate awards were given to individuals and cooperatives by various institutional bodies. For instance in 1979, prizes were awarded by the Committee of Culture and Socialist Education, the UCECOM and its regional bodies, the Museum of the Village and Folk Art and the regional Vâlcea Museum. These annual awards exemplify the craft and heritage infrastructures of the time in which the makers operated. In this new and obligatory cultural ritual, the competition participants gave the most representative pieces to the town's house of culture, creating an inventory of emblematic models and traditional masterpieces.

These socialist craft fairs, competitions, exhibitions, museum-craftsmen networks generated a system of valorising devices building hierarchical typologies of craftsmen and their work. As local produce was appropriated into the networks of the national economy (through state shops) and heritage (through the growing network of museums), the artefacts of Horezu became recognisable at the extra-local level and constructed as a national emblem of craftsmanship. These displays of socialist folklore were key to the building of the 'socialist new man' in the spirit of nationalist folklore (Iancu and Tesar 2008).

These memories of origins and relationships tell the story of a select group of folk artists. These potters formed dynasties that through their creations, their involvement in art exhibitions and other public domains of socialist Romania, built the reputation of Horezu. The potters' preference for certain patterns had been constituted in a nexus of legitimation and social relationships with the community of experts, in socialist exhibitions, contests and interpersonal encounters. In this system of evaluation and judgement, the potters gained fluidity in the operations of classification and channelled their creativity and workmanship towards the patterns desired by experts. The workmanship and practical knowledge of the potter operated in interaction with the socialist system of folk art that guided their action in the workshop. The highly competitive folk art scene under socialism affected the channels through which craft knowledge was transmitted. The codification of designs and the process of assigning them to individual folk artists had led to the privatisation (individual and family-based) of the local style and channels that transferred traditional knowledge. Operating in the system of folk art distinctions, the designated potters reproduced particular designs as examples of good practice and co-constructed traditional forms in consultation with the specialists. The relationships between makers and experts demonstrated the interplay of promoted and targeted spheres of craft activity. Practice was integrated within the political economy of craft knowledge (Makovicky 2010).

Beyond the institutional framework, local memories of socialist origins and relationships tell the story of a particular intimacy. From the 1960s, museums not only played a significant patronage role, but also participated in the everyday lives of the craftsmen. The networks provided folk craftsmen with prestige and stable sources of demand. Elderly potters recalled that museum employees had been a regular part of the everyday and many still kept in touch with museum professionals. These long-term relationships extended to the children of the potters and the experts who maintained connections later into their adult life. The significant arenas of these encounters between collectors, folk artists and heritage specialists had been competitions and annual markets. Furthermore, the experts would organise visits by prominent international guests, celebrities and politicians.

Conversations with curators and ethnographers confirmed these claims about connections developed with specific craftsmen through narratives about the curators'

‘private holidays’ at craftsmen’s households and their acquaintance with particular families. Formal and informal encounters were incorporated into networks of contacts and reciprocal visits and services between experts and craftsmen. Just as curators were allowed into the potters’ domestic sphere, the craftsmen were often invited to the city for a museum fair or a public demonstration of pottery techniques. The standard of such reciprocal hospitality involved prearranged state accommodation and transport to the city. Some potters also had the rare privilege to travel abroad to participate in folk art exhibitions.



**Fig.7.7** Offices and former shop of the *Cooperativa Ceramica* (left)

**Fig.7.8** Housing estate in Horezu, decorated with plates (right)

Alongside the development of the craft as folk art, pottery under socialism also became increasingly industrialised. This simultaneous development was linked to the activities of UCECOM. The Horezu cooperative included a range of around 50 crafts, from hairdressing, textile production, carpet making and carpentry to ceramics. The pottery section was particularly productive in the 1980s when orders came from all over Romania, the USSR, France, Italy, Austria and Germany. While the official policy of incorporating folk crafts under UCECOM was set to protect them from capitalism, the state established a network of industries to produce national folk art for the international market. According to the archival accounts of the cooperative, the number of craftsmen (referred to as artisans) working for the cooperative in the 1980s reached 100, generating an industrial enterprise employing a labour force from Horezu and other locations in the area.

The cooperative provided opportunities for the artisans' development on the job. Following a period of apprenticeship within the enterprise under a master potter, new workers became responsible for specific operations on the production line, according to their skills. They were assigned to a working group (*echipa*) dealing specifically with the extraction and transport of clay, modelling, decorating or supervising the firing process. The artisans would work according to the norm, producing a daily average of 200 pieces of a particular model and size. The production was remembered as very advanced and technically refined – the cooperative had a German industrial clay mixer, some gas-operated kilns and various electric wheels. The production process was supervised and quality-checked by master potters, ensuring that the pots met the requirements of the orders from their national and international clients.

Work in the Ceramics Cooperative (*Cooperativa Ceramica*) was well remembered by the makers and the museum specialists. For most curators I interviewed, UCECOM's management of the craft cooperatives was perceived as beneficial for the craft. In the beginning, in the memories of the former employee of the Museum of Folk Art, cooperatives were famous for tasteless products, one example being folk decorations on nylon curtains. In the 1970s and 1980s, (a period often referred to as *under Ceaușescu*), the organisation became engaged with specialists from the heritage sector to oversee the design process, ensuring a degree of connection to genuine and traditional folk patterns. Interviewing one of the Bucharest museum experts from the period, I learnt about the production process and the division of labour at the time. She stated that the employees of the cooperative would make exactly the same type of artefacts as folk artists but within a different mode of production and on a larger scale. Her goal was to re-establish quality and an authentic character of craft production. Interviewing the former section supervisor, the commercial agent, accountant and various artisans of the Ceramics Cooperative, the scale of production within in Horezu appeared vast. It was a project of authenticity on a mass scale.

As Iancu and Tesar (2008) suggested, the policies of the socialist state towards craft production instrumentalised folk art within a ideology of national socialism “rooted in the ancestral tradition and to be in tune with the project of modernisation” (ibid.: 53). The two modes of production, both of the folk artists' and of the artisans', were highly institutionalised and monitored in terms of quality control. Where the folk artists

negotiated their craftsmanship with the expertise of the socialist state heritage sector, the cooperative-based producers reported to master craftsmen and the demands of UCECOM. From the 1960s, state cultural policy had encouraged and managed artisanal output in the form of national folk art markets, competitions and exhibitions in museums and cultural centres. Through both forms of labour under socialism, Horezu pottery participated in the process of “legitimising the state through culture” (ibid.: 50).

These new structures developed multiple relationships of reciprocity. The makers employed by the cooperative praised the stability of commissions and the well-organised distribution of products across the network of state shops. Furthermore, they appreciated the quality of education available through cooperative apprenticeships, close relationships with the master craftsmen and craft training in high schools. They identified themselves with the cooperative and enjoyed the respect for their craft within the socialist society.

The potters recognised the noticeable decline of these connections and privileges with the state after the 1989 revolution when the state heritage sector increasingly distanced itself from Horezu. This alienation was particularly evident during museum fairs when potters would increasingly have to compete with other craftsmen. The respondents expressed their dissatisfaction that the museums would bring together makers of woodcraft, textiles, decorations and even *kitsch* or food produce. Now museums would allow any type of stall into the market contributing to a decrease in quality and the contamination of folk art.

In the 1990s, following the deconstruction of the socialist economy, cooperatives and state enterprises were closed down. Being an entrepreneurial potter became a new occupation and an alternative activity in the shrinking job market. In the course of privatisation, a number of the residents of Potters Street set up workshops and, in contrast to the secure market of former cooperative shops, started to produce and sell their objects individually, participating in craft markets, through middlemen (*comerțianți*), setting up mini boutiques in front of their houses or producing to order.

Following the post-socialist deindustrialisation process, heritage and market futures became key strategies for development in the region. As state patronage retreated, civil organisations sprang up to secure funding for cultural initiatives and to promote the continuation of the craft in the area. The existing capital of local expertise, prestige and



the previous state promotion became a backdrop against which new relationships were constituted and new forms emerged.

The growing grass-roots interest in the heritage of the region can be exemplified by the existence of four organisations that aim to guard and develop traditions in the area: The Association of the Horezu Valley (*Asociația Depresiunea Horezu*), The Association of Folk Craftsmen ‘Rooster of Horezu’ (*Asociația Meșterilor Populari „Cocoșul de Hurez”*), The Association for the Promotion of Authentic Heritage in Horezu (*Asociația pentru Promovarea Patrimoniului Autentic Horezu (APPAH)*) and The Foundation for Rural Civilisation ‘Peasants’ (*Fundația Națională pentru Civilizație Rurală „Niște Țărani”*).

At the same time, the European Union became a key player in the reconstruction of regional identity, local development and the heritage management of the area. Currently, this on-going shift from national to supranational strategy is visible in the proliferation of heritage, tourism and development projects. In 2008, the Horezu Valley became one of the 20 European Destinations of Excellence for its intangible heritage and traditional assets. In 2009 – 2010, part of the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area initiated a EU-funded programme on local heritage protection.<sup>61</sup> Between 2010 and 2013, the local authorities ran a project entitled ‘Horezu Rooster – the Bastion of Sustainability of Romanian Ceramics’<sup>62</sup> to promote the annual European fair ‘The Rooster of Horezu’ with competitions in creativity, modelling and the decoration of pots. In the course of the project, the local authorities sent delegations of potters to participate in similar events in Faenza (Italy) and La Galera (Spain). The aim was to reach a European public, create new networks, attract international visitors, collectors and specialists and bring Western European practitioners back to the town. In 2012, Horezu gained a new place on the map of European and universal heritage, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for “the knowledge and skills associated with

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Microregion Horezu – Revitalisation through Valuation of Historic Heritage’ (*Microregiunea Horezu - revitalizare prin valorificarea patrimoniului istoric*) was a project established to record and catalogue the cultural heritage and local monuments, report the current state of conservation; oversee urban planning and heritage protection regulations, provide measures for new initiatives, promote better compliance with local specificity; develop cultural products (exhibitions, paintings, written work, video), promote religious painting, intangible heritage, traditional skills and products and to provide teacher training about heritage.

<sup>62</sup> This initiative was co-organised with the Association of Horezu Depression and the Association of Folk Craftsmen ‘Rooster of Horezu’, using the funding of the Administration of National Cultural Fund (Administrația Fondului Cultural Național).

Horezu ceramic and its transmission techniques distinguish it as a symbolic marker of the identity of the people of Horezu and Olari” (Craftsmanship of Horezu Ceramics 2013). The pottery centre’s continuity gained world recognition.

Eight months before the inscription, I conducted an interview with a former director of the major Romanian ethnographic museum. He expressed concerns about the nomination process for UNESCO, arguing that the experts’ efforts for inscription were a continuation of the competitive mechanisms ruling cultural heritage management in the socialist market of experts. The director stated that UNESCO’s activities in Romania are enmeshed with the long tradition of Romanian objectification of rural culture. For the director, this competition for prestige maintained its elitist and expert-led character, often marginalising the voice of the community. The system of listings and heritage preservation was about competitiveness and control. He pointed out that the engagement of Romanian specialists in global heritage discourse echoed the manipulations of folk arts and the practice of the state-controlled socialist contests of folk art and ‘Song to Romania’ festivals. For Verdery, under Ceaușescu:

recognised cultural authority was essential to claiming cultural representativeness, or to discourses about ‘authenticity’, which were important weapons in the horizontal competition for central resources (Verdery 1991:197).

The politicisation of the heritage strategy ironically evoked a sense of continuity between the socialist heritage practices and the new global actors. This approach to heritage as a competitive stage is demonstrated by a comment on the Horezu designation success by Gigel Stirbu, the Romanian President of the Joint Standing Committee of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate for Relations with UNESCO. Stirbu announced that Romania ranked 42nd out of 122 countries in terms of UNESCO designations. He claimed the country had a significant “cultural potential requiring support and promotion” (Haemus.org 2012). In this context, the rank of the state is expressed through its success in the designation process. At the same time, the UNESCO heritage sites serve to direct attention of the international community to the country’s case for development resources.

Given the richness of supranational interventions in the area, it is clear that since Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007, Horezu has invested a good deal into its heritage resources. In the context of post-socialist deindustrialisation and the reconstruction of the economy, tourism and cultural heritage protection programs are key

factors for the development of an area mediated by international agents, state heritage brokers, local civic organisations and various funding bodies. The expertise of the heritage specialist, previously led by state institutions, has been delegated to these stakeholders and executed through global operational procedures. This new heritage regime (Bendix *et al* 2012), through the application of global typological devices of listing, recording and conservation standards, has had a significant impact on the construction of Horezu craftsmanship.

Through these instruments, international actors legitimise a neutral narrative of identity based on the 300-year continuity and craft transmission. These mechanisms are in fact deeply political. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observed, “heritage converting locations into destinations and tourism makes them economically viable as exhibits of themselves” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 151). Horezu, by becoming a new kind of destination has transformed the process of making pottery into a form of metacultural production (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004) with a particular trope of what constitutes its history and genuine cultural expressions. From emblematic nationalist folk art, Horezu pottery became framed as globally recognised intangible heritage, a listed and bureaucratised cultural performance with all its potentialities and limitations.



**Fig.7.9** Example of a decoration stamp

The process of generating protected lists of techniques, decorative styles and tools poses questions about what is seen as valuable in the preservation process and the heritage continuity-oriented storyline. The image above (**Fig.7.9**) shows part of the 1957 Horniman Museum collection of stamps used for ceramic decoration. This technique has been discontinued in the centre and is currently placed outside the repertoire of scholarly descriptions or museum presentations of Horezu equipment. The stamps in the museum collection demonstrate the working style of the post-war potter and serve as material

witnesses to changing practice. At the same time, these obsolete tools represent the selective character of heritage infrastructures. What is being listed depends on the point in time at which the inscription is made, stabilising meanings around an arbitrary place within an evolving form. Another problematic issue is how this authorisation of the past affects current and future versions of practice. The future of Horezu and other centres of folk art remained a problematic category for one of the former directors of an ethnographic museum. In a conversation, he pointed out that market trends have appropriated traditions and local meanings of the craft. He mentioned that potters are a particularly significant asset in the post-socialist market and will invent ways of ‘getting on’ without support from the state.

These remarks demonstrated the ambiguities of the changing hierarchy of the political economy of knowledge (Makovicky 2010: 91) framing pottery. This craft was navigating its way, disappearing and reinventing itself throughout history. As the nation-building discourses of folk art and socialist folk industry were being replaced by the UNESCO designation, European Union development programmes and market forces, the craft once again became reformulated and transformed.

#### **7.4 Time regained: Gabi’s story**

For Smith (2006), authorised heritage discourse favours aesthetic material culture to be cared for, protected and passed down. It also identifies those who act as the “legitimate spokespersons for the past” (Smith 2006: 29). In Horezu, the authorised heritage discourse of Romanian scholars during the socialist period saw pattern designs as indexical of the long duration of symbol-making peasantry, often linking folk art to the idiom of national/people’s origins. The authentic Horezu potter uses certain glazes, designs and tools (Mihaescu 2005, Petrescu and Stahl 1958, Vladuțiu 1981). This symbolism is embedded in a specific set of values, as designs often connote:

pre-Christian beliefs and are a landmark in arguing the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people. As a result, the ornamental pottery produced in Oboga and Horezu became the icon of Romanian identity, largely exhibited in national museums and international exhibitions. (Iancu and Tesar 2008: 48).

For several museum specialists and ethnographers today, there is a strong sense of a loss of symbolic depth to Horezu patterns. One of the main concerns of ethnographers is the

production of folk artefacts devoid of meaning and the context of past peasant society. In an interview with one of the directors of a Romanian ethnographic museum, I was told that potters did not know the meaning of the patterns. They continued to use traditional designs oblivious of their authentic symbolism.

Using the example of the rooster pattern, I argue that eliciting stories about the design provides insights into the stories potters tell about themselves and their historical experience. The discussion about the rooster offers an alternative storyline about continuity and change. In several workshops, I was told that a truly hard-working craftsman rises up upon hearing the rooster's crow. The potters often explained that they identified themselves with the rooster and narrated "their rooster" as a marker of professional dedication and as the distinguished Horezu approach to the craft. The rooster was envisioned as proud, reliable and boastful, connoting a sense of autonomy and confident mastery of the trade. It was interesting to discover how the pattern triggered narratives about autonomy and the craft's local history.

According to Gabi,<sup>63</sup> an eccentric and good-humoured potter in his late 60s, potters today are free to operate autonomously, controlling their rhythm of daily tasks. Under socialism, he claimed, potters were forced to work for the socialist *Cooperativa Ceramica*. He reminisced that work took place "on the hour, on the hour – people weren't used to producing this way". Gradually, several potters started to leave the cooperative. Their return to their household studios was initiated in the 1980s, when the renown of traditional Horezu pottery spread across the country and the possibility of home-based work (*muncă la domiciliu*) as folk artists arose for more people. In the 1990s, following the dissolution of the cooperative, as the privatisation of craftsmanship became an alternative to the shrinking job market, new workshops appeared on Potters Street and around the town. These producers were the descendants of the folk potter families, former *artisans* and new craftsmen looking for ways to combat growing unemployment. Today, under the market economy, objects are sold *in situ* or as individual commissions via craft markets and middlemen (*comerțianți*). Less often there are orders from souvenir shops, restaurants or international customers. In Gabi's view, the current trend is to work in the 'traditional' house-based studio (*atelier*) where "potters aren't directed by anybody. I work out of free will, for pleasure and passion".

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<sup>63</sup> On respondents' request, all names of the potters quoted in Chapter 7 and 8 have been changed.

Following from Gabi's narrative, the reconstruction of traditional working patterns allowed the potters to regain autonomy. E.P. Thompson's (1967) classic study on time discipline provides a useful context through which to understand how the potters' autonomy relates to the image of the rooster. He argued that in the domestic mode of production (characterised by peasantry and artisans), there is a specific 'task orientation' and disregard for clock-time. In artisanal contexts, the working day is flexible (ibid.: 60) and dependent on the synchronisation of subsidiary tasks (ibid: 70). In the pre-industrial past:

the work pattern was one of alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness, wherever men were in control of their own working lives (ibid.: 73).

