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Politics and national celebrations in
Romania during the reign of king
Charles II-nd

PH.D. THESIS ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION	4
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS, METHODS	5
PERFORMATIVITY	5
METHODOLOGY	18
CHAPTER I – THE SPACE OF NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS	23
1.2.RHETORIC AND PRACTICE IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE	23
1.2.RHETORIC AND PRACTICE IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE	29
<i>Alba Iulia – the meca of the Romanian spirit</i>	29
<i>Blaj – the cultural citadel</i>	35
<i>Cluj –the heart of Transylvania</i>	38
1.3.RESHAPING THE URBAN SPACE – THE CITY FESTIVAL	42
1.4.CELEBRATION SPACES INSIDE THE CITY – RITUAL PATTERNS.....	47
<i>The sacred space of the Church</i>	49
<i>The cemetery</i>	52
<i>Public buildings – Festiv decorations and temporary settings</i>	54
<i>The royal palace</i>	61
<i>The Cotroceni Plateau</i>	62
<i>The stadium</i>	66
<i>The scene</i>	68
<i>The rural setting</i>	70
<i>Findings</i>	74
CHAPTER II -CALENDAR AND CEREMONIAL TIME	75
THE CALENDAR AND THE CERMONIAL TIME –THEORETICAL GUIDELINES	77
2.1. THE NATIONAL CALENDAR OF THE ROMANIAN NATION.....	80
<i>May 10th the day when all aspirations are fulfilled</i>	83
<i>The place of the Great Union of 1918 in the colective memory and the calendar</i>	84
<i>Negotiating for free time: May day celebrations</i>	93
<i>The Day of all heroes</i>	105
<i>June 8th : a new sincronization of the national time</i>	108
2.2.THE INNER TEMPO OF THE NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS.....	118
2.3. THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FESTIVITIES : GENERAL FEATURES.....	121
CHAPTER III - ACTORS AND EMBODIMENT IN NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS	122
3.1. FROM SOCIAL TO NATIONAL IDENTITY BY MEANS OF GESTURES.....	124
3.2. THE NATIONAL PARADE	126
3.3. THE ARMY	131
3.4. THE CLERGY	137
3.5.THE YOUTH	139
<i>Children’s Day</i>	142
<i>The milk feast</i>	143
<i>January 24th</i>	144
<i>The month of May</i>	145
<i>June 8th – Youth and Sports Day</i>	147
3.6. THE PEASANTS	153

3.7. THE POLITICAL AND CIVIC ADMINISTRATION	158
<i>Who is present and who is absent</i>	158
3.8. THE FOCUS OF THE RITUAL : THE KING	163
<i>King Charles II during the celebrations of January 24th</i>	167
<i>Festivities in Bucharest</i>	170
<i>8th of June – Restoration Day</i>	173
CHAPTER IV - PLACE AND FORM OF DISCOURSE IN NATIONAL RITUAL.....	189
4.1. THE IDEA OF NATIONAL CELEBRATION REPRESENTED IN AND CREATED BY SPEECH	190
4.2. THE STRUCTURE AND THE FORM OF THE FESTIV SPEECH.....	192
4.3. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE : THE CELEBRATION OF JANUARY 24 : AN EXAMPLE OF THE UNIFYING POWER OF WORDS	198
4.4. EXPRESSING IDENTITY DURING CELEBRATIONS	204
<i>The voice of the elite</i>	205
<i>Opinions of the civic groups</i>	212
4.5. FEATURES OF PATRIOTISM	219
<i>Being a heroe</i>	220
<i>The Monarchy</i>	227
4.6. THE KING'S NARATIVE: OVERTONES	235
<i>Reactions to the king's speech</i>	242
FINAL REMARKS	252
REFERENCE.....	258
PICTURES	265

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The current study is focused on the national celebrations of the Romanian state between 1930 and 1940. This timeframe coincides in Romania with the reign of King Charles II. From a historical perspective this decade is interesting because it is a time of experimenting and a time of major political shifts. The Romanian state transitions within this interval from a democratic model externally represented as a constitutional monarchy to a totalitarian model imposed by Charles's authoritarian regime.

Using as documentary sources newspapers of the day, and some archival documents, I would like to outline the way in which the Romanian national identity is understood by various political and social actors; the way the national edifice implies a process of continuous negotiation between nongovernmental and official groups, as well as a competition of discourses originating both in the capital and the hinterland.

