

Revolution and Mentality in Wallachia (1821-1848)

Abstract

This thesis is the result of a reflection upon the way how to build a relationship between Eastern Europe and a political event like a revolution, with a special approach towards the principality of Wallachia during the period 1821-1848. Putting aside the traditional view, mainly still a descriptive one, choosing the instrumentary proposed by the cultural history, the luckier heir of the history of mentalities, our research privileges un *approche problématisée*, focused on some very important topics, such as the relation between the discourse and the revolutionary practices, the politisation of the masses, the legitimacy and the violence, the rapport between the political modernity and the popular culture, the memory of the political event.

In order to achieve our purpose, we had to use a variety of edited and inedited sources. Therefore, we chose the travel narrations, annotations on old books, chronicles, memories, official documents – proclamations, administrative and diplomatic reports –, the press, the correspondence, interrogations, depositions. The employed methodology is specific to the cultural History of Politics, as it is defined in a series of French, Britain and North-American contributions. The most representative points of view are illustrated in the first chapter, dedicated to the evolution of the historiography on the subject, including a critical perspective upon the Romanian historiography. Far from being a momentary fashion or a superficial outlook of a traditional view, the cultural history of politics has proved itself extremely fecund in the last two decades, with visible results for the recent period of time, stressing unturned items, by introducing new sources and a new reflection, which demonstrated the complex character and the cultural dialogue built around the Political factor. As they are being synthesized nowadays by Sudhir Hazareesingh, the important directions of the field are the political symbolics, the collective memory, the political ritual, the history of mediations and the history of the imaginary and sensibilities.

From this point of view, our work was structured in order to offer a long term perspective on extremely well defined excerpts, relevant for our demonstration. The first part is dedicated to the transit from the Ancient Regime to the Modern times, seen through different topics, capable of sustaining our opinions. Subsequently, the first chapter insists on the change of the perception of space and time, the transition from the organic solidarities to the organised ones (Alexandru Duțu), the appearance of the public space and the critique of power. Actually, between 1780 and 1840, we observe the modification of the representations

of space and time, from elites to peasants. The contacts with the foreign armies (Austrian, Russian) gave birth to new habits (the cloths, the sociability) and contributed to the reconfiguration of the relations between the public and the private space. Despite the difficulties of communication, the process of civilisation (Norbert Elias) proves itself to be dynamic. The perception of the other records a series of both positive and negative shades, determining certain modifications on the collective sensibilities. The circulation of the elites, due to political, commercial or educational reasons, the rural mobility, even if compulsive in most of the cases, forced the surpassing of one's space, the diversity of individual or collective experiences and the enlargement of the cultural horizon. The circulation of the information, through newspapers, official bulletins or proclamations of the foreign armies, caused the infiltration, till the rural space, of information about exceptional spaces or persons (the sovereigns) from far away, excluded from a direct contact. The political event (the installation and departure of the princes, their reign and death, the victories of the Christian Empires) begins to perceive an increasing interest, demonstrated by the more and more precise notes, including in the old books. The fact that it is being associated with the eschatological time, whose representations are more frequent in the rural and urban space, is peculiar to a certain climate of the principality of Wallachia at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, a period dominated by both fear, death and hope. The contact with the civilised Europe, the discovery of the past in different representations, the mediations upon key concepts, such as country and patriot, the discovery of new elements of solidarity which overlap the traditional ones, are another indicator of the changes of mentalities in the Romanian society. These changes influenced the relations between the central power and society. Both the Phanariot prince and the Romanian one are the main subject of a constant debate and a diversified critique throughout the period investigated, due to the increasing expectations of all social categories. From memoirs to secret societies and conspiracies, the variety of possibilities clearly indicates a certain desacralisation of the sovereign, who is exposed to a double pression, from the inside, as well as from the outside. Hence, we can equally speak of the circulation of special representations of the political action, which imitate the current patterns of the epoch.