This view on task orientation and work pattern reflects Gabi's perspective on the past of Horezu pottery. In such a rhythm, work is pleasure. In contrast, in industrial production with mechanised manufacturing techniques, the workday is punctuated by clock-time, generating a regulated and restrictive time-discipline (ibid.: 93). Such an approach to the industrialised work pattern was narrated in Gabi's memory of the 'on the hour' working environment of the mechanised cooperative. In this story, the rooster pattern is embedded in the local history of craft and the related notion of the maker's autonomy. In contrast to the *Cooperativa's* time-discipline, the privatised, folk art-producing *atelier* was seen as more pleasurable and bringing a sense of control over personal time and work rhythm. By becoming folk artists, the potters re-conceptualised themselves as independent craftsmen. They skilfully used the opportunities provided by the socialist heritage industry, positioning themselves between work environments and creating designated folk art designs to maintain this status. The rooster pattern works as an emblem of their approach to work and historical experience.

I would now like to return to the words of the curator discussing the devaluation of pattern symbolism. The theoretical positions of Romanian specialists emphasised the formal aspects of artefacts, framing and codifying folk art imagery as signs that communicated fixed meanings concerning the livelihoods and values of peasant society. In the present-day workshop, artefacts are made for purely decorative use, the curator pointed out, and these symbolic understandings were increasingly threatened by the influence of superficial aestheticism and commercialisation. The case of the Horezu rooster exemplifies the nature of folk pottery imagery beyond such evaluations. The meaning of

the rooster is situated in the wider context of material practice and craft identity that is being practiced, negotiated and transformed in a historical setting. Rather than being a fixed design with pre-defined features, the rooster is part of the temporal fluidity of meaning. Following Skounti, intangible heritage:

appears to be the same when it is never quite the same even for two closely related moments in history. Intangible cultural heritage changes, it is fluid, it is never performed identically, it is once true on itself and different. This defines its essence, its unity, and its specificity. As for authenticity ... it does not have one. Its constant re-creation, ... its differentiated application within a group or a society, its diversity of meaning for all and everyone, are at odds with a notion of authenticity conceived as rootedness, faithfulness or fixedness (Skounti 2008: 78).

The rooster tells the story of regained autonomy. It is a symbol of resistance to the state intervention into what is perceived as the natural rhythm of work. Beyond heritage temporality and the static view on fixed style, the emic perspective from the workshops reveals an alternative storyline about the craft's lived history.

## **7.5 On work rhythms today**

The recognised, characteristic features of Horezu as a folk pottery centre are the techniques of production, the shapes of the vessels and the ornamentation styles used by potters. But how do these relate to the daily labour of being a potter and potters' own understandings of this craft practice today? The next section seeks to understand folk pottery beyond the received knowledge of heritage temporality by exploring issues of today's craftsmanship and makers' practice-based conceptualisations of work rhythms, space and continuity.

A day in the workshop may involve various activities. Just as in the 1950s (Petrescu and Stahl 1958: 39), the tasks involved in pot-making often require the involvement of multiple family members and paid workers. Firstly, the clay is extracted from a nearby hill and transported by tractor to the household. It is then placed in a designated space in the yard and left (usually over the winter) to homogenise. The raw material is mixed in an electric blender (*malaxor*) to remove impurities and is rolled into cylindrical sections. Two of the present-day potters, Mrs Tambrea and Mr Petran, suggested that this phase of the process is key to the success of the end piece. It is particularly physically challenging, as large lumps of clay are being moved and filtered. Lack of attention to air bubbles, stones

or pieces in the final stages of the pot.



**Fig.7.10** Mixing the clay in the *malaxor* (left)



**Fig.7.11** Preparation of clay for mixing and moulding (right)

The purified, mixed sections are then divided into smaller parts and rolled by hand into balls of clay representing the size of the final pieces. At this stage, it is crucial to synchronise the feel of the clay in the hand with a preconceived design of the future pot. Careful estimation is required, as for throwing a vase, the potter needs three sizes of clay balls from which he makes the main body, the upper part and the holder.



**Fig.7.12** Decorating plate (left)



**Fig.7.13** Moulding the balls of clay before throwing at the wheel (right)





**Fig. 7.14** The emblematic tool of Horezu: the fine wire-tipped stick (left)



**Fig.7.15** The symbol of Horezu craftsmanship: the bull's horn (right)

The next phase of production moves to the household *atelier* where the Horezu pieces take their shape. Typically, there is a potter at a wheel shaping the plate, covering it with liquid glaze or applying patterns with the characteristic, emblematic tools of Horezu – the horn and the wire-tipped stick (see **Fig. 7.14** and **7.15** above). With impressive rhythmical precision, he/she pours drops of the glaze onto the plate using the hollowed-out bull's horn and shapes these drops into patterns with the stick, using it like a painter's brush. The process of decoration occurs in a particular sequence of manual operations and tourists visiting the workshops are welcome to observe the hypnotising sequence of the potter's movements. This visually attractive activity takes just a few minutes. Ornamentation is perceived as female work, though male potters do decorate as well.<sup>64</sup> With great dexterity, turning the wheel with his/her feet, the decorator applies the glaze with an extraordinary mastery of the brush-like stick. The spiral, floral and geometrical patterns are carefully splashed onto the liquid surface of the piece. The pattern has a particular significance in terms of colour choices and the natural character of the glaze.<sup>65</sup>

It is widely known that authentic Horezu potters use certain colours and natural glazes. Departure from the repertoire causes controversy. The use of a new range of colours is problematic for museum curators as it contradicts their view of the craft. One of the museum ethnographers based in Bucharest, discussing current developments, noted:

“We are interested in real ceramics, close to tradition ... not things that are not Horezu. There are large numbers of visitors, foreign as well, so the potters are obliged

<sup>64</sup> In 2012, the main prize of the annual Rooster of Horezu Market competition was awarded to Mr Giubega who excelled in the technique of decoration.

<sup>65</sup> The core glazes are yellow, green, blue and brown.

to come to our museum exclusively with Horezu pottery. From the museum perspective, they are obliged to work with tradition.”

For the specialist, the introduction of change constitutes a marker of inauthenticity and dislocates the pot from a fixed position. The material fabric of the object embodies the real tradition and consequently, any material intervention threatens its status and provenance. The modified object is not Horezu. This approach to modification is embedded in the positivist framework of conservation practice where historic value and continuity through time are inherent in the lack of material change (see discussion in Jones and Yarrow 2013). The museum specialist’s perspective on the glaze demonstrates the fixed materialist paradigm of authenticity as “objective and measurable attribute inherent in the material fabric, form and function of artefacts” (Jones 2010: 182) undermining the cultural complexities of the term. The purity and ‘reality’ of the authentic object has been integral to classificatory modes of museum practice. In this framework,

modified, hybrid and heterogeneous objects have often been considered inauthentic and thus excluded from the pure categories that are conserved and represented (Kingston 1999: 188).

As Jones (2010) suggested, this reductionist approach to material culture, prevalent in various forms of heritage expertise, embeds intangible culture in particular regimes of meaning and exchange (ibid.). The expert produces, mediates and negotiates a set of values and serves as a gatekeeper for particular types of objects and makers.

The tangible reality of object production in the potter’s workshop operates outside these categories of material purity. On a daily basis, the heritage craftsman faces challenges of supply, economic constraints, uneven rhythms of orders, equipment maintenance, transport and other costs. Just as new glazes are being contested, so are improvements in equipment and the production process. One particularly contested area is firing. This key operation usually takes place on a designated day of the week, lasting about ten hours and requiring constant supervision and the repeated addition of wood into the kiln in order to maintain the right temperature. Some potters have started using electrical kilns claiming that, in addition to the comfort of not being required to stay in the dirty and hot space of the shed, the objects resulting from this type of kiln are more regular. Others opine that the modern firing technique is inauthentic and produces pieces of lower quality.

The tourist office employee shared a similar view. He supported this opinion by references to tangible differences in quality. He mentioned an *experiment* of leaving old and new plates outdoors and learning that those fired in the traditional kiln were more resistant to the elements. The pieces fired with wood maintain the vivid colour for a longer period. Recent innovations, he argued, produce an inferior type of pottery and the use of the electric kiln is inconsistent with the traditional character of the craft. His experiment was a metaphor of the contrast between the enduring, deep-rooted, permanent *old* and perishable, short-lived, unstable and decaying *new*.

In contrast, for the potters firing is a process indicating technical efficacy. One respondent explained that good command of firing methods represented a degree of mastery and intellectual skill: “I fire in a more intelligent way than others, using only 40% as much wood”. A good kiln and the efficient mastery of the process to avoid defects is a key criterion, determining the value of the practitioner. Ideas of intelligence and of originality were also related to the use of tools, as this potter pointed out. He preferred to use a rudimentary glaze mixer to continue his father’s legacy. His kiln, though, was newly made and more efficient, a more intelligent option than most of the others from Potters Street.



**Fig. 7.16** Kiln used for firing pottery in Horezu (wood) (left)

**Fig. 7.17** Electric kiln (right)



**Fig. 7.18** Freshly decorated plates, left to dry (left)



**Fig. 7.19** Decorating small bowls with the horn and wire-tipped stick (right)

Knowledge of all phases of production as interconnected synchronised processes was very strongly associated with the intellectual abilities of the maker. For the craftsmen, lack of knowledge of one phase results in defects. Being a good potter was narrated as being capable of controlling surprises in modelling, decoration and firing. Techniques were key to the idiom of the centre's originality: skilful multiphase manual work was the most valuable aspect of the potters' craft and the distinguishing feature of their sense of genuine mastery. The particularities of the kick-wheel, decorative techniques with the local toolset, natural glazes and the use of wood kilns framed the sense of value and quality. Although a number of craftsmen introduced mechanised equipment using electric wheels, kilns and imported glazes, the narrative of authentic techniques remained strong. This idiom is mediated and co-produced in relation to the expectations of heritage experts and customers.

The potters' understanding of their technology of production as a heritage value is a strategy for negotiating the forms of classification of workmanship generated by the heritage infrastructures and by the clientele seeking genuine folk art objects. Being more or less technically traditional (and intelligent) were the main criteria against which potters judged each other's work and status. As much at stake as keeping the material fabric of tools, glazes and patterns in good order was the need to protect one's knowledge of technique: potters would often conceal their own innovations and technical choices from outsiders. These covert innovations allowed them to maintain the image of long duration skilful authenticity and uninterrupted continuity of working methods.

Some respondents, however, expressed more flexible views on the purity and contamination of folk art. They saw innovation as part of their professional identity and enjoyed introducing an element of playfulness. One craftsman, for example, showed me one of his inventions. It was a design of a piggy bank decorated with Horezu patterns, which he jokingly called the 'Reiffeisen Bank model'. The shape was primarily made for his grandson, but had now become part of his staple commercial offering. Small client-oriented innovations did not necessarily conflict with traditional work, he stated, simultaneously claiming the status of the last authentic craftsman in the area. Another female potter, and a couple who specialised in producing objects on order for larger clients, represented a similar approach. Their commissions for restaurants were based on small photographs of models sent from Italy to be reproduced in clay. Through trial and error, she would use her craft knowledge to achieve a replica of good quality. For her, "the commercial orientation of modernised patterns" provided an opportunity for skilled development.

Some attempts to modernise patterns did not succeed or were rendered invisible. One potter said he could not develop new products, as they were neither accepted on the marketplace nor in museums. Others would produce idiosyncratic objects, such as ceramic garden decoration, without revealing their Horezu provenance. Furthermore, some patterns would be tailored to different national tastes, one example being the development of abstract decorations for Italian customers. Depending on the audiences and stages, patterns are strategically used either for heritage or commercial purposes. The pattern, the toolkit, the material and the process are incorporated into the rhythms of daily labour as well as the broader categories of practice. On a daily basis, the potter works in the composite environment of personal decisions and values as well as the classifications framing the practice from outside. The next section examines a particularly characteristic example of tensions and negotiations that this complex ecology of practice brings into the making of ceramics.

## 7.6 Fixing the pattern, resisting change

In Horezu today, group identity is often narrated through the symbol of the rooster, an increasingly codified and fixed image. The president of the local pottery association mentioned that the rooster had become the potters' *brand*, an emblem of identification distinguishing the authentic maker from the producer of kitsch or a usurper from outside the centre. This representational form of authenticity has recently been legally protected through the recognition of the rooster image as a trademark under Romanian law. The tourist office and the local cultural centre promote a unified visual language of designs, organising discussions with craftsmen with suggestions on the preservation of the authentic character of the craft. These meetings upset one of the younger potters, who saw them as a bureaucratic assault on the potters' knowledge and responsiveness to their clientele.

However, the collective effort taken by the potters' association to protect the pattern as a registered trademark is a sign of solidarity as well as competitiveness. The protection effort has been framed as a response to the inflow of Bulgarian, Hungarian and Chinese imitations contaminating the market. This conflicting landscape of practice is played out in the space of the town itself. Potters warned me about the Chinese quarter at the edge of the town, selling kitsch made outside Horezu. This border-zone commercial area was the first point of contact with the town. The shops run by the locals, situated between the stalls, have large notices reading: "We do not sell Bulgarian or Chinese products". The notices served as signs of solidarity with the potters in the village and conveyed a sense of an invasion of outsiders, an inflow of imported kitsch pottery and the influence of the Chinese district (*cartier chinezesc*).



Fig. 7.20 'We don't sell products from China and Bulgaria', pottery shop door notice in Horezu (left)

**Fig. 7.21** Stall with *kitsch products* and traditional ceramics (right)

The category of usurpers connotes a redefinition of who is included or excluded from the community of makers. The designs are part of the common heritage of the centre to be protected against outsiders mass-producing Horezu objects without authorisation or the use of traditional techniques. This increasingly guild-like approach is embedded in a perceived need for collective action against market outsiders.

Although production has been moved back to individual competing households, these makers share an increasing sense of collective identity based on the repertoire of designs and techniques and use ornamental schemes for protection against those invading their space. The usurpers' objects (Hungarian, Chinese or Bulgarian) sold in the stalls at the entrance to Horezu produce economic insecurities that were not addressed by the retreating state. Thus, new instruments of the transnational protection of cultural property and heritage branding are being welcomed and lobbied for by the potters. Becoming a trademark, increasingly fixed decorative schemes are material manifestations of the transforming reality of practice interlinked to the effects of transition, market competition and heritage classifications.

According to Rowlands (1993), in inscribed forms of cultural transmission, prevalent in European material culture and heritage practice, "people are exposed constantly to highly visible examples of material objects invested with authoritative credibility" (ibid.: 142). These forms of cultural transmission, exemplified by the codification of cultural forms and the preservation of heritage, are concerned with duration, patterning and linearity. They render object traditions, souvenirs, and heirlooms as valid vehicles construing continuity. In this light, heritage practices and institutions fetishise durability and repetition of form, as origins are reproduced through materiality.

Facing the categories and inscriptions of the heritage and tourist industries, the potters of Horezu mediate their creativity with the socially reproduced definitions of the heritage infrastructure. Making artefacts is an activity embedded in a network of distinctions, values and categories. Replicated patterns are an intersection of these forces, decisions and restrictions, becoming a material manifestation of objectified performances and the changing interactions between the makers and their social worlds. They are strongly embedded in the politics of value and the relationships between craft



practitioners, the state and several heritage actors, framing the socio-economic status and the prestige of the potters.



**Fig.7.22** Plate from the 1957 Horezu collection

## 7.7 Taskscapes and plots

Thinking about the wider relationships of skilled practice, Ingold (2000) argued that forms of activity are performed socially, are mutually interlocked and become meaningful in the context of their ensemble, a wider taskscape. As tasks are interlocked social activities occurring in time, Ingold pointed to the social temporality of practice. The concept of taskscape provides a valuable framework within which to analyse craft in its movements and rhythms.

Making ceramics in Horezu is a combination of material and discursive tasks played out in time and space. One of the key tasks of the Horezu potter is an ability to create an authentic narrative of craftsmanship and knowledge transmission. The potters' narratives on craft learning and making the household studio are illuminative of what being a Horezu folk artist means today. The life-stories and workshop environments are sites of self-identification and legitimation within the potters' community and in the wider context of institutions and discourses surrounding this craft practice.

The potters often tell a story of having been taught by their parents at home and of having been born into the profession. A common part of their life histories is a narrative about early childhood memories of playing with clay. This is followed by a storyline of an organic learning process that results in the point of current mastery. One potter declared that such tradition of knowledge transmission has been uninterruptedly continued in their



families “for the last 120 years”. Others, less specifically, claimed that the family has been engaged in the production for generations. The romanticised notion of learning through pleasurable presence in the workshop conceals the nature of pottery as a coping strategy in the post-socialist period. Other narratives of entering the craft reveal the historical dimensions of craft training and the transmission of knowledge beyond the script communicated in ethnographic exhibitions and heritage institutions.

Andrei, the son of a potter renowned in the socialist period, learnt the trade from his father in the 1990s, after he was made redundant in his ‘bureaucratic job’. Rodica worked in commerce and decided to try pottery after a series of insufficiently paid positions as a hotel receptionist. The owner of one of the first households on Pottery Street learnt the craft in high school but after graduation worked in industry. The closure of the factory in the 1990s made him consider relearning the profession from his father-in-law. Today he and his wife work exclusively in ceramics. In fact, the number of folk potters in the area increased as a result of the post-socialist transformation. As, after the 1989 revolution those employed in the cooperative were left without work, they set up home-based studios, learning from their parents, other family members, neighbours or other craftsmen in the area. These new potters, to varying degrees, entered into networks of partnerships with museums and craft markets. The Iordanescu family is perceived by the curators as living heritage and regularly produces artefacts for museum acquisitions and souvenir shops. At the same time, this family is locally seen as an inauthentic newcomer and the head of the household is said to be “just a shepherd” that learnt the trade in his forties from a neighbour. The story is part of the interplay of solidarity and hostility amongst the makers. Potters switch registers of storytelling about life history and craft transmission depending on the audience and circumstances.

I see their ways of telling craft stories about themselves as a form of narrative practice (Gubrium and Holstein 1998). In particular, I consider person in relation to practice:

The person — the actor — is addressed by people and forces and institutions external to himself or herself and responds using the words, genres, actions and practices of others. In time, the person is forming in practice and so are the cultural resources that the person adapts to author himself or herself in the moment ... Thus, local practice is significant for the continuing formation of

institutional arrangements in socio-historic time/space (Holland and Lave 2009: 4).

