

Cashing in on Dracula: Eastern Europe's Hard Sells

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Just about over a decade ago the majority of ordinary Romanians, and particularly the inhabitants of Transylvania, were unaware of the international infamy of Vlad the Impaler and his literary counterpart, the chilling Count Dracula. It was only around the time of Ceaușescu's regime collapse that news of the region's macabre notoriety trickled down to these lands. Soon thereafter, local entrepreneurs hastily acquired copies of Bram Stoker's book and ventured into developing small-scale tourist enterprises by copying the horror classic. Hotel buildings were designed to resemble castles, some restaurants featured Dracula-themed furniture (copied from Hammer horror movies on pirated videos) while others had the butter in their *chicken Kiev* coloured deep red.¹ Live entertainment included actors in full Bela Lugosi gear hiding in a coffin in the hotel's basement and coming out to scare visitors at the stroke of midnight. Besides moderate growth in regular tourism, the commercial exploitation of Dracula and Transylvania got a boost through the increase in academic tourism, with several international meetings of scholars specialising in the horror genres.

Since the mid-1990s the Romanian government has been engaged in plans to build a Dracula theme park and entertainment complex, a project that so far has been surrounded by controversy. According to domestic backers, the development would give an immediate boost to the economy of the whole region. According to international critics, besides failing due to shaky business planning and inadequate infrastructure, it would be an assault on the cultural heritage and on the ecosystem. And, according to one Hollywood studio, Dracula as popularly known could not be freely used for commercial ventures as the character does not belong to the Romanians in the first place.

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This investigation will try to show that attempts intended to capitalize directly on Dracula's trademark image—like the high profile Dracula Park campaign—have run into unanticipated hurdles and so far failed to give any significant boost to Romania's economy, but that local film entrepreneurs have been much more successful in cashing in on Dracula by finding gentler and less direct ways to use the association between Romania and the infamous vampire.

It is useful to compare and evaluate these different manifestations of the pragmatic yet idiosyncratic post-communist endeavor to make Dracula more bankable for Romanians. We will look at the curious mixture of entrepreneurial and state-socialist approaches revealed in the course of the attempts to profit on Dracula. We will see how image issues inform economic judgment (and vice versa), and how brash pushy entrepreneurs and refined high-brow cultural heritage defenders are driven by largely the same fiscal motivation. This study's main contentions are:

- While the use of stereotypes is usually seen as an adverse act of one-way cross-cultural projection of preconceived ideas, in certain contexts stereotypes are embraced from within, developed and drawn on in a voluntary move of self-exoticism carried out by agreeable cultural entrepreneurs and other internal actors. However, in a globalized corporate-dominated world the fact that one may readily accept the association with a certain stereotype does not guarantee automatic access to the commercial exploitation of the same stereotype.
- While nowadays “almost all nations have to [. . .] mobilize themselves as spectacle and to attract large numbers of visitors,” in poorer nations where the domestic consumer market is not solvent cultural entrepreneurship is underpinned by decisions made on the basis of perceptions of Western (entertainment) market demand.² The development of large scale tourist projects here may be undertaken as national-scale enterprise and the respective attraction are often staged as *representing* the country. But such large scale attractions, in fact, enhance the sense of split identity, the consciousness of a perpetual differentiation between an image of oneself one projects outwards and presents as “object of the tourist gaze” and another “true” self, mostly characterized by being different, not identical with what is being projected.³

“Everyone Else Makes Money from Dracula. Why Shouldn't We?”⁴ Dracula's Romanian Identity

Romania, the land of Dracula, occupies a prominent place as a region that many would associate with bats and vampires and is thus one of the darkest and most exotic backdrops of the Southeast European imaginary. The numerous film adaptations of *Dracula* in which the Western protagonist travels to these sinister lands have reasserted the image of Transylvania as a claustrophobic kingdom of stalking horrors, inhabited by sleepwalkers and

pale mute peasants. “Thanks to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* [. . .] and to scores of *Dracula* films ranging from the abominable to the exceptional, the name ‘Transylvania’ has acquired something of a mythical aura in the mind of the average Westerner,” writes American scholar Dennis Hupchick.⁵ He then elaborates that “because of such imagery, many Westerners think that Transylvania exists only in the minds of fiction writers and filmmakers. Many express surprise when they learn that Transylvania actually exists.”⁶

This *Dracula*-linked Western conceptualization of Romanian identity is still prevalent, as seen in the way Romania is introduced by influential American journalist Robert Kaplan who follows in the footsteps of Bram Stoker’s protagonist in his popular book *Balkan Ghosts* (1993). “This region, unrolling from the back windows of Count *Dracula*’s mythical castle,” Kaplan writes, “was still, nearly 100 years after Stoker published *Dracula*, one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe.”⁷ Kaplan is inclined to see *Dracula*’s mark all over the place, thus constructing Romania as a land inhabited by individuals whose character is marked by a “Latin bent for melodrama” and an Orthodox-influenced “Byzantine bent for intrigue and mysticism.”⁸ Reinforced by the Carpathian landscape (“darkened by fir forests and teeming with wolves and bears, out of which arose a pantheon of spirits and superstitions”) and yielding further unsettling associations, “the very word Transylvania conjures up images of howling wolves, midnight thunderstorms, evil-looking peasants, and the thick, courtly accent of Count *Dracula*, as portrayed by Bela Lugosi.”⁹

Initially, the Dublin-born Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula*, had intended to have the protagonist, Count Wampyr, based in Austria, and this is where the novel was to be set. Then, in order to avoid direct parallels with Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s vampire classic *Carmilla*, he thought he had better move the action elsewhere. Stoker had never set foot in Romania, yet after carrying out library research he discovered records of a fifteenth-century ruler Vlad Țepeș (a.k.a. Vlad the Impaler), whom he then used as a prototype for the literary character, whose imaginary castle was now re-located to Romania. The real Vlad had ruled in Wallachia, a different region altogether, but Stoker chose Transylvania, or “land beyond the forests,” a name that sounded more mysterious.

