

# **The Importance of Local Art in the Construction of Diverse World Narratives**

A thesis presented

by

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## ABSTRACT

Humans are social beings, whom come together in societies and produce collective constructions of meaning. These societies, will be equally marked by the construction of the ‘self’ as its relationship with others. Thus, globalization has existed since the first exchanges between multiple cultural groups. However, over the past twenty years with the appearance of internet and fast communication the world has acquired a great opportunity in which faster interactions and interconnectivity have influenced both the local and the global dialogue. This interconnectivity brings the opportunity to give visibility to multiple narratives, and, gives us the occasion to address how world stories have been constructed and how we can enhance a world dialogue based on the diversity of its participants. It is in this quest of the articulation of multiple narratives that this thesis discusses local art as the visualization of a local discourse, and explores its challenges when confronted with a fast moving narrative. It is in this tension of defining the self and being part of a bigger dialogue that my thesis question is

*How is local art being used to claim a place in a globalized context?*

In order to answer this question, I will build a theory that frames how the world narrative and dialogue has been constructed from a scholarly perspective and, what are the elements that will build on a society. Secondly, I will contrast this perspective with three examples, which are Japan, Mexico and Romania in order to test how the theory applies to concrete constructions of social narratives, and how, through art local people relate to their story whilst also claiming a place in a world discourse.

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## INTRODUCTION

When we keep silent we die, without word we do not exist. We fight to speak against being forgotten, against death, for memory and for life. We fight for the fear of dying the death of being forgotten...we need a new world. A world that can behold many worlds, a world that can behold all the worlds.-Sub-Comandante Marcos.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote, spoken by Sub-Comandante Marcos in 1996, can be understood as a claim for Mexican indigenous communities to participate in the national construction of a local narrative.<sup>2</sup> Dissecting this phrase reveals three relevant perspectives; Firstly, the voice becomes a medium to claim a space, to tell a story and to not be forgotten. Secondly, we see a struggle in which the right to a voice is not being fulfilled. Thirdly, it is a phrase of reconciliation. That is, beyond the struggle of having a voice that seems to be lost, it promotes a world in which there can be multiple voices, “a world that can behold all the worlds.”<sup>3</sup>

Sub-Comandante Marcos’ claim can be contextualized by the Mexican indigenous communities’ claim for recognition from the Mexican government and a society to which they belong. This thesis argues that Marcos’ claim is not unique to indigenous communities. Rather, it

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<sup>1</sup> Paris Alejandro Salazar Rodriguez, “20 frases del Subcomandante Marcos,” *Chilango*, (2014), accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.chilango.com/cultura/20-frases-del-subcomandante-marcos/>

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Cattaruzza, “Por una modernidad Donde quepan muchos mundos”. accessec June8, 2018 [http://www.globalproject.info/public/resources/pdf/Por\\_una\\_modernidad\\_donde\\_quepan\\_muchos\\_mundos\\_Giovan\\_ni\\_Cattaruzza\(2\).pdf](http://www.globalproject.info/public/resources/pdf/Por_una_modernidad_donde_quepan_muchos_mundos_Giovan_ni_Cattaruzza(2).pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Salazar Rodriguez, “20 frases del Subcomandante Marcos”, *Chilango*.

is a constant struggle encountered at the local level of contemporary globalized societies as local narratives are forced to find their voice in the context of shared world narratives.

In order to deconstruct the complex issue of giving a voice to locals, I will begin by establishing how we can understand the global construction of narratives. As discussed by Habibul Haque Khondker, globalization is a new concept; nonetheless, the origin of globalization as a practice cannot be traced as it is based on the dissemination of culture, ideas, and interactions of people from different cultural groups.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the global is built upon the integration of numerous locals, and this symbiotic relationship is captured in the term “glocal”. Mikel Elcessor agrees with Khondker and argues that “glocalization” is the culture of cultures, in which, the story of humans is also the story of human interactions. Therefore, he agrees that globalization has existed since the beginning of human societies. However, he adds that over the last twenty years we have seen an acceleration of how the exchanges of cultures become faster and dynamic. Thus, it is by this exchange of interactions that Elcessor adds that the importance of having a diverse world narrative is based on the visibility and viability of local narratives in order to create sustainable world dialogue in which a complex discourse is based on multiple and diverse voices.<sup>5</sup>

This integration of locals into world narratives brings both challenges and benefits. On the one hand, there exists anxiety over a loss of authenticity: being part of a global narrative raises the concern about homogenization of culture and the emergence of a single globe discourse. On the other hand, Khondker argues that globalization is based on diversity as opposed to

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<sup>4</sup> Habibul Haque Khondker, “Glocalization as globalization: Evolution of a sociological concept.” *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2004): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Mikel Elcessor, “How do cultural institutions balance being global and local?,” *Salzburg Global Seminar*. Last accessed July 8, 2018. <https://www.salzburgglobal.org/news/latest-news/article/glocal-what-is-global-and-what-is-local-in-todays-world.html>

homogenization. He argues that there are five elements, which are key to the concept of glocalization:

1. Diversity is the essence of life.
2. Globalization does not erase *all* the differences.
3. Autonomy of history and culture give a sense of uniqueness to the experience of the group of people whether we define them as cultures, societies, or nations.
4. Glocalization is the notion that removes the fear from many that globalization is like a tidal wave erasing all difference.
5. Glocalization does not promise a world free from conflicts and tensions but a more historically grounded understanding of the complicated-yet pragmatic view of the world.<sup>6</sup>

In Khondker's view, then, the key to diversity within globalization is in the unique local cultural narratives.<sup>7</sup> This means there is a constant exchange between global dialogue and local cultures. Therefore, there is a need to understand how these exchanges will be forged and how the locals will construct and position their narratives in the building of a diverse world dialogue. As a result, I claim that we encounter three questions when exploring the dynamic of local narratives in global societies: 1) What is the story? 2) Who writes the story? 3) Can the story be changed?

These questions are important as they will help us discuss the role of local narratives within global constructions. The first question addresses the past. The cultural narrative, the story with which a society will identify with. This story can be seen from two perspectives. One perspective takes the view from the local group; this is the story that locals have about themselves. Contrastingly, framed in a global context this story will have different interpretations, in which we can find the expectations regarding a specific cultural group and the position it will play in contrast with other narratives.

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<sup>6</sup> Khondker, "Glocalization as globalization", 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 9.

This exchange between the local narrative and the expectations brings us to the second question: “who writes the story?” In this question, the story can have different narratives depending on whether it is seen from a local perspective or from an external perspective. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the position of the story from a glocal perspective in which we can investigate the interaction between the inner selves and the global dialogue when constructing a shared discourse.

Finally, this brings us to our final question, “can the story be changed?” This question is relevant in the construction of a world narrative, as it poses the challenge of giving agency to modify the dynamics between cultural groups. From a local perspective, it is relevant because it asserts who has the capability of modifying the narrative and how much agency locals have in the construction of their story. From a global perspective, it allows us to see world diversity from multiple positions, thus, it allows us to see narratives as dynamic processes and not as static or finished stories, through its capability to constantly reinvent itself.

These questions are significant, as they will help us to assess how locals confront their own storyline and how they can find their place in a globalized world. Therefore, I argue that by looking into local cultural narratives we can explore how we can have a more diverse and inclusive dialogue within a common global narrative.

This thesis, then, will focus on: 1) how local narratives are constructed; 2) The agency that locals have in the construction and modification of their specific narrative; and, 3) the role they play when addressing a shared world story.

In order to address these three points I will look into the construction and position of local arts within societies. The reason to look into art is that art is firstly a way to understand the world; therefore, it allow us to bring abstract concepts, in this case the narrative, into a material dimension. Secondly, I argue that the use and place that each society gives to their local art will give us clues to understand how they value their sense of self and how they position these art forms as a representation of their society in a world dialogue. Finally, because art can critique society; as argued by Ellecessor, art is the materialization of ideologies and abstract concepts, thus, has the potential to challenge power relations, and, it is also sensitive to social challenges in this way.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, ultimately, my research question is

*How is local art being used by locals to claim a place in a globalized context?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to answer the question on:

*How is local art being used by locals to claim a place in a globalized context?*

I will divide this thesis in two sections: the theoretical framework and examples.

The theoretical framework will be a literature review about how narratives are constructed in which I will mainly discuss the works of Stuart Hall, Ulf Hannerz, Ralph Grillo, Gennifer Weisenfeld and Eleonora Belfiore. By referring to these authors, I will address the construction of the storyline from three perspectives.

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<sup>8</sup> Mikel Ellecessor, “How do cultural institutions balance being global and local?,”



1) The Narrative: the use of the narrative as an abstract concept, and how an idealized understanding of what is expected from a cultural form can influence the construction of societies.

2) The Narrative as an Applied Form: the necessity for the narrative to transition from an idealization into an applied practice. That is that how to address the need of a narrative, in the development of an organized system, and its relation with institutions in order to further develop a society.

3) The Narrative as an Art Object: the art practice as the materialization of a cultural narrative. Art's position and value affects how the society will grow and how it will be reflected in its aesthetic values. Additionally, what is the agency that locals have in discussing these art forms and what will be its position to claim a place in a world dialogue.

In the second part, I will use three examples to contrast with the theory. My aim with this exercise is to draw a contrast on how the story has been written, and, how with actions, societies are claiming a space to own their narratives. In order make this contrast; I will base the second part of the thesis on an auto-ethnography experiment in the analysis of three examples, which will be Japan, Mexico and Romania.

With the auto-ethnography experimentation process, I will see each case from a different perspective with different degrees of separation, in which I will take the position of an outsider, a local and a tourist. These different approaches will create a bias on how I am reading the story; however, this bias is part of the process because when constructing and reading different cultural narratives, this bias is unavoidable given our own perceptions and context. Therefore, it allow us

to see that a same story can be open to multiple interpretations. The examples will be shown as it follows.

4) Japan: I will be the outsider, as I have never been there I have no connection to the place and will only rely on second hand source material, therefore I will read this narrative from afar.

5) Mexico: I will be the local. Since I was born and raised in Mexico, I cannot separate my own personal experience, perception and emotions regarding its narrative.

6) Romania: I will be the tourist. As I have been there I have had the opportunity to briefly share the narrative, nonetheless, since I am not affected by it my reading is with more distance than the one that a local would have.

Additional criteria that I use when selecting the cases were; 1) they are from different continents, therefore, they do not have a direct influence between each other; 2) the three are non-western countries, which, as I argue, will also influence how they approach the quest to find a place in a globalized world. 3) Mexico and Japan have highly distinctive and recognizable art forms; however, I chose Romania as my rupture case because one of the main claims of this thesis is that there are different ways to read cultural narratives. Thus, I will look into how Romania is using its art forms beyond the reproduction of a specific aesthetic or continuum process from the past. Instead, the Romanian example shows how art can also be a medium for social reinvention.

It is important to point out that the three cases are not comparable between each other. This thesis is not trying to prescribe a methodology on how countries should address their local

constructions of meaning, but to show in different cases how the global and the local influence each other and how they come together in world dialogue.

Additionally, as I am only presenting three examples, I am not conducting a deep cultural analysis on any of the cases. The intention of this thesis is to study the specific *use* of art in different contexts in which my aim is to look into participation through cultural narratives and art. However, it is important to point out that societies are complex constructions in which, although art plays an important role, it is only one of the many components that will determine the behavior of a cultural group.

## PART 1. THEORY

### 1. THE NARRATIVE

Narratives are a very powerful tool, on a very basic level they tell us about the world and how it works. They also help us to learn about ourselves. They help us discover and understand who we are, where we come from, to where we belong. They forge our identity, and they position us in the world, they give us a space to imagine, they give us clues, and they shape our perspectives.<sup>9</sup>

As discussed by Ibrahim Nehme, narratives are intangible, are imagined and are abstract concepts; however, they are relevant as they guide us to make sense of the world. Furthermore, they provide people with a position and allies in the construction of an interaction with others. Thus, a narrative is not just about the perception that we have about ourselves but will also be based on the contrast with other societies, and how we will build on our relations to have a global storyline found in the construction of multiple smaller stories.

These are strong remarks; they make us question whether a narrative can indeed define us, and if so, what is the agency we have on modifying the story. Moreover, what is the position of the narrative when contrasted with others and how will different narratives construct a world discourse. Within the contrast between defining the self and the interactions with others, is that is relevant to discuss, who writes the story? What is the story? And, can the story be changed? Through the quest of answering these questions, I argue that it is relevant to discuss the basis for

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<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Nehme, "We are the heroes of our own stories". *TEDxBangalore2014*. Last accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f05-KBsy3lY&t=108s>

constructing shared cultural narratives. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the bases of how can we understand the integration of multiple narratives and their inclusion in a world dialogue.

Stuart Hall writes, “cultural identity is defined by a system of shared meaning, which people who belong to the same community, group or nation use to help them interpret the world.”<sup>10</sup> Hall adds, that the shared construction of meaning is the element that will make us delimit the "us" and the "them". This means, there is a demarcation of the characteristics and values that a specific group has concerning others and, as a result, built in their own and particular perspective to understand the world and construct their cultural discourse. Thus, a culture will become a share construction of meaning that within a shared perspective finds a way to be distinctive in relation to other cultural groups.