Thinking through public time and narrative in Horezu illuminates the process of constructing and reconstructing identity that plays a role in mediating history and on-going practice (ibid.). The production of craft persons is related to interwoven and often contested domains of local practice and intimate embodied identities that result in a particular “history-in-person” (ibid.).

The narrative mechanisms through which craftsmen are mediated and communicated are ordered in a particular sequence. For Ricoeur (1980), storytelling gives meaning to the experience of time, constructing narrative identities through the intentional creation of a plot as well as through meaningful action. The narrative is an inherently performative phenomenon and acts of ‘recitation’ and public storytelling incorporate the story into a community, gathering it together through the social practice of plots performed within ‘public time’. (Ricoeur 1980: 175). In this context, telling stories of a pleasurable childhood education in craft creates a plot that legitimises the maker in front of the external ‘public time’ and heritage discourse. At the same time, its public character serves as a community-building device, bringing together makers with the same chronology of practice, transversing the storms of lived history. Narratives bring the makers together; giving the plot a common pattern and sequence. In their story, craftsmanship is linear and regular; one generation of makers replaces the set of previous practitioners in a sequential continuity.

Folk art is a pleasure of the *atelier*. This insertion of life history, in the narrative of learning in the parental workshop, performs a function for the identity and self-presentation of the potter as a legitimate craftsman. In Horezu, the self-presentation of a master maker is supported by the art of storytelling. Self-presentation is a constant narrative act of grasping together two time-points: of the learning process and current excellence in the quality of production, creativity and respect for traditional models and techniques ... all embedded in the memory of being a child playing in the workshop. In Ricoeur’s words, Horezu potters are characters in a quest for continuity and

the quest has been absorbed into the movement by which the hero - if we may still call him by that name - becomes who he is. Memory, therefore, is no longer the narrative of external adventures stretching along episodic time.

It is itself the spiral movement that, through anecdotes and episodes, brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves. The end of the story is what equates the present with the past, the actual with the potential. The hero is who he was (Ricoeur 1980: 186).

In this life history narrative, the authentic Horezu potter has grown up in the *atelier* with its traditional tools, patterns and operations. Kin-based apprenticeship is of value in the categories framing the pure repository of folk art. The plot perpetuates the idealised mentoring process (Herzfeld 2004: 51) and serves as a metaphor for the genuine status and reputation of the makers. The art of storytelling to communicate the authentic origins of the craftsman has a particular intended effect as understood by Gell (1998). As Kingston (1999) suggested:

The technology of enchantment relates specifically to the power of origination and those regarded as responsible. Origination also has a special role in the Western imagination of authenticity, which has the same root, *auctor*, as both author and its subsidiary, authority (Kingston 1999: 344).

The magical effect of the potter's authenticity acts in a similar way to the technology of enchantment and connotes ideas of enchanting origination and the authority of the maker's unique craft knowledge.

Authenticity is performed through the itinerary of the socially desirable craft biography and constitutes the temporality of the potters' taskscape (Ingold 2000: 196). The plot of intimate personal memory is facilitated by public representations. Potters aware of the values and distinctions associated with the craft maintain the story of exclusive origin of skill through play, the narrative being a significant factor for their choice of what type of memories are chosen to be publicly evoked or negated. In this context of pure origins, the experience of learning in the cooperatives, knowledge transmission from peers, neighbours, in the schooling system or apprenticeship appears unworthy of being told. Other learning environments, of significant presence in the experience of Horezu makers of the last 40 years, are not mobilised as a base for self-presentation. These selective life stories and reminiscences of learning are situated between biography and discourse, generating public narratives in Ricoeur's sense and producing social consequences. The landmarks of learning and absences of experience demonstrate how life-history relates to the genre of story-telling (Haukanes 2005).

It has been noted that authenticity is actively produced in the process of commoditisation of culture that favours particular identities to be staged or sold (Cohen 1988; Dicks 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Phillips and Steiner 1999). For Constantin (2009b), Romanian crafts are hybrids produced through the active negotiations of two systems of meaning: the local representations of utilitarian domestic occupations and external imaginaries of their peasant character with “philosophical and aesthetic qualities, being traditionally “wise”, “genuine”, “beautiful”, “everlasting”” (Constantin 2009b: 17). Constantin argued that Romanian artisans were engaged in a struggle to maintain a sense of autonomy “within their craftwork and towards political regimes of others” (ibid.). In the post socialist market economy they constantly worked to balance their status as folk artists and producers in a complex field of institutional and commercial relationships. Constructions of authenticity were key to these negotiations. In Horezu, the narrative serves as a way to construct an identity of an authentic craftsman against outsiders and producers of kitsch. It is a commoditised story of autonomy, sellable on the market.

At the same time, in this case there is much at stake in successful storytelling – the narrative is a prerequisite of maintaining the ‘outstanding universal value’. The continuous transmission of knowledge along family lines has been one of the key categories of authorised heritage discourse both in the socialist period and today, as UNESCO’s category of designation of the craftsmanship as intangible heritage of outstanding universal value. Currently, in market and tourist encounters, the potters perpetuate the narrative promoted by this interpretation. The story plays a public role in the process of heritagisation (Leblon 2012, Poria, 2010, Sanchez-Carretero, 2012, Walsh 1992) through the rendering of biography. This task is completed skilfully by the folk artists. They use these narratives to fit into the official chronology of craft transmission and to maintain their status and neo-traditional identity within the collective of legitimate makers. The narrative community is increasingly characterised by new internal and external divisions of practitioners according to the values assigned by museums and tourist offices as well as by the craftsman themselves. How do the potters view different categories of practitioners?

Under socialism, there was space for both folk artists and workers-artisans: the makers could choose to enter the museum-folk art fair networks or be employed by the cooperative. The dissolution of the cooperative industry in the 1990s led to the

unemployment of a vast number of artisan potters and other types of craftsmen. Those, living in Potters Street benefited from the rise of the heritage industry, entered the growing folk art market and became ‘elements’ of the intangible cultural heritage. Others, who could not set up a workshop, acted as waged labourers for the first category of makers, with an increasingly inferior status as anonymous workers. These waged, marginalised craftsmen, a product of the post-socialist closure of the cooperative, seemed to mirror the pre-industrial era category of journeymen, moving from one master to another to do small jobs.

The context of the emerging divisions within the community of makers relates to issues of pottery and distinctions of status. As Bourdieu (1984) observed, potters calling themselves ‘art craftsmen’ (or ‘folk artists’) are embedded in systems of classification and institutional milieus generating ranks and affecting their daily tasks. The strategies of self-identification, often accompanied by an antagonistic approach towards other practitioners of the trade are ways of gaining material and symbolic benefits. For Bourdieu, these operations of self-labelling are linked to power relationships and constitute “an institutionalised, theatrical version of the incessant struggles over the classifications” (Bourdieu 1984: 481). Bourdieu’s insight is useful in grasping the distinctions amongst craftsmen in Horezu. In this context, the symbolic boundaries between practitioners are embedded in practice and generate status groups engaged in classificatory struggle. These struggles of distinction are played out in narratives and place people and things in a hierarchical order. Similarly, Kondo’s (1990) research amongst craftsmen in Japan suggested that craft communities are often embedded in distinctions and ‘community solidarity’ amongst craftsmen often implies practices of exclusion of subgroups, labelled as unskilled (Kondo 1990: 230).

In Horezu, economic constraints and the architecture of the heritage industry have generated new communities and categories of inclusion and exclusion, with designated potters’ dynasties, authorised craftsmen, new families involved in the practice and a network of journeymen-like waged workers as unprotected labourers employed by other makers. There is a tendency towards growing distinctions between these groups with a significant decrease in status for the post-cooperative artisans affected by deskilling, growing insecurity and lack of access to a workshop. Along with the heritagisation of life histories and skills, these new forms of distinction amongst practitioners might be

epitomised in the aftermath of the UNESCO inscription as the possession of a traditional workshop and a family history becomes a marker of being genuine and a necessary element of making legitimate pottery in the town. The divisions between the groups are increasingly linked to claims of authenticity. A similar phenomenon took place in the context of Cretan artisans, where

The dominant model of the past also creates a chronologically deep concern with questions of originality ... In this way, a few 'artists' emerge from the mass of 'artisans', displacing the latter economically and in terms of local prestige, and leaving them to produce the less inspired souvenirs and trinkets that clearly represent a 'bad' imitation of past aesthetic glories but do so in response to a carefully cultivated mass market (Herzfeld 2004: 114).

There is a correspondence between the position of the Cretan artisans and Romanian potters. As selected potters become listed, registered and catalogued as elements of intangible cultural heritage, new spheres of distinction are reified and sedimented in the heritage infrastructure, generating social distance and limiting opportunities for unprotected labourers.

Understanding life histories as narrative devices of community, distinction, identity and autonomy brings insights into the current typologies of those involved in the production of ceramics in Horezu. Exploring the complexity of narrative time and labour rhythms (with its metaphors embedded in the pattern) as opposed to the time of authorised heritage discourse, it is useful to think through the idiom of craftsmanship as a lineal intergenerational affair. Returning to Ricoeur, it is necessary to reconsider the underlying mediation of history, authenticity and heritage temporalities favoured by museums and the divisions and distinctions produced by these narratives. For Ricoeur, by adopting a generational logic in our interpretation of the past, we risk creating a problematic, fictive narrative composed of sequential chains of memories and practices that could be continuously extended to the past as a "retention of retentions" (Ricoeur 1980: 114).

In the case of Horezu, adopting the generational schema of craft transmission distorts lived experience and historical complexity, painting a false picture of how, why and under what conditions the craft was learned, abandoned or taken over in a given historical moment. Alongside the pleasant experience of the child in the *atelier*, there exists a wider range of learning environments constituted through various interactions and activities in both informal and formal settings. Instead of presupposing a community of sequential

practitioners in the family line, we must acknowledge various aspects of the craft community with its typicality, but also tensions, hostilities, exclusions and variety of local contexts of practice. Instead of identifying transmitted units of tradition, such as ‘traditional’ operations or imagery, we need to acknowledge the situated forms of knowledge that built craft practice in a more specific historical context with various discontinuities and internal tensions. Rather than breaking up experiences into generational slots and fixing the past into transmittable wholes, it is interesting to reflect on the ways that practices are being continued, broken down, modified and manifested in making, telling and material practice. The following section considers one of the material aspects of practice that became the main anchor of the craftsman’s narrative plot – the Horezu workshop.

## **7.8 The task of domesticated authenticity**

For Ingold (2000), taskscapes are embedded in landscapes and places are constituted as embodied forms of activity. The features of places are constituted along the lines of taskscapes and are incorporated in the flow of practice (ibid.: 198). Considering places as congealed with tasks shows how the everyday spaces of Horezu craftsmen perform in the wider array of the potters’ activities.

Visiting Potters Street, the first impression is of walking into the space of a medieval guild. Typically, the façade of each building is covered in plates produced by the residents of the house. There is a heritage name plaque placed next to the door and various pots are scattered around the yard and on the fence. Stepping into the yard through the gate, the visitor is invited to visit the workshop. There, under the diplomas certifying the potter’s prizes gained in national craft markets or folk art festivals, freshly made pots are available for purchase. If the visitors have special requirements, the potter might take them to the domestic space, the kitchen or the living room where more pots are stored. The households of potters who used to be renowned folk artists under socialism have private exhibitions of historical pieces and one created a special dedicated space for a private museum, displaying the *oeuvre* of the family. The domestic space is key for self-presentation in Horezu and constitutive of the status of the craftsman.



**Fig.7.23** Diploma of the Romanian Academy of Art, potter's house (left)

**Fig.7.24** Photographs of visits of the Romanian King Michael and the President of Romania in the potter's house (right)

The households of Potters Street are currently public and commercial emblems and exhibiting is one of the main activities in the production of the craftsman's identity. The space becomes a hybrid of interlinked private and public spheres. An exhibition of production processes takes place during public demonstrations - making occurs in front of the public gaze, for the voyeuristic pleasure of tourists, heritage experts and clients. Heritagisation modifies the content of the workplace and whereas before the potters would have sold all their produce, now they have become the conservators of their works. These presentations are public articulations of skill, illustrating the importance of the discursive component in this craft. Labour experience becomes reified, aestheticised and performed in the spectacle of heritage. The intimate private setting serves to legitimise the public role of the heritage craftsman.



**Fig. 7.25 and 7.26** Front rooms of elderly female potters





**Fig.7.27** House facade, Potters Street (left)



**Fig.7.28** Boutique run by one of the potters at the entrance to Horezu (right)

As Horezu develops its status as a tourist destination, the fashioning of the household studio reaches a new level of elaboration. Two younger potters have relocated from the Potters Street to the main road at the entrance to the town. These purpose-built structures are manifestations of the space-based competition over resources in the heritage industry. The buildings are designed primarily as shopping areas with dedicated galleries and workshops incorporated within the commercial space. In one case, the surroundings are constructed for public use – the garden is planned as a pleasant environment for tourists to stroll amongst greenery between the store and the workshop. As domestic spaces are relocated in order to be publicly available, a beneficial location allows the selected potters to attract the first incomers to their house-studios.

The creation of the studio spectacle is embedded within a range of practices of memory and self-construction. The task of making the *atelier* is a sign of the metacultural production of a workplace to fit the idiom of heritage; the studio is simultaneously both authentically local and universal (Herzfeld 2004: 2). The heritagised space of the workshop with its emblematic toolkit serves as a material form emphasising continuity. The *domesticated* workplace connotes a long tradition, a particularly intimate relationship with the craft. Those who demonstrate a house-based skilled practice are the possessors of a particular familiarity with the craft.

Increasingly the value of the maker is fixed in the production of the place, an essentialist notion of craftsmanship linked to the museum-house, the spectacle-studio, the commercialised and heritagised space of work. The studio is a part of the inscribed practices framing Horezu craftsmanship where “objects are culturally constructed to

connote and consolidate the possession of past events associated with their use or ownership.” (Rowlands 1993: 145). It is a reified metaphor manifesting legitimate practice and the possession of a particular status within the community of makers and the global hierarchy of value framing traditional artisanship (Herzfeld 2004).

Horezu potters are involved in a set of tasks including labour, storytelling and spatial practices. This ensemble of activities, choices, dependencies, inclusions and exclusions is the complex taskscape of their practice (Ingold 2000). Becoming a Horezu potter involves a whole range of manual, narrative, material and social skills, including storytelling about the self, cultural transmission and the ability to create material environments of conspicuous display. Rather than mechanically reproducing the idiom of heritage or economic models, they act upon them, generating materialised responses and developing an extended dynamic repertoire of tasks. These intimate practices have a resonance with their emic sense of existential authenticity (Reisinger and Steiner 2006b).

In order to resist marginalisation, they generate a taskscape of stories, objects and material as well as spatial practice. Only through these complex negotiations, can they escape obliteration or marginal designation (as usurpers, reproductive workers or newcomers) and engage with the changing social representations, hierarchies of value and historical events in which these activities are embedded. In this sense, the fashioning of the self and of the space in which the profession is enacted are key components of the taskscape by which the potters regenerate (rather than merely invent) their craft’s tradition.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

Pots are not complete things or self-contained fragments. The museum artefacts from Horezu need to be understood as integral to the wider relationships with particular temporal and spatial dimensions. The holdings of the Horniman Museum include tools and ceramic pieces that do not fit the idioms through which this pottery was represented in exhibitions. The deposited museum material, comprising abandoned tools, obsolete stamps and plates with old patterns, now serves as an expression of local agency and riddance that was an outcome of the post-war period. At the same time, it acts as a document of material

transformation and a gateway to the understanding of the intimate temporalities these changes implicated.

Taking as a point of departure the acquisition of the tools for the museum collection, this chapter explored the contexts in which Horezu objects emerged, demonstrating that artefacts, patterns and techniques are relational entities. They are assemblages of meaning co-produced with local conceptions of craftsmanship, the historical background and idioms of identity and work. Horezu pottery is a situated activity that is

embodied, located uniquely in space, and in their relations with other persons, things, practices, and institutional arrangements. They come to be located differently, where they are, doing what they are doing, as part of on-going historical process (Lave 1993: 152).

The potters' taskscape shifts through the return to traditional techniques and household studios and the deployment of strategies of the self, visible in stories of the undisrupted, multigenerational transmission of craftsmanship. These are the ways in which contemporary craftsmen negotiate the changing power structures and construct their material identities in time and space. By mediating the forces and values of the heritage idiom, tourist industries and the market, they continuously improvise and reinvent themselves and their labour. The material culture produced is situated at the nexus of these historical, personal and social negotiations, and in the opportunity structures of the post-socialist institutional frameworks and transformations of work practice. In this context, the craftsmen are reconstructing themselves as they are discursively remaking histories and negotiating their daily activities and workplace.

Authorised heritage discourses in crafts, based on institutional categories of authenticity often fix the notion of cultural practice in material idiom or assign it to a selected group. These evaluations of traditional craft generate categories that increasingly guide the allocation of development resources and tourism strategies. In this framework, labour becomes invisible, history is turned into a nostalgic narrative and practice tends to be embedded in abstract categories.

Told in their *ateliers*, craftsmen's stories of their experience of history, notions of time and labour vary in significant ways from the authorised heritage discourse, cultural management programs and narratives evoked in markets and museums. Stories from

below show how lived history can shed light on a more tangible social symbolism and the categories guiding practice and framing situated knowledge. By showing the daily experience and metaphors of production (through techniques and patterns) and listening to voices on social categories, activities, instruments and rhythms of work, our view of the potters' taskscape becomes wider and interwoven into the fabric of discontinuities and tensions as significant as the official historical scripts and stories of harmonious transmission. The interpretations *from below* show that just as much as people make specific pots, the ceramic objects as well as their stories and spaces, make people.

In 2012, the Horniman Museum collection facilitated unique insights unfolding these material and immaterial connections. Knowledge gained through the Horezu artefacts enriches the museum interpretation with alternative perspectives for the recontextualisation of the collection. The local responses allow consideration of the potters' taskscape and intimate temporalities, enabling new understandings of Romanian pottery and offering the potential to reimagine the artefacts in the museum setting. The next chapter expands the view on the craft to other sites and demonstrates the vibrancy of material practice through the repertoire of possibilities offered by pottery in Romania more generally. I investigate pottery's continuity and material presences both in the spaces of the collection's origin and on the new stages on which the craft is being produced and performed.