Even though Stoker’s decision to transfer the action from Austria to Romania was accidental, it was a crucial one. It appears that the vampire was embraced in this newly found homeland. The “amusing bravado of the imaginary Transylvania of movies and comic books” was particularly powerful in shaping the international stereotypes of Romania, as Romanian-American émigré writer Andrei Codrescu testifies.¹⁰ Sibiu-born Codrescu refers to *Dracula* as “my compatriot,” clearly suggesting that Romanians need this image for their self-esteem: “In Transylvania,” he claims, “we have an ontological blood relation to the book.”¹¹ It “gave the young people of my generation a certain sexual and nocturnal thrill,” as all of Codrescu’s American friends knew “the eminent legendary Romanian *Dracula*, in his incarnation

as Bram Stoker's and Bela Lugosi's vampire."¹² That Romania was, in fact, a real and quite different place, was a separate matter.

Probably not everybody was happy with the vampire references. But if this was the image that Romania was to be associated with anyhow, why not commercially exploit it? In the 1990s a growing number of Romanian entrepreneurs began realizing that the identification of Romania and Dracula could open up a host of ingenious possibilities and could be put to work. Some early Romanian attempts to cash in on the Dracula myth can be traced as far back as the 1970s. Because of the non-commercial orientation of the state-socialist regime, however, they never flourished. Back then, Dracula-related tourist activity seems to have been kept going by irregular tides of curious foreign tourists coming to Transylvania and enquiring about the location of Dracula's castle. The state-authorized *Dracula: Truth and Legend* tour would take them, to the disappointment of some, to trail the footsteps of the authentic historical Vlad Țepeș in Wallachia. Tourists' nocturnal expectations were better catered to after the opening of Hotel Castle Dracula in the Borgo Pass (the access road to Count Dracula's castle in the novel).

The Romanian documentary *Yes, Sir, Comrade Bram Stoker!* (Tibor Schneider, RO, 2001) focuses on the man behind the Hotel Castle Dracula project, Alexandru Misiuga, a pioneering cultural entrepreneur and a former tourism official from Bistritsa. He first learned of the popular literary character from visiting America in 1968, then got hold of the novel and quickly figured out the potential tourist significance of the Dracula myth. When appointed director of the local tourism office in the 1970s, Misiuga managed to maneuver party leaders to agree to building the hotel and pursuing Dracula's commercial value. Launched in 1985, today the Castle Dracula Hotel welcomes groups mostly from Germany and features a shop with vampire merchandise and other spooky attractions. Generally described by observers as a Las Vegas-type of imitation Gothic, and seen as a brave but unconvincing attempt to cash in on fictional characters, the hotel is thriving. "Dracula does not exist here; he has to be invented to make business. It is all tacky kitsch," remarks American anthropologist Colin Quigley in regard to these hospitality efforts.¹³

Promoting Dracula tourism internationally as a private enterprise picked up at a wider scale around 1993, with private companies which co-sponsored a 1995 Dracula congress and reportedly spent \$20,000 to set up a tour of Transylvania's medieval cities; several more gatherings of academic Draculogists have taken place since. The Transylvanian Society of Dracula also organizes specialized expeditions, and a tour operator maintains the Dracula Land website.¹⁴ It is believed that the volume of current Dracula-related tourism stands at about 250,000 visitors a year.

The business potential of Dracula tourism appeared to be significant, yet it was difficult to estimate what revenues it could bring. It was Bram Stoker's character that would bring the tourists, but this one was an imaginary figure far remote from the authentic Vlad Dracul from Romania's history. Some

sort of reconciliation between the real historical figure of Vlad Țepeș and the literary Dracula needed to be found to enable a successful commercial exploitation of the Dracula myth.¹⁵ Given the overall depressed state of the Romanian economy and the lack of firm figures from Dracula-related operations abroad, all attempted estimates of Romania's Dracula assets were vague. Nonetheless, in Romania, one was overtaken by a pervasive feeling that the country was sitting on a fortune that was just begging to be mined.

The Dracula Park Project

The idea of a Dracula theme park seems to have come into the public domain as early as 1990, but was first actively promoted around the time of the 1995 international Dracula Congress and stayed in the media spotlight thereafter. Its most visible proponent was Matei-Agathon Dan, tourism minister in Ion Iliescu's governments (1992-1996 and 2000-2003). "Dracula myth exists—we want to package it nicely and sell it to tourists," Dan reasoned.¹⁶ "It's absurd for the myth to be used in many ways abroad, while it is not beneficently taken advantage of in its country," the ministry's website reiterated.¹⁷

Active planning for the Dracula Park took place under Minister Dan in the early 2000s. Glossy posters in black and blood-red and other similarly sleek promotional materials featured the park's anticipated design. Planned attractions were to include a fake castle and an artificial lake. All rides would have a vampire theme: Dracula roller-coaster, ghost train, and house of horrors, vampire dungeons, torture chambers, blood-filled catacombs, judgment chamber, scary mirror house, labyrinth garden, tournament site, and an alchemy laboratory. The eateries would serve gruesome dishes like blood pudding and brains, as well as gory vegetarian options. The affiliated vampirology institute would coordinate Dracula-themed societies worldwide. Craft shops would feature armour making and teeth sharpening. Accommodations would vary from a camping site to a 700-bed luxury hotel.