The second part focuses on the analysis of the temporality of the revolution, perceived at the level of the discourse, as well as through the installation of new practices and institutions. The time of the revolution is the one of a new beginning, of a renewed society, based on new values, like equality and fraternity, but also the good patriot (1821) or citizen (1848), the latter being stimulated by an emulating politics, constantly encouraged by

the revolutionary leaders. It is, also, the era of the exceptional personality, of the charismatic leader (Tudor Vladimirescu or Gheorghe Magheru), of the subversive enemy, defined in the inside by the tchokoï and in the outside by the Russian. All these subthemes constitute the analysis of the second chapter. The third one insists on the exploration of the collective sensibilities and the social imaginary, through the rumour, the universe of the popular violence, the control of the social body, but also of the revolutionary social spaces, such as the clubs, the schools, the administrative and the civil guard's headquarters. This phenomenon of political socialisation cannot be understood, unless we deal with a seduction of the Politics, which constitutes the object of the fourth chapter. In the first chapter, we demonstrated the important role of the soldiers in the revolutionary movement. Either we speak of the pandours from 1821, the members of the national militia in 1848, the appeal at a military sustain always appears as necessary and important. It is not just the Romanian case, but the comparisons with the French case from 1789 and 1848 (Serge Bianchi) or the South American one at the beginning of the 19th century (Clement Thibaud), illustrate the same thing. We could point out the episode of the constitution of the National Guard, a very representative moment for the civic culture of the Romanian patriotism, as well as a modern experiment, which partially succeeded, inaugurated by the revolutionary leaders who established a new model of the nation under weapons and of the revolutionary legitimacy. The role of the priests or of the revolutionary commissars as cultural mediators and instruments of the revolutionary power represents another opportunity of analysis. If the first ones were constantly used by the power for the propagation of its decisions, their implication or unimplication with the revolutionary government does not only concern the success of the revolutionary propaganda, but the perception of the novelty in the rural world, with the way in which these novelties correspond to the social expectations and the level they surprise the local solidarities or not. The priest, leader of his community, with or against the revolution, is a common cliché of both the revolutionary and the counterrevolutionary discourse, each of them pointing out the prestige of the servant of the shrine, as well as the legitimacy of the local power or not. Last, but not least, we cannot ignore the importance of the institution of the revolutionary commissar, who will ensure the spreading of the propaganda and the revolutionary symbols in the most remoted corners, contributing to the politisation of the masses. The success is, still, hard to measure, the resistance of some of the villages indicating a sudden brusqueness of the traditional mentalities (the reactions of the communities oscillate between the refuse of placing the revolutionary symbols on the steeple of the church and the violent reply against the commissars, who had to leave immediately)

and contradicting the reports, usually optimistic, on the success of the revolution in the provinces. The fifth chapter insists on the anthropological and political postulates of the feasts introduced by the revolutionary leaders. Therefore, we are able to retrace an enlarged space, from the entrance of Tudor Vladimirescu or the revolutionary govern in the towns till the much more elaborated forms of training the popular behaviour, of revolutionary pedagogy, political legitimacy and cultural dialogue during the ceremonies of swearing on the „Constitution” or burning the documents of the Ancient Regulamentary Regime, we assist at a constant presence of this festive dimension of the Politics. The chapter also includes an analysis of the political symbolism (Maurice Agulhon, Pascal Ory), of the role played by the symbols, such as the cross, the tricolour banner, the statues, the festive allegories, the Organic Regulations or the Archontology. Around them, new solidarities, oppositions and symbolic battles are created, whose importance is still far from being evaluated by the Romanian historiography, especially when regarding the measurement of the political spaces of the epoch.

The third part brings at issue, in the sixth and seventh chapter, the limits of the revolutionary power and its memory as a way of survival of a political project. Was the revolution a successful project? In 1821 and 1848, the two revolutionary movements stood under a powerful pression, both internal (the existence of counterrevolutionary groups, usually devoted to the Ancient Regime in 1821 or the Regulamentary one in 1848) and external (the entrance of the Turkish troops in 1821 and the Russian in 1848). The revolutionary authority was condemned to a limited period from the beginning. The co-inhabitation with elements of the Ancient Regime, the impossibility of fully and actively exerting the power (the case of Tudor Vladimirescu, obligated to co-inhabit with Alexandru Ipsilanti), the lack of an efficient control over the Center – the capital – being known that both Tudor Vladimirescu and the revolutionary govern had to leave, are only a few elements. The existence of counterrevolutionary groups, devotees of the Ancient Regime constituted, especially in 1848, a powerful brake against the popularisation of the decisions of the revolutionary leaders. Although, the myth of the counterrevolution was successfully used by the revolutionary govern from 1848, as a permanent stimulation of the local patriotism, of the shaping of the national solidarity around the revolutionary power, its importance to the public imaginary must not be neglected. The example of the plots from the 19th and the 29th of June is relevant for the fragility of the revolutionary power in 1848. The undergone repression after the entry of the Turkish troops in the principality in 1821 and 1848, offers a new image of the revolution. The restitution of the old type of power pursues the