**Fig.8.1** Sightseeing tour in the pottery centre

## Chapter 8: The afterlives of folk pottery

### 8.1 Introduction

“From the museum perspective, pottery is an interesting activity. The market has consolidated the craft and maintained it because it created space for distribution ... Museums have promoted pottery... they contributed to the continuity of this craft, continuity similar to tradition. Today, there have been significant changes in decoration and colour ... New forms appeared, ones that were non-existent before”.

Excerpt from an interview with the director of a Romanian ethnographic museum

The comments of the museum director indicate anxiety about the authenticity of Romanian pottery today. From the museum perspective, the future of Romanian traditional pottery appears imperfect. There is a vision of a commercialised polluted material world, full of confusing bits and pieces scattered around the marketplace. It would seem that the identity of ethnographic areas has been diluted; forms and designs are being forged and applied to new objects. The present-day craft moves in the direction of kitsch overtaking the territories occupied by traditional folk art.

This chapter attempts to challenge such a view. Concerned with preserving authentic artefacts, museum perspectives on Romanian pottery often tend to overlook the diverse strategies of practice and the multiple social contexts of artefacts. With the aim of gaining an understanding of folk pottery beyond museum categories, the chapter brings together contemporary responses to the museum objects in the words of practicing potters in Romania. Firstly, it focuses on the artefacts of the Horniman Museum collection exploring two folk pottery centres in northern Romania from which objects for the collection were acquired. Secondly, it explores the irregular landscape of contemporary practitioners of pottery, both those perceived as authorised folk artists and others, represented by the museum curators as makers of kitsch.

The material was collected through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with around forty makers in their studios, during museum demonstrations and markets in Horezu, Sibiu, Braşov, Suceava and Bucharest. These narratives centred on images of the Horniman Museum collection as well as the objects made by the potters

today. The respondents discussed their entry into the trade, everyday techniques of work and the process of developing patterns and forms. By evoking the potters' perspective on technical and aesthetic choices and routes through which they engaged with the craft, I argue that practice-based assessment of objects sheds a different light on the objects and the craft.

## **8.2 Technical milieu, creativity and artisanship**

An ethnographic approach to techniques, creativity and artisanship enables a framework for reassessing the Horniman Museum collection and Romanian pottery. Here, I see technology as a social practice interwoven with meaning, sensuous engagement, experience, collective values and social relationships (Dobres 2001). Raising the question of cultural technology, material variation and choice, Lemonnier (1993) argued that techniques could be interpreted through their embeddedness in social representations as societies continuously classify and conceptualise ways of making and materials. Technical choices, be they gestures of innovation or borrowing, are situated within the social representations attached to processes, actors and technological elements (Lemonnier 1993: 3). In this context, as we re-enact social values through the daily acts of engagement with the material environment: “materialisation is per se socialisation” (Coupaye 2009: 5).

In this context, Mahias' (1993) research on Indian pottery interpreted technological variation as a material marker of social distinctions, differentiation and self-identification. As Mahias observed, “variants in the technical process tell us more about the potter than do his wares” (ibid.: 170) and studying tools and processes can uncover these symbolic representations. In India, she illustrated, techniques were endowed with metaphorical and mythological meanings, indexical with the rank and status of makers of particular sub-groups. The study of technical features could illuminate the symbolic contexts mediating socioeconomic phenomena, issues related to the reproduction of the social order and broader categories of the societies in which techniques are embedded, practiced and contested (ibid.: 177).

Gosselain's (1998) research on pottery in Cameroon showed how objects are shaped by “technological styles” beyond physical and technical predicaments. Both the decision-making process and technical behaviour are nested in symbolic and economic factors

(Gosselain 1998: 90). The technological style arises in the social context of the potter, in learning, practice and meaning. For Warnier (2010), pottery provides an opening for investigating technologies of the self. Examining the relationships between material cultures of containment, Warnier suggested the significance of the intersections between pots and the technology of power, expressed through the institution of sacred kingship in Cameroon (Warnier 2007). As pottery “is the necessary extension of the body in eating, drinking, washing and (in many societies) urinating and defecating” (Warnier 2010: 193) it provides a symbolic basis for daily actions and wider social relationships. In this context, an ethnographic focus can shed light on the techniques by which we act and conceptualise body, power and related subjectivities.

The problem of craft practice and style relates to issues of reproduction and innovation. Art and technology or art and craft have been enmeshed in classificatory logics related to the hierarchical idioms of creative novelty and repetitive execution (Adamson 2007, Ingold 2001). In order to challenge the conventional understandings of static folk art, craft production could be interpreted as forms of “active regeneration” (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 6) beyond mechanical replication. Hallam and Ingold (*ibid.*) argued that seemingly repetitive practice could be perceived as a complex active engagement with the material world involving observation and improvised creative action. Seen in this light, Mall’s (2007) discussion of the southern Indian *kolam* drawings pointed to the problem of innovation and structure in craft practice. Drawn with the use of printed pattern books, *kolams* were executed through acts of open-ended manipulation of design prototypes. Mall demonstrated how the improvised movement across the grid resulted in the development of new patterns (*ibid.*: 75). The practice of ‘arriving at’ the drawing emerges through material enactment rather than realisation of a pre-determined model. Destabilising the folk pattern, Mall emphasised the significance of unpredictable, novel paths of execution that reframe the *kolam*-making as a “complex action on the world” (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5).

Ethnographic case studies also demonstrate that imitation is often at the heart of creative practice. For example, Nakamura’s research on Japanese calligraphy (2007) pointed to the significance of reproduction and performative imitation beyond the mechanical replica. Calligraphic creativity stems from the combination of tradition and innovation, generating interplay between the makers, their techniques and materials

(Nakamura 2007: 95). Thinking about creativity as a “process of environmentally situated and perceptually engaged activity, that is of use, through which real forms emerge and are held in place” (Ingold 2001: 22) provides a framework beyond the conceptual dichotomy of innovative design and mechanical process. The generative potential of activity, movement and the practice of bringing things into existence emerge as key to the production of material culture.

Making and craft in Romania have been explored through ethnographies of artisanship in the context of commodification processes (Mihăilescu 2008c). Drawing from the notion of invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), these studies showed how the markets have been opening up for various actors and discourses. Recently, Constantin (2008, 2009b) has conducted extensive research on the cultural scene of folk fairs, reflecting on the complex social field in which a broad array of folk artisans operated. This pioneering work on Romanian craftsmanship explored a range of issues from ethnicity, socio-professional status, authorship and representation, to perspectives on tradition, market economy, style, symbolism and the clientele. Constantin (2009b) pointed to the phenomenon of artisanship as a:

complex interplay of variation, hybridisation, and regeneration, on the cultural scene of the national network of ethnographic museums and fairs” (ibid.: 17).

For Constantin, variation related to the work and the commercial character of the activity were affected by the status of the maker in the context of educational background, affiliations, family-based labour practices and various economic aspects, such as access to resources and degrees of market adaptation. Occupational labelling of the practitioners correlated to values and economic factors, and traditional patterns of manufacture were linked to market demands.

In the light of the above ethnographic discussions, I will now turn to the analysis of the biographies and technical choices of contemporary potters in Romania. As craft objects are embedded in technology (Lemonnier 1992: 6), the understanding of museum artefacts requires consideration of issues of production, stylistic variation and the multiple contexts in which they emerged. As the physicality of artefacts cannot be divorced from social interactions and material engagements (Dobres 2001: 48), I will focus on the museum collection pottery in the context of making and the social practices of craft.



## 8.3 Crafting lives in the Bucovina folk art centres

### 8.3.1 Radauți

The trip to Sorin's workshop in Radauți, a small town situated in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border was one of my first fieldwork encounters in a potter's workplace. I was equipped with images of the artefacts from the Horniman Museum collection and a set of publications about the potter's grandfather, a renowned maker who had sold objects to the museum. Sorin's workshop, continuing the family legacy, is located in the rear part of the town's ethnographic museum. In order to reach Sorin's workplace, one needs to walk along the permanent display area, a line of slightly dusty exhibition spaces with a selection of rooms on pottery history in the area, ceramic techniques in Romania and various sections about peasant technology and folk arts.

When I entered the museum on a Wednesday afternoon, I was the only visitor. The entrance to the workshop was in the far corner of one of the last rooms, not easily noticeable. As I knocked on the door, a man smoking a cigarette let me into the workshop. His *atelier*, the museum website suggests, was an attempt to present visitors with the experience of ceramic processes and to showcase the creations of the artist, a renowned representative of a five-generation tradition of family craft. On entering the room, there was a display of various forms of his work in the renowned local forms of decorative pottery, as well as multiple diplomas from folk art contests, participation in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC and his membership of the Romanian Academy of Traditional Arts. In the other corner, there was an electric kiln and open back door overlooking a yard with a clay container. When I visited the studio, Sorin was packing his ceramics for a pottery market in southern Germany.



Fig. 8.2 Object from the Horniman Museum collection acquired in Radauți (left)



Fig. 8.3 Kuty-style bowl of southern Polish origin, Horniman Museum collection (right)

After another cigarette break, I showed Sorin the images of the Horniman Museum collection artefacts. He identified them immediately as local produce, explaining that these objects must have been collected from his grandfather and pointing out that his work could be found in several foreign museums. Two bowls were in a traditional Radauți design, the third piece was typical of the Kutty style, he explained, mentioning this ornamentation scheme as reinvented by his grandfather.

The Kutty style was a traditional form of ceramics historically widespread in the area, but in decline at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Horniman Museum includes one bowl in the Kutty style from a period preceding its reinvention. This decorated piece came from a private collection in Bucharest. It represented the 19<sup>th</sup> century realisation of Kutty, and is described in the object documentation file as “made by an unknown potter in the South of Poland”. Before World War I, the region of Bucovina was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, bordering with Galicia province, historically under Polish influence. This pottery is based on the characteristic colour palette of yellow, green, brown and white, symbolising the four seasons. There were a variety of decorative schemes<sup>66</sup> and shapes on display including vases, plates, bowls, and brandy containers, to candlesticks, crosses or decorated oven tiles.

Around 1961, Sorin explained, his grandfather Cosmin “resurrected” Kutty style, giving it a unique local identity and new popularity. Explaining his grandfather’s life history, Sorin started with the 1950s. In that period, the potter was forced to work in the local cooperative but as a result of the intervention of a specialist,<sup>67</sup> he was given autonomy to work independently and received acknowledgement of his folk artist status. Sorin and his brother Marcel spent childhood summer holidays with their grandfather, slowly mastering the techniques of pottery and gaining reputations for their own work through participating in exhibitions, fairs, craft courses and socialist competitions. In the 1980s, Sorin recalled, Radauți was a destination for international tourists and pilgrims stopping on their way along the Bucovina monastery trail. As a result of this development

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<sup>66</sup> Common motifs include a range of vegetal, geometric, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic shapes with a rich variety of images such as flowers, leaves, garlands, birds, deer, bull or figures of saints, hunters, soldiers, horsemen, mermaids or peasants.

<sup>67</sup> According to Sorin, this specialist was Elena Secoșan, the curator of the Bucharest Folk Art Museum curator, coordinating the Horniman Museum acquisitions. She was also the coordinator of the curatorial team for the museum’s collecting trip that resulted in the Horniman Museum collection.

in the socialist tourist industry and in order to facilitate tourist visits, the family *atelier* was relocated to the museum.

As the Horniman Museum collection represented two pieces of the Radauți technique, I was surprised that there were only a few plates made in that style in the present-day workshop. Sorin explained that the market for the style had decreased as tourists tended to underestimate Radauți pottery as merely resembling “simplified copies of Horezu objects”. Facing these challenges, Sorin focused on the production of objects in the Kutty style. Recently, this practice “evolved to modern forms” including crosses, candlesticks and decorative tiles. This evolution is tailored to specific clientele. Showing me around his small exhibition he pointed out that for German customers he has been developing new types of artefacts, producing large decorative plates with images of saints different from conventional Orthodox iconography and representations of abstract forms in the traditional colour scheme. He saw himself as an artist and “academician”<sup>68</sup> combining the long-term legacy of the potters’ dynasty, the authentic Kutty style, with innovations. His openness for change manifested itself in the use of modern technology (i.e. the electric stove) and experimental, client-led designs.

His status as an art practitioner, the family-based authenticity and an exclusive claim on the authorial copyright of the style were key to Sorin’s narrative. He perceived his work in exclusionary terms as the legitimate continuation of this local style and placed his personal signature on every piece of ceramics produced in the workshop. His unique family legacy prevented major departures in terms of design. At the same time, his personal notion of heritage allowed some room for negotiation with the genuine character of Kutty patterns and the needs of those who would not engage with the traditional Orthodox or regional imagery.

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<sup>68</sup> Member of the renowned Academy of Traditional Arts from Romania.



**Fig. 8.4** Sorin's studio – family images and certificate of participation in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC (left)



**Fig. 8.5** Exhibition of Sorin's work with his wheel (right)



**Fig. 8.6** Museum exhibition with a portrait of Sorin's grandfather, the inventor of the local ethnographic style (left)



**Fig. 8.7** The studio space with a modern electric kiln (right)

There was a sense of isolation in Sorin's story, as he looked with nostalgia towards the past prestige of his grandfather's *oeuvre* and the vibrancy of 1970s and 1980s Radauți. He spoke of a colourful world of workshops, craft fairs and competitions for folk artists. Under socialism, there was a higher respect for craftsmen, he stated, recalling state support in transport arrangements, accommodation during exhibitions and orders for various museum commissions. Looking at him now, staying at the backyard of the empty dusty

museum, these stories seemed very distant. In his opinion, museums today did not provide sufficient support for crafts, incentive, or motivation, instead focusing on criticising his artworks. He claimed that one of the main consequences of the post-1989 changes for him, as a potter, was a significant deterioration in status.

One benefit from the transformation was the freedom of international travel, restricted in Ceaușescu's Romania. This gave him an opportunity to participate in Western European pottery fairs. In his view, these visits constituted an encounter with real craft, representing creativity and technique on a world-class level far superior to generic Romanian ceramics. As he packed his plates decorated with the Evangelical saint images popular with his German customers, I left the workshop and made my way to the second folk art centre in the region.



**Fig. 8.8** Objects from Marginea in the Horniman Museum collection

### **8.3.2 Marginea**

The village of Marginea, situated in the Radauți area, is renowned for the production of black pots. The Horniman Museum collection includes a set of seven objects collected in this village. In the 1957 'Folk Art in Rumania' Horniman Museum exhibition catalogue, Otto Samson wrote about this pottery centre:

Radauți District of the Suceava region is famous for its black pottery. The colour, a greyish black, is produced by a special baking technique lasting seven hours ( $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  reduced to  $\text{FeO}$ ); a physical process of carbon depositing takes place. The pitcher from this district is of traditional design, dating back to early times. Similar specimens have been discovered nearby from the Roman period (Samson 1957: 3).

The present-day pottery workshop can be explored through its professional website with a video about the Neolithic roots of the craft, history, technique, providing information on local sites of interest and the possibility of ordering vessels through an online shop. *Ceramica Marginea* is a complex situated on the tourist route to the UNESCO-listed Sucevița Monastery. Its beneficial location was clear; even on a gloomy Tuesday in March, there were two tourist buses parked in front of the site.

The complex consists of a modern house, a shop with a “pottery exhibition”, a small cottage, and a large workshop at the rear. The cottage sits in the middle of a paved yard and was buzzing with visitors haggling with the elderly *babushka* over the peasant shirts and blankets. Entering the pottery *atelier*, I encountered George handling another large group of visitors. This 60-year-old man was throwing a vase and talking vigorously to the onlookers surrounding his wheel. On finishing with one group, he approached some schoolchildren and gathered them around to repeat the procedure and describing the know-how of making black pots.

“I never had time for museums” – the potter replied to my question about the origins of the Horniman Museum collection – “I was a worker (*muncitor*), busy making pots”. George learnt on the job from his father, as both were part of the socialist cooperative. After the transition, the cooperative was closed down and privatised. It was George who decided to purchase the site and bring it back into operation. In 2012, his workshop produced a range of ceramic models, employing two families and a small group of workers. George understood the possibilities offered by black ceramics – they could be used for new objects useful in a modern house. With time, he explained, the models and techniques evolved but the key ingredients remained. His pottery had a characteristic black colour obtained through reduction firing and was decorated with simple geometrical etchings.

He took me to his “exhibition”, the shop located next to his workshop, showing the black pottery alongside idiosyncratic Easter decorations, figurines of Greek sculptures and Romanian peasants, garden decorations and plates in the Horezu style. The wide variety on offer was a necessary condition for the survival of the *Ceramica Marginea*. For George, visitors were interested by the black pottery, its history and technique. The majority, however, came to experience the craft demonstration. He suggested that the



flexibility of production was related to the fact that visitors were reluctant to buy black objects for their homes. For the owner, the enjoyment of work and the opportunity to continue the tradition was accompanied with a strong sense of the market and the needs of the tourist industry. The aesthetic qualities of regional produce and a strong notion of the embeddedness of Marginea ceramics in the legacy of Neolithic and Roman roots were not in opposition with the contemporary trade principles as the potter is a craftsman, a worker and a trader. In order to continue making ceramics, he suggested, one needed to survive on the market and embrace the needs of the modern man. In particular, living in a period of economic crisis, pottery needs to be affordable, useful and aesthetically pleasing.



**Fig. 8.9** Craft demonstration in Marginea studio (left).



**Fig. 8.10** Marginea *atelier* – the premises of the former cooperative with a studio gift shop and a cottage, now serving as a separate souvenir shop for traditional dress (right).



**Fig. 8.11** Modern Canadian electric wheel used to produce traditional black pottery (left).



**Fig. 8.12** Eclectic shop attached to the studio, Marginea (right).

Tourism has been one of the key driving forces in the locality, as the monasteries and painted churches of Moldavia are significant Orthodox pilgrimage sites. The area became an international destination through the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation of the Moldavian painted churches. Being positioned on one of the main roads on the monastery route, the Marginea pottery centre has capitalised on the flow of visitors and established itself as a tourist attraction. The site has developed a strategy of producing a spectacle, a cultural and commercial experience with craft demonstrations, an exhibition and a range of folk souvenirs. The Marginea potters were aware that tourists sought historical and spiritual experience. They produced a narrative of the centuries-old practice displaying Neolithic figurines or Roman amphorae “in the Marginea style”. At the same time, they considered themselves as entrepreneurial and adaptable to change, making smart modern choices in technique and style.