Where would the park be located, though? Should one be true to the vampire story or to the historical Vlad? Most Dracula movies are filmed at Bran castle near Brașov, even though the location's links to the historical Vlad Țepeș are debatable. Then there are the places quoted in Stoker's book that are located in Transylvania—a completely different part of Romania. The discrepancy resulted in confusion over which locations should be considered essential to a Dracula-themed visit and respectively promoted: the sites related to the real historical personality could be of interest, but then most tourists would come to "experience Dracula" and not to investigate Romania's medieval history. It proved a challenge; the consensus was that a dedicated Dracula theme park should be located in a place that would have some relation to Vlad yet touch on the imaginary Dracula as well.

Several locations linked to the name of Vlad Țepeș (Țirgoviste, Poenari, Bran/Brașov) competed to have the park located nearby. It was Sighișoara,

however, Vlad's birth place, that emerged as the favorite, reportedly because the area's Saxon heritage was likely to attract interest from German investors. A picturesque medieval location, the town needed regeneration; the park's construction could bring Western-style prosperity. The park was to be built on the Breite plateau, a "broad sheep-grazing ground" of 300 acres interspersed with 120 venerable oak trees, about five kilometers from Sighisoara. A cable transport line would connect the town to the park; the missing communications network would be swiftly taken care of, and the whole undertaking would create about 3,000 jobs in the first phase of the project. Most building activity would be completed within a six-month period.

The project's cost was estimated at \$31.4 million. But no financing had been confirmed by mid-2001, even though the tourism ministry claimed that German and Austrian firms known for the development of zoological gardens and aquariums would come on board with an investment of €10 million if appointed to finance, build, and administer the park. No commitments were taken by potential merchandisers either; it was only the Greek branch of Coca Cola and the Austrian Brewers Union that pledged conditional investment in return for a decade-long exclusive deal for their beverages on the park's territory. With foreign investors not forthcoming, it appeared that the project would need to rely mostly on raising the funds at home. The Sighisoara Tourist Development Fund pledged \$12.1 million and other branches of the local authorities pledged about \$17 million. Any outstanding amount was to be secured from private investors. To raise these funds, a bond issue run by the Romanian Commercial Bank was launched. The initial public offering took place in December 2001 with much fanfare. Conscious that the much-needed reinvigoration of the local economy depended on the success of this bond issue, many of Sighisoara's 40,000 inhabitants purchased packets of 100 shares (at the cost of \$34/ £22), an acquisition equalling a third of their average monthly wage. Nonetheless only about 40% of the shares were sold by the deadline, and even though it was extended, the target amount was not raised.

All of this was taking place amidst an increasingly loud public controversy over the location choice of Sighisoara. The resistance brought together a variety of seemingly incompatible groupings. In a truly ecumenical manner, for example, the usually divided Christian denominations of Romania jointly opposed the project and declared it an unwanted encouragement of the occult, especially after a local pastor claimed he had seen "unnaturally pale persons dressed in strange black clothes loiter around town."¹⁸ There were fears that the project was glamorizing evil and would attract the wrong kind of satanic cult audience; pious protesters invited officials to get ready for Judgement Day. Backed by Greenpeace, local environmentalists expressed concerns that the park's construction would destroy ancient oak forests and harm the region's ecosystem. The most vocal protest, however, came from the London-based heritage preservation organization the Mihai Eminescu Trust, involved with

the conservation and regeneration of Saxon villages and communities in Transylvania and Maramureş (Siebenburgen) for the purposes of ecotourism. Yet another tourist organization, if of a different kind, the Trust caters to affluent visitors fond of the unspoilt rural charm of the area. The building of the Park would directly undercut their own tourist operation, so they put to work their defenses. Following an open letter by the Trust, on 5 November 2001 *Romania Libera* published articles by well-known Western intellectuals who were critical of the plan and were expressing concern that Sighișoara's protected medieval town would be inevitably destroyed by the planned mass tourism. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee–ICOMOS–was alerted and asked to intervene as it appeared Romania had neglected obligations to its World Heritage Treaty. The controversy extended as far as to include the Mihai Eminescu Trust's patron, the British Prince Charles, who lobbied with Romania's President Ion Iliescu.¹⁹ The tourism minister threatened to resign over the Prince's intervention. Even if objectionable, the project had to materialize for the sake of economic recovery. Such views were enhanced by rumors of the immediate creation of 3,000 jobs and by (unconfirmed) estimates promising of a million local and foreign tourists during the very first year of operations.

The international outcry, however, forced tourist officials to seek firm evidence of the project's economic viability. In 2002 Romanian authorities approached the international business consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers and asked them to subject the project to a rigorous feasibility test. The government would listen to the consultants' advice and would ensure that everything was in stringent compliance with economic and ecological norms. The consultants were also asked to make suggestions as to possible financing for the project (the estimated investment for which had meanwhile risen to a \$100 million). The PwC feasibility report arrived in January 2003 to state the obvious: the business plan could not withstand basic cost-benefit scrutiny. There were serious doubts as to the park's chance to offer something that would not already be available at more accessible locations in the West and that would prompt masses of Western tourist to take the trip to Romania. The plans to build the park near Sighișoara did not have much economic viability.²⁰ What had been known but obviously ignored all along was now coming from an authoritative source. PwC's report had used the comparable companies method and had looked at the performance of ten other similarly-sized theme parks from across Europe (like Denmark's Legoland, which rarely gets more than a million visitors a year despite its more convenient location and superior infrastructure). The experts had then looked at Sighișoara and two alternative locations—Lake Snagov near Bucharest, where Vlad is believed to be buried, and Constanța, a Black Sea resort. The Sighișoara location was remote and difficult to reach. It would take about five hours to get to here from Bucharest, and the nearby airports in Târgu-Mures and Sibiu did not have international facilities. The recommendation was ultimately to go for Snagov. According to the projections, Sighișoara and Constanța could not attract tourist crowds