In contrast, Ralph Grillo argues that identity is not bound to a national context or territory, nor a set boundary in a globalized world.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, according to Grillo, we cannot understand cultural identity as a closed system. In this way, a significant part of cultural identities will be based on the influence, contact, and contrast with other cultures<sup>12</sup>. As a result, when having multiple narratives, there are various interpretations in which the same story can be seen from different perspectives. Therefore, there is a difference between constructing a narrative form a local view and also being part of a world narrative. Through this balance, we may discuss, who is writing the story?

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, “New Cultures for Old”, in *A Place in the world?* , Ed. Doreen Massey and Pete Jess (New York, USA: Oxford University, 1995), 176.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph David Grillo, “Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety,” *Anthropological Theory*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 158.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

Khondker refers to sociology as the scientific study of societies.<sup>13</sup> He emphasizes the term ‘scientific’ as he argues that like any other science, sociology is trying to make sense of processes in the pursuit of finding methodologies, in which its quest is to organize micro-contexts and macro contexts, local narratives and global narratives.<sup>14</sup> As he argues, sociology has claimed the space of making sense of how the story is constructed. However, this carries a significant challenge, because by drawing a method for reading a cultural narrative, it frames the construction of the narrative with standpoints that might not be relevant or accurate for different social contexts.<sup>15</sup> Hall shares Khondker’s perspective and argues that sociology makes sense of history, events, narratives, and positions in the pursuit of finding a common storyline<sup>16</sup>. In addition, Hall argues that western perspectives have marked the construction of the narratives<sup>17</sup>, that is that an idea of lifestyle priorities, education, values, and economics have been based on a European idealization of aspirations for development<sup>18</sup>. Thus, this lens, a ‘base’ to understand the ideals for culture building advances a single view on how the story has been written<sup>19</sup>.

Eleonora Belfiore explains how western anthropologists wrote the notion of cultures outside westernization by trying to explain something that was unfamiliar by a familiar point of

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<sup>13</sup> Khondker, “Glocalization as globalization”, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies”, in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 261

<sup>17</sup> Hall, “New Cultures for Old”, 190.

<sup>18</sup> “What is Westernization,” *IGI Global Disseminator of Knowledge*, accessed July 04, 2018. <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/combating-the-gimme-more-mindset-in-modern-classrooms/51534>

<sup>19</sup> Hall, “New Cultures for Old”, 190.

view.<sup>20</sup> As a result, culture writing was approached from an otherness perspective<sup>21</sup> as it did not take into consideration local voices in the conceptualization of the idea that was formed around them. According to Ralph Grillo, this perspective on culture writing affected how different cultures were perceived as it brought to the table a notion of “high and low culture”<sup>22</sup>. What had a high cultural value was defined by western civilizations and was marked as an ideal for development. On the other hand, societies outside this parameter were perceived as primitive and underdeveloped which endorse power relations in the construction of the narrative and the position that each local storyline would play when shared in a global context. This power relation could be seen in a homogenization on the global narrative which is problematic, as it enforces a binary understanding of culture in which there are just two possible outcomes, “like us” and “not like us”: western and not western.

As Grillo argues, these binary categorizations enhanced cultural essentialisms. Cultural essentialism as Grillo defines them, are stereotypes based on the selection of specific characteristics and characteristics of a cultural form.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it presents the problem with a single narrative in which the simplification of culture prevents the discernment of cultures as

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<sup>20</sup> Elenora Belfiore and Olivier Bennett, *The Social Impact of Art: An Intellectual History*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 32-39.

<sup>21</sup> The definition of otherness that I will use is the one given by Jean François Staszak. In which otherness is defined as “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us”, the self) constructs one or many dominated out groups (“Them”, other) by stigmatizing a difference –real or imagined- presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. Jean François Staszaks, “Other/Otherness” *Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Elvesor, 2008) <http://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/geo/files/3214/4464/7634/OtherOtherness.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Grillo, “Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety”, 159

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

complex constructions of meaning. Instead, it addresses them by the selection of specific elements only.

Bringing together Belfiore's perspective regarding anthropologist writing the story, and Grillo's view on how this has exacerbated the selection of essential values, we are faced with two significant challenges: the uni-dimensional writing and the single interpretation. In Belfiore's perspective, we can see the single writing as it discusses the problem of having a single figure writing the story, which will enforce a sole perspective, and set parameters in the story writing, which will set a fix position of aspirations toward a culture form should aspire. Thus, the single writing is problematic as it neglects the consideration of multiple local voices in the construction of narrative. In parallel, this lack of voices, as Grillo argues, shapes single reading, which promotes the oversimplification of culture and address its properties and content from an essentialist perspective and not for their whole complexity.

Artist Nyornuwofia Agrosor and writer Chimamanda Adichie addresses the effects of the single writing and the single reading. In the case of Agrasor, she argues that in the case of Ghana what has been taught in schools about her culture is taught from an outside perspective as education and culture aspirations were based in western ideas of what is expected from a cultural form. Therefore, she argues that, "when the story that is being constructed about you is not about you it is problematic"<sup>24</sup>. What Agrosor implies in this phrase, is that, as the conception regarding her culture was built by an outsider, there was a misconnection in which the aspirations of the narrative were built out of the local culture, thus, her local narrative was built upon an otherness perspective. In order to contest this view, she argues that there is a need to claim back the right to tell her story

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<sup>24</sup> Nyornuwotia Agrosor, *Residente*, Directed by René Pérez Joglar, 2017.



and have a voice in the selection of the standards upon which her local narrative will be built. Adichie agrees with Agrasor and claims that the challenge relies upon how we read the story and where we find value. Adichie claims, that it is in giving visibility and having multiple voices on how to read a story that we can contest the cultural essentialisms, or as she defines them, the single narratives.<sup>25</sup> Thus, taking ownership of your discourse will help to challenge power relations and understand culture for its full complexity. Furthermore, it will also have an influence on how different narratives are read, as it will shape how a story can be discussed beyond a single standpoint.

Past narrative constructions still play a role in culture-construction nonetheless. With the interconnectivity brought by globalization, we have seen a paradigm-shift in the storytelling process. The access to media, internet, and communications have facilitated the multi-dimensional story writing process, such that it is no longer written by a specific western explorer. Instead, we can find more diverse narratives, thus we can address culture building from multiple perspectives. I argue that this claim by locals to the right to tell their story has been constant in the construction of global narratives. Increased visibility in recent years has enabled this paradigm shift, this, has allowed to have more voices in the construction of world dialogues which has allowed to see culture building as a complex, fast and dynamic process.

Thus, Ulf Hannerez writes that culture can no longer be simplified to be defined by been western or non-western, as this categorization does not take into account the diversity that might

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<sup>25</sup> Chimamanda N. Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story" *TEDGlobal 2009*. Last accessed: June 28, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg&t=28s>

be found in these two categories<sup>26</sup>. Also, he adds, culture building can no longer be understood as the confrontation of contrasting binary positions but acknowledge there is a claim to understand culture as a complex process in which we approach globalization from a constructive perspective of organized diversity in which each culture is given agency to re-tell and re-write their own story. Thus, it is by having a wider perspective on how we understand culture building that we can contest cultural essentialisms and single narratives.

Through this perspective, Gennifer Wesienfeld writes that, we are at a crucial moment in which we can rethink how culture building is carried out in which different societies can find their own way of been contemporary according to their own cultural conception<sup>27</sup>. Wesienfeld perspective supports Hannerez remark in which it is in the change of view that we can understand culture as not the opposition of binary concepts of being western or nonwestern but as an inclusive form of organized diversity.

The importance of making a shift regarding how we read cultural narratives is significant as narratives will be the starting point to build our societies. As discussed by Addichie and Agrossor, global and local narratives will influence each other. On a local level, the claim demands the right to write their own story, to not be defined by an outside perspective and to contest cultural essentialisms. On a global level, we see the claim of a position on how a culture will be perceived when brought together with other cultural narratives. This claim calls for a more diverse

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<sup>26</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. (Chivhester: Columbia University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Reinscribing Tradition in a Transnational Art World," *Transcultural Studies*, no 1 (2010), <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/transcultural/article/view/6175/1766>

perspective on how we are reading the story and opens the possibility to understand the story from multiple viewpoints. Moreover, this shift is relevant as it allow us to see cultural narratives as dynamic process in which we see the story as something that influences us but is also is constantly reinvented. This raises the question: are we defined by our narratives? Can we change the story?

Ibrahim Nehme clearly explains how the global and the local influence each other in the construction of a society and the dangers of being defined by a strict perception of the narratives. As he explains, the Arab world is a place of impossibilities, in which the narrative has been marked by the idealization of restrictions and a static fix ideology set on a discourse of defeat. He argues that these narratives of impossibilities goes into our subconscious and that has an influence on how Arabs perceive themselves, their narratives and their position regarding the rest of the world. Nonetheless, he argues that things are changing, there is a new generation fighting against this narrative of impossibilities and to not be defined by the past. Therefore, as he explains, all these actions are changing the Arab world and constructing a “better story”, which will enable to have a better future and challenge current social constructions.<sup>28</sup>

By Nehme’s perspective, we can see that narratives are constantly changing, and that there is a tension between what the narrative is, and the need to see narratives as dynamic process. This is highlighted by looking into the actions that are being carried out in society that lead to its constant reinvention. Thus, in order to have a change of perception, Nehme discusses the following three steps.

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<sup>28</sup> Nehme, “We are the heroes of our own stories.”

Firstly, we have to be aware of the narrative. In the case of Nehme, being aware is not necessarily agreeing with the narrative, but it does give a starting point, to know which characteristics of the story (that has been told about them) that participants agree with or not.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, he argues the need to document what is happening. The narrative gives a starting point, but by looking into what is happening in the *present* we can assess what is changing in society, and how the narrative is being changed by the actions carried out by the community.<sup>30</sup>

Thirdly, write a *better story*. Nehme described writing a better story as one that assesses how the actions will integrate to the narrative, therefore creating a new storyline that is no longer defined by the past but that can also acknowledge the changes that are happening in the society. Thus, through the actions acquire ownership of the narrative and conceive the narrative as a constantly evolving process.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude, in this chapter we discussed the narrative as an abstract concept in which a culture is both defined by its own construction of meaning, the perceptions others have about it and the position it plays in world narratives. Thus, this chapter aims to create a starting point for *who* has been writing the story, *how* the story has been written and to initiate a question for the following chapters: *can the story be changed?* To answer this question, this chapter has presented key propositions that the second part of this thesis will draw on.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Firstly, reading a cultural narrative is a matter of positionality. This means that the story will be perceived in different ways by a local and by an outsider. Therefore, the narrative will change according to the audience. Nonetheless, it is essential to discuss what are the values upon which the narrative is framed. From an essentialist perspective, it might be framed in terms of expectations and essential values (Grillo), but in a quest to find one's own voice. Or, if the narrative is underpinned by an understanding of culture as a complex process with multiple influences (Agrasor and Adichie).

Secondly, we have to acknowledge the role of westernization as an idealized model for development and the context upon which culture writing has been carried out. However, there is also a tendency to break the barrier in which each nation can find its own narrative finding value in its local perspective. This perspective opens the possibility of having a more open scope for the expectations regarding a cultural form. Moreover, on a global level, this shift will eventually build a more diverse world narrative as it enables us to understand culture as a complex process without fixed ideas of where the value of the story relies upon. On a local level, taking ownership of the story will also make locals question their culture and the part they play in their society, and, as discussed by Weisenfeld, find within their story their own way of being contemporary

How can a nation find its own way of being contemporary? I argue that in order to find this answer, we have to look into how the local narrative is constructed and how, by its perception of self and the place it gives to its narrative within its society is that we can find a new perspective on how we can redefine the relationship between the local and the global.

## 2. THE NARRATIVE AS AN APPLIED FORM

In a world with extensive interconnectivity, is it still relevant to make a differentiation of culture or identity defined by physical space and borders? As discussed by Grillo in the previous chapter, a culture or an identity can no longer be defined by being constrained by borders; however, that does not mean that narratives do not have to find different ways to coexist with each other. It is in this need of organization that we can discuss what is the role of narratives in contemporary societies, as they have to collaborate with social structures and institutions in order to develop in an organized world. It is in this need of organizing narratives that it is relevant to discuss the functions of a narrative within a society; whether it is by an abstract approach in which a narrative is used as a way to understand the world, or whether it is used as a form of social organization. Thus, it is within the narrative being a shared construction of meaning or a form of organization that it is relevant to discuss the difference between nation and nation-state. A nation is a “group of people who feel bound by a common language, culture, religion, history, or ethnicity”<sup>32</sup>, a “nation-state” occurs when “a nation and a state largely coincide”<sup>33</sup>. In simpler words, a nation occurs when there exists recognition of shared identity, and a nation-state is what we will define as a country, which implies a pragmatic and functional approach of organization.

This differentiation is significant, as on the one hand, the nation is built upon a shared construction of meaning but is not bound by a territory or borders. Therefore, the cultural narrative can be shared beyond the borders of a country. Examples of this would be the Arab World or Latin

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<sup>32</sup> “Nation,” *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed May 29, 2018.  
<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/art/education/definitions>.

<sup>33</sup> “Nation State,” *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed May 29, 2018.  
<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/art/education/definitions>.