This sense of adaptation, modification and the intelligent approach to heritage in the Marginea workshop resembled the attitudes of the *jua kali* artisans in Kenya described by Wright (2008). Her ethnography of the Lamu coconut carvers demonstrated how the artisan community identified the inventor of the technique as *mjanja wa wajanja*, “the cleverest of the clever”. (Wright 2008: 330). Murage, the pioneer artisan of this often defined as a traditional craft, had started the technique of carving coconut after meeting an Australian tourist who commissioned him to reproduce a bracelet bought in Mombasa. As Wright noted:

He told me that he was struck by the cleverness of using coconut shell as a carving material: “Here, we pay so much money for wood and the carver’s profit is low. But these coconuts are everywhere in Lamu. It is a great thing to carve what other people throw away.(*ibid.*: 331).

Wright’s study exemplified how crafts frequently viewed as timeless were often an individual invention, a form of production for the tourist market arising in dialogue between visitors and makers. The carver viewed himself as skilful. He had mastered the technical challenges of coconut as a material, following Wright’s comment on the “ingenuity in creating tools, he replied “Yeah, *jua kali*. There are many obstacles, therefore we are clever” (*ibid.*: 337).

A similar notion of entrepreneurial adaptation amongst folk artisans has been investigated in Makovicky’s (2011) study of erotic needlework in Koniakow, Poland.



Commonly, vernacular designs are seen as conservative and lacking design consideration. Instead, Makovicky argued,

the history of local cottage industry is one of continual design innovation and the celebration of the insight and entrepreneurial spirit of named individuals ... who figure in the popular imagination as single-minded pioneers. Within these celebratory narratives, cultural innovation is inextricably linked to commercial innovation (ibid.: 167).

In both carving and needlework, the continuity of the traditional craft rested on the creativity, intelligent hand and commercial intuition of individuals. The emic perspective of the Kenyan coconut carvers and Polish lace makers showed that the value of the local practice is situated in the entrepreneurial ability to innovate and surmount drudgery and economic challenges.

In Marginea, the value of craftsmanship was embedded in the skill of overcoming the decline of the cooperative and turning the folk art centre into a modern tourist destination. It was also a question of the pleasure of work. George repeatedly emphasised that in a transitional economy only dedicated craftsmen took the risk of managing such a risky enterprise. The Marginea workshop was an outcome of a laborious reinvention.

These two visits to the pottery workshops in the northern Romania showed the nuances of the potters' uses of folk style, views on innovation and on the afterlives of their folk art legacies. The Radauți case showed a strong identification with the notion of pottery as folk art, exclusive heritage and the signature production of designs and patterns. The workshop became a museum artefact, fixing the craftsman within predefined, authorised production. Innovation was limited to compositional variations within the scheme established by his grandfather's tradition and Sorin saw himself as a continuator of the artistic continuity of the family. In Romania, he was highly reliant on the heritage sector, and through the positioning of his workshop inside the museum, dependent on the categories of museum evaluation of authenticity. This negotiation was problematic in the context of operating with the two conflicting identities – that of a creative artist versus that of the loyal continuator of family tradition. The strong identification with the museum was also a source of isolation and implied a lack of aesthetic flexibility, a decrease of status and the sense of being restricted, defined by his grandfather's work.

The potters of Marginea and Radauți crafted their lives in the aftermath of the folk art industry with various degrees of adaptation to the new economic conditions and social milieus surrounding their craft. Their responses to the museum objects and stories about contemporary practice represented different views on style, identity and models of workmanship. Although in both cases style was perceived as a dialogue between continuity and the invention of patterns and forms, it expressed a multiplicity of negotiations. They were positioned differently between their stylistic integrity and the demands of the experts and their clientele. In both cases, the contemporary makers did not stand still: they departed in various degrees from the templates of folk art. These departures were embedded in various representations of variation and reproduction that affected the potters' daily practice and self-conceptualisation as traditional makers of ceramics. The two neighbouring folk pottery centres faced similar challenges of decreasing state support, economic crisis and the relevance of the traditional style. Although these forces produced similar tensions, they resulted in the divergent afterlives of the *ateliers* and innovations of their products.

#### **8.4 Historical reconnections: Neolithic styles**

Some potters occupy a particularly ambivalent position between the old and the new. The notion that negotiations between innovation and copy can be challenging is well demonstrated in the case of potters working in the reconstruction of Neolithic ceramic styles. During my interview with a curator of one of the largest ethnographic museums in Romania, I noticed on her desk a small clay figurine of the Thinker of Hamangia<sup>69</sup>. As she explained,

“This figure is only a copy, it is strange ... It is a very interesting ceramic but it is not Neolithic. What are the ceramics produced today? It is neither Neolithic nor archaeological.”

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<sup>69</sup> The Thinker of Hamangia (or Thinker of Cernavoda), dated 5250 - 4550 BC, is a clay figurine representing a seated man in a contemplative pose.



**Fig. 8.13 and 8.14** Archaeological Cucuteni pottery on museum display, Piatra Neamt, Romania (left) and Bucharest (right)

One of my first encounters with the Cucuteni style was during my visit to the Horezu pottery market in 2012. Catalin’s stall stood out amongst the folk pottery products, with its large anthropomorphic vases and a line of Thinker sculptures. Following the meeting at the market, Catalin invited me to his studio in Bucharest.

The workshop was located in a garage next to his house and as I entered, he was shaping pots for a craft fair. The *atelier* consisted of four workspaces, an electric kiln at the back and a bookshelf packed with archaeological literature. One corner of the workshop was full of beads to be sprayed with colour; others had a variety of pots, both in the Cucuteni style and in more modern shapes. The walls were covered with wooden garden ornaments and masks. Showing me a photo album of old sepia images of Bucharest with a self-made ceramic cover, he explained that he had been trained as a photographer. Developments in digital technology equipment issues led him to close his studio and provided spare time for ceramic activity.

Catalin and his family had previously been “making things” and one of his former passions was woodcraft. He enjoyed working with the texture of the material, carving a range of caricatures of peasant characters in various types of wood. Later, he moved on to making furniture using hardwood panels and produced several cabinets, tables and other items for the house interiors. As work went very well, commissions flowed and Catalin started to look for an employee. His heavy workload and repeated failure to find “someone who would work rather than be paid for idle hours in the workshop” motivated him to switch trades.

The family engaged in ceramics by chance, Catalin's wife explained, from a clay-based project made for pleasure. Aurelia practiced crafts for relaxation, one of them being coiled clay models made in the kitchen in her spare time. "When you prepare clay" – Catalin emphasised the therapeutic qualities of the activity – "you activate various nervous centres in the body and gain a sense of calm and focus". At first, Aurelia had access to a friend's studio, where she had the pieces fired and then sold in museum fairs. This success encouraged her to purchase her own kiln and experiment with technique.

At first, Catalin assisted his wife in decorating. His personal interest in pottery was initiated by a museum display of Cucuteni ceramics. Intrigued by the museum visit, he explored archaeological literature on this style and hand coiling. The technique of building vessels without the use of a wheel was the main point of inspiration. How 6,000 years ago, he asked himself, could one create such aesthetic objects? He praised the high levels of skill, the perfect hands of the craftsmen drawing in complex patterns and modelling vessels of fine finish and thickness. He proceeded by trial and error using the visual prompts from the museum material. The designs required mathematical precision, they appeared continuous and calculated along the surface of each piece. Being able to create these objects with a simple technique became an obsession, an experimental rhythm that, according to Sennett (2008), is shared by all craftsmen. As Sennett noted:

Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding (ibid.: 9).

One of Catalin's problems was creating a Cucuteni fertility figure. He arrived at a satisfactory result via long process of mastering errors, as the first two attempts collapsed during coiling and drying and the third broke down in the kiln. He jokingly admitted that he was mad about her and other large pieces, making objects for the sake of the challenge that were impossible to sell. For Sennett, the principle of craftsmanship is related to a sense of operational intelligence and quality-driven work. For craftsmen, engagement with tools facilitates the dynamics and intuitive leaps within the process of quality-driven work. These aspects of fixing and exploring can be seen in acts of repair and explorations of tool functions and techniques (ibid.: 213).

Catalin's workshop was a materialisation of the craftsman's 'arousal'. He equipped this space with a hand-built table and a replica of the Neolithic rotating stand. For him,

creativity was embedded in experimental actions and explorations into materials, tools and material engagements with space, processes and objects. These values contrasted with the understandings represented by museum professionals. Catalin explained that they underestimated the contemporary Cucuteni-style potters, regarding them as producers of replicas. In a conversation with a curator, he was told that he would never reach the proficiency of the Neolithic craftsmen. For Catalin, this critique was related to the museum staff's lack of true engagement with the objects beyond their propositional knowledge. He explained that he had not aspired to reach the Neolithic level of skill and the use of the coiling technique was motivated by the idea of the “imperfect” handmade object. At the same time, these criticisms did not take into account the wider circumstances of material practice today. In prehistory, he emphasised, potters were not concerned by the state of their bank account. The judgement of craftsmanship requires an understanding of its labour and the circumstances in which it is practised.



**Fig. 8.15** Cucuteni vessels in an IKEA cupboard, Catalin's studio (left).



**Fig. 8.16** Demonstration of the Neolithic throwing technique with toolkit made by the potter (right).

The case of Marin provides a contrasting example of entry into the trade and the negotiation between creativity and Neolithic style. His interest in Cucuteni ceramics was initiated during university education when, as an art student, he was exposed to Romanian prehistoric art. He reminisced that he was fascinated by the sophisticated forms of this art and the possibility of creating ceramics without the use of a wheel. His work, he explained, was not about making copies but constituted an artistic creation. He interpreted the Neolithic prototypes, incorporating them into creative practice. “Taking the technique further” was an act of using Neolithic hand coiling for the execution of modern objects, at times arriving at abstract or minimalist forms. Distinctions between ceramic or sculptural

forms were fluid, he added, and dependent on the artist's intention, his vision and the process of the object's development.

One of the themes explored by Marin on the basis of the Cucuteni prototypes were the prehistoric anthropomorphic shapes. Ceramics was a creative and often humorous play with form and archetype. Using models of the fertility figures, Marin made erotic objects of robust female-shaped bodies, phallic and anus-like vases. For Marin, ceramics is the most complex art form, combining the skills of drawing, knowledge of form, colour and modelling. Ceramics is vested in "surprises" and involves a dynamic interplay between knowledge of the material and accidental discoveries. Marin explained that pottery is an exercise in creation and the pleasure of making, an activity dependent on one's views of work and what ideas it entails. These comments reflect Ingold's (2001) discussion of craft practice as "an open-ended configuration in which expectations, implications and alternatives are loosely interconnected." (ibid.: 34). Marin's perspective demonstrates Ingold's view that the making of artefacts is a combination of emergent properties and the principles of working with materials and forms.

In contrast to Catalin, Marin successfully engaged with the heritage sector, participating in exhibitions in the capital's open-air museum, art galleries and international displays. In museums, he noted, objects are placed into a different context but ethnographic museums, Marin emphasised, locates "the object within the space in which it breathes". It was interesting to discover that Cucuteni pottery practiced as experimental art appeared to be more acceptable in the ethnographic museum than Catalin's reconstructions, considered as repetitive replicas unworthy of being placed on public view.



**Fig. 8.17** Humorous anthropomorphic vessels inspired by Cucuteni style

The experimental character of engagement with Neolithic pottery was explicit in the case of Bogdan, a renowned maker of Vadastra ceramics. Vadastra culture, based in southwest Romania, represented the Middle and Late Neolithic and was characterised by coiled black pottery with incised geometric patterns (Mirea 2009).

In Bogdan's case, his involvement in the craft was initiated by chance through an experimental archaeology project conducted in his village. In 2000, Vadastra was visited by an international group of experts, archaeologists and artists, to perform excavations and reinterpret the archaeological site through a series of art installations and reconstructions of the dwellings and techniques of livelihood. In the course of the project an example of a Chalcolithic kiln was found, and soon a replica was designed to re-enact the craftsmanship of the Neolithic potters. The project received funding from the Romanian government as well as the European Union and the World Bank and involved research and social engagement. Gheorgiu has described the project as one to

transfer the technological know-how issued from experiments and ceramic analysis directly to the community, in order to develop a new centre for traditional ceramics that would help villagers to develop a participatory tourism in the area (Gheorgiu 2002: 12).

Witnessing the activities of the research team triggered Bogdan's curiosity. His initial encounter with the group was through working as a driver for the archaeologists and participating in pottery courses that were available for all villagers. After two years of skill building, he mastered the craft and developed an interest in archaeology, finally taking up the trade as a professional practice.

For Bogdan, the Vadastra legacy was an underrepresented part of European prehistory and a sign of Romanian cultural power with a legacy of material culture comparable to the great civilisations of renowned archaeological sites in Egypt, Rome or Greece. This undervalued richness, he claimed, has been slowly regaining its status revitalised by his craft and widespread educational activities. Bogdan defined his engagement with Neolithic archetypes as a 'resurrection' of this prehistoric art. For Bogdan, creativity constituted an experiment of cultural revival and practice-based commitment to the return of the authentic forms of Vadastra.

These three cases of potters working with Neolithic styles highlight the various contexts in which their practice was situated. Although, in the heritage experts' interpretation, these practitioners are often regarded as reproducers of replicas, the makers' perspective reveals a more nuanced view of the dynamics between innovation and imitation. Bogdan, Marin and Catalin's biographical entry points into the craft showed that their craftsmanship was a modern practice, embedded in various interactions between the makers and the field of Cucuteni and Vadastra heritage experts. The specialists constituted their representations of this material culture in museums, art catalogues, workshops and academic publications. The archaeological and art historical understandings of the prehistoric material culture mediated the makers' initial encounter with this pottery. Their work in 'reconstruction' or 'resurrection' was in dialogue with the expert community, the producer of dominant narratives and images. The specialists provided both the source for representations and the measures of legitimacy and authorisation. They were a powerful force enabling the potters' activities, defining their status and providing assistance or restrictions to their craftsmanship.

The potters' multi-layered relationship transcends the museum's visual and linguistic categories. Their bodily and psychological entanglements constituted how artefacts grow in process. As Dobres (2001) suggested, techniques are related to sensory and culture-based engagement. The craft practitioners

bring forth artefacts through sequential productive activities and associated bodily gestures (techniques), they simultaneously engender an awareness of themselves, learn how the world works ... thus the making of artefacts is also and necessarily the making of people and culture (ibid.: 50).

This coexisting sphere was well-illustrated by Catalin's narrative on techniques and materials - the 'inner peace' and 'sense of order' generated in the engagement with the ceramic process and a sense of challenge and surprise occurring in contact with clay forms and tools. For Marin, one of the inspiring notions of Cucuteni came from the existential questions embedded in the object. The 'fear of emptiness' (*frica de gol*): art historical interpretation argued that the dense coverage of the surface of the Cucuteni vessel was a symbolic expression of the Neolithic potter's sense of metaphysical anxiety. This fear of the void, embedded in the design, Marin explained, could be interpreted as death or the unknown. This engagement of the object with metaphysical questions was a source of inspiration and a significant factor in his involvement with Cucuteni technique. The



Vadastra potter identified his re-engagement project as an embodiment of the legacy of the past.

Rarely did these potters simply repeat the gestures of Neolithic makers. Rather than mere replicas of past skills and forms, their practice was placed within the varying contexts in which each of the practitioners was working – as a craftsman, a contemporary artist or as an amateur archaeologist. The value of the challenging craftsmanship of the coiling technique was an almost obsessive category against which they viewed their own skill. Tooling was a site of creativity for Marin and Catalin, a challenge to engage in for a sense of pride and drive for innovation. They created their own repertoire of tools and practices. They established a personalised formula of workmanship and engagement with the prototypes of practice.

The potters endowed the objects with various meanings and metaphors, telling stories about the makers' representations of material culture. The conversations with the makers demonstrated how the technical process might be narrated in dynamic relations between novelty and continuity, experimental passions and stylistic 'resurrections', national belonging and individual technical challenge. The repertoire of stories and activities of these makers places the potters' creative engagements far beyond the notion of copy, mentioned by the ethnographic curator at the beginning of this section. The followers of Neolithic potters perceived their professional identity through the multiple readings of continuity and creativity, locating the self through their engagement with unique procedures of work and technical, bodily and personal engagements with the past.

## 8.5 Reinterpreting Saxon craftsmanship

Nicolae's stall in the Sibiu pottery market was comfortably located in the central part of the Baroque town square in the shade of the fountain, protecting the potter from the hot September sun. I met him during the second day of the fair, when the customers were slowly returning home with their bags of pots. He was playing with clay, shaping small models of cottage houses, and jokingly encouraging by-passers to haggle on the special occasion of the market. His sense of humour was apparent in his selection of pots – there were figurines of Dracula, garden gnomes, piggy banks, clowns and seemingly broken flowerpots. Work was pleasure – he said – and the product needs to be useful, decorative and uplifting. Pointing at his ceramics, he explained that all these objects were shared products of work. He, his children and his wife co-produced pottery and hand woven carpets in their self-made studio located in the vicinity of the city of Braşov.

Nicolae had always been interested in learning new skills and 'trades' (*meserie*). He entered pottery through working on the restoration of Braşov's historic city centre, where he was employed as a builder. As some conservation work required repairing historic stove tiles, he took up an apprenticeship with a rural potter to learn how to deal with the material.



**Fig. 8.18** Painted Saxon wardrobe on display in a museum in Braşov, Romania

His work was a combination of ‘old trades’ with new uses of objects and inspirational designs. One example of this hybrid quality was the display of large vases on his stall, tall simple shapes covered in brown glaze and decorated with floral ornaments. He explained that these pieces were inspired by Saxon furniture. The German-speaking Saxon craftsmen were renowned for woodcraft and the intricate, colourful patterns that adorned the furniture of the Braşov townsmen and then influenced folk art furniture in the locality. Nicolae encountered the patterns used on the pots through a friend whose mother used the Saxon designs in making hand-woven carpets. The story is even more complicated, he laughed, as she received the designs from a person in France who owned a 1930s catalogue of images of Braşov Saxon furniture. The designs circulated abroad to make their way back home. Nicolae pointed out that his contemporary practice allowed the Saxon imagery to be reinvigorated and reproduced in accordance with the needs of current use, and the past was re-joined with the present.