larger than 600,000 a year, whereas a location closer to the Romanian capital Bucharest had the chance to generate nearly 40% more flow, hitting the one million visitor target. Other considerations addressed issues like infrastructure and added Bucharest-related profits. Thus, despite protests from the town of Sighișoara—shareholders now began asking for their money back—the Dracula Park project was to be moved to Bucharest.²¹

The real issues of the plans for the Dracula Park—difficulties with financing and the lack of economic viability—finally took center stage. It was no longer possible to avoid facing them. Clearly, the most problematic aspects were of a purely economic nature: missing investments, inflated visitor estimates, non-existent infrastructure. In addition to the environmental and moral objections, the expert opinion had exposed a hasty construction timetable, lowered construction costs, and management incompetence. The cost estimates had varied widely, between the manifestly unrealistic \$15.6 million and the \$100 million mark, suggesting difficulties with sound economic planning.

The most remarkable aspect of the way the Park project was handled, however, was the curious mixture of capitalist techniques and authoritarian communist style top-down management. On the one hand, there were the new “capitalist” methods: extensive use of advertising aimed at creating favorable public opinion (glossy brochures and posters, TV ads, website marketing, and even a video reassuring the pious believer in the compatibility of Dracula and the good Lord). There was the IPO, the feasibility study, and the use of consultants and expert opinion. And there was the dismissive stance toward protests coming from UNESCO and the Culture Ministry, motivated by determination not to let business ventures get muddled up by culture-related considerations. This clear demotion of culture within the political hierarchy—in comparison with the position culture previously held under state socialism—unambiguously signaled the triumph of “free” enterprise.

On the other hand there was a “business plan” that, like in communist times, would not withstand scrutiny but was never really scrutinized. Then there were the old-style bullying and intimidation techniques: a senator who had expressed critical opinion on the park was threatened with an investigation into his communist past; the mayor of Sighișoara requested disclosure of the names of protesters who had spoken to foreign journalists; and a newspaper reported that the Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service was investigating “enemies abroad” who oppose the project.²² Last but not least, there was a smoke screen of propagandistic patriotic rhetoric. At the Tourism Ministry’s website the Park was billed as “the first Romanian tourist’s integrated product of national importance”; media appealed to Romanians to invest in the patriotic project; and the national television station featured footage of the prime minister buying shares of the bond issue. In any case, Romania’s Dracula Park project was not the only one that approached business in such a hybrid *laissez-faire-cum-totalitarian* manner; this mode of handling business is characteristic for the “transitional” post-communist economies across Eastern Europe.

Castel: Cashing in on Dracula by Association

While the controversy surrounding the park stayed in the focus of public attention, the Romanian film service industry capitalized on Dracula in a different way: by making the most of the fact that in the mind of Westerners Romania is closely *associated* with Dracula. Just glancing through the list of foreign productions filmed here over the past decades reveals that most of them had some vampire-related or similarly macabre theme. Many of the skilled workers formerly employed within the context of the Romanian film industry have been earning their livelihood in recent years on foreign vampire-themed B-productions that financed by producers across Europe and North America to provide a much-needed “blood transfusion” for the local industry. “Cost savings can compensate for the increased risks associated with producing in a transitional society, but there can also be a creative incentive,” Australian scholars Ben Goldsmith and Tom O’Regan claimed in their study on international film studios.²³ “The low-budget productions filmed in Romania in the last decade have made much use of Transylvania’s mythic identity as the home of Dracula. Where better to produce a vampire film?”²⁴

Romanian studios attracted a host of mid-sized vampire or horror projects, like Dimension films’ *Dracula II: Ascension* and *Dracula III: Legacy*, and several recent entries of the *Hellraiser* franchise—which used Romanian partners both for studio and location shoots, with post-production completed in the West. A host of Romanian businesses prospered by providing specialized services to these productions. Companies like Ager film, Atlantis, the former state-owned film company Buftea—now owned by ProMedia—and the new Swipe studios have all competed for a share of filming activities. In each case, it was the *association* with Dracula that brought business down to Romania in the first place, a situation where local companies did not need to directly sell Dracula’s image, yet indirectly capitalized on it.²⁵

It is the emergence and dazzling success of Castel (Castle) film studio, however, that is directly linked to this flurry of activity. Launched around 1992, Castel remains the only studio built from scratch in the region of Eastern Europe—not to mention Europe at large—since 1989. Situated near Bucharest airport, not far from the site that PwC had recommended for the Dracula Park, Castel is adjacent to a fifteen-mile forest and the eight-mile Snagov Lake. It boasts five sound stages and a water tank, as well as recently built post-production facilities. The studio was erected on several acres of prime real estate land, near the so-called “Pacea” (Peace) complex, exclusively open to Communist Party officials in the past. During Ceausescu’s times this area had been used solely by Romania’s political elites; the very access to these places had been previously restricted to the public. However, from a modest beginning in advertising slots, around 1997 the studio saw a breakthrough to servicing feature filmmaking coming from abroad. By the end of 2003 the company had worked on over eighty features and hundreds

of commercials, claiming to be “the most cost effective” solution for shooting in Europe. The majority of films Castel co-produced during this first decade were in the horror genre: vampire flicks, or films featuring phantoms, witches, ghosts, werewolves, Frankensteins, freaks, dark angels, Leprechauns, and a range of other evil creatures.²⁶