As I have already mentioned, the main source supporting my stated goals is the written press of the day, which offers for the considered timeframe ample descriptions of the events and a valuable sampling of images reflecting the way the national celebrations were conducted. Additionally I also used diaries and personal journals of the implicated major actors, in order to find a balanced perspective of the events between the social representation put forth by the press and the impressions of those directly implicated.

In order to analyse the main ceremonies of the Romanian state, each ceremony had to be deconstructed. From a methodological standpoint, a very valuable instrument that presented itself as a guideline was the theory of performativity. Thus, in an overall context, the paper is part of what Peter Burke calls the performative turn of history.

Generated by a shift in cultural pragmatics, the performative theory can be extremely useful in capturing the intersection of semantic and pragmatics processes. The present thesis therefore begins with an introduction and a chapter dedicated to these theoretical considerations. It refers to the way in which celebrations are interpreted by different researchers, be it anthropologists, historians or sociologists. It highlights those views that mostly deal with celebrations as moments of interaction between speech and action/physical representation. There is a focus on interpretive models pioneered by

anthropologists like Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz or Richard Schechner and on manner in which they have epistemologically linked ritual as study element of anthropology with other subjects and disciplines

Proceeding from a general theory to a more particular case, the present study tries to decipher within the structure and proceedings of national ritual the way in which national identity is understood and assumed at different social levels.

By taking terms usually used in anthropology, sociology and drama studies, the thesis is structured on the principle vectors of drama critique: space, time, actors and discourse. I have analysed through this filter the celebrations of the 24th of January, 1st of May, 10th of May (Romania's national holiday), Heroes Day, the celebration of 8th of June and that of December 1st. Contiguous to all these official celebrations I have chosen to focus also on other festive moments, closer to the border of festivals, bearing a stronger entertainment aura, as it is the case with Child's day, Milk day, or The Book festival

The space of national celebration: Starting here one can draw a series of conclusions regarding the whole mechanism of apportioning the political and national celebrations in Charles's decade of reign, more specifically what does and what does not constitute the Romanian identity landscape. As a formal aspect of the scene, the tendency in the interwar period is towards uniformity, or possibly a conquest of the new provinces by major architectonic landmarks built in the Romanian style that end up forming the background of the official ceremonies. In general, choosing the scene, the actual place, depends mostly on the character of the celebration, the intentions of the organisers, and the message they are trying to transmit. The street, the marketplace, the open place are the primary backgrounds used for celebrations and ceremonies, while the cemetery, the church, school or theatre are spaces considered more appropriated for the process of representing a national pedagogy session. As a side note one must highlight the fact that the authorities have the capacity to temporarily reorganise or totally modify entire swathes of the urban space.

The chapter titled *Calendar and ceremonial time* captures some aspects of the way in which social time can be modelled through festive action, but also the way the social and political spheres moulds the internal rhythm of each celebration. Considering

this dynamic, one can notice that at the end of the interwar period national ritual tends to occupy an increasing span of time, a larger portion of citizens free time, and it seems to trap them in a circular pattern of performing or rehearsing a ritual dedicated to the state or the king. Not only are holydays more numerous and spaced tighter and tighter, but their internal rhythm also suffers alterations. The most visible example is the celebration of June 8th, a celebration that becomes annually more burdened, extended with more ceremonial steps, and extended time wise. Another example is December 1st where the initial internal tempo is no longer adequate, forcing the organising civic actors to impose more strict timing and rules for the proceedings. There is an evident multiplying of voices wishing to express or make a point, which in turn leads to fragmentation and an effort to better manage time, so that everyone's voice is heard. In essence, celebratory time in the 1930s is extremely malleable, subject principally to political needs, but not insensitive to social constraints.

A second feature of the celebration timing is the way in which it respects and follows felicitously and intuitively the cadence and historical succession of events in the national calendar (24th January 1859, 10th of May 1877, 8th of June 1930). One can see how, vernacular facts and recent events, like the 1918 Union or the memory of the First World War try and sometimes succeed in finding a place within the social memory and the celebratory calendar among other great historical landmarks. The paper assumes that as long as there is a public debate regarding the proper calendaristic date for a national celebration there is a fundamental disagreement within social memory, which in turn leads us towards being able to follow the process through which a nation chooses its defining elements of the past, and ultimately build its identity.