disarmament of the population, the confiscation of the official documents of the revolutionary power, the detention, the inquiry and condemnation of the participants, the control of the spaces of public sociability and the surveillance of the territorial mobility of the inhabitants of the principality or of the foreigners, most of them, suspects. The process is much more obvious in 1848, when the participation at the revolution is equal to a political crime. The analysis of the testimonies entitle us to affirm that the repressive dimension focuses on three levels: a violent ebullition against the participants – sometimes the innocent ones become the scapegoat –, the organisation of a device of controlled violence (the institution of a special commission of inquest, detention, the inquiry and condemnation of the recriminated, the case from 1848). Consequently, in 1848, we assist at the constitution of a process of *damnatio memoriae*, which is being operated at the level of the whole society, with a different impact. The analysis of the interrogations of some revolutionaries, inquired by a special commission, allows the intimation of the sensible points for the definition of the space of the power. The qualities of propagandist, the participation at clubs or revolutionary ceremonies are considered serious mistakes which lead to severe punishments, in case the fault is demonstrated. The folders of inquiry demonstrate, still, that the retracing of the facts is a difficult process, the witnesses frequently change their declarations, the guilty ones deny any participation or know how to defend themselves, the political fault, even if more easy to define, is not always so easy to demonstrate. All in all, the last subchapter focuses on how the revolution fails in the outside, among the emigration, despite the hopes and planes conceived in the European space. The reconsideration of the attitude, the decredibilisation of the ex-leaders, such as Heliade Rădulescu or Christian Tell, the impossibility of accepting a common plan of action, the different visions upon the line of action, but also upon the memory of the revolution, obvious in some of the works published in the exile, lead to breaks among the members of the revolutionary elite. The challenge to duel, addressed by Bălcescu to Tell is a significant episode for the disruption of the revolutionary exile and the destruction, at a symbolic level, of the group Heliade-Tell, considered the „Judas of the Romanians”, as shown by a series of epistolary testimonies from the Magheru fund. How was this political fact from 1848 remembered? If until 1859, we can talk of a negative perception, built at an official level, considering that the power had been taken once again by the devotees of the Ancient Regulamentary Regime, eager to give up the „communism and socialism” installed in 1848, we remark that during the riot of the boarder guards and gendarmes from 1854, a significant episode takes place – the taken of the power in a village from Oltenia is made in the same revolutionary manner, by placing the tricolour flag on the

steeple of the church. The return of the ex revolutionaries and their acceptance in the governments after 1859, concurs with the revival of the revolutionary episode. The incident of the republic of Ploiești from 1870 takes place under the most clear 1848 revolutionary rhetoric; in the same manner, 1898 is the first commemoration, directed by the liberals, not necessarily as a public recognition of the revolutionary event from 1848, but as a symbolic assumption of the political filiation and as a confirmation of the legacy of the 1848 generation.

It is probably one of the great merits of the cultural history of politics, which allowed us to insist on the affective dimension of the city's life, on the emotions and on their role in History, as anthropologists emphasize nowadays (William M. Reddy). Not only the rational constructions, but also the emotional explosions, best illustrated by the rumours and ceremonies, demonstrate why it is not erred to interpret the revolutions as *political cultures of the emotions*. The role of the feelings in the politics raises an increasing interest in the last period, through the dedication of thematic numbers of reviews or books. Moreover, our thesis invites to another reflection upon a fundamental concept, such as the power, which is not so coercive as Michel Foucault thought and which appeared not as the privilege of a certain elite, but it is being permanently negotiated around the ideas, values, symbols or rites, giving birth to specific representations and practices. The part of imagination inspires both attachments and refuses, which belong not only to the elites, but also to the ones that were excluded for a long period of time from the power, such as the peasants, ignored by an ideologized historiography, for which they counted only from the perspective of the class struggle. These actors, correctly analysed, contribute to the clarification of fundamental subjects, like the politisation, the culture of the national patriotism, the social modernization or the citizenship. All these are important themes for the historiography of the subject, successfully studied by the Western and North American historiography, the Romanian space presenting extremely valuable information, contributing, as we have shown, at the synchronization of the Romanian historiography of the theme with the European and Universal one.