America in which it is by recognition of a shared identity that a nation can be built, but that is not restricted by constitutional boundaries. On the other hand, the nation-state as it is a country, will position the need of organization for the people bound to their territory. That is that in a nation-state there might not be necessarily a uniform shared construction of meaning, but there is a responsibility towards its inhabitants in a more practical way. The responsibilities of the nation-state are along the lines of providing safety, rights, participation, a passport, among many other benefits as a form of recognition to the members of its community. Thus, the relevance of discussing a national identity will be how to position the narrative, which is an intangible concept, within a practical and functional approach of a society.

Understanding the nation-state as a form of organization and not as a shared construction of meaning, allow us to question whether it is relevant to place a common narrative in the construction of the organization of society. Mikaela Bilström argues, that national identities, as a social process are produced, reproduced and transformed discursively. Furthermore, national identity consists of a shared characteristics and identities within a group that will allow a society to limit its boundaries and will make a demarcation of unity, constructing an "us" to achieve their collective goals<sup>34</sup>. In other words, Bilström argues that in fact, there is a need to create a sense of belonging and identification within a nation state, as there is a need to find common ground in the pursuit of building an organized system and achieve specific goals within a society. It is in the need of finding traits of identification in order to achieve a purpose that a narrative goes beyond a shared story but that it also acquires a utilitarian purpose. In order to understand the functional

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<sup>34</sup>Mikaela Billström, 2008. Nationalism and National Identity in Romania. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai.Philologia*. 30.

approach of the narrative, it is relevant to discuss Hylland Eriksen's, perspective on the need for the narrative to create a common myth.

In the previous chapter, we discuss the need for a common narrative from Nehme's perspective in which we discussed the narrative as a way to make sense of the world. However, Eriksen adds, that the need of the narrative, as myth, is beyond a common story and argues that it is also tied to a quest for a moral structure of the world. Therefore, creating order in a chaotic environment will legitimize a society; this responds to the need for continuity in times of great change, thus national myths are presenting the birth of the nation and its history as a "development cycle".<sup>35</sup> It is by this development cycle that the myth is built upon a common past that will serve as a base to build identity into the present and the future.

Through Bilström's and Eriksen's perspective the narrative will be not just an abstract concept or an idealization, but it will also translate into actions, a way of being, and what is expected of a society. This has two main goals. Firstly, the narrative will try to find common traits in a society in order to determine common aspirations as a group and build on a sense of belonging in order to evolve as a society. Secondly, they will seek to create a moral structure, which will translate to common values and expectations of behavior. Thus, it is in this quest to turn a common narrative into actions that it is relevant to discuss the role of the traditions.

Traditions, as discussed by Eric Hobsbawm are a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual and symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid, 31.



values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity.”<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, Hobsbawm adds, that a “tradition is an idealization of a continuum process”<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, when constructing the tradition, the construction will be based on the selection of concepts that a society chooses to save, and to identify with when constructing its narrative. Hobsbawm adds that traditions will also carry on values of authenticity and purity<sup>38</sup>; thus, I argue that traditions can be discussed as the essence of the local as they will be the actions or imagine narrative with which people will identify that will make them unique in contrast with the other cultures.

Contrastingly, as discussed by Unni Wikan we cannot have a notion that culture is static, fixed, objective, consensual and uniformly shared by all members of a group.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, being part of a cultural group will not mean that every member shares the same perception regarding their own local narrative. Consequently, the challenge of constructing a society will largely rely on the relation that the society has towards its narrative.

In short, when bringing together Bilström’s, Eriksen’s and Hobsbawm’s perspectives, we can find three specific purposes of using the narrative as an applied form. Firstly, Bilström argues the society’s need to find common traits of identity in order to achieve common goals. Secondly, Eriksen refers to the narrative as having a common past, creating a moral structure, identity and thus expectations for the members of a society to conform to. Finally, Hobsbawm adds that the tradition goes beyond an abstract concept and becomes a way of being and doing, in which

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<sup>36</sup> Eric Hobsbawm And Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Grillo, “Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety”, 158

traditions will turn the narrative into an action. Nevertheless, as discussed by Wikan these trades are not uniformly shared, and it is when the same narrative can be open for multiple interpretations and opens the possibility to discuss the role that a narrative plays in a society. These theories raise the question: what relationship do societies have with their cultural narrative? Is this narrative static? Is it being seen from afar as an idealized history and way of being? Or, on the other hand, is society using its narrative as a stepping-stone to further develop their culture? Through this perspective, Hannerz discusses the dynamic process of constructing a society by presenting two ends in culture building: the mind, and the public form.

As explained by Hannerz, the mind is constructed upon a well thought idea of what are the philosophies that a culture should follow, the idealization of the myth; what are the values that will be shared, what will consciously bring us together to one another and what is expected from the participants of a society.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the mind will be built upon the aspirations towards a society should thrive and aspire. It is through this perspective that the mind intends to give a parameter of "who we are" and "whom do we want to be." Furthermore, Hannerz argues that the mind is also associated with social structures and with elite groups.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the mind goes beyond the construction of a philosophy or an idea of culture and is also shown in the creation of institutions within society.

Contrastingly, the public form is how, through action and critique, a society will react to the mind. Thus, the public form is a more dynamic process and will make the narrative reinvent

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<sup>40</sup> Hannerz, "Cultural Complexity," 7-15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-15.

itself to construct a storyline with which local people can identify –or not- with the perspectives given by the mind.

The mind and the public form are constantly challenging each other, and it is in their integration and tensions that the cultural narrative will be built upon. Therefore, the narrative can be positioned in the center, in which the mind will give a starting point to build the identity and will also give a parameter of behavior and aspirations that a society can choose to follow, or challenge by the actions done by the public form. This highlights the role of local narrative in society, the flexibility of this narrative and questions who has agency to modify it.

The narrative's flexibility is marked by the role that the tradition has as the essence of the local. The flexibility of the narrative is marked by the negotiation between the tradition and the cultural narrative on how strict is the preservation of the local, its essential values and as a dynamic process. Therefore, the narrative can be seen from two perspectives; 1) as an idealization; 2) as an everyday practice.

When addressing a narrative as an idealization, Hobsbawm discusses the preservation and invention of traditions. Hobsbawm claims that traditions although being constructed by idealizations, are constantly changing and reinterpreted by societies. Nonetheless, he adds that in some cases there might be a quest to save the tradition and to make the idealization stronger. It is in this quest of preservation that we have to question what is the purpose of the reinforcement of common ideology and way of being set in the past. This is important to question, because this ideology might not necessarily be accurate to the dynamic process carried in the present and the aspirations to construct the future.

Contrastingly, Gennifer Wesienfeld argues that a tradition should not be interpreted as the opposite of contemporary or marked as a rupture, but as a form of continuum process in the present.<sup>42</sup> In Wesinfeld's perspective, the value of the tradition lies in its capacity to provide a starting point to integrate the narrative with the present and to be a stepping-stone into the future. Therefore, by Weisenfeld perspective, the tradition should be part of the local narrative and not a parallel, idealized construction.

The tension between the invention of the tradition and the use of the tradition as the base to further build a society manifests as an ownership dilemma. When the tradition or the perception of self, is static, it is owned by the mind in the form of fixed aspirations that are not congruent to its society, therefore, the cultural narrative will be based upon an idealization. Contrastingly, when the public form owns the tradition, it will be a dynamic process in which the narrative is constantly evolving along its society. Bringing these two concepts together, raises a discussion regarding the position and the purpose of promoting flexibility and ownership within society. By having a strong sense of self, as Weisenfeld argues, a community can reinvent itself and use its narrative to speak out against social structures and therefore find value in their sense of self in order to address their story and find their position within a world dialogue.

To conclude, in chapter one the narrative was discussed as a shared construction of meaning. However, when part of society, the narrative acquires not just a discursive approach but also a functional purpose. Therefore, we have two ways of addressing a cultural narrative. The first regards narrative an abstract concept and a shared construction of meaning. The second approaches narratives from a nation-state perspective, that as it is marked by boundaries whilst

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<sup>42</sup>Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Reinscribing Tradition in a Transnational Art World"

containing multiple cultural narratives within its borders. Nonetheless, it still needs to find common ground in order to function as a society and an organization system in the articulation of multiple voices.

Having the narrative within an organization system enables the society to have agency over the way the narrative is addressed, shared, organized and the place it plays within a system. Nonetheless, understanding society as a system will not mean that all its members will equally share the construction of meaning and the perception of the position that the narrative has within the society.

Through this alternative conception of how narratives are constructed, we find two perspectives. The mind, which will be represented by an idea of aspirations and institutions towards which a society will ideally aspire. And, contrastingly, the public form that will be how local people relate to the idealization of the narrative. Societies need these two ends; however, they will not always agree. As discussed by Hobsbawm, in the invention of the tradition we can see a tension in which there might be the need to impose a narrative that is no longer accurate to the society that is addressing. Therefore, this invention of the tradition might raise conflict in which, within an over-idealized narrative there might be a disconnect between the idealization of the culture, and the everyday actions performed in societies.

Therefore, the narrative provides a starting point to explore what society is. Moreover, the integration of multiple perspectives and seeing the narrative as an idealization and as a practice is that it comes a significant question, where is the value of the narrative? This question will be individually answered by each local entity in the construction of the position that they will give to their narrative as an applied form within its society.

It is by this challenge that ideally a nation-state should articulate the opportunities for each local narrative to develop in its own way, moreover, how can the organization become part of the narrative? Is it a system that is open for questioning? Or, on the other hand, does trying to enforce a fixed ideology, will promote the loss of the flexibility of the narrative to reinvent itself? Thus, I argue that there has to be a middle point between an over-idealized narrative that is an unreachable construction of meaning and continuation of a story and a practice. However, there is also a risk in which when being to practical, could it be that the narrative loses its power of imagine what yet does not exist in the material world?

### 3. THE NARRATIVE AS AN ART OBJECT

Through time, art has had multiple interpretations. In an early stage, Nicolas Bourriaud argues that art was a way of giving meaning and explaining life, therefore, art became the element that would bring the narrative and its interpretation into a visual form, in which, it would transform a concept into a physical representation and transcend the imaginary universe into the tangible, material world.<sup>43</sup> Contrastingly, he adds, later on, art became a way to understand the relationship between men. Therefore, it changed from being a way to understand life into a way to understand human relations and give meaning to societies and its interactions<sup>44</sup>. Through these perspectives, we can see that art has both functions of constructing and questioning society; therefore, we must ask, what is recognized as art? Who can produce it? And, what is its position within its societies? It is by discussing these questions that we can investigate the role that art plays in its society, and explore how local people address their narrative and construct their societies. Thus, in order to address these questions, we will discuss art from three perspectives. Firstly, the accessibility to the art world. Secondly, art as a global circuit. Finally, the role of local art plays in contemporary societies.

Firstly, we will begin by discussing the social function of art. Art can operate under its own set of rules; as discussed by Adorno, art will be the element that can be inside and outside society.<sup>45</sup> That is that, while it addresses social issues, it can also do it from a liminal space of possibilities

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<sup>43</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les presses du reel, 2002), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Lambert Zuidervaart, "The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48, no. 1 (1997): 64–65

in which it can make impactful inquisitions into society that no other field can do. Claire Bishop agrees with Adorno that art is independent of societies. As Bishop claims, it is in art's state of autonomy that it enables the exploration of possibilities as utopias, and the construction, not just the imagination, of the cultural narrative, shaping the aspirations of a society into a physical world.<sup>46</sup>

Adorno and Bishop place enormous value on art being autonomous from societies and discuss them from an up stand position. In this position, Adorno differentiates between high arts and low arts.<sup>47</sup> According to Adorno, high arts discuss and inform societies. In contrast, low arts are a form of entertainment for the masses.<sup>48</sup> I argue that this differentiation is significant as high art circuits will be close in definition to Grillo's conception of high culture in which we will have two main outcomes. Firstly, that art is not accessible for the whole society as it will be associated with elite groups. Secondly, it promotes an oversimplified conception of what is art and how can it address societies.

To discuss how art can be more accessible to societies, I argue that there is an important opportunity in focusing on art first function, which is, 'how to make sense of the world'. This form of art is evident in the development of traditional art as it is the progress of a continuum process through time. Furthermore, it is also a collective construction of meaning in which, contrary to Adorno's perspective, its value relies on being a type of art that is accessible to local people as it is based in their own narrative, making it a more dynamic process. Nonetheless, this art form also

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<sup>46</sup> Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology 110*, (October 2004), 54.

<sup>47</sup> Zuidervaart, "The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger," 64–65

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



faces significant challenges as it has to find its position between an idealized society and contemporary society, the *use* and *position* those societies will give it, and, the role that it will play when constructing a world discourse.

It is in the challenge of being part of a world discourse that Nestor Garcia Canclini discusses the construction of art from a global context. Canclini argues that art will construct its meaning by having a global understanding of a common understanding for interpretation.<sup>49</sup> As he writes, this has brought a tension in which we believe that art is universally shared and beholds the same construction of meaning when addressing the entire world. By this homogenization of what we expect from art, Canclini argues we neglect to approach the diversity in narratives, as we do not make differentiation of genders, ethnicities and diversity when discussing the global construction of art.<sup>50</sup> This quest for a common base has enhanced to have a differentiation in which, on the one hand, contemporary art addresses world audiences and on the other, there are expectations of a cultural form when local art accesses global art circuits.