While the theme park proponents were wrestling in public over their intention to get the most out of exploiting Dracula’s image, the people at Castel quietly but effectively managed to cash in. The proponents of the Park never came to realize that the heavy dependence on “corporeal travel”²⁷ was the major obstacle to their project: they had to bring the tourists to Romania physically and make sure that these tourists find here more or less than what they expect. Castel, instead, was bringing to Romania only people’s imaginations. Long before PricewaterhouseCoopers recommended Snagov as the best location for making money on Dracula, Castel and associates had succeeded in putting Dracula to productive use at this very location.

Image and Economy: Issues of Control

Bram Stoker’s novel is regarded as the world’s most enduring gothic text. On top of it, it is probably the best selling one: it has never been out of print, has been translated in many languages, and has inspired hundreds of films. It has triggered scores of merchandise products and other spin-off businesses, many of which seem to be thriving. The many websites that sell Dracula-related merchandise are proliferating even further. The fact that Aberdeenshire (Scotland) and Yorkshire (England) keep contesting each other’s claims of having served as a prototypical location for the book could be seen as indicative, as it probably suggests that the bickering is over a share in a lucrative business.²⁸ The Bram Stoker Heritage Centre in Dublin also has claims over Dracula, which it sees as an “essentially Irish story with global appeal,” full of local symbols and elements like storms, fog, rats, Gypsies, a castle, and an abbey.²⁹

As Dracula’s alleged “homeland,” post-communist Romania of course hoped to jump on the gravy train as well. In order to claim its share of Dracula-related profits, it was prepared to perpetuate stereotypes and voluntarily make Dracula an intrinsic part of the national identity. The voices of those who worried that the embrace of Dracula would turn Romania’s history into a comic strip and durably assert the wrong image in the world’s public opinion were barely heard internationally. They would not dare rocking the boat too much anyhow, as their objections were clearly levelled against vital economic interests. One could not afford thinking of the detrimental effect of destroying 400 year-old trees or turning oneself into an exotic cartoon when one is faced with 17% unemployment. The projected revenues from the exploitation of Dracula’s image had informed fiscal policy; the need to exploit and cash in on Dracula was ultimately dictated by real concerns of economic welfare. After

all, all those who rely on “place” as a means of attracting tourists, Urry has noted, are compelled “to monitor, modify and maximise their location within the turbulent global order.”³⁰

But was the willingness of enterprising Romanians sufficient to guarantee them unlimited commercial exploitation of what was now being constructed as a national icon? As it soon transpired, the candid plans of Romanian entrepreneurs to cash in on Dracula were not as easy to realize. In August 2001, after learning of the Romanian ambitions related to Dracula Park, Universal Pictures approached the tourism ministry to discuss compensation for the intellectual property rights that would be affected if the project went ahead. Universal demanded that a percentage of the park’s future takings be forwarded to them for the usage of the classic Dracula image and film clips. Or it could be a set annual fee. Hollywood’s *Universal* had made several Dracula films with Bela Lugosi between 1930 and 1960. Bypassing all real historical prototypes and Stoker’s character, Universal now claimed it had in fact developed and respectively patented Dracula’s image with the black cape, the deathly pale skin, and the fangs. The fact that Bela Lugosi himself was a native of these lands (born in Transylvania as Béla Blaskó) did not seem to give Romania’s claims over Dracula any more weight.

Looking even further back in history, it now seems clear that Dracula is probably one of the most extensively copyrighted brand names. It was for something like copyrights considerations—to avoid similarities with LeFanu’s *Carmilla*—that Stoker himself had changed his protagonist’s name and had moved the action of his novel from Austria to Romania. Then, after failing to secure the rights to filming Stoker’s *Dracula* novel in the early 1920s, film director F.W. Murnau had to change the name of the character once again to *Nosferatu* (GR, 1922). In 1935 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer made *Mark of the Vampire* (US), directed by Tod Browning and starring Bela Lugosi, thus involving almost the same creative team of the original *Dracula* from 1931, but had to change the name of the character once again for copyrights reasons; here he is called Count Mora even though he looks pretty much the same. What an irony. Dracula’s alleged landlords finally read the writing on the wall: theirs was only a limited level of control over the count’s image and its respective commercial exploitation. Romanians had to learn a lesson: if they wanted to cash in on “their” lucrative Dracula, they had to make sure it was indeed “theirs.”

Solvency, Market Demand, and Self-Exoticization: From Cold War Paraphernalia to Esoteric Exotica

In the immediate aftermath of 1989, all post-communist Eastern Europe lived through a period of adjustment regarding cultural exports. State interference in culture was no longer a problem, but there was no support for culture either. To survive one needed to learn to sell. But sell what? And to whom?

The Soviet Bloc markets had disappeared overnight; one needed to find solvent markets quickly.