**Fig. 8.19** Nicolae’s market stall – modern vase with a Saxon floral ornament (left)



**Fig. 8.20** Playing with clay – Nicolae’s composition made during a lull period at a fair (right)

For Nicolae, the product is led by the technique and the value of the object is secondary to the value of skill. He argued that there was a certain “memory in clay” leading the hand of the potter to particular technical solutions, shapes and pattern variations. Traditions assumed their material forms through the dexterity and the commitment of the maker. His principle of valuable craftwork was related to his ability to create and to take the embodied tradition further. The challenge of ‘trade’ and the satisfaction of acquiring productive skills was key to his practice and identification as a craftsman.

Nicolae's example of the construction of craft value through personal challenge and resembles a case study noted by Alashev (1995). Conducting research in a ball-bearing factory in Russia, he investigated the idioms of the workers' identity in an environment that made them continuously transform their skills. (ibid.: 77). In this factory, the equipment worked only due to the employees' commitment and engaged approach to the manufacturing process. Individual workers demonstrated a high degree of skill in mastering, personalising, removing defects and modernising their machines to such an extraordinary extent that the machines became unusable by other workers. For Alashev,

The craftsmanship of the worker and his individual methods of work is based on knowledge of the properties of production, the design of his own machine, the peculiarities of working with this or that raw material. Traditionally craftsmanship is the pride of the working person (ibid.: 94).

The Russian factory workers were constantly developing new skills in dialogue with the factory equipment and production process. They constituted their value through their attitudes to work, from their knowledge of their work environment to continuous specialist engagements with constantly broken old machines.

Nicolae's case represented a similar personalised attitude to work and skill. He focused on mastering the trade and its tools, innovating objects and overcoming design challenges. These activities constituted his self-projection of value through his interaction with the disobedient object. His success in mastering yet another skill, tool, production process or the intricate Saxon decorative style was linked to his craftsman's sense of achievement. The hybrid production of Saxon-modern ceramic objects was another manifestation of his sense of craftsmanship as continuous skill building, and also, just as one lazy afternoon in the pottery market in Sibiu, in finding new things to do with the material at hand (*see Fig. 8.19*).

On finishing my interview with Nicolae, at a casual glance the market seemed to be slowing down. The shoppers were strolling around the square as the sellers packed away their market stalls. Pots were being wrapped in newspaper, placed in cardboard boxes, carried away or placed inside cars arriving at the square to pick up the produce. I approached one of the stalls that still enjoyed significant interest. The table top was covered in ceramics of the north Romanian and Saxon styles. On display was a large diploma certifying the prize awarded by the market organisers. I joined the queue in the

company of two elderly ladies examining small bowls and a man purchasing a number of garden pots.

The stall owner, a renowned folk artist in the production of Baia Mare style ceramics, conversed with her customer about discounts and this year's business. There are two pottery families from the town of Baia Mare involved in the production of Saxon ceramics. Maria's family was considered as one of the most valued groups of potters in Romania, producing a wide range of ceramics ranging from traditional Baia Mare objects "characteristic of our ethnographic area", the family's own style<sup>70</sup> and modern garden ornaments and flowerpots.

The Saschiz objects were a recent addition to their offerings. Maria, the stall owner explained that her family had reinvented the Saschiz style through their research in museums and catalogues. Saschiz ceramics were cobalt-glazed, with a range of complex white floral and animal decorations. Most remaining examples of this blue enamelled sgraffito-cobalt pottery are dated from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hoffman 1956, Klusch 1980). Saschiz ceramics, renown for their quality, were mostly represented by pear-shaped jugs and decorated stove tiles (Istrate 2001: 73).

The Baia Mare potter perceived the Saschiz material culture as part of a common regional Transylvanian heritage of workmanship and the multi-ethnic character of the region.<sup>71</sup> Showing an exquisitely decorated plate, Maria mentioned that working in the Saschiz style was a response to growing demand for these designs. Furthermore, the reinvention of the style was an attempt to engage with a new and challenging technique of intricate sgraffito decoration. The sensory experience of making and engaging with the pieces has been a significant factor in the potters' decision to recreate Saschiz pottery. For the Baia Mare potter, the Saschiz objects facilitated explorations in form, enamelling technique and design. Of particular significance were the technical novelties of dealing with the objects' surfaces and the textures of the pattern. The Saschiz-style decorations were applied in thick and accurate layers that could be felt when touching the final object. The richness and layered character of the pattern was a demanding task for the decorator, a

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<sup>70</sup> The 'family style' enjoyed exclusive rights through the inscription on the national design register.

<sup>71</sup> Baia Mare is located in the distance of about 300 km north from Saschiz. The common heritage has to be understood in the historical context of the ethnic relations in the region as in the past the Romanians were excluded from the Saxon craft guilds producing this type of ceramics.

particularly tempting challenge for an experienced potter. Maria produced a number of non-commercial objects born of technical experimentation. She presented me with a number of exquisite but unsalable jugs and plates created for the sake of the challenge.



**Fig. 8.21** The multi-layered surfaces of Saschiz pottery (left)



**Fig. 8.22** The potter with her exemplary piece of Saschiz style during a fair (right)

The stories told by Nicolae and Maria, the potters engaged in the revival of two Saxon pottery styles, illustrated the multiple forms of reengagement with the historical craft of the lost Saxon community. Their narratives highlight some of the diverse points of reconnection and interpretation of the Saxon cultural legacy. The material culture of this ethnic minority was a source of inspiration among several Romanian potters. The stories of their forms of revival often referred to a sense of the local identity of the Transylvanian region as a site of multiple forms of heritage. At the same time, turning to historical models and reproducing them in contemporary contexts involved setting up technical challenges: experimenting with the possibilities of clay as a wood-like material and developing pattern-making virtuosity.

Inspiration from Saxon pottery was situated at the nexus of market demands and investigations into aesthetic and technical choices. Departing from the ethnographic canon of pattern and form, or the principle of being attached to a continuous territorially defined production of particular designs and techniques, these makers worked innovatively in engaging with historical pieces. They found tools, techniques and forms to apply these inspiring encounters in new contexts. At the same time, they projected a sense of continuity beyond the notion of ethnographic area, linking their work to the wider ‘Transylvanianess’ of the Saxon heritage, which they saw as a building block of their own material culture. Their notion of object value stemmed from the workmanship and market applicability, which they constantly monitored, skilfully modifying the pieces to meet the modern needs of their buyers and generate new forms of functionality. They sold flowerpots with Saxon furniture patterns or more “authentic” decorative objects targeting

roots tourists, the descendants of the Transylvanian Saxons currently living in Germany. The Saxon-inspired potters of the Sibiu craft fair negotiated their commercial practice with that of “re-inventors” of heritage and creative entrepreneurs.

Despite the discontinuity of the Saxon minority in the region today, they perceived continuity as shared practice. They investigated the archives, examined historical catalogues and images, claiming a degree of correspondence between their products and the historical prototypes. This sense of continuity of skill stemmed from the claim of quality craftsmanship the Saxons were identified with. Their work’s legitimacy was embedded in the technical mastery that characterised their forefathers in trade. Imagining Transylvania’s past as a shared cultural space allowed them to project a sense of commonality with the lost Saxon community. This selective vision of history and cultural space allowed them to transgress the demarcations along the lines of ethnicity and the ethnographic area. The potters imagined the ‘Transylvanian culture’ as inclusive, open for manipulations, experiments and creative re-imaginings of its material future.

## **8.6 Tasty, healthy clay**

It was a hot Sunday afternoon on the main square in Sibiu. Despite the blistering heat, the pottery fair was buzzing with visitors and every stall was surrounded by a group of shoppers, tourists and by-passers. Judit’s stand was placed in the middle of the square, full of colourful bells, espresso cups, vases, tagine pots, decorated Easter eggs and milk jugs. Most of the objects were shaped in a minimalist fashion with geometrically applied glazes and subtle painted elements resembling the Korond pottery style.<sup>72</sup>

Judit was a petite potter of Hungarian origin, combining craftsmanship with a full-time job as a primary school teacher. Korond pottery, steeped in the traditions in the seventeenth century guilds, has been one of the most renowned folk art centres in the post-war period. “Under the communists, Korond cooperative employed over 600 workers” – explained Martin, another potter from Korond that joined my conversation with Judit. Just

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<sup>72</sup> Korond (Corund) is a village located in the Szekely Land in central Transylvania. Mostly occupied by a Hungarian minority, Korond is renowned for its folk pottery. Marin Constantin’s research in Korond pointed to a mono-craft specialisation of the village and a strong sense of identification with the Hungarian folk culture. Constantin documented that the potters traced their practice to a 300-year craft continuity, formed a guild-like association and held regular craft fairs. The craft was transmitted through apprenticeship and ‘autodidactic’ methods (Constantin 2009b).

as in Horezu, the craft moved back to the household in the post-socialist period, generating numerous new workshops. Judit was one of the new practitioners without a history of pottery production in her own family. Her personal interest in ceramics was initiated by a potter friend and followed by a series of handicraft courses. She explained her entry into the trade through an interest in handmade products and traditional skills. Ceramics was part of her broader engagement with handicrafts. As Judit describes on her website:

I think it all started when my mother handed me the scissors. "I created" - so said my family, joking about my activity, which practically consisted of cutting all the newspapers in exciting shapes. Then I went on with the needle, pencil, brush, grater, knife and other tools. Then I learned from handy crafters [sic] and schools what can be made of leather, clay, wood, wool, reed, wicker.

Ever since that, I lived under the spell of tools, materials, and my own hands (Femina Faber 2013).

For Judit, the notion of family-based transmission of craft was not a guarantee of quality. Only a fraction of potters were privileged to learn within their families and some treated the trade instrumentally, focusing on continuity rather than excellence. In contrast, she learnt and performed the craft with passion and initiative, experimenting with the processes:

the greatest satisfaction is not due to the final product, but the good feeling that fills me while the work process (sic). I should not call it work, because creating is a way of life for me, a necessity, without which I would not be able to live a full life.

I'm handy crafter [sic]. My goal on one hand is to create useful things, which bring pleasure not only to me - the creator - but also later on to their users. On the other hand is to pass on the knowledge accumulated, to provide to as many as possible the joy of creation and fulfilment throughout handy craft (Femina Faber 2013).

In Judit's view, the choice of techniques and designs depended on the practitioner. She was led by an individual sense of aesthetics and her views on the utilitarian value of the object. She drew inspiration from Korond in the form of "decorative citations" and selected aspects of the traditional designs. Her pottery was distinctly feminine, she noted, producing smaller and more delicate artefacts. There was a strong affective element in this work; pottery was made to her heart's content (*din inima*), requiring a sense of intimate dedication to the process. Style cannot be fixed as it is developing in the process of



learning and work. Being a craftsman was a respectable activity requiring affection, it is an art and a special ability of “making something out of nothing”.



**Fig. 8.23** Judit’s kitchen pots – combining natural clays with modern shapes (left)



**Fig. 8.24** Martin’s stall with unglazed natural ceramics (right)

Due to her lack of family background in craft production, Judit’s studio was sparsely equipped, requiring her to purchase ready-made glaze and prefabricated clay blocks. She noted that this was a disadvantage for her pottery, as the objects were less natural than ceramics manufactured with locally sourced and manually processed raw materials. One of the goals of her work was to reintroduce natural materials into the modern household.

The idea of nature was a recurring theme throughout a number of conversations in the markets and pottery workshops. Potters often emphasised the use of natural glaze and firing methods, evoking metaphors of craftsmanship as a mastery of the four elements – water, earth, fire and air. According to a potter from Western Romania, in contrast to plastics, metals or Teflon, clay was a healthy solution that brought the most out of food stored in containers made from it. Her most popular product was a clay casserole dish for the preparation of traditional cabbage rolls (*sarmale*). She explained that any dish prepared in earthenware had a more genuine and robust flavour, as clay was a form of soil that gave life to all we consumed. Cooking in clay had also significant health benefits.

The potters’ responses about clay illustrated the relationships between ideas of nature, well-being and material practice. Working in clay, leather or wood implicated a specific sensory connection with the material world nested in a defined set of values and

meanings (Dobres 2001). The potters' vision of natural life was evoked by the material and procedural idioms of making. In these conversations, the stories about the benefits of earthenware were often accompanied by narratives about the spoils of civilisation and the detrimental speed of life. They looked towards the 'traditional past' as a resource that could be incorporated into the tempo of modernity and decrease its health-related consequences. Crafts are often associated with the idea of a preindustrial Arcadia (Adamson 2007: 104). In the case of the potters, the vision of the peasant bucolic was embedded in an interconnected discourse of workmanship, well-being and balanced nature.

The materiality of earthenware and the sensual qualities of the objects produced were narrated as indicators of craft personhood and quality. Judit's narrative about her preference for raw material and craft techniques was embedded in metaphors of a sense of "full life". The natural, raw clay, the production process based on the balance of elements and the pleasures of manual and embodied engagements with materials constituted craft identities and a sense of a quality-oriented approach to everyday life. The potters innovated models, forms and chromatics, but retained what they perceived as the authentic elements of the craft – the hand-made quality of production and the use of natural material. These categories of purity were framed through embodiment and the senses, the taste, smell, and texture of clay, and its beneficial properties. From the practitioner's perspective, the genuine character of the object was situated in an engagement with materiality, interwoven with a story of a genuine self generated through the natural properties of the material. Design conventions were viewed as secondary to the essence of the craft, subjecting the visual and linguistic qualities of the artefact to the embodied and sensory characteristics. According to Dobres (2001), the meaning of making is nested in the technological processes through an

encounter in the world of socially engaged people; a meaningful, material, and embodied experience that produces awareness, understanding, knowledge and material products (ibid.: 50).

The meaning of the potters' practice was a "sensuous affair" situated in the making process (Dobres 2001), re-enacted continuously in their material and technical solutions and the experiential processes of identity construction.

## 8.7 Conclusion: On agency and modality of practice

Often, in Romanian museum practice, there is an expectation that potters would maintain the ideal types of their respective ethnographic area to avoid pollution by kitsch or the harmful modernisation of craft. Local styles and fixed repertoires of forms are framed as the core features of folk craftsmanship. For several curators, there is an assumption that potters' creative expressions affect the value of artefacts and create tasteless hybrids. These departures catapult the practitioners out of the community of traditional craftsmen. Similarly, the framework of traditional technique in the heritage sector continues to emphasise the preservation of authentic ways of making. Through the use of particular tools, the potters are legitimised or left out from museum presence.

The potters carrying the legacy of the ethnographic area are expected to use defined tools, techniques and patterns. Numerous potters benefited from authorised status, enjoying the advantages of work within a tourist destination showcasing the traditional craft (*see* Chapter 7). The Vadastra example showed that some potters consulted experts in an attempt to produce an authentic technical environment. The makers have transformed their practice according to the principles of workmanship and technique set out by heritage specialists. As the technical logic of heritage created a system of differentiations, those who embraced modern solutions for shaping and firing, at times publicly concealed this equipment to maintain their status. Others, such as the potters from Marginea or Korond, negotiated these categories and rejected tools as markers of legitimacy. In the Marginean narrative, the idiom of tradition was vested in the stability of trade under the challenging circumstances of post-socialist reconstruction. As the mastery of the potter was linked to the ability to survive, the perception of continuous practice went beyond the application of equipment considered as backward and detrimental to their work.

Some stories told in the markets emphasised that technical variants were not a novelty. Under socialism, numerous museum specialists played an advisory role in the manufacturing of folk artefacts within mechanised cooperatives. According to an elderly practitioner, compared to the socialist period and the golden age of 1980s folk art competitions, only recently did the creativity of the potter become undesirable or too transgressive. In one conversation, a potter from western Transylvania identified the heritage experts' new preoccupation with tools as being destructive for the profession. He

criticised the museum specialists' tendency to dismiss makers' adaptability and experimental gestures. For a number of craftsmen, that sense of devaluation and pressure to be true to tradition resulted in alienation (see Radauți). From the curators' perspective, the distance between the specialist and the maker stemmed from the former's rejection of kitsch.

According to the responses of the interviewed museum specialists, the recent tendency to invent or change designs was a market-driven compromise. The commercialisation of the contemporary potters was a widely discussed issue, providing insights into the relationships between creative and imitative practice. Investigating the questions of the marketisation of Romanian artisanship, it has been pointed out (Constantin 2009b, Iancu and Tesar 2008) that the post-socialist entry into the market economy has prompted potters to create new types of products in response to the demands of their clientele and the tourist market.

The potters' responses only partially confirmed the significance of the market forces leading to the execution of hybrid artefacts. Market demands were often perceived as overlaid into technical challenges. For the makers, responding to the demand was an opportunity to step out of their routine, improvise and generate new sets of processes and variants of artefacts. Maria's work with Saschiz pottery exemplified a shift from artefacts production motivated by a market trend to an engagement in haptic experimentation and sensory discovery of Saxon workmanship. The cases of unsalable Saschiz plates and Marin's numerous attempts on Neolithic figurines demonstrated that non-marketable objects were made for their own sake and for the pleasure of craftsmanship (Sennett 2008).

Technical concerns constituted significant themes in the conversations on creativity and reproduction. As Lemonnier (1986) suggested, technical variants are "not only about the presence or absence of a given feature, but ... about different ways of doing the same thing" (ibid.: 17). Techniques of Romanian pottery were interwoven with representations surrounding tools and operational sequences. For example, some hybrid artefacts would be narrated as expressions of the materiality of tradition. Judit's tagines with Korond ornamental accents and Nicolae's wood-like vases with patterns derived from Saxon furniture illustrated the relationship between haptic knowledge and existential authenticity

(Reisinger and Steiner 2006b). Both makers pointed to the need to create utilitarian pottery, emphasising their work's modernity and functionality. Their formal innovations were accompanied by a sense of authenticity vested in the material (Judit's natural pottery) or technique (Nicolae's vessels). For those who developed new designs, these acts of departure from a prototype served as ways of engaging bodily experience and building up levels of skill.