Weisenfeld agrees with Canclini that when addressing local contemporary art, it is based on the assumption of how local art should look like and what will be the aesthetic values upon which it will be identified by. Thus, having an oversimplification of what is expected of local contemporary art. Furthermore, it will also be affected by how idealized is a cultural form and as she explains, how close is to the center or the periphery<sup>51</sup>. What Weisenfeld argues regarding the position from the center and the periphery, is that there are standpoints of what is expected of a

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<sup>49</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini. *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for entering and leaving modernity*. Translated by Cristopher & Silvia Chiappari & Lopez. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, (1995.) 33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Reinscribing Tradition in a Transnational Art World"

cultural form that will influence the perception of whether the art form is perceived as an idealization of culture or as a current dynamic art form. When being in the periphery of the art world, the art piece will be appreciated by its essential values. Contrastingly, when being close to the center, it will have more agency to be perceived beyond what it is expected of culture, therefore, have a diverse, dynamic visual representation and allow a culture to be perceived through its whole complexity. It is in this contrast of how to merge contemporary art and local art that Weisenfeld discusses the role of the biennial effect.

The biennale effect will become the world forum for art from which we can see the articulation of local artworks in a world setting. Moreover, it provides insight into the position of local narratives through a world audience, as they will provide an overview into seeing what the valuing and perception regarding multiple storylines. Weisenfeld adds that the biennales are not exempt from catering to art circuits in which, there is a constant negotiation of who is doing the curating process and how is it been shown.<sup>52</sup> This process of selection is relevant, as it will give an order to the local narratives in an applied art circuit. This perspective beholds a close meaning to Khondker articulation of sociology as a method, but, in this case, we can see the method applied into how to ensemble the diversity of art forms and what will be the negotiation of how the multiple art forms construct a world artistic discourse.

Weisenfeld approach on biennales brings both benefits and tensions. On the one hand, having an assumption of what is expected of a culture reinforces cultural essentialisms. On the other hand, when it is regarded as a base to further develop, but not as an outcome, it can be seen as the complex construction of a cultural discourse. This construction of discourse is important as

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

we question how these interactions will be perceived and what will be the position of diverse narratives brought together. Weisenfeld discusses the specific example of biennales. However, this example can be applied to multiple art settings as in the core what we are discussing is how fixed is the perception of how local art should “look like” and how should it be “viewed”. From this perspective, we can question whether it is based in an idealized aesthetic form or as a dynamic process. How do we value it and what will be the position that takes when been contrasted with other narratives. It is in this need of finding its place in global art circuits that we can discuss the role that local art forms have in their societies.

Firstly, we can begin by discussing the role that traditional art plays in contemporary societies as the closest representation of the local essence and assess the opportunity that it offers to integrate into contemporary societies. In order to discuss this subject we first have to point out that there are multiple forms to define what is traditional or local art. Therefore, I will provide three definitions.

The first definition of traditional art is given by Diego Mier y Terán in which he defines traditional art as craftsmanship. As he argues, traditional art is the materialization of a form of doing and it is the continuum process carried through time; therefore, it is the representation of a cosmology in an object.<sup>53</sup> This definition of traditional art is based in the conservation of a process, placing high importance on preserving characteristics of purity and authenticity in the construction of the art piece.

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<sup>53</sup>Diego Mier y Terán, “La Tierra Habla en Silencio,” *Innovando la Tradición*. Last access June 3, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/innovando-la-tradici%C3%B3n/la-tierra-habla-en-silencio/1802622153138323/>

Ismael Rodriguez gives the second definition as he discusses, a craftsmanship as a form of traditional art as a continuous process in which we can see dynamic changes; therefore, it is by its repetition and availability to society that it is constantly adapting to its community.<sup>54</sup> He further argues that through collaborations between designers, architects and artisans there can be a form of integration of craftsmanship into contemporary societies.

The third definition is given by Gennifer Weisenfeld in which she argues that traditional art can be a hybrid of identity, whilst also having contemporary influences, therefore, this art forms can mark tension, rupture, and conflict with the idea of how a traditional art should be and therefore understand traditional art as a cultural continuity.<sup>55</sup>

When contrasting Mier y Terán's, Rodriguez's and Weisenfeld's arguments we can see three very different perspectives on how to define traditional art. Firstly, Mier y Terán shows a conservative perspective in which he discusses a static focus on the authenticity and purity of an art form, in which its value relies on preserving a process from the past. Secondly, Rodriguez shows a more moderate perspective; through the need for preservation he offers a bigger skim of representation in which he argues the need of collaborations between, architects, designers and artists in the pursuit of bringing traditional art forms into the present - into contemporary societies. Thirdly, Wesienfeld argues that traditional art is a continuum process in which it can be hybrid; tradition can be seen as the base to develop future art forms further and it positions it as a relevant participant of contemporary societies.

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<sup>54</sup> Ismael Rodriguez, "Neoartesanía 2.0". *TEDxGuadalajara 2013*. Last accessed: June 29, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qK6GgaHRxM&t=66s>

<sup>55</sup> Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Reinscribing Tradition in a Transnational Art World"

From the transition from Mier y Teran's definition to Wesienfeld's interpretation, I argue that we can see a evolution into a bigger perspective of what can be considered traditional art. Through Mier y Teran's perspective, we have a highly rigid definition of what will be the aesthetic values that will define an art form. Comparatively, Wesienfeld argues that the aesthetic forms are constantly reinventing themselves. Through this contrast, we can discuss that it is in the dynamic process of change that we can see a local art form beyond its essential values. Therefore, this change of perspective opens the view on what is local art and what are the functions that it can play in a society. These functions will be in the lines of how strictly we want to preserve the tradition and if tradition is seen as the idealization of a process or as continuously changing dynamic.

After having discussed the change of perception of what is traditional art, from Mier y Teran's perspective to Weseinfeld's viewpoint, I argue that in the first instance, local art is built as a reaffirmation of a craftsmanship. However, its degree of complexity and participation in the construction of a society will also be influenced by the use that societies give to this art form.

As discussed by Eleonora Belfiore, although different art forms play different roles within society, they are also valued in different ways and these differences enable hierarchies and power relations within different forms of art productions. Through this argument, Belfiore discussed that there will be political, cultural and economic values, in which different art forms will have different degrees of these concepts<sup>56</sup>. The use of these criteria will allow us to discuss "how the cultural narrative is being used", and how they can connect to local art forms whether they are being used

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<sup>56</sup> Eleonora Belfiore, "The Politics of Cultural Value: Towards an emancipatory framework" Last access: June, 12, 2018. <https://culturalvalueproject.wordpress.com/2014/07/18/dr-eleonora-belfiore-the-politics-of-cultural-value-towards-an-emancipatory-framework/>

as a base to grow the society further or, if on the other hand it is used as form of idealization of the cultural form. Moreover, practically, what will be the implications for accessibility and openness of the narratives, the art forms and the conception of identity built in both the mind and the public form. Through the tension between the mind and the public form, we can see local art as the visual representation of the narrative in which, through its flexibility and accessibility, we can see if art has a close connection to its society with two possible outcomes. On the one hand, we may see that the art forms are adapting to the rapid changes in societies, therefore, complementing each other in the construction of societies. On the other hand, we may question whether we are approaching culture construction based on an idealization, in which it runs the risk of operating as a parallel participant of contemporary societies.

I argue that the use of traditional art when addressing cultural narratives comes with a caution clause when narrative is an idealization of culture. Regarding traditional art as the only art form that will address the cultural narrative as a collective construction of meaning, oversimplifies the cultural discourse. As discussed in chapter two, within the same nation-state there can be multiple narratives. Therefore, although I see value in traditional art, I see a risk in using traditional art as an equally shared construction of meaning. Furthermore, it comes with the risk of becoming a cycle in which it is by the repetition of a specific art form that a cultural narrative can promote cultural essentialisms rather than approaching society in its full complexity. Through this perspective, I argue that the shift from a traditional art form into a cultural narrative is based on the conversation between tradition and society. Thus, one of the outcomes of how local people perceive their cultural narrative is the use and value that they give to their local art forms. Additionally, I argue that it is important to look beyond the traditional art perspective and discuss new art forms that might be arising in societies in the quest of making sense of their storyline.

To conclude, what I want to demonstrate with this chapter is that art serves a highly specific and unique function in societies in which it will become the materialization of the narrative and the demands of society. Thus, it is relevant to discuss the position it plays in societies and who has access to question this position. The perspective discusses by Bourdieu, Adorno and Bishop are relevant as they give agency to art: have an important position in which impactful social critique can be made. However, I argue that there is also a need in society for a public and popular form of art in which local people can address their narrative in a more accessible way and be able to discuss their cultural narrative.

I see a great value in traditional art in the development of a more accessible art form; however, the relevance that it will have in its society will be a matter of position both globally and locally. The global and the local are highly connected and I argue that they will influence each other. On the one hand, as Weisenfeld argues, if the narrative is being addressed as part of the center or the periphery, this will have an effect on how a cultural group perceives their art forms and it will enable the art forms to reflect and highlight complex construction or address them just for their essential values. Therefore, I question, if in global circuits, the art form is addressed by its essential values, will that also promote simplification of the use of the traditional art at a local level?

I argue that this perception will affect how traditional art is being addressed at a local level as it will face the challenge of being addressed as an idealized concept in which its quest is to pursue authenticity and purity of the local. Instead, if it will be allowed to change with the dynamic transformations of societies. It is in this tension between the conservation of a narrative and its

agency to change, that I see a significant opportunity to address the main research question of this thesis:

*How is the local art being used to claim a place in a global context?*



## PART 2. EXAMPLES

### 4. JAPAN

Japan is a country of contrast that has managed to construct a unique cultural narrative. Moreover, Japan conceives in its culture and tradition a form of continuum process; therefore, they have managed to sustain a strong identity whilst confronting the challenges of participating in a world dialogue.

The root of Japan's strong sense of self comes from a period of insularity in the Edo Period from 1615 to 1868<sup>57</sup>; during this time, they closed their borders to the rest of the world and only traded with the Dutch and the Chinese. This allowed them to construct a strong culture based solely on their own national values. Therefore, when Japan finally opened its border in 1868 and confronted globalization where westernization was the dominant discourse, as Koichi Iwabuchi writes; Japan went into a form of "domestication" instead of "imitation."<sup>58</sup> This differentiation is significant as it gave Japanese society the agency to conceptualize the idea of what was modern, adapt it into their own culture, and construct a way to integrate to the world narrative by its own standards.<sup>59</sup> Investigating this form of adaptation between constructing a strong local narrative and an open dialogue, we find three concepts that although seemingly contradictory, enabled Japan to position

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<sup>57</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Met Museum." *Art of the Edo Period (1615- 1868)*. 2018. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd\\_edop.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/edop/hd_edop.htm) (accessed February 22, 2018).

<sup>58</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization. Pop Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. (London, Duke University Press, 2002),10.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

itself as an interesting example for using tradition as a form of cultural development. These concepts are “Nihonjinron”: "the relation between art, tradition and artisanship" and "commerce."

The first term that I address is “Nihonjinron”. Kosaku Yoshino writes that Nihonjinron is a compilation of texts that elucidate the characteristics that make unique Japanese culture. As Yoshino further explains, Japan’s identity is built upon the comparison to "the other." The “other”, in this case, will be everything that is not Japanese; thus, Japanese perceive themselves as being part of the periphery instead of the center.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Nihonjinron is based on the particular and unique way that Japanese approach the world, consequently, it goes beyond an ideology and becomes a way of living embedded in everydayness. This way of life does not center on contradictions of giving high or low values, good or bad, but to understanding Nihonjinron as a way of life.

As Nihonjinron is a way of life, then it is applied to everyday ideas and objects. It is by this concept that we can discuss our second subject, which is the relationship between art, tradition and artisanship. In Japan, art and artisanship do not have a clear differentiation. As discussed by Patricia Graham, for Japanese culture, craft is an applied form of art in the mastering of a technique that aims to achieve perfection in an everyday object.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, in Japan, the artisan is perceived as a similar figure as the artist. The conceptual overlap of artist and artisan highlights two key issues. Firstly, when we discuss Japanese art, it will be highly influenced by Nihonjinron, which will translate into having a unique and particular aesthetic. Secondly, as the artisan and the artist are so closely aligned, the two influence each other and in this combination question both tradition

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<sup>60</sup> Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan. A social inquiry*. London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 1992.

<sup>61</sup>Patricia Graham, *Japanese Design. Art, Aesthetics and Culture*. (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2014), 80-81.

and the Art World without having a clear differentiation between high and low arts. Therefore, through this concept, Japan contest Adorno's notion of the separation between art and society because in the Japanese conceptualization art is a participant of society and not a figure from above, thus is through art being within the rich of the population that it becomes a dynamic process.

The third subject is the commercial aspect in which, as tradition and art are common participants of society, they are seen as a commodity addressed as part of the demand and supply system. In this way, being part of the demand and supply system, traditional art is influenced by how people build their relationship to art through everydayness and become an asset for cultural development.