In the early 1990s, a trade in communist-era memorabilia seemed to take off at grass-roots level, with merchandise displayed on folding tabletops at make-shift market locations in the central squares of cities like Krakow and Sofia, and even more often, at market stalls in Western capitals like Vienna or Amsterdam, supplying a certain flare of specifically “themed environments,” as per Gottdiener’s term.³¹ For a while, Cold War-times paraphernalia—like Soviet army hats, pieces of the Berlin Wall, or even chunks of the absurd concrete bunkers built all over Albania by the paranoid Enver Hodxa—made for popular souvenirs as well as successful exports. The Romanian keepsakes included glossy photo albums of the Ceausescus and 1989-revolution era national flags with the state coat-of-arms cut out. But then the communist kitsch lost novelty value, and Western attention moved away from its interest in laid-off Russian diplomats selling Kalashnikovs and the dismantled monuments of Dzerzhinski and Lenin littering abandoned parks. The sales of nicely packed pieces of the Berlin Wall were gradually confined to the exclusive and pricey souvenir shops on *Unter den Linden*. The market for Cold War-era paraphernalia was slowing down and getting exhausted.

However, the market for other, more exotic artifacts, appeared to have more longevity, and Romania had somewhat of a competitive advantage here: it could exploit Dracula. It would do it along the lines used by neighboring Yugoslavia, where the patenting of idiosyncratic commercial exotica was clearly manifested in the revived mercantile exploitation of colorful Gypsies, as seen in films like Emir Kusturica’s *Black Cat, White Cat* (FR/GR/YU, 1999).³² In this range of films, the Romani experience was presented as an excitingly contagious lifestyle, a microcosm of exuberant flamboyance populated by freewheeling creatures bathing in sunshine and making love amidst sunflowers. Similarly, a few decades earlier the Greek celebration of the zeal of the Mediterranean spirit had created a context in which Greece was presented as a country of eternal sunshine and its people as joyous *bon vivants* all quivering with fervor. Films that established this image, like *Never on Sunday* (Jules Dassin, GR, 1960) and *Zorba the Greek* (Michael Cacoyannis, US/UK/GR, 1964), have been credited with making Greece a jolly addition to the repertory of Western holiday-makers and with turning the country into a favorite holiday destination.³³ Looking at the Italian case, Maria Wyke has also shown how projections of ancient Rome on screen have supported various causes of national promotion as well.³⁴

As one moves further north into the landlocked parts of Romania, it all changes toward a darker shade, yet the stress remains on the excitingly esoteric and exotic nature of what could be experienced there, building on the mass taste for moderate macabre horror that the likes of Dracula and Transylvania appear to offer. In the case of the Romanian exploitation of Dracula one knows that the real thing and the imaginary one have little in common,

nonetheless a mercantile interest thrives, building on the fascination with the imaginary. Film scholar Marian Țuțui believes there is little ground to behave differently. “Small cultures are condemned to exoticism,” he writes, speaking of *Dracula* as “a metaphor for the state of small cinematographies and a solution for the Romanian one.”³⁵ “Seemingly to the way Caribbean cultures have exploited the zombie,” Țuțui claims, “*Dracula* is a typical example of a cultural asset foresightedly taken over and reset after a long time in the context of its original culture.”³⁶

The attempts to sell supposedly “authentic” but in fact overstated indigenous “assets” like *Dracula*, however, effectively constitute voluntary Romanian contribution to the exclusion and “third-worldization” of Europe’s Southeastern periphery. They help to establish a perception of the area as a depository for various sorts of exoticized metaphors and, more importantly, as a region bound for eternal trouble, inhabited by bull-headed people inundated by historical enmities and cycles of violence. The adverse stance that one can take against circulating cultural stereotypes, however, should not obscure the fact that one communicates by relying on stereotypes, and that besides resisting them one can also capitalize on them. In the case of Southeast Europe, the voluntary self-exoticism leads to a situation in which the “Orientalization” of the region is revealed not as a purely Western project but rather as a process which has been embraced, internalized, and partially carried out by consenting locals.³⁷ It is not just “the West” which constructs the Balkans compliant to Western stereotypes; this construction is taken up and carried further to a large extent by locally-based cultural entrepreneurs themselves, and the resulting voluntary self-exoticism becomes a common mode of self-representation.

In the case we explored here, the exotic “otherness” of Romania, which may have originated in the West—as is clearly the case with Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*—was gradually taken up and internalized by local cultural entrepreneurs who were willing to depict their culture based on whatever Western stereotype of it was in circulation. These entrepreneurs had no problem being typecast detrimentally as long as the self-inflicted exoticism could be turned into a steady cash-flow. In his well known text on “cosmopolitans and locals,” Ulf Hannerz speaks of the dialectical interdependence of the two in a symbiosis that ensures “survival of diversity.”³⁸ It is the project of keeping diversity alive, he claims, that “allows all locals to stick to their respective cultures,” and simultaneously ensures the survival of cosmopolitans, as the latter cannot possibly exist “unless other people are allowed to carve out special niches for their cultures, and keep them.”³⁹ In the case we are discussing, however, the locals were carving a niche of “diversity” that was created for the sake of the cosmopolitans; the “local” was made to comply with the supposed demands of the “cosmopolitan” and the “survival of diversity” was surface appearance. It was compliance with the “tourist gaze”—the culturally-shaped mode of looking at a place that determines what tourists seek and see when they visit a destination—that determined decisions on what Romania and Romanians

were to be: they would be whatever was expected.⁴⁰ What on the surface would appear to be the “survival of diversity,” enabling the persistence of the “local,” was in fact not much more than a performance; a staged spectacle.⁴¹ One needs to concede, then, with Urry, that “national identity is increasingly conceived of in terms of a location within, and on, a global stage.”⁴²