Creativity was often perceived as arriving at a skill and included the practice of imitation. The work of the producers of Neolithic ceramics resembles the notion of creativity discussed by Nakamura (2007). The craft was initiated by the visual encounter with the representations of this discontinued craft in exhibitions, catalogues and illustrations. On that basis, the makers engaged in a long process of embodied technical approximation "to arrive at" the artefact. The value of the final copy was mediated by the memory of haptic self-pedagogy, the creation of one's own toolkit and a rhythm of operational sequences to reach the desired standard. Their creativity emerged through imitative practice in the act of translation of the prototype into haptic forms of knowledge and tactile encounters. Rather than a fixed repertoire of processes and patterns, pottery was often an outcome of ways of doing, sensing, seeing and manipulating forms, patterns and processes.

Thinking through the idioms of creativity and transmission points us to the tactility of craft knowledge. The haptic expertise of potters, their handling of artefacts, materials, forms and designs, calls for closer attention beyond the occasional demonstration of technique or workshop. The rich textures of sensory knowledge and meaning-making are integral to rethinking of the 'archived' craft material in museums and scholarly literature.

I hope that this study demonstrates that ceramic craft production is more than a continuous parade of authentic folk models. This research among the potters of Romania included those who operate in the authorised heritage networks and others who are not identified as carrying the right sort of tradition, situated outside the legitimising "antiquarian understandings of knowledge and material culture" (Smith 2006: 30). Drawing from encounters with various contemporary makers, I presented their craft biographies, stories of how they became involved with ceramics, their interactions with the produced pieces and their perspectives on designs and techniques. These silhouettes

exemplified the understudied agency of the producer of folk art. Discussions around artefacts and techniques are useful to articulate questions about categories of knowledge and practice. They reflect concerns on what constitutes a legitimate copy and creativity in the sphere of traditional craft. Also they reframe the craftsmen as a group of practitioners with various points of entry into the profession rather than an abstract peasantry continuously producing prescribed material culture.

The encounters with Marginea and Radauți potters illustrate the multiple afterlives of ceramic production in the Horniman Museum collection's places of origin. The conversations in the markets present a richness of responses to objects and styles. In this context, considering the perspective of the makers allows the recognition of local agency related to pottery. It highlights its kaleidoscopic character, simultaneously local and national, historic and innovative, heritage-like and commercially driven. More importantly, by bringing forth the perspective of the producer, ceramics emerges as a combination of the tangible (styles, models, artefacts) and the intangible (affective attachments, perceptions of the material). The sensory understandings of pottery, present in the makers' narratives, have rarely been addressed by ocularcentric museum scholarship. The makers' responses uncovered the nuanced, embodied evaluations of craft. Pottery is a form of technology, linking the social with the individual body of practice and bringing forward experience mediated by the hands of thinking, sensing and knowing craftsmen. It includes non-visual and non-linguistic forms of knowledge. Our understanding of the technical practices that generate material culture (and museum artefacts) requires an acknowledgement of the non-material, as things come into existence in the nexus of material, symbolic, social and sensuous factors. This recognition necessitates a reassessment of the artefacts located in the museum holdings.

## **Chapter 9: Beyond the curtain, beneath the display**

Ethnographic research into collections can throw light upon the understudied aspects of their acquisition and display, the personal and political agendas of the collectors and the contingent historical processes of exchange that made collecting and exhibition-making possible (O’Hanlon 2000: 4). Exploring the meanings of the artefacts in their places of origin allows us to glimpse beneath the museum display to uncover alternative categories through which the objects can be reinterpreted.

This thesis illustrates a distinctive case study in the Eastern European context and adds to the body of museum ethnography that investigates the consequences of classificatory systems. In order to engage with multiple aspects of the museum material, this thesis was divided into three parts. Part I considered the history of the 1957 Horniman Museum Romanian collection. Parts II and III were based on collection-led ethnographic encounters in Romania. Part II focused on material from the village of Viştea, comparing museum documentation with other narratives about the artefacts and investigating the collection’s acquisition process, the artefacts’ production, the spaces of their use and changes in production over time. Part III examined the ceramic collection and the making of folk pottery. In order to reassess heritage and craftsmanship in this context, responses from the selected centres of production (Horezu, Radauţi and Marginea) were juxtaposed with the voices of pottery practitioners that fall outside the legitimising frame of museum practice. In this concluding chapter, I would like to outline the main themes that emerged through this research and signpost possible areas of further study.

### **9.1 Front stage: the collection redefined**

Throughout the thesis, I aimed to create a pathway through the multiple objects and stories locked in this collection. In Part I, I described the events and exhibition practices that set the stage for the constitution of the Horniman Museum’s collection. In the light of historical study, how can we envisage this folk art material? Is it a set of artefacts, display arrangements or exhibition cases? Perhaps images, archival photographs, a list of entries in the institutional database, the written material related to the acquisition and public presentation? The first set of chapters allows us to understand that this collection encompasses all of the above and can be read on multiple levels. Firstly, I show that it

constitutes a tangible nexus of social relationships between collectors, institutions and curators enabling its public presentation in a particular historical and social milieu. Secondly, I demonstrate that it is a site of contacts and negotiations between its community of origin and its final repository on museum display or in storage. Thirdly, I highlight the ways it is constantly brought together and remade in relation to institutional networks, modes of display and the international and historical contexts in which exhibitions are constructed.

In order to understand the history of the Romanian gift to the Horniman Museum, I used the overall theme of assemblage as the key organisational metaphor. In archaeology, an assemblage is a “group of objects of different or similar types found in close association with one another and thus considered to be the product of one people from one time” (Kipfer 2000: 38). The deposited objects are characterised by a contextual proximity, enabling insights on past events, processes, practices as well as

the actions of display and social performances through which past actors experienced these acts of assemblage, and the participation and deployment of deposits in memory-work (Joyce and Pollard 2010: 309).

For Harrison (2013), museum collections can be studied ethnographically as assemblages through consideration of the process of the artefacts’ travel from their sites of use and production to the museum. This archaeological sensibility allows consideration of the events that led to the objects’ deposition in storerooms, presentation on display and the process of acquisition that drew objects and people together (ibid.: 20).

Assemblages are constructed and can be investigated across multiple layers. Examining the dynamics of assembling and re-assembling, of the front stage and backstage of this collection (Bouquet 2012: 141), my historical reconstruction has looked into the spectrum of scales through which the collection came into being. In Chapter 2, I delineated the broader contours of the collection’s history as an entity playing a vital role on the stage of Romanian-British representations and international politics. Glimpsing beyond the Iron Curtain, Chapter 3 provided insights on a different scale, exploring the contradictions inherent in the collection’s structure. Digging through layers revealed unsettling frictions within this set of objects in the context of the situation in the Romanian countryside during the 1950s, the complexity of curatorial trajectories and Cold War-related political pressures faced in exhibition making.



Another conceptual framework that proved applicable to this study was considering the collection as a meshwork. As Ingold (2007) suggested, etymologically, the line is linked to the Latin meaning of ‘linen’. Taking a perspective on the collection as a structure “of interwoven threads rather than of inscribed traces” (ibid.: 80) directs us to the intersections of parts and relationships between sources. For example, by using a textile metaphor, every event of exhibiting this folk art in post-war London can be considered “a knot in the meshwork, and the threads from which it is traced are ways of wayfaring” (ibid.: 100). It allowed me to move along a variety of historical traces in a flexible manner and to unpick the minutiae of the collection’s human histories, its travels and the contexts of international flows of objects and people (Chapter 2) (Byrne *et al* 2011). The motif of meshwork opened this research for investigations into the maze-like interconnections between things, people and locations (Harrison 2013, Ingold 2007). In tracing knots and threads, I aimed to bring together the processes and connections that made the selection and movement of things possible. The metaphor of meshwork captures the texture of the research process as well as the various manifestations of the collection’s artefacts in time and space.

## **9.2 Backstage encounters**

Revealing the backstage constituted a new assemblage of concerns that informed my multi-sited exploration of the collection’s provenance. Romanian folk art objects have conventionally been associated with ethnographic areas and unchanging local styles. Instead, this study considered the social relations and mechanisms by which the museum objects “accumulated histories” (Gosden and Knowles 2001). I have argued that in order to move away from received knowledge about Romanian folk art, these museum objects can be reimagined as the products of craftwork with a distinctive historical background. This research demonstrated that seemingly static, locally specific folk objects were often being constructed in the interplay of continuity and creativity, carrying their own stories. Just as they represented group values (be they regional, village-based or family-related), they also spoke of aspects of individual virtuosity and competition. The artefacts were embedded in an intersection of the personal experiences and social relations as well as forces of innovation, negotiation and friction.

In order to understand these forces, bringing together anthropology and critical heritage studies, my study attempted to account for the process of the objects' becoming. This perspective provides an understanding of the making of artefacts in their relational field (Ingold 2000: 345) and allows us to move beyond materialist parameters of interpreting and authenticating folk artefacts (Geurds 2013) as fixed things with identifiable features. Narrating material culture through common technique sheds light on its variation and serves as a means of bridging multiple field sites through emic expertise.

In Parts II and III, I presented responses to the collection's material. This ethnography focused on the producers of artefacts and was developed through a sequence of interactions initiated by the images of the objects. Each part addressed a distinctive group of the museum's holdings, providing a basis for the exploration of divergent aspects of the material culture and craft practice today. Together, the two parts presented contrasting trajectories vital to the understanding of the collection as a whole. The exploration of making vernacular objects, represented by the Horniman Museum artefacts, revealed significant transformations in material culture and skill. I argue that in the workshops and households the daily exercise of craft activity was linked to wider infrastructures and values that delineated the possibilities and limitations faced by the artisan. In different ways, the weavers and potters were negotiating relationships with the outside, be these with state cooperatives or heritage institutions. In both cases, these outside forces had a significant impact on the style of their work, as well as the production process, and both crafts moved from the status of an activity embedded in the domestic economy to a form of production geared for folk art industry (in the form of outwork or a factory-like setting). At the same time, the practitioners were not simply moulded by these factors, but emerged as active agents in these relations through their technical choices, 'manoeuvres' and reconstructions/'evolutions' of practice. In the light of the investigation of textile styles in Viştea (Chapter 6) and pottery styles across Romania (Chapters 7 and 8), this thesis stressed the problematic nature of geographically centred folk art categories.

One of the pivotal problems related to the application of an ethnographic approach in the re-engagement with the collection is the notion of representativeness. In this context, what is the value of the two case studies in the reinterpretation of this extensive collection? Firstly, through its ethnographic focus, this project of taking the artefacts back 'home' aims to create a meaningful space of encounter beyond the short-term, episodic

and rushed practice that characterised the acquisition of the objects. Secondly, an in-depth study allows us to grasp the context in which the artefacts 'sit'. It was noted that

museums need to be understood as participating in a wider spectrum of human efforts of display, curation, and engagement with things through which relationships are materialised and negotiated over time (Bell 2012: 71).

Dialogues emerging from examining the collection images and documentation with various research participants in Romania challenged the museum perspective on the local engagement with things. Here, the metaphor of assemblage was useful in thinking about the sets of objects in the shifting context of the house and the artefacts' compositions (Chapter 5). Similarly, my research in Horezu demonstrated that the local form of display deserves a critical examination and that relationships with objects in the local context need to be investigated historically (Chapter 7). It is through ethnographic methods that these social contexts can be best explored.

Ethnographic research shifts the discussion of technical areas from the elegance of abstract categories towards a grounded approach. Rather than allocating the craftsman to the style, this approach allows space for considering the contemporary concerns of the practitioners. Furthermore, thinking about the biographies of the artefacts, ethnographic research enables us to trace the multiple afterlives of the museum material and to recognise the broader spectrum of the collection's counterparts in the local community. The kaleidoscopic world of the contemporary Romanian potters, encountered in festivals, markets and workshops is in a stark contrast with the scholarly depiction of Romanian pottery. My ethnography demonstrated multiple ways in which potters identified themselves as both traditional and creative. As shown in Chapter 8, the contemporary emic meanings of artefacts shed new light on craft continuity and transmission, demonstrating the multiple pathways of material practice.

By following acquisition stories and initiating new encounters through objects, this study illustrates that the story in which the collection can be placed is not simply one of regional peasant craft traditions. It is the understanding of the historical backstage of interactions and negotiations that reveals the collection's significance. In the impossibility of retracing the multiplicity of all encounters, I see the thesis as an entry point rather than

an end. No study can provide a definitive description of a set of 300 artefacts. Each one is a slice of the material world and a continual negotiation of interactions and interpretations.

### **9.3 Taking the scene by storm?**

As noted in the Introduction, this research appeared as a particularly timely initiative of visual repatriation as it seemed to be the last opportunity to address the historical context in dialogue with the surviving local donors from which the collection was acquired. The sixty-year distance from the moment of acquisition gave this investigation an added resonance as the oral sources were regarded as about to be lost in the mists of history. Simultaneously, the exhibition proved to be timely in relation to a range of current issues as well as historical relationships. In drawing this thesis to a close, it is necessary to reflect on the current exhibition project, field-based knowledge taken back to the front stage of a museum exhibition and the opportunities and challenges of such endeavour.

As outlined in the project proposal, Alexandra Urdea and I were invited to be part of the new exhibition. Upon our return from the field, we were invited to meetings to discuss the exhibition with the museum curator, educational officer, conservator, PR professional and other members of the museum staff. As there is limited space in this conclusion to fully discuss the making of the “Revisiting Romania: Dress and Identity” exhibition at the Horniman Museum, I will reflect on the position of the project in the current institutional and political milieu, the negotiations between my research and the final exhibition space as well as the collaborative process.

Firstly, it is necessary to reflect on this project’s embeddedness in the continuum of exchanges, unfinished dialogues (Bell 2003) and the political context in which it was situated. During its museum career, the Romanian collection underwent several life stages and mobilised multiple dialogues. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the insertion of this collection into the Horniman Museum established a relationship between the Romanian and British cultural institutions. The cultural relationship between the two countries was not ‘cancelled out’ and the collection is periodically revisited. The first redisplay project took place in the 1980s<sup>73</sup>, in the context of Ceaușescu’s political vision for a pro-Western socialist Romania and a cultural politics aiming at transforming society

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<sup>73</sup> See Urdea (2015) for a discussion on the 1984 re-exhibition and the British curators’ journeys in the 1980s Romania.

and creating a new type of person (see Ceaușescu speech in Kideckel 2003). In the light of these nationalist cultural politics and the popularity of the ‘Song to Romania’ programme, it was unsurprising that in 1984 the Horniman Museum was sent a folk dance ensemble and a Romanian folk music specialist to reinterpret the collection. It was also understandable that the objects representing the Saxon ethnic minority were considered undesirable on the Romanian side in this redisplay. The interinstitutional dialogue and the narrative of the exhibition were delineated by the constraints of the period.

In the course of the exhibition project, Alexandra and I discovered that on-going institutional reciprocity and political motivations continue to inform the interpretation of this collection today. The gift created an ongoing relationship that generates a skeleton for further reinterpretation and embeds future partnerships. Every act of ‘revisiting’ the collection evokes these relationships and to some extent re-inserts the objects into pre-existing knowledge frameworks. In this context, other collaborations, such as the AHRC project, became secondary to the reproduction of inter-institutional obligations between the Horniman Museum and its diplomatic counterpart.

From the outset of the exhibition project, the museum expressed the wish to involve the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) as a key co-funder and partner in the exhibition development. In the early stages of our research, prior to fieldwork, Alexandra and I were invited to attend meetings between the curator and the institute representatives, where various ideas for exhibition designs and accompanying events were discussed. With supplementary funding from the RCI, the museum intended to mount the exhibition in its main hall. The Romanian cultural attaché mentioned that he would remarry in the space of the gallery to re-enact a traditional wedding. It seemed that the alliance generated by the collection gift was to be once more re-emphasised and celebrated in public space.

From the moment of its constitution, the collection carried the mission of a political representative. As I explored earlier, in 1957 and 1984 the set was mobilised to tell a story about the Romanian state and its nation. Similarly in 2014, the artefacts’ re-emergence from the stores coincided with current political concerns in Anglo-Romanian diplomacy. In the course of the project, it became clear that the museum-led representation of Romania became particularly timely, framed by discussions about recent Romanian

immigration to the UK.<sup>74</sup> In the period of the research project, there was unprecedented growth in media coverage of Romanians living in the UK. During my writing up period, there was an increase of press articles focusing on an image of criminalised or benefit-seeking Romanians. From a non-descript Eastern European country, associated perhaps with orphans, Transylvania and the scenes of Ceauşescu's assassination, Romania became cast as the homeland of unemployed *homi sovietici* flooding the British Isles. As a result, in the course of my research, the redisplay became increasingly connected to the problem of representing contemporary Romanians in Britain and their presences and voices. Once again, diplomatic agendas were entering the museum space in an attempt to project particular national narratives. Once more, the collection was at the front stage of intersecting histories and international self-images. It was interesting to witness how, under different circumstances, the same set of objects was mobilised to perform the role of cultural ambassadors. As a result of the RCI involvement in the project, the 'Revisiting Romania' show was accompanied by a photographic exhibition presenting images of contemporary Romanians living in the UK. These images with biographical vignettes, commissioned by the RCI, presented highly aestheticised portraits of Romanian artists, bank managers, fashion designers and other skilled professionals. The photographs seemed to represent the modern face of Romanian migration just as the artefacts, separated in the exhibition space, were acting as fragments of the home country.

From the beginning of the project, I envisioned the exhibition as an experimental conversation between the existing collection and its counterparts in the 'revisited sites' today. Inspired by several exhibition projects, such as 'Trafficking' and 'Stolen World' at Museum of World Culture in Gothenborg, 'Weavers at Musequeam' at the UBC Museum of Anthropology or 'Cultures of Trade Open Lab' project at the Museum of World Cultures in Frankfurt, I wanted to provoke new juxtapositions and generate extensive online content around the Romanian material. I proposed that a bilingual online platform would initiate a new dialogue between the British and Romanian ends of the project, actively involving past owners and users of the artefacts, Romanians in the UK and the several museums assisting in the project. Throughout the fieldwork process, I wrote a blog that I hoped to be part of the final web material to present the development of the project and to demonstrate the pathways of my anthropological journey. The website was

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<sup>74</sup> Related to the country's European Union accession in 2007.

proposed as a platform of active conversation around the exhibits, emphasising many facets of the objects and their presence in daily lives, memory and political discourse.