These three perspectives are demonstrated in Japanese cultural policy. In which national policy asserts that: "Cultural properties are essential to accurately understand the history and Culture of Japan and they also form the foundations for its future cultural growth and development".<sup>62</sup> As such, in order to develop their society, Japanese value the promotion of Nihonjinron inside and outside Japan. To do so, they encourage the involvement of society, and advocate companies and private funding to invest in Japanese cultural development. Therefore, Nihonjinron is a product of Japanese culture in which the base of their society is built on having a strong identity in which its position of accessibility through everydayness makes it a participant of social constructions and a differentiator when addressing the rest of the world in which Nihonjinron and art are key elements to achieve this goal.

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<sup>62</sup>"Agency of Cultural Affairs. Government of Japan". *Cultural Policy of Japan* (Japan. Fiscal, 2016),3-16.

In order to demonstrate the dissemination of Nihonjinron through art, I will provide three examples on the use of art as an ally to position Japanese narrative both in high and low arts circuits inside and outside Japan. Firstly, I will discuss how traditional art has reinvented itself and has found collaborations with international partners as a way to thrive and use artisanship as a valuable aesthetic construction. Secondly, I will discuss how through the promotion of pop culture, Japanese ideology has positioned itself as a relevant figure in the Asian context. Finally, I will discuss the work of Takashi Murakami as an example of how traditional art and contemporary art collaborate in the reinvention of Japanese narrative.

Firstly, as discussed by Takahiro Yagi, Japanese traditional art does not escape the global contradiction in which on the one hand, it is idealized and conceived as a token of authenticity. And, on the other hand, it is challenged by fast productions methods and the need to expand to new markets beyond the artisan and traditional perspective. As many others artisans in the world, Japanese artisans face the challenge to commercialize their products as they are in an uncomfortable position of being between the idealization of a culture and being recognized as an art form. It is by this need of reinvention in which Yagi, a sixth generation metal tea wear artisan, founded “Japan Hand Made”<sup>63</sup>. Japan Hand Made is a collective of six different artisan houses with long traditions that, through generations, have produced everyday artisan objects. The six independent artisan houses decided to join their practice and promote themselves as specialized Japanese artisans and masters of a specific technique and a particular aesthetics. Later, through this organization, they formed a partnership with Danish design studio “OeO” in which they

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<sup>63</sup> Japan Handmade. "Japan Handmade." 2018. Last accessed May 12, 2018. <http://japan-handmade.com/about/>

collaborate to develop contemporary Danish design and Japanese artisan method.<sup>64</sup> Examples of products manufactured by Japan Hand Made can be seen in (Figure 1) (Figure 2) and (Figure 3).



Figure 1. Ki-oke Stool<sup>65</sup>



Figure 2. Objects Collection<sup>66</sup>



Figure 3. Vase Round<sup>67</sup>

This collaboration is relevant because it shows the contrast of using the Japanese tradition as “a way of doing” materialized in an international design product that is not restricted to existing solely in a Japanese context. Additionally, the artisan work is valued in an equal position with the design studio, in which it was a collaboration and not the use of Japanese art for its essential aesthetic but that was recognized as a unique “way of doing” in the design process. Within Japan Hand Made we can see how traditional art can access high art circuits; however, Japanese dissemination of culture is also based on being accessible to masses. Through this perspective, I will discuss the second example, which is Japanese influence on pop culture.

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<sup>64</sup>Tom Downey, “AFAR” *A Detail Look Inside Japan’s Modern Craft Movement*. September 9, 2015. Last accessed May 22, 2018. <https://www.afar.com/magazine/an-inside-look-at-japans-modern-crafts-movement>

<sup>65</sup> Nakagawa Mokkaugi, *Ki-oke Stool*. 2018. Wood and copper. Japan Handmade. Access July 3, 2018. <http://japan-handmade.com/collection/nakagawa/>

<sup>66</sup> Kaikado, *Objects Collection*. 2018. Copper. Japan Handmade. Access July 3, 2018. <http://japan-handmade.com/collection/kaikado/>

<sup>67</sup> Asahiyaki, *Vase Round*. 2018. Porcelaine. Japan Handmade. Access July 3, 2018. <http://japan-handmade.com/collection/asahiyaki/vaseround/>

As discussed by Nissim Kadoshi Oztmazgin Japan has profited from its traditional art and has used it as a base to construct low art forms based on pop culture. As Oztmazgin writes, having a wide range of products such as music, animations, television, and fashion has allowed that Japanese culture is accessible to a young generation in Asia.<sup>68</sup> However, these art productions are not far from traditional art as they take as a base the traditional Japanese aesthetics (figure 4), for the development of pop culture icons in the form of anime (figure 5). It is in the use of similar elements like the lack of shadows, the black outlining in the drawings and the use of Japanese elements like the cherry blossoms and the traditional umbrella that anime take as base traditional Japanese paintings to make a product that is accessible for the masses.



Figure 4. Woodblock Print<sup>69</sup> Figure 5. Anime<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Kadosh Nissim Otmazgin and Nissim Otmazgin, “Japan imagined: popular culture, soft power, and Japan's changing image in Northeast and Southeast Asia.” *Contemporary Japan Journal* 24, no.1 (2012) [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-journal](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-journal)

<sup>69</sup> Utagawa Toyokuni, *Woodblock Print*, late Japanese Era 1800s. Scanned into computer May 1, 2010. Wikimedia Commons. Access July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Utagawa\\_Toyokuni\\_ukiyo-e\\_woodblock\\_print.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Utagawa_Toyokuni_ukiyo-e_woodblock_print.jpg)

<sup>70</sup> Justin Adams, “Why Japanese Anime is Superior to American Animation”, 2015. *Chronicle, The University of Utah*. Access July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. <http://dailyutahchronicle.com/2015/09/09/why-japanese-anime-is-superior-to-american-animation/>

As a result, this has reinforced the cultural consumption of what is Japan, enabling Japan to become a soft power in its region. This position, as discussed by Oztmazgin has facilitated that Japan is perceived as an ideal of flexibility and reinvention. Consequently, Japan has become an aspiration of culture within the Asian context which has promoted that Japan becomes a political figure of influence in the region. This approach of combining the art form, the narrative, and the accessibility has allowed Japan to reinvent its culture and, as explained by Iwabuchi has allowed Japanese to have a space in which they mediate between "the west" and "Asia." Therefore, as he phrases it, they are inescapably global and Asian whilst also finding their unique position in both paradigms.<sup>71</sup>

The previous two examples have shown the benefits of Japan's cultural approach from a high arts and low arts perspectives. On the one hand, giving high value to the traditional art form has enhanced that Japan can access high art circuits. On the other hand, the flexibility within the art form has allowed shaping the narratives and the aesthetic into an art form that is accessible, therefore, making Japan a figure of influence in the world, especially in the Asian region. However, the third example will show how as discussed at the beginning of the chapter, there is no clear differentiation between high arts and low arts and how it has enhanced to promote Japanese art as a product in the work of Takashi Murakami.

Takashi Murakami is the example of the combination of high and low arts. Murakami addresses Japan's Nihonjinron as a pop culture product due to its accessibility and idealization. He discusses the integration of traditional art and contemporary art as a contra-movement to critique society. As he frames it, is by using low arts elements in high art circuits, he questions the

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<sup>71</sup> Iwabuchi, "Recentring Globalization", 15.

accessibility and elitism of the Art World in which he tries to break the barriers of high and low, as we cannot understand a culture without one and the other<sup>72</sup> (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The 500 Arhats<sup>73</sup>

In his work, he uses Nihonjinron as a product and takes it to the extreme by making collaboration with big international brands such as Louis Vuitton (Figure 7) and Vans<sup>74</sup> (Figure 8). In which I argue he uses Japanese art as a form of mass consumption in which by using Japanese art as a product, he tests the limits between local and global, using the local idealization of a culture as a consumption product for the world. Therefore, it is by the example given by Murakami that

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<sup>72</sup> Artron. "Muramura Takashi: Octopus eating his own leg" large-scale solo exhibition held in Vancouver Art Museum in February. January 2018, 2018. Last accessed July 5, 2018. <https://news.artron.net/20180126/n983370.html>

<sup>73</sup> Takashi Murakami, *The 500 Arhats*, 2012 (detail). Acrylic on Canvas, mounted on board 302 x 10,000 cm. Private Collection. Widewalls. Accessed July 8, 2018. <https://www.widewalls.ch/takashi-murakami-500-arhats-mori-art-museum-japan/>

<sup>74</sup> Jonathon Keats, "Forbes," *From Louis Vuitton to Fukushima: Post-Pop Artist Takashi Murakami Tries To Show He's No Sell-Out*. 9 de April de 2018



we can see a clear integration of the three elements discussed in this chapter; that is, "Nihonjinron", "the relation between art, tradition and artisanship" and "commerce."



Figure 7. Monogram Multicolor Speedy City Bag<sup>75</sup>



Figure 8. Vans x Murakami<sup>76</sup>

Murakami's perspective on how to join seemingly contrasting elements like high and low arts, and, local and global have gone beyond an artist's statement and become a new art movement. The Super Flat art movement, Murakami argues, is based both in the "flat" aesthetics of Japanese art, and also the lack of depth in Japanese art, which in recent years has been used for its aesthetic essential values and not addressing the complexity of Japanese culture.<sup>77</sup> Contrastingly, it is important to point out that this movement that began as a critique to Japan's use of essential values was recognized by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō as a new Japanese art form.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, we can see a cycle developing in which what began as an underground movement to critique Japan's essentialism got a position within institutions turning it as a recognized art form. As a result,

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<sup>75</sup> Takashi Murakami, *Monogram Multicolor Speedy City Bag*. Louis Vuitton Bag. High Snobiety. Accessed July 8, 2018. <https://www.highsnobiety.com/2015/07/17/louis-vuitton-murakami-pieces/>

<sup>76</sup> Takashi Murakami, *Vans x Murakami*. Vans Tennis Shoes. Style Stories EBay. Accessed July 8, 2018. <http://stylestories.ebay.com/vans-x-takashi-murakami/>

<sup>77</sup> Weisenfeld, "Reinscribing Tradition in a Transnational Art World"

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

through this integration, we can see a constant reinvention of art, its values and the position that is taking within society and also claiming a place in both local and international art circuits.

Going one step further, in the three examples: Japan Hand Made collaboration with OeO, Anime as a form of dissemination of Japanese culture and Murakami's integration of Nihonjinron in high arts global art circuits, I question if this art forms although having its roots in Japan, will they be addressed as Japanese art or global art? It is in answering this question that Khondker argues that in the integration of the local into a global discourse they influence each other, in which the result is that we have global discourse based on local roots. Therefore, as he argues we find hybrid constructions based on blending, mixing, adapting a local discourse with a global narrative. Thus, we can no longer find a clear differentiation of what is global and what is local.<sup>79</sup>

To conclude, Japan has managed to build a discourse in which it profits from its tradition both locally and globally. In the case of Japan, the construction they have about themselves is as important as the promotion of their narrative in a world dialogue. Therefore, in this case, is relevant to discuss how the idealization of culture is being used to claim a place in a world narrative.

In a first instance, as seen in Japan Hand Made with OeO, we can see a use of Japanese Artisanry as a tool to position art as a "way of doing." Here, the value relies on accessing high art circuits by valuing Japanese art both as a process and a final aesthetic form in which Japanese artisanship is used as a complex construction of meaning. In contrast, the use of Japanese aesthetics as an influence in anime and pop culture demonstrates the use of Japanese art as an aesthetic form that will allow to easily propagate Japanese culture into the world, turning its aesthetic forms into

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<sup>79</sup>Khondker, "Glocalization as globalization", 6.

an ally to promote Japan outside its borders. This purpose is achieved by the construction of an idealization, -and simplification- of Japanese art and culture. Therefore, in the contrast of these two cases, I find a contradiction in which Japanese art is being addressed as a complex construction of meaning in which the value is in the process and a "way of being and doing" but is also being used for its essential values. Thus, it is by the case of Murakami that we may argue that a society is built upon two extremes in which society needs high arts and low arts, complexity and simplicity. Through this perspective, Yoshino perspective on Nihonjinron is relevant to understand the construction of culture in which an art form or a culture will not be intrinsically good or intrinsically bad as they are a matter of perspective in which both add value to society.

## 5. MEXICO

Mexico a country of contrast, which is built upon the idealization of a nostalgic past and a contemporary modern society. This differentiation has led to a divided country, with one eye set in the past and the other in the future with seemingly disconnected perspectives. One based on the glorification of indigenous roots and the other set on the creation of a worldly modern narrative. Therefore, the current challenge for Mexico is the integration of these parallel constructions in order to bring both ends into a reconciled, contemporary, diverse discourse.