If one ignores the intellectual property claims various parties have over Dracula’s image, the successful exploitation of a local exotic cultural asset proves directly linked to purchasing power and marketing savvy: Dracula is undoubtedly marketable, yet there is no existing demand for the product within Romania’s domestic market. For the Dracula Park project to be successful patrons would need to be brought in from far away and this proved difficult, especially when the added complication of various copyright claims kicked in. Accordingly, the politics of “self-exoticism” are closely linked to the clear distinction between internal (insolvent) and external (solvent) markets, effectively leading to a situation where one lives with a continuously split consciousness of one’s identity: what one *is* differs substantially from what one *pretends to be* in order to satisfy demand and sell abroad. It is a nonsense and often cynical commercial adjustment, often accompanied by concealed contempt for those Western clients who “buy” into the travesty. All the Dracula traffic may be indispensable from an economic point of view, yet it is treated by Romanians with scorn and ridicule. Australian cultural studies scholar Katheryna Olijnik Longely is quite right to claim, in this sense, that it is possible “for exoticism to turn the tables and become, potentially, a strategic interpretative tool for readings of cultural interaction”: “the exotic” changes positions and comes back to parody and mock the very act of presenting oneself as exotic.⁴³

In the wider context of the post-communist world, the only citizens of the former Eastern Bloc that are relieved from the need to come up with a similar type of marketable invention and are able to pay for their own “self-exotic” product appear to be the East Germans. Even though affected by high unemployment rates and plagued by difficulties, they are at least solvent. When East Germans come up with cultural products of so-called *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for Eastern Bloc things) they do not need to look for clients internationally, but can sell them to themselves, while Romanians and others have to have a product that sells abroad. It is noteworthy that the significant increase in the commercial value of objects catering to *Ostalgie* came alongside increasing purchasing power. Even though this process is at its most clear in the former East Germany, products of *Ostalgie* have occasionally been successful in other East European countries where the recycling of Cold War-era paraphernalia can be seen as part of a “communist nostalgia” trend in the region at large.⁴⁴ A good example would be the box-office triumph of Péter Timár’s 1960s communist nostalgia musical *Csinibaba/ Dollybirds* (1997) in Hungary, a film where Communist *apparatchiks* are presented as amiable folk frequenting garden pubs; the film brought in fine revenues even if distribution was limited to Hungary.

One of the clearest manifestations of the commercial value of this open nostalgia for the lost period of state socialism came with Leander Haußmann's nostalgia musical *Sonnenallee/ Sun Alley* (DE, 1999), a surprise box-office hit in Germany. Like other communist nostalgia films, *Sun Alley* was not exported and therefore could not create buzz abroad, but broke records locally and opened up market demand for further *Ostalgie* products. The commercial success had been unexpected even for director Haußmann, who, speaking in retrospect about a boom in *Ostalgie* in Germany, said, "We had evidently touched upon a basic need: the longing to reclaim a bit of one's own identity. All of a sudden the East German theme appeared to be interesting also commercially."⁴⁵ The massive commercial success of a more recent *Ostalgie* picture, *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, DE, 2003)—which made its budget more than ten times over within a matter of months, and which was the first *Ostalgie* product to achieve international success—significantly strengthened the expanding *Ostalgie* market of objects, artifacts, books, and television programs.⁴⁶

The *Ostalgie* trend is clearly building upon the need of people in the former East Bloc to regain their culture. It is an indirect admission that a viable popular culture had existed within the system of state socialism; one that was cast aside and denied throughout the "transition" of the 1990s, and needs to be reclaimed. The underlying commercial dynamics of *Ostalgie*, however, are also indicative that such reclaiming is affordable only for those who can pay for the popular culture of their liking. It all comes down to the purchasing power of the population: the East German production of *Ostalgie* can be successful because the Germans can sustain it by selling it to themselves. Elsewhere in the former East Bloc—like in Romania—cultural entrepreneurs could not possibly engage with domestic identity concerns; they had to look to artificially enhancing a dubious yet marketable cultural asset—like *Dracula*. To get their hard earned cash, they had to embrace stereotypes and continually perform on the global stage.

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Notes

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1. Rudy Chelminski, "The Curse of Count Dracula," *Smithsonian* (April 2003).

2. John Urry, "Globalising the Tourist Gaze," *Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK* (2003), 7. <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Urry-Globalising-the-Tourist-Gaze.pdf>. Accessed July 31, 2006.
3. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, 2nd edition (London: Sage, 2002), 11.
4. Dorin Danesan, mayor of Sighișoara. Quoted in Rose George, "Dracula Park Is Supposed to Revitalise Romania's Tourist Industry. But the Locals Think it Sucks," *Independent on Sunday Review*, 26 January 2002, 18–21.
5. Dennis Hupchick, *Conflict and Chaos in Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 49.
6. Ibid.
7. Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 135.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 149.
10. Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside: a Manifesto for Escape* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 14.
11. Ibid.
12. Andrei Codrescu, *The Hole in the Flag: a Romanian Exile's Story of Return and Revolution* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), 177.
13. Colin Quigley,
14. See <http://www.draculand.com>.
15. Scholars have repeatedly stressed that the links between the historical figure of Vlad Țepeș and the fictional Dracula have been grossly overstated and have insisted that these two should be studied as separate entities. The legends of Vlad's rule indeed inspired Bram Stoker but the novel has little to do with the real man. Vlad Țepeș, a 15th century historical figure, was born in 1431 in Sighișoara and his life has been linked to a range of Wallachian locations, even though his rule extended as far as Brașov (Kronstadt) and Sibiu (Hermannstadt). He had the reputation of impaling his foes, was killed in 1476, and is thought to have been buried near Bucharest on the shores of Lake Snagov. His Saxon enemies had printed pamphlets detailing his alleged cruelty; in historical research he is often seen as an early propaganda victim in a bigger political and economic game. "Unlike Vlad the Impaler," Franco Moretti aptly notes, "the historical Dracula, and all other vampires before him does not like spilling blood: he needs blood." Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," *New Left Review* 136, no. 1 (November-December 1982), <http://www.newleftreview.net/?page=article&view=2197>. Accessed July 31, 2006.
16. Quoted in "Coming Soon—Dracula Land," *BBC News* (BBC, 9 July 2001).
17. "Drakula Park—at Sighișoara," Romanian Ministry of Tourism website, http://www.mtromania.ro/oferta_eng/attractii/dracula/dracula_park.html. Accessed 9 October, 2005.
18. In response to these protests, the Tourism ministry released a 12 minute film at the Berlin tourism fair in March 2002. The English language video, called *Dracula and the Good Lord*, is designed to convince tour operators that organizing trips to the new theme park would not be blasphemous. "Christians Protest over Dracula Land Plan," *Ananova*, 23 October 2001.
19. "The proposed Dracula Park [is] wholly out of sympathy with the area and will