My exhibition concept centred around the notions of home and work, critically reflecting on the fixed representational framework symbolised by the wooden cottage and traditional crafts. Working with the field material presented in Chapter 5, I intended to investigate the transforming space of the house and the ever-changing role of objects. By bringing together things from the dressed and undressed house, I wanted the visitors to think about personal stories and values of everyday objects. Inspired by the ‘At home in Japan’ exhibition at Geffrye Museum, I sought to create an immersive environment in which the visitor would be able to explore the everyday possessions of a Romanian house. This space would break the myth of the Arcadian room through the introduction of contemporary objects, ephemera and family photographs found in Viştea today. It would emphasise the home as a living space of memory, social change and dialogue between those who occupy and sustain the house and others who passed away or moved abroad. These absences are made present through material culture and constitute significant parts of the household. In order to ensure a collaborative process of revisiting and curating this collection, I intended to invite the villagers to co-design the gallery and to create a new ‘dowry chest’ reflecting their current perspective. The accompanying online content would enable visitors and people from the village to share their own stories and reflections about objects on display and the collection.

Discussing these ideas with the curator, I was informed that my fieldwork material would become part of the exhibition. Indeed, one of the display cases was named ‘Dressing the House’. As the museum team were predominantly concerned with showcasing the existing collection, I was asked to point to key textiles from Viştea to make up a local room. These were then approved and arranged by the team. A few months later, I was asked to write short descriptions of particular objects (such as an icon or dowry chest) and provide a number of fieldwork photographs. The curator informed me that the design budget was now limited and there was no space for a comparative intervention. As a result, the ‘undressed house’ was never put on display. Critical engagement with the ‘rustic’ stereotype of Romania was limited. The presentation of the Viştea artefacts almost entirely mimicked the diorama of the 1957 ‘Folk Art in Romania’ exhibition. As a result, rather than presenting the objects’ complex historical trajectory and

the dynamic nature of the local vernacular architecture, the interpretation has visually reproduced the same *in situ* style arrangement of the material (see **Fig.3.9**). This unhomely, or perhaps uncanny effect was emphasised by the flatness of the composition in the display case.

A similar negotiated process of making the new exhibition occurred in the context of the display concerning skill and work. Drawing from my research on weaving and pottery, I proposed to tell a story of changing craft skills and types of work involved in craft practice. I aimed to display traditional textiles alongside new styles and perspectives collected in the field in order to show the changing character of work and the lives and afterlives of skill. In terms of pottery, the design concept involved the creation of a fictional workshop space stuffed with objects from the collection related to work, alongside tools present in the daily work of Romanians in London and ‘back home’. On opening cabinets and drawers, visitors could watch video projections of the making process or take a handout of how-to-guides on making pots or painting a London house etc. These sheets, similar to those produced for the ‘Disobedient Objects’ exhibition, would demonstrate the whole *chaine operatoire* of e.g. traditional textile production as well as highlight the often-invisible labour performed by Romanians in London today.

I envisioned the display as an atelier and a souvenir stall, resembling the workspaces I encountered during my fieldwork in Romania. The worktop and the cabinets would have various pieces of equipment, trinkets, pieces of wood, clay and metal, as well as cleaning materials, drill, paint, nails, glue, rubbish and leftovers. Objects could be handled, touched, open and reshuffled. The space would act as a stimulus to museum visitors to reflect on the objects without the taxonomical museological categories that I found similarly unhelpful during my fieldwork. This methodology would act as a critique of the common in-situ traditional workspace arrangement and delve into the connection between work and identity.

In contrast, the Museum’s approach was to include a section about ‘making’ using textile production and pottery-related objects taken from the existing collection. The ceramics section, I was informed, would be placed in the “object in focus” display case at the entrance to the gallery. The spatial limitations of this case meant that the display would only include a few artefacts. As result, a selection of Horezu plates from the collection



was placed alongside two pieces brought from the field. As I was also asked to contribute a description, I added an exhibition label problematising the notion of tradition and emphasising the dynamism of this craft. At the same time, it was decided that the display that focused on textile craft would be located in a small wall case at the other end of the gallery space. The exhibition team decided that carved distaffs were the most aesthetically pleasing objects related to textile work and made them key to the interpretation. As a result, the case presented a row of aestheticised spinning tools. Rather than engaging with the insights produced by the project's ethnographic research, craft was again represented as aestheticised "folk art".

Another example of negotiation between the museum and the anthropological ends of the project was the discussion of the linguistic presentation of the exhibition cases. Given the number of Romanians with a limited knowledge of English residing in Britain, I proposed that the interpretive text on the panels was presented in both English and Romanian. This would provide information for more visitors and generate an inclusive environment in accordance with the anthropological ethical guidelines on sharing research (ASA 2011) and the collaborative aim of the project. In order to avoid textual overload, this could involve using additional labels situated in one part of the gallery or providing multimedia material such as QR codes. Due to the funding cuts experienced by both the museum (Hunt 2010, Miller 2013) and the RCI (Şuteu 2012: 6), it was argued that the translation and the online component would present the intituitions with an additional cost that could not be carried through.

Exhibitions always grow and ripen in a wider environment, in which curatorial choices are embedded in pre-existing economic, political, institutional and material factors. My role in the co-creation of this exhibition was an apprenticeship in understanding the complexities that such projects entail. Possibilities of radical departures from existing forms and practices are inevitably constrained by these complexities and the already well-established relationships interconnecting them.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the key impetus for this thesis was the AHRC's collaborative doctoral award, with its projected outcomes in the form of insights usable for museum application. The specificity of knowledge generated through research poses a challenge to the multiple values invested in collaborative projects. In the course of my

fieldwork, I faced the dilemma of how information obtained from my research activities could be best formed into a body of knowledge assimilable by the museum. Specifically, the polyvocal insights gained from Viştea and the pottery centres appeared particularly complex, as the responses did not seem to fit the typical curatorial narrative focused on continuity of material production. Rather than being immersed in a generic makers' community or homogenous material setting, objects were parts of a broader spectrum of relationships, processes, contested practices, forking-path narratives and multiple trajectories of the craft.

In the case of weaving and pottery, traditional knowledge was shared in different ways. Whereas the weavers transmitted their skills and styles within a gendered community of makers, in the case of pottery there was a clearly emerging notion of knowledge protection. In Horezu, the craft emerged as an internally differentiated trade with hierarchical, guild-like channels of transmission of craft and status. Wider dissimulation of the style was narrated as design theft, kitsch and the practice of illegitimate impostors. In both cases, rather than a marker of a harmonious rural community, craft knowledge was an issue of gender and status and an area of hierarchy and contestation. This leads us to consider the mechanisms by which craft knowledge is transmitted as well as protected, excluded and denied. These counter-narratives challenge the assumptions of museum-ethnographic re-engagement and knowledge-sharing projects.

Often these initiatives assume that collections will be rediscovered as being of value to local respondents. As my ethnographic exploration progressed, the values embedded in the local communities became an intriguing issue (for a comparative discussion of value in this collection, see Urdea 2015). Through my field research in Viştea, I highlighted the process of the devaluation of material culture, one where traditional artefacts did not represent what was 'lost', but what was neglected and discarded. Although there had been a strong connection between textile objects and the broader contexts of work ethics and community values, for the last 70 years the understanding of these traits has undergone significant change. As weaving was no longer practised, textile making traditions and skills were narrated as having little or no relevance to a modern livelihood. Researching the history of Horezu artefacts, I explored devaluation as a moment of collection acquisition – these objects were acquired by the museum in a moment of local 'riddance' and rejection. In the Horezu perspective, continuity was often contested as the craft

evoked distinctions of practice and multiple views of artefacts and workmanship. The above counter-narratives suggest that the material practice represented by the museum set is no longer representative of a given livelihood or craft tradition. Secondly, these insights invite us to think about incorporating acts of riddance into the exhibition narrative and, perhaps, problematising the local value of other representative museum collections.

Anthropologists who work in partnerships with museums must confront the problem of multiple values and “the obligations that stem from the historical, physical, and political ‘weight’ of objects” (Harrison 2013:14). In prioritising values, I argue for placing the expertise of makers at the fore. Such recognition would make the project of museum re-engagement a truly democratic initiative. Instead of reactivating old networks and working with the same authorised community of practitioners, such an approach stresses that crafts are being modified, reworked and even abandoned. Investigation into the craft today facilitates the real presence and meaningful input of the makers.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the museum could be conceptualised as a method, posing epistemological questions of the kinds of knowledge gained through exhibition making and working with collections. Thomas (2010) identified a series of dilemmas faced by the contemporary relationship between the museum and the field of anthropology:

Does anthropology remain the discipline that informs anthropological collections to be, in turn, informed by them? What kinds of knowledge underpin the interpretation of collections? What methods does that interpretation involve, and what knowledge does it generate? And to move from theory and research to public engagement how in the early 21st century should anthropological collections be displayed? What stories should they tell? What questions should they raise? (ibid.: 7).

Collaborative projects situated between museums and academic anthropology are at the very centre of such dilemmas. They constitute third spaces between various forms of discourse and often involve manoeuvring between an anthropological focus on critique and the museum’s objectives. The complexities of navigating the two fields were revealed through my involvement in the preparation of the 2014 exhibition at the Horniman Museum.

Collaborative projects have been identified as problematic in other re-engagement initiatives (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008, Hoerig 2010). For Harrison,

this way of working not only generates creative friction, which is potentially generative of new forms of knowledge, but also has the potential to transform the values of researchers and their attitudes toward the objects with which they work (Harrison 2013: 14).

I argue that rather than reproducing expectations, the collaborative endeavour is tested on the ground and constitutes a reflexive practice. I see the third space of my doctoral apprenticeship as an inquiry along the lines of frictions, divergent interests and responsibilities toward multiple research participants and curatorial and academic supervisors. In this context, my thesis could be read as an attempt to convey the process of learning situated between the disciplinary modes of knowledge and local and tacit spheres of meaning beyond the dichotomy of the curatorial and the community (Golding and Modest 2013). In this continuous process of negotiation, objects can act as ambassadors for critical dialogue and partnership, revealing intertwined histories and multiple perspectives and agencies (Knowles 2011).

#### **9.4 A thing of the past**

One of the key objectives of the project was to investigate the memories evoked by the museum artefacts. As the research progressed, I examined a multiplicity of sites in which memory was enacted. This included inscribed memory in archives and museums as well as material and tacit memory recalled through oral narratives and embedded in the spaces of the households, workshops and craft markets.

In the context of the 1950s archive and museum, cultural memory and value seemed codified and rendered abstract in neat typologies. Heritage and museum frameworks often formalised and objectified material culture, building axiomatic bodies of knowledge on on-going forms of practice. These archival systems of classification often expunged local agency from their documentation. Similarly, heritage industries were concerned with classifiable culture. In the post-war period, the Romanian state heritage system invested heavily in projecting a unified image of folk art and established a system of heritage management to control, guide and evaluate cultural production and the legitimate memory of the past. Under state socialism, intangible heritage and vernacular practice were

penetrated by the government, generating folk art industry infrastructures for socialist state investors (including museums and state shops) and tourism. At the same time, socialist cultural institutions, such as the IRRCS established networks and relationships of reciprocity between the Romanian countryside and the capital and between Romanian and foreign cultural institutions in order to project unified narratives. Traces of these institutional sites of memory and controlled exchanges demonstrate the mechanisms by which traditional material culture was supposed to be preserved and narrated.

Moving away from institutional and inscribed (Rowlands 1993) forms of heritage and remembering evoked a separate kind of memory. Exploration of the multiple memoryscapes (Basu 2013a) related to objects and craftsmanship, as shown in the Parts II and III of this thesis, demonstrated the dynamics of remembering and forgetting (Forty and Küchler 1999), related to local historical experiences and embodied practices. Exploring the narratives of the everyday production of material culture, the mundane daily activity of labour and workshop experimentation was a way to interrogate the specificities of material memory and heritage at the local level. For example, from the perspective of craftswomen in Viştea, heritage value was not a meaningful metaphor through which the collection artefacts could be understood. In contrast, old/traditional material culture was evoked as an *aide de memoire* for stories about drudgery, underdevelopment and discomfort. Rather than an activity linked to the Arcadian peasant past, weaving emerged as a gendered, solitary practice, connoting bodily memories of hardship and limited prospects. In the case of pottery, I have identified multiple sites of negotiation of heritage value and the memory of the craft. On the one hand, there are personal memories of work in socialist cooperatives and changes in the styles and techniques of production. On the other hand, there are public stories to be told in order to meet the expectations of the heritage industry (Chapters 7 and 8). It was interesting to see how these desired legitimising memories entered the intimate lives of the craftsmen and generated particular biographical plots. Where heritage status is at stake, personal memory seems to be more cultivated and carefully performed.

I hope I have shown that the memoryscapes of this collection are multiple and dispersed around the vast territory from which the material was acquired. Although this thesis constitutes only a slice of the possible evocations, its case material provides a valuable means of rethinking the relationships between institutional and personal sites of

memory, their public and private articulations and associated localised and centralised practices. Evoking the emic meanings of the objects and their material histories on the local level reveals complex and contested counter-narratives about the collection. When brought together, these divergent stories invite themselves back to the museum for new public re-articulations (Basu and Macdonald 2007).

## **9.5 Suggestions for further study**

There are several paths to pursue further investigation of this collection.

Firstly, there is a wealth of information embedded in the artefacts and their documentation about other types of material practice that were outside the scope of this study. Consideration of the plethora of material expressions represented by the collection (such as woodcraft or basketry) might reveal differences in the historical trajectories of Romanian crafts more broadly and can be used to identify patterns in their afterlives.

Secondly, my research of the Horezu site took place at a pivotal moment in the development of the location. There is rich potential for exploring the transformation taking place in Horezu following its listing in 2012 on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As studies of several UNESCO World Heritage Sites illustrated (see Butler 2007, Joy 2012), it can be assumed that the post-designation life of the centre involves further change that could be mapped and documented in more detail. A comprehensive perspective on the emerging themes of authorised production, heritagisation and the distinctions and negotiations amongst practitioners requires that the dynamics of the Horezu case be studied in the long-term.

Thirdly, the focus and time-scale of this project did not allow for full engagement with policy-making issues related to crafts. On many occasions, the potters would narrate their work in relation to taxation, the changing politics of the state and the instruments through which entrepreneurship is practiced in contemporary Romania. Whilst critical heritage studies have recognised the significance of how heritage regimes and the state frame material practice, this area of study fails to provide a substantial account of the particular legal and political infrastructures affecting intangible cultural heritage. Such a research direction could highlight issues of the trajectories of crafts and their products on a comparative basis. Perhaps an economic perspective paired with practice-based studies is

a way to bring new relevance to the critical role performed by museums in protecting, facilitating or giving a voice to those engaged in material production today.

Whilst there is a plethora of studies about everyday practice, consumption and spaces in what was formerly the Eastern bloc (often called post-Socialist states), there is a gap in anthropological scholarship related to the economic transformation of the material culture of production and technology. Until now, little has been written about the technical choices made by these societies and their relationships with local evaluations of historical change. This materially oriented exploration of historical processes could be applied to several aspects of economic practice and productivity in the region.

Lastly, there is the unconsidered social history of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War period. As this thesis focused on one side of a particular exchange, the objects, people and cultural diplomacy projects flowing from the West to the East remains unexplored. An investigation of the multiple institutional connections would make an intriguing comparative study that outlines both the commonalities and differences of such activities.

I began this thesis quoting Gosden, Larson and Petch who see the museum as a launchpad for adventures in time and space. I hope that in the course of the thesis I showed the fascinating nature and potential of such an anthropological journey. This project took some of many possible pathways and followed a trajectory along a specific assortment of places, people and things. I hope that I demonstrated that museum practice could build upon socially and historically nuanced understandings of objects that such ethnographic venturing offers. Fieldwork-based knowledge should not be a novelty or a woolly appendix to the 'solid' museum database. Rather than sitting somewhere beyond the museum, it should contribute to rethinking past classificatory frameworks, help to rebuild the existing structures of museum knowledge as well as facilitate new ways of presenting 'things' to their future audiences.

## **APPENDIX: Potters: semi-structured interview questions (English version)**

In the Horniman Museum, where I write my doctorate for, we have objects made in ... I would like to ask some questions about the objects, history of ceramics in ... and the techniques.

1. Objects were collected by (name of the museum and collector) Do you remember anything about this event?
2. Did (name) often donate pieces to the museums?
3. In the 1950s, when they were collected, Romania had a new government. In what ways, do you think, did communism change the work of potters in...
4. In Poland, under communism, crafts were often made in cooperatives. Was also a UCECOM in operation in (name of the pottery centre) ?
5. Did the collectivisation of the countryside have an effect on pottery?
6. Did it change the work of potters?
7. Do institutions (houses of culture, museums, folklore events) have a positive or negative effect on the work of potters?
8. These are the objects (images shown) they were collected in (year) - what type of objects are they?
9. Do you make similar pieces to these?
10. (Name of the pottery centre) is renowned for (style) Do you make all these types?
11. These are historical styles, can you tell me something about them?
12. Which of them do you make the most and why?
13. Was there a typical style of (name of the centre)?
14. Do you work on your own or with other people?
15. When in the museum or city markets, what do people usually look for?
16. What do you think ceramics was after the war compared to what it is now?
17. How did you become a potter?
18. When did you learn?
19. How long did it take?



20. Did you consider other occupations?
21. Did you work only with (name) or other members of family or the village?
22. Are there different techniques, styles used by you compared to...?
23. Where was the *atelier*?
24. What was this building before?
25. Why do you work here? Why did you choose this location?
26. Do you teach people to become potters?
27. Who can be a potter?
28. Is it important to learn in the family?
29. What is the most important/most difficult to learn?
30. How do you teach?
31. Do many people choose this occupation?
32. Do you often donate/sell objects to museums?
33. What do you think a potter is – a popular artist or craftsman?
34. Is the artistic side of the work important in everyday life?
35. Do potters now have organisations, communicate across regions?
36. In the Horniman Museum, we are planning to make an exhibition based on the Romanian collection for English visitors. What story do you think should the museum tell about pottery and potters?

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