As discussed by Octavio Paz, Mexico is defined by two indigenous figures, the first one Cuauhtemoc, who was the last Aztec Emperor and symbolizes Mexico's father and the idealization of Mexican indigenous communities as strong heroes of the past. On the other hand, we have the 'Malinche' who symbolize Mexico's mother. Malinche was Cortes mistress, who served as the interpreter for the Spaniard conquers. Thus, she is singled out as a traitor and as an important figure in the defeat of Mexican indigenous communities. As Paz further discuss, Mexican culture is based in this contradiction of the edification of heroes of the past and the specific moment in which Mexico was "defeated and conquered." As Paz further argues, the idealization of this moment is the root of Mexicans addressing its culture after the Spanish conquest, as it is perceived as the moment in which their pride was robbed.<sup>80</sup>

Leticia Reina and Cuauhtemoc Velasco agree with Paz, with the concept that there is a tension in which Mexico glorifies its pre-Hispanic past as a myth of origin. As a result, present indigenous communities have been disconnected as current participants of contemporary culture

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<sup>80</sup> Octavio Paz. *El Laberinto de la Soledad*. Ciudad de México. Fondo de Cultura Económica, (1992).27.

as their value is located in the strict preservation of an idealized past.<sup>81</sup> Thus, this quest for strict preservation has resulted a segregation, in which the enforcement of an imagined tradition neglects its right to change and participate in contemporary societies. Ramos and Velasco agree with Paz that that moment of defeat has strongly marked Mexican culture. Nonetheless, they argue that after centuries, we cannot blame this moment for the inequity between modern culture and what we have idealized in tradition and indigenous communities; furthermore, they see an opportunity for Mexico to come to terms with its past and construct new roads towards cultural development by addressing this disparity.<sup>82</sup>

This idealization has enabled Mexico to address its tradition from two perspectives that can be seen in culture and art contractions; 1) as a topic in which it idealizes its culture and 2) as ‘a way of doing’, seen in the manufacturing of artisan work. As Garcia Canclini explains, after the Independence process of 1810 there was a quest for modernity, without modernization. Having an analphabet population of 84% in the 1890's decreased to 57% in 1940's what was considered art and culture were built by the more educated people which were a small elite that could travel and that would take the Europeans ideas of modernity and apply them to the Mexican context. Nonetheless, from the 1920's on, with the muralist's movement, there was a turn to nationalism using Mexican narrative as a centerpiece for art practices as a medium for national assertion. Nonetheless, although national motives were used as a central topic, it was still produced by an elite group of artists.<sup>83</sup> This approach caused a separation on what would be considered traditional

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<sup>81</sup> Leticia Reina and Cuauhtemoc Velasco, *La Reindianizacion de las Américas. Siglo XIX. Mexico, SigloXXI* Editores, (1997). 1-16

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Nestor Garcia Canclini. “Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for entering and leaving modernity”. 41-42

art. On the one hand, a form of art that would address an idealization of tradition as a subject. On the other hand, artisan work as a form of making carried through time. This second form of understanding of tradition (as a way of doing), would take essential qualities of the artistic production of a specific group within society which preservation was key in order to conserve “pure” Mexico.

Consequently, this brought a differentiation in the form in which these two ideas of tradition were approached by the art world. Artisan work had no permission to change as its change would be seen as corruption in its authenticity and the corruption of what was "pure" Mexico. On the other hand, what was consider art were the practices that were influenced from abroad and that would use the tradition as an idealized subject. Artworks would go to museums and biennales, while artisan work would go to specific artesian fairs.<sup>84</sup> This separation brought a contradiction in the actors and methods of participation in the creation of meaning. Artisan work was regarded as a token of national identity but would not have the same value as high arts; therefore, it would be referred to as popular art. This not only brought an aesthetic differentiation but also a social and economic one in which there is an inconsistency in which we see artisans and indigenous communities as keepers of the narrative but, in many cases place them in a marginalized position regarding the development of the rest of the country.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>85</sup> According to INEGI Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, 89.7% of indigenous communities live below the national poverty line. This article also argues that this is due to the lack of perspective on how to integrate diversity as it is based on an idea of westernization; therefore, there are many barriers, to name a few, language barriers, education barriers, geographical barriers, among many others. Sylvia Shmelkes, "Educación y Pueblos Indígenas: Problemas de Medición", *Realidad, Datos y Espacio. Revista Internacional de Estadística y Geografía* 1, no. 4 (2013): 4-8.

The position of what the traditions meant was framed as an ideological discourse, nonetheless, in recent times "the public form" has contested this discourse and claim a place of participation in Mexico's cultural construction. In 1994, the Zapatistas indigenous movement came to life as a form of recognition of indigenous culture. One of their mottos was "never again a Mexico without us"<sup>86</sup>. In this statement, what they were asking for was to acknowledge the diversity within ethnic groups and to be taken into consideration as participants of social constructions. As discussed by Giovanni Cataruzza, the relevance of this movement was the organized claiming of a voice not based in a decolonizing discourse based on giving back a position taken away by the colonization process, but in acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between contemporary Mexico and its indigenous communities.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, as Cataruzza addresses in Sub-Comandante Marcos<sup>88</sup> speech, there is a claim of autonomy, not for independence. The difference, as Marcos explains, is that they were not looking to become an independent nation but to be able to define their own rules while also being part of society.<sup>89</sup>

Ever since the Zapatistas movement, there have been changes in trying to find new ways in which Mexico can address its culture. Within the Zapatista movement, I argue that what we are seeing is the claim of indigenous communities to contest being treated as an idealization of Mexican culture in which, the core of the demand is to claim a position in the construction of the society. This demand can be seen in three main claims 1) Visibility for the diversity of the

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<sup>86</sup>Reina and Velasco, *La Reindianizacion de las Américas*, 1-16.

<sup>87</sup> Cataruzza, "Por una Moderindad"

<sup>88</sup> Sub Comandante Marcos became a public figure as the voice of the Zapatist movement. Nonetheless, in every speech he made he would cover his face to demonstrate that it was a collective demand for recognition and not a personal individual posture.

<sup>89</sup>Cattaruzza, "Por una Moderindad"

indigenous communities in contemporary societies. 2) Participation within the social constructions. 3) Recognition from the institutions as it was within acknowledging within a system that they can be recognized as contemporary participants of Mexico's current societies, and not, as Paz argues, heroes from the past.

Through this demands, traditional art has been a key element in giving visibility to indigenous communities, as in recent years it has intended to break previous barriers of accessibility to high and low art circuits. Nonetheless, the transition from an idealization to giving artisan work a place in contemporary art form is still complex in its implementation.

When looking into the governmental perspective, we can see that FONART's<sup>90</sup> policy towards cultural building is based on notions of accompaniment artisans in order to promote "better forms of life" and "guidance in order to promote their products in local and global markets".<sup>91</sup> This approach is close to the "socially responsible" discourse which is a term that designers and cultural promoters have coined in recent years. The aim of being socially responsible is to promote ethical ways of collaborating between artisans, artist and designers. It advocates that when working with an artisan community the participants should reflect on and remain aware of the ways that this relationship is carried out in order for the implementation of the practice to benefit the community and not just the artist or designer. In simpler words, the aim of being "socially responsible" is to have a guidebook to prevent local cultural appropriations<sup>92</sup>. Although

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<sup>90</sup> FONART is "Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías" which is, the Mexican institute that is in charge of the policy-making and dissemination of artisan work.

<sup>91</sup>"FONART. 2018. Last access 28 de May de 2018. <https://www.gob.mx/fonart/que-hacemos>

<sup>92</sup> The definition of cultural appropriation is the one given by Erich Hatala Matthes. In which cultural appropriation is defined as "misunderstanding or a misuse of a cultural art form by just using one specific characteristic of the culture to produce and art form, moreover, it is associated with a power relation in which a *dominant* culture profits



these approaches come from a good intention of inclusion, it is associated with the idea that in order for traditional art to access world markets or high art circuits it has to be by the accompaniment of another figure, whether, it is an institution, a designer or an artist. Therefore, as referred by Mier y Terán, this approach tries to empower something that is already powerful<sup>93</sup>, which enhances a power relation instead of positioning artisan work as an equal and relevant participant of Mexico's contemporary culture construction.

The socially responsible approach although problematic has brought to light the issue of cultural diversity participation. It has enabled about the discussion of artisan work to become a current, relevant local topic. As a result, over recent years we have seen more artisan-designer collaboration in Design Weeks and high art markets.

Although we can see the artisan work, right now, it is addressed as the use of a technique and a responsible way of addressing culture. This approach brings benefits and considerable risks. On the one hand, it allows us to have a conversation and to start making steps into more inclusive forms of art productions based on the diversity in points of view; moreover, it also gives visibility to a part of a culture that had been restricted to participation in high culture productions. Nonetheless, as it is still in an early stage, the approach is still top to bottom in which the artisan work is valorized as a technique, therefore, the use of artisan work becomes a form of design and art branding tradition as a Mexican aesthetic form but not as a complex form of doing based on a cosmology.

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from a cultural essentialism and enables social marginalization." Erich Hatala Matthes, Cultural appropriation without cultural essentialism? *Social Theory and Practice*: 343-66. 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Mier y Teran, "La Tierra Habla en Silencio."

By addressing tradition just for its aesthetic qualities, it seems that tradition and contemporary Mexico go in parallel highways in which on the one hand, institutions are trying to include indigenous communities into the national discourse and on the other, there is a tension in preserving the idea of being authentic and contemporary. Leticia Reina and Cuauhtemoc Velasco argued that we can no longer understand these subjects as being separated as most of our society is *mestiza*<sup>94</sup>. In other words, there cannot be a contemporary Mexico without the participation of its indigenous communities in modern contexts. Therefore, as they phrase it, there is a rise of ethnic flags like a joining element opposing cultural, political and economic domination.

This approach of demanding a space can be seen in small but constant actions. An example of this is the case of a primary school in Dzitnup, Yucatán, where the principal María Candelaria May Novelo has implemented that on Monday's girls wear a huipil<sup>95</sup> and boys wear white pants and a formal white shirt (Figure 9).

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<sup>94</sup> The idea of *mestizaje* began as a concept of race, in which mestizos were the descendant of the combination of indigenous communities and European conquerors result of the European conquest of America. Nonetheless, after the Mexican revolution in 1910, this term changed to define that it was also a term that could apply to culture as after the European conquest, Mexico, was the product of the exchange of these two ideologies. The term later on propagated to Latin America in which now it is understood as the symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and European influences. "Mestizaje and Indigenous Communities" Last access: June 5, 2018. <http://jg.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/Peasants/mestizaje.html>

<sup>95</sup> The Huipil is a traditional Mayan Dress.



Figure. Students wearing traditional Mayan huipil.<sup>96</sup>

The use of this attire goes beyond the pursuit of aesthetic. It is the way in which Novelo addresses the invisibility of indigenous communities in society, and encourages pride in the children by taking ownership of their traditional clothes as a form of claiming that Mayans are not a culture of the past but that also have a place in contemporary societies. Moreover, although simple and discrete, is a strong statement coming from the public form in which it facilitates local people to reclaim their tradition as a practice of identity and everydayness, contesting the homogeneity of globalization and positioning tradition as something that is only used in special occasions but as normal part of daily life in contemporary society.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Trajes Típicos en las escuelas: una propuesta para revivir las raíces de México”, *City Express Blog*. Last accessed July 8, 2018. [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-book](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-book)

<sup>97</sup>Denise Maerker, *Estudiantes y maestros cambian uniformes por trajes regionales maya - En Punto con Denise Maerker*. 2017.

To conclude, as we discuss Mexico has a complex relationship in the way in which it addresses its tradition in which a glorification of the past has prevented the acknowledgment of several and diverse groups; therefore, it has restricted its participation for social constructions. Is in this idealization it has directed its actions and policy in the pursuit of an aesthetic form that is based in the use of essential qualities of the imaginary construction of indigenous communities, therefore, appropriating indigenous culture as a form of nation branding while simultaneously neglecting their right of speech and participation. Nonetheless, in recent years we have seen that indigenous communities have demand to take over the ownership of these aesthetic forms as a contra-movement to contest the oversimplification of their culture in order to see it beyond an aesthetic form and reclaim their culture's complexity and right to participate in national constructions. This form of reclaiming ownership of the tradition has promoted that indigenous communities become more visible as the traditional art is the visual form of an ideology. In rethinking the exchanges in the art world, we can reconstruct what is the position that traditional art has in the development of culture. Although the interaction between high arts and low (traditional) arts is still in an early stage; there is an existing dialogue in which the institutions take a standpoint and this view is constantly transformed by public participation. As a consequence, the interaction between artists, artisans and designers is constantly been reshaped and we can see movements into a more inclusive local narrative.

One of the most relevant perspectives to single out is that in the case of Mexico the claim is not to change the art form. The challenge is in a change of perception in which there is a need to contest the idealization of indigenous communities and through institutions give them the place to evolve with society and not as heroes from the past. This case is relevant when discussing chapter two, the narrative as an applied form in which in this case there is a claim to recognize the

diversity of the country, and, which representation will be reflected in the valuing of local art forms and the access to high art circuits. Furthermore, I argue that contesting the idealization starts at a local level. Therefore, in order for Mexico to access high art circuits beyond an idealization of an aesthetic art form and simplification of culture, it has to begin with itself addressing its full cultural complexity and participants.

Therefore, I argue that in the case of Mexico, a strict preservation of the past becomes a form of segregation and that is within the acknowledgment of change and allowing artisanship art forms to reinvent themselves that Mexico achieves two main goals. Firstly, the integration between contemporary Mexico and its idealized past. Secondly, promoting a discourse of diversity based on giving an equal position to indigenous and artisans communities in Mexico's contemporary society, which will support a challenge to current power relations.

Mexico's problems will not be fixed overnight. Nevertheless, art is the visual approximation of a more complex problem that it is the integration of diversity in the construction of national identity. It is by addressing its local narrative that I believe Mexico can find an ally in its diversity instead of treating it as referred by Paz, Reina and Velasco "a shadow of defeat."