ultimately destroy its character,” Prince Charles said. “Prince Charles Opposes Dracula Park” *Newsline* (RFE/RL, 7 May 2002). This statement was followed by a phone call to Romanian president Ion Iliescu, who reportedly reassured the Prince that he personally was “not an ardent proponent” of the project; that Romania was “open to all suggestions”; and that the project would not be “blindly implemented.” “Romanian President Needs No Journalist Advice,” *Newsline* (RFE/RL, 9 May 2002). According to more recent reports, Prince Charles, who now enjoys the reputation of a Romanian “eco-avenger,” is still closely involved with the ecotourism project and is traveling to remote outposts in Romania “to see for himself the complexity of preserving Romania’s Saxon heritage against a backdrop of possible EU accession in 2007 and a growing tourism industry.” D. Atkinson, “Royal Approval of Rural Simplicity,” *Financial Times*, 8 October 2005, W5. The same *Financial Times* piece describes the horse-drawn cart as “the preferred mode of transport” of local Romanians. It appears that the Prince and his associates are determined to keep transportation at the same untouched level of delightful underdevelopment.

20. “Western Consultants Oppose Romanian Dracula Park Project,” *Newsline* (RFE/RL, 17 January 2003).
21. The dynamics of the story became reminiscent of the one of the abandoned theme park project near Braselton, Georgia, which had been considered as a potential development venture by film star Kim Basinger, who then callously dropped it in 1993, leaving many of the local people broke. Basinger had purchased Braselton in the late 1980s for \$20 million with the intention of developing a theme park modeled after Dolly Parton’s Dollywood in Kentucky. But then she was sued for pulling out of a Hollywood production and had to declare bankruptcy in 1993. In the fall-out many creditors—Braselton locals—also went bankrupt.
22. George, 18–21.
23. Ben Goldsmith and Tom O’Regan, *The Film Studio: Film Production in the Global Economy* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 98.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Indicatively, Romanian cinema’s attempts to use Dracula’s image directly have not been successful: a recent Romanian English-language production aimed at Western markets—*Dracula the Impaler* (RO, 2002)—did not export particularly well.
26. For a full list of projects see Castel’s website, <http://www.castelfilm.ro/filmography/filmography.asp>.
27. Urry, “Globalising the Tourist Gaze.”
28. *BBC News* (BBC, 21 March 2001).
29. See www.bramstokercentre.org.
30. Urry, “Globalising the Tourist Gaze,” 2.
31. Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: American Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments*, 2nd edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).
32. Dina Iordanova, *Emir Kusturica* (London: BFI, 2002).
33. “By the 1960s,” Lydia Papadimitriou writes, “the financial potential of tourism had been realized and the production of a set of stereotypical images of the nation followed. By the middle of the decade, plot lines and images related to tourism and holidays were regularly present in Greek musicals. A particular range of national

stereotypes associated with tourism emerged in the genre and included *tavernas*, beaches, ancient monuments, folk costumes. Rural and traditional Greece now became represented in picturesque images reminiscent of folk idylls, and ancient monuments were depicted next to contemporary buildings, thus underlining the old nation's embrace of modernity." Lydia Papadimitrou, "Traveling on Screen: Tourism and the Greek Film Musical," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 18, No. 1 (2000): 95–104. See also Lydia Papadimitrou, *The Greek Film Musical: A Critical and Cultural History* (London: McFarland & Company, 2005).

34. Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (London: Routledge, 1997)
35. Marian Țuțui, "Dracula, a Metaphor for the State of Small Cinematography and a Solution for the Romanian One," *Cinematographies of Small Nations* (Cinemathèque of Macedonia, Skopje, 1997), 122.
36. *Ibid.*, 125.
37. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI, 2001).
38. Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996), 111.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.
41. Hannerz.
42. Urry, "Globalising the Tourist Gaze," 7.
43. Katheryna Olijnik Longely, "Fabricating Otherness: Demidenko and Exoticism," in *"New" Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*, ed. Isabel Santaolalla (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 24.
44. See Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East: Film Culture, Unification, and the "New" Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
45. Leander Haußmann, "Es kam dicke genug," *Der Spiegel*, 8 September 2003, 220.
46. See a special cluster of articles in *Der Spiegel* (8 September 2003) on these issues. Released in February 2003, *Good Bye Lenin!* was made for about \$4 million and had already made more than \$40 million in the German market only by Fall 2003.