Do we have any proof that this is working? We have. In 2018 presidential elections, Mexico had its first indigenous woman presidential independent pre-candidate. Although she did not get the total amount of votes to become an official candidate this event proves that there is a path in cultural reconciliation. María de Jesus Patricio, also known as "Marichuy" discourse was based on giving visibility and a voice to the need of participation through institutions of over 60 different

ethnic groups and not address them as parallel-dissociated subjects of society.<sup>98</sup> This approach is significant as it seeks to join the parallel ways in which contemporary Mexican and traditional Mexico have been evolving and find in their intersection a path towards development based on their diversity.

Perhaps, Marichuy represents our third indigenous figure: the daughter. The need of resolution and approach culture as a form of syncretism that joins the past, the rupture and the hopes of the construction of a better understanding for the future based on diversity and the need to bring tradition to our present discourse.

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<sup>98</sup>Juan Villoro, "NY Times." *Prohibido Votar por una Indígena*. February 24, 2018. Last accessed May 25, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/02/24/opinion-villoro-marichuy/>

## 6. ROMANIA

When arriving in Bucharest, my first impression about the city was that it is under construction. Almost on the same property, you can see a pre-war house, a building from the communist period and modern contemporary construction. As Bucharest, Romanian identity is based on the juxtaposition of a past notion of self, a problematic communist period and the need to rebuild a national identity (Figure 8)



Figure 10. Bucharest Panoramic<sup>99</sup>

This example will be different from the previous two. In the first two examples, we discussed how to position a common narrative in which traditional art played a major role in the continuum process of a narrative. Nonetheless, the Romanian example will address the relationship between art and the narrative from a more abstract perspective. While in Romania there does exist traditional art, the aim of this chapter is not to see the role of a narrative as continuum process but as what happens when there is a need to reinvent the storyline. As discussed by Nehme in chapter

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<sup>99</sup> Jimena Valenzuela, Bucharest Panoramic. 2018.

one, there is a tension in which societies are constantly claiming a space not to be defined by their narratives. Romania shares this perspective as it has the challenge to contest its communist past in which there is the need to re-invent the narrative whilst also being part of a world discourse. Therefore, this chapter will discuss how Romania is reconstructing its storyline and how art has aided this reconstruction from both “the mind” and “the public form”.

Firstly, we will briefly discuss Romanian historic context. After Second World War, Romania was occupied by the Soviet Union, although it got its independence in 1958, Romania remained a strict communist regime up until 1989 under the dictatorship of Nicolas Ceausescu<sup>100</sup>. During the communist regime, as discuss by Ana Codrea Rado, art forms out of the communist propaganda were strictly censored, as anybody that contested the regime would be incarcerated or worst<sup>101</sup>. Therefore, the critics that artist could do towards their society were limited and almost imperceptible<sup>102</sup> as they would only be shared in small artistic clusters. This period, known as Romanian dark days<sup>103</sup> was marked by a society whereby the communist approach of social conformity and homogeneity and the lack of public participation shaped the narrative.

In 1989 communism in Europe was ending and former communist countries like Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Bulgaria were opening their borders to the rest of the world. Nonetheless, Ceausescu, proclaim himself as the last defender of communism, which

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<sup>100</sup> Emma Graham Harrison, "Twenty-five years after Nicolae Ceausescu was executed, Romanians seek a 'revolution reborn'." *The Guardian*, December 7, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Anna Codrea-Rado, "The Paris Review", *Making Art in Communist Romania*, December 2017. Last access June 10, 2018. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/12/15/making-art-communist-romania/>

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Bianca-Maria Balsan. "Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe." *Romania/ 1. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments*. August 21, 2012. Last access June 8, 2018. <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/romania.php>



led to the only violent revolution in 1989<sup>104</sup>. As discussed by Simina Bădică, the defeat of Ceaușescu's communist regime brought a period of collective amnesia in which the past was not addressed since it was too recent and too painful,<sup>105</sup> as stated by the The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance

The greatest victory of communism, a victory dramatically revealed only after 1989, was to create people without a memory – a brainwashed new man unable to remember what he was, what he had, or what he did before communism.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, up until recent years this part of the Romania history had not been addressed. Twenty-nine years after the revolution we can make an interpretation of what happened, how the story was interpreted and how the relationships between commons and institutions have been forged into a new narrative.

As discussed by Emma Graham-Harrison, since the revolution ended, the communist regime came down but it did not bring a complete change of practice. After Ceausescu's death, the people that once served the communist legislation stayed in office under the democratic flag<sup>107</sup>. Therefore, as further discussed by Graham-Harrison, although there is now an open system there is still a feeling that the old ways of communism are still in place. This has brought an anxiety about the possibility of a new revolution to which the government and institutions have taken two actions. Firstly, to separate themselves as much as possible from the communist discourse, and

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<sup>104</sup>U.S. Library of Congress. "U.S. Library of Congress." *World War II. Romania Table of Contents*. n.d. Last access June 9, 2018. <http://countrystudies.us/romania/22.htm>

<sup>105</sup>Simina Bădică, "Prognosis: Integrating the Communist Past, Assuming Participation, Embracing Multiple Stories.", in *Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Europe*, Ed. Corina Dobos and Marius Stan, 99-101.Zeta Books. (2010)100

<sup>106</sup>The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance Museum. Last access June 7, 2018. <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/memorial-en/>.

<sup>107</sup> Graham-Harrison, "Twenty-five years after Nicolae Ceausescu was executed".

consequently to have a discourse of openness that denies the communist past. Secondly, the pursuit to enforce a collective narrative of unity and nationalism<sup>108</sup>.

As discussed by Mikaela Billström, in chapter two, national narratives pursue the construction of a common “us” in the quest of common goals in the organization and further development of a society. Therefore, in this case we can see the selection of specific traits in the creation of a new Romanian narrative. An example of the invention of the new common narrative can be seen in former Romanian president Traian Băsescu’s speeches. In his discourse, he refers to the great creation of Romania in 1918, the inter war periods, and the celebration of past kings but omits the communist period as part of the Romanian narrative. In Băsescu’s discourse, he places the value in a shared narrative as being part of the EU and repeatedly reinforces values among its citizens of being credible, active and committed to fight against world terror<sup>109</sup>. What we can see in Băsescu’s arguments shows three main aspirations in the construction of Romanian narrative. Firstly, we can see a reinvention of the narrative by the selection of specific events in which he lives out the communist past. Secondly, the aspiration to be associated with the EU as part of a bigger narrative -a nation and not just a nation state - which implies the quest to be part of a world narrative far from its communist past. Finally, it reinforces high valued characteristics of the personality that a Romanian should have.

I argue that Băsescu’s perspective can be seen as the construction of “the mind” that asserts characteristics that will intend to define the Romanian character and aspirations. Therefore, after looking into Băsescu’s discourse, I argue that the mind is being constructed under a perspective of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

caution in which it does not pursue bold and strict statement defining what is Romanian as there is still an anxiety within the society of being defined by a single and dominant narrative. This perspective can be seen in the Artworld, which I observed specifically during the exhibition of the 2018 Romanian Design Week.

In the product design space, the aesthetic approach although coming from multiple Romanian designers was too neutral. In other words, the designs selection could be seen in any other place of the world as I argue that what was being shown was too universal. This approach was not because of a lack of artisanship or some obvious reference to Romanian culture but because the proposal was too safe. To exemplify this point I will contrast (Figure 11) which is a photo I took at the event and (figure 12), which is a photo from Studio Henk, a Dutch design studio<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> I wanted to try my theory of the design been a common aesthetics, therefore, I gave myself 5 minutes to see if I could find something similar in a short span of time. Studio Henk. "Studio Henk." *Modular Cabinet MC-6L*. 2018. <https://www.studio-henk.nl/nl/products/hardwax-olie-naturel-light-3041-poedercoating-zwart-200-cm-3-frames-227->



Figure 11. Romanian Design Week 2018.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 12. Modular Cabinet<sup>112</sup>

When contrasting these two images, I argue that we can see a perspective that seeks to be part of a world discourse in which by the homologation of the aesthetics it is trying to stand by the perspective given by the mind, which is, being a country open to being part of an inclusive world narrative.

In contrast, when looking into the graphic design section, there was a more critical discourse regarding the cultural narrative. As an example of this (Figure 13) that shows a set of matches of former communist leaders, in which the implicit message is ‘burn the communist past’ and ‘Kajet’ that is a book in which it discussed and portrays the aesthetic forms of Romanian minorities, for example, the Roma (Figure 14).

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<sup>111</sup> 2018. Romania Design Week

<sup>112</sup> Studio Henk, *Modular Cabinet MC-6L*. 2018. <https://www.studio-henk.nl/nl/products/hardwax-olie-naturel-light-3041-poedercoating-zwart-200-cm-3-frames-227->

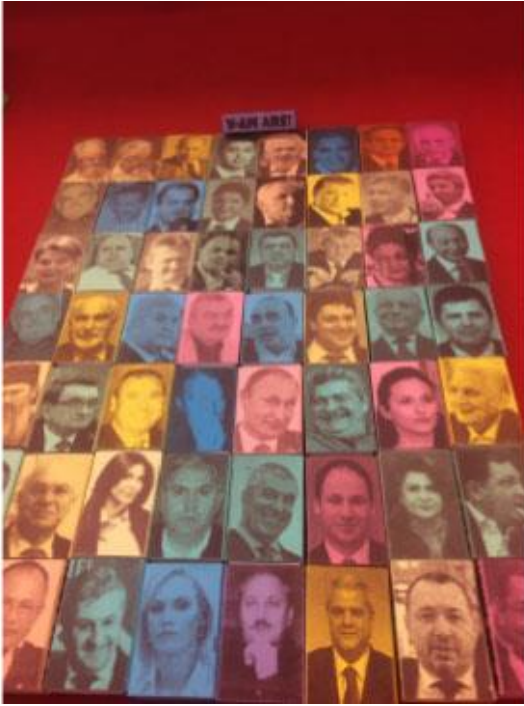


Figure 13. Primitiv Print<sup>113</sup>



Figure 14. Kajet<sup>114</sup>

In the Design Week as a perspective backed by the institutions, I argue that we could see a quest of being perceived as an open, and modern society in which it is safe to promote aesthetics that are close to a world discourse. Contrastingly, in the graphic design section, we could see a more bold approach in questioning the past and the construction of the discourse based on diversity within the Romanian society. I argue that although moderate, the openness in the graphic design section to address the narrative shows a change of perspective in which topics that would be forbidden before are starting to have a place in the Romanian narrative and institutions.

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<sup>113</sup> V-am Ars, *Primitiv Print*, 2018. Romanian Design Week.

<sup>114</sup> Alice Stoicescu, *Kajet*, 2018. Romanian Design Week

Society has also been busy rebuilding its sense of self from a public form. After Ceaușescu's death, graffiti became a way of public and anonymous demands for change. Phrases like "Take down the nightmare" and politically oriented messages started appearing in the streets of Bucharest.<sup>115</sup> These marks in public space became the way in which artists and locals could critique their political system. From that moment on, we can see in Romanian public space as a place of encounter, as discussed by Cosmina Goagea the public space is where Romania can construct a collective new narrative. Nonetheless, as she argues, although there is more openness from the government, this is still an ongoing process in which authorities still have resistance for these artistic, and collective interventions.<sup>116</sup> "The Calvert Journal," agrees with Goagea in the perception that there is a new generation of Romanian artists engaged in constructing a new narrative in public space. In which, the main topics are racism, politics, classism, sexism, among many others.<sup>117</sup> Which implies a construction based on current issues and how will they will deal with them and not in the continuation of a character from the past.

In chapter three we discussed Bourriaud's two social functions of art. He argued that art in a first instance is a way to understand the world and later on it became an ally in building on human relations. In the case of Romanian art, I argue that art forms carried out in the public space, by the public form, are addressing Bourriaud first perspective on making sense of the world while also creating a collective us. Nonetheless, this collective us will not be based on having a strict shared

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<sup>115</sup>Rolandia. "Rolandia." *Street art in Romania*. 2018, Last access June 3, 2018. <https://rolandia.eu/street-art-romania/>

<sup>116</sup> Cosmina Gogea discussed the challenges of doing art projects in Romania during her panel discussion "Urban Activation Through Participative Practice" in the frame of the European Academy of Participation held in Bucharest, Romania, May 17, 2018.

<sup>117</sup>The Calvert Journal. "The Calvert Journal." *Creative action: how a new generation of Romanian artists is tackling societal problems head-on*. January 11, 2016. Last access, June 12, 2018. <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/5251/romanian-activist-art-theatre-civic-community>

narrative but based on how to articulate the diversity found in the Romanian society in order to have a discourse of organized diversity.

Romania's current construction of narrative is based in the present and the future. Nonetheless, as discussed by Simina Bădică, the challenge that Romania is facing is how the narrative regarding the past will be digested into Romanian history books. Bădică positions two alternatives into how this approach that can unfold within institutions. In which she suggests two alternatives, one of negation and one of reconciliation. Bădică explains the position of negation by quoting former president Traian Băsescu's discourse on December 16, 2006. In which he argues that communism "was an oppressive regime which deprived Romanian people of modern history"<sup>118</sup>. Contrastingly, Boris Buden argues that there has to be a recognition of the past in order to digest its role in the present in order to deal with it and integrate it as part of their contemporary discourse.<sup>119</sup>

Artist Irina Botea Bucan has also addressed the issue of how to deal with past in her 2006 reenactment film "Auditions for a Revolution."<sup>120</sup> In this short film, she reenacts the Romanian revolution with no Romanian speakers while simultaneously, contrasting it with the original film record of the 1989 Revolution. As she explains, she used this approach to understand what had happened and by performing the reenactment addresses where things went wrong, making sense of the story. As she discussed in a conference in the European Academy of Participation in Bucharest, this short-film was highly criticized as it was seen as a form of cultural appropriation

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<sup>118</sup>Simina Bădică, "Prognosis: Integrating the Communist Past, Assuming Participation, 100.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Irina Botea. Last access on June 12, 2018. [http://www.irinabotea.com/pages/auditions\\_for\\_a\\_revolution.html](http://www.irinabotea.com/pages/auditions_for_a_revolution.html)

of a Romanian historical moment.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, as she discussed, she aimed to open the topic beyond Romanian people and, by having a new perspective from outsiders, reinterpret the past in a new way while also providing an informed view in which the participants could place themselves in mind and body in this specific moment of Romanian history.<sup>122</sup> Through Botea's perspective, we can see an openness to discuss the local narrative in a new way. Botea's intention is not to treat the Romanian narrative as sole property of the Romanian, but through an informed view open the debate into how a totalitarian regime came to an end violently and explore how the repercussions in Romanian society are unfolding since that action. Therefore, could the openness of the discourse based in the Romanian experience help the world address the dangers of a single narratives? And, hopefully, prevents these events from happening elsewhere?

To conclude, the example of Romania is different from the examples of Mexico and Japan. This was a conscious choice as my aim with this example was to show the issue of what happens when the narrative has to face the challenge of contesting a continuous process. In the case of Romania, the challenge of reinventing the narrative became clear after the 1989 revolution in which there was a need to redefine what would be the values from which the Romanian society would reconstruct itself.

This perspective has brought two relevant and present issues in the construction of narratives. What are the needs for unity in a nation-state (shown in the mind) and the anxiety of being defined by a single narrative (showed in the public form). In the case of the mind, the anxiety relies on constructing a sense of unity in the pursuit of finding common goals to contest the fear

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<sup>121</sup>Irina Botea Bucan discussed her project "Auditions for a Revolution" in an open workshop in the frame of the European Academy of Participation held in Bucharest, Romania, May 17, 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.



and distrust that the society still has for its political system. The claim for unity comes from a practical and functional approach of society in which by sharing the same territory they have to find the way to find common ground in order to build and develop their society. This perspective is shown by trying to unify the society in a common discourse, which show aspirations of modernity based on being part of a world dialogue in which as a result, in the Romanian Design Week there was a lack of clear identity trades and strong questionings, in which the aesthetics and the discourse were too neutral. On the other hand, the anxiety in the public form relies on being defined by a single narrative. Therefore, the discourse that is being constructed in the public form, as Hannerez might argue, is one of organized diversity. The stage to portray this demand is carried out in public space as the place of social encounter in which together, the society is trying to articulate "who we are" by recognizing and finding a space for dialogue and integration of the diversity found in the Romanian society. This shift is significant as local art is not being used as the continuum process of an aesthetic form, but, as "what art can do" in which participatory art practices are relevant to define the narrative, character and aspirations of contemporary Romanian society.

Through the challenges given by the mind and the public form we can see a perspective in which the cultural narrative is not based on a nationalistic approach based on the continuum process of shared past. Contrastingly, it is based on the need to develop a society that has highly contrasting viewpoints. Therefore, the cultural narrative is not rooted in agreeing in a storyline but on what will be the conditions in which the mind and the public form can disagree. And still, find a way to function as a society.

When referring to the past, it is relevant to discuss how they will construct their relation to a problematic past. This view gives us the possibility to see the narrative as a constant process of reinterpretation, in which with time the past will continuously be re-tell and re-signified. Thirty years ago, maybe even fifteen years ago, it would have been unthinkable even to imagine that an art form could openly critique a communist figure, much less an institutional frame. Nonetheless, although cautious, we can see a critique within institutions in the Romanian Design Week. Moreover, art in the public space is also acquiring relevance in the construction of a new open and inclusive Romanian narrative.

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the main challenges of societies is to not have their narratives be defined by absolute concepts. That is that we encounter constant confrontations of apparent opposite conceptions. Idealization and practice; western and non-western; traditional and contemporary; art and institutions. Therefore, in order to contest these perspectives, we have to see culture writing beyond the contrast of confronting ideas and address societies through the negotiation of contrasts, as it is in their integration that we can have a more diverse and interesting world discourse.

Thus, this thesis began as a quest to look into ways to encourage a more diverse world dialogue in the pursuit of finding the place between having a distinct local narrative while also being part of a world discourse. What I have found is that, the first step in achieving this goal is to have a wider perspective on how to read each cultural narrative. As discussed in chapter one, by giving each culture the agency to find their own way of being contemporary we can contest historical, binary and contrasting positions and see globalization as a form of organized diversity rather than the confrontation of fixed standpoints. It is by contesting these standpoints that we have to acknowledge the responsibility of the three figures in culture writing; which are the writer, the reader and the narrative.

The responsibility of the writer will be in having a critical method. In this thesis, we have discussed how the story has been written by voices that in many cases do not acknowledge the local participants and have thoroughly discussed the dangers of single narratives, cultural essentialisms and have claimed the importance of the narrative as written by locals. However, during my experimentation process, when being the reader and the writer, I found out that we need

the integration of both local and global voices in the construction of a narrative. In a globalized world, to have a single writer either from a global perspective or a local position would imply danger of oversimplification. Furthermore, the meaning of culture will be given by both a society's sense of self and its contact with others. It is in this connectivity that I argue that there is a need to be responsible in how the story is being written, and how the story is being read. Through the experimentation process, through my position as a local, a tourist and an outsider I could not avoid the selection of specific characteristics and I was constantly biased by my own perception. That made me have a particular position and selection of values. Was that a form of cultural essentialism? Yes, it was. I could not go into depth in any of the cases, and recognizing the cultural complexity makes me acknowledge that I was being selective of what part of the story I was telling. In order to contest this bias I had to firstly acknowledge that I was looking at a small portion of the story only and that was much more to see. Therefore, I argue that the responsibility of both the writer and the reader is to acknowledge these biases, and be open to read each culture from different perspectives avoiding, as much as possible, reading each story with same stand points.

The responsibility of the narrative will be in recognizing its two functions. Firstly as a shared construction of meaning. Secondly, it will work as a form of organization within societies. It is within this perspective that the beginning of a understanding a culture as a complex construction of meaning starts at a local level in which each nation will need to negotiate between its idealization and the position that it gives to its narrative within social structures in order to later claim a position within a world discourse. However, as I saw in each of the cases, each example place different values in their narrative and as discussed by Belfiore it was unavoidable to carry cultural, political and economic values with some degree. Thus, it is a constantly dynamic cycle in which there is a process for claiming and reclaiming in which the narrative will be constantly

redefined by the perception that its participant have. This makes it imperative that the narrative, as an abstract concept, becomes available to both commons and social structures. In which, there is a risk of going too far into an idealization or too far into practice that the narrative loses its possibility to address its society from a liminal space of aspirations. Through this perspective, it is important to address how society is using its local narrative and in this thesis I found an enormous opportunity in looking into art as a materialized form of an abstract concept. Thus, these are my findings regarding how in the case of Japan, Mexico and Romania art is being used to find a place in a globalized world.

In the case of Japan, having a strong sense of self has allowed it to position its narrative in a world discourse. And, by having a diverse use and reinvention of its unique aesthetics it has succeeded in being in high and low arts circuits. This, has allowed that through its traditional art it position itself as figure of influence both regionally and globally. Although this is an immense benefit, which can be seen in economic and political gains, it has also encouraged Japanese art to become a product of Japanese culture. Therefore, although it has accessed high and low art circuits I question if it has gone too far to both extremes and if by this contrast, it has lost its position in which it is accessible for its society as a tool for social critique. Thus, I argue if in the case of Japan the local narrative is used more to position itself in a global narrative that in being accessible within its society.

In the case of Mexico, I argue that it encounters a double challenge, which is how to contest an idealized narrative and how can this narrative comes into practice within social structures. That is that in the case of Mexico the idealization of the narrative and the art form as being associated to the past has neglected to have a space in contemporary societies as currents participants. This

form of idealization has encouraged the cultural narrative and the contemporary society to go in parallel highways, which has enabled the segregation of indigenous groups. Therefore, in this case of the use of traditional art the challenge is in giving visibility to an existing social disparity. Thus, it is within the claim of a position from the public form, that we can see that the claim is not to change the art form but to encourage institutions to give a place to its narrative beyond an idealization. Going from an idealization into collaborations with designers, architects and even the reinvention of traditional art, will change the art form? Most likely it will. But as discussed by Weisenfeld, it is in the reinvention of the art form that we can see traditional art as a present participant of society. Consequently, the challenge is not to preserve the art form, but to give the elements to society to reinvent it from their own position. Giving a position to traditional art within institutions one of the many ways towards cultural reconciliation. Moreover, I argue that it is within having a strong sense of self and bringing the past into the present that Mexico can reinvent its relation with its narrative, which will also promote a stronger position when addressing global circuits.

In the case of Mexico it is clear that it is in the reconciliation with its idealized past that it can contest past notions in which changing its perception of self can help it bring its past as an ally into the future. Contrastingly, when discussing the case of Romania, the challenge lies in how to contest a narrative which is not accurate to its participants.

It is in the process of negation of the past and avoiding to be defined by a narrative, Romanians have find two interesting and contrasting outcomes. On the one hand, by institutions, there is a quest for homogenization with the rest of the world in which by pursuing a common world narrative will distance them from a problematic past, this approach was clear in the design

week product design section. However, what I found interesting is that through present art practices like participatory art, Romania is opening the dialogue in which it is contesting the idea of what a cultural narrative should be. That is that traditional art or local narratives used to be the quest to find common ground. However, in Romania, today the quest for a cultural narrative is to look into how to articulate the diversity in their society. Today Romania's public art form is been used to answer the question "who are we?" without establishing a clear aesthetic line. Nonetheless, I argue that in 40 years from now Romania will have gone through a process of digesting its immediate past, to a development of new art forms. In which, there will be elements from the past, unavoidably influenced by today's multi-connected societies in which its local discourse and art forms will be highly connected to the need of being part of a world dialogue.

Within these three examples, the local is highly marked by how it will be positioned and influenced by global perspectives and its contrast with ownership dilemmas. In the case of Japan, Murakami opens the dialogue in which local and global art circuits influence each other. Thus is through the integration of both that the art forms can be reinvented in which they contest binary positions of high and low, local and global, art and commerce. In which, by the exaggeration of these concepts Murakami achieves to open a conversations on how to contest previous notions of art and culture. In the case of Mexico this claim can be seen in Marcos' perspective of assertion by social participation, and through art claiming visibility to not protect the authenticity but to have the elements to further develop in which the quest is to bring an idealized past into a contemporary society. In the case of Romania, through Botea's example we can see that ownership is not based on Romanians solely discussing Romanian narrative but that by making it accessible, it breaks the idealization process and discusses it, re-signifies it and uses the integration of multiple voices. Therefore, in the three cases we can see a re-signification of ownership. Thus, ownership

lies in having a voice in global conversations not in over preservation of an authenticity based in a past concept of treating narratives as property rather than stories and allies in the quest to connect with others and see both local and global construction as organized forms of diversity.

The aim of this thesis was to open the conversation to look into how we can have a more diverse perspective when addressing the integration of multiple narratives. Thus, it is through the contrast of the three examples that we can no longer define a narrative by the preservation of an idealization, an equal construction of meaning or a continuum process from the past. This thesis addressed the conventional approach of what is a local narrative, however, I argue that for further studies it is important to redefine the local as it is –and will- be increasingly complex due to the interconnectivity brought by fast communications and to migrations in which, the need to see societies as forms of organized diversity is acquiring relevance.

Thus, these are the two topics that I see evolving as the continuity of this thesis.

1. One of the main topics discussed in this thesis was the re-interpretation of seeing local art, thus, I argue that it is important that when defining a local art form we look beyond traditional art, and as in the case of Romania explore informal art productions and the impact they have in the construction of societies.
2. When looking into the influence of local and global art circuits, I argue that local art is not bounded to a physical territory. As demonstrated in the case of the collaboration between Japan Hand Made and OeO, I think that there is an unexplored field of transnational art and how there can be interesting collaboration of multiple local art forms. Moreover, I argue that within time this will become a more common practice as there is both a need to



be part of a world circuit whilst also adding value by the integration of multiple perspectives.

Finally, as we could see there are multiple ways in which a narrative can be used as an applied form in which it is by finding value and empowering local narratives that we contest past power relations, both locally and globally, and have an overall more diverse discourse. However, I believe that the most important motivation for promoting diversity comes from a human need, that is that: if we do not promote diversity in cultural narrative, we miss the multiple perspectives from which we can address and see the world.

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