The third chapter is entitled *Actors and embodiment in national celebration*. It explores the ways different social groups and actors use gestures and body language to express themselves within the celebration moments. Mainly I have tried to highlight the process of internalizing national identity through ritual and the subsequent acting out of this new identity.

By following the festive events, one can observe a powerful and constant civic participation. Throughout the decade the message of active Romanian national ideology is implemented and internalised. A physical aspect of the process is visible in the

ordering of national day's parading. The nation thus becomes a symbol, represented through groups such as the army, the clergy or the peasant. A privileged place is reserved for the sovereign within this schema. A substantial part of the theses is allotted to capturing the way in which Charles chooses to present himself and interact with his subjects within the confines of the national festivities. Of all the Romanian kings, Charles II is certainly the most resourceful in crafting and working with image, particularly the self-image he builds during this decade. From a genuine need to justify his reclaiming of the throne he builds and then greatly extends a propaganda machine. What is most glaring, be it for his contemporaries or later generations, is his ability and speed in alternating symbolic representations: he is the soldier king, the aviator king, the peasant's king, the Voievod of culture, the First Sports Personality in the country, the huntsman king and the Great Builder. A special focus is on his role as the Grand Sentinel role, which he chooses to reiterate and replay as often as possible. His preference for the role was partly because he was the initiator of the Sentinel movement (a Scoutt like organisation) which at the end of the considered timeframe ends up enveloping all other forms of civic education. The Sentinels are transformed in a few years in the symbol of national becoming desired by the king. Regarding youth, there is a general trend towards modelling them and setting norms for their development, and all of society seems to find this pressing throughout the interwar period. The aplomb surrounding the Scout movement, well reflected mainly in the 8th of June celebrations, is mainly intended to reflect the prestige of the monarchy. This specific holiday, 8th of June, also called Restoration day, is a perfect example of the way in which power (in this case political power) models a whole social and cultural system.

My paper has captured a series of recurrent traits specific to festive representation. The holiday thus requires uniforms, cadence and rhythm in movement, the army having a great role as a model and a source of inspiration. Religious gestures and symbols are also omnipresent as no national celebration is complete without them; moreover celebrations seem to create a strong bound between religion and folklore. As a matter of fact, the presence of the peasantry at national celebrations, particularly in the case of the ones orchestrated by Charles's regime but not exclusive to it, is extremely common. This reflects the internalisation of a particular formula widely circulated in

those years, Romania as peasant state /nation. Throughout his reign king Charles II diligently tried to co-opt this social segment, even by integrating them within the screenplay for the June 8th theatrics as sustaining elements in the Restoration narrative.

The chapter also tries to engage the issue of the relationship of other notable actors with the national celebratory proceedings, while highlighting the dynamics that transforms the national celebration into a vehicle for communication and symbolic infighting for the political class. I chose some examples, one being Charles's relationship with Iuliu Maniu, but also the shifting links between the sovereign and other political leaders. Action creates meaning so again the interpretation of ceremonial events follows the participation or absence, and the body language of the political figures within the time and space of public celebration.

The last chapter of the thesis is entitled *Place and form of discourse in national ritual*. The starting point is an analysis of the importance granted to the concepts of national ritual and national celebration in the narratives of the day. The opinions of a series of intellectuals are scrutinised in an attempt to answer the question: what does national celebration mean in interwar Romania?

The research seeks to underpin the rules by which discourses functioned within the national ceremonies. These then become indicators for the way in which the power games of the different participants play out, and when a particular voice is favoured over others by these same rules, we can anticipate the preponderance of a certain vision over the collective consciousness.

The next step brings forward examples of discourse held on the occasion of national holidays with the aim of identifying the way in which the orators build their narratives. The manner of ordering and referring to past, present or future events can serve as signs of the place each participant occupies in the competition for power. The same story, for example the December 1st 1918, or the Great Unification Day event, is sometimes ordered differently, thus bringing to the fore different perspectives. The present thus becomes influenced by the past in the same way that recounting the past is filtered by the needs of the present. A recurring theme I encountered in analysing the discourses and narratives of the politically powerful elite is the fact that although the narratives are projected by different actors with diverging intents, there still is a general

consensus that in the particular case of national celebration, the speeches should be composed in a way that emotionally binds the participants to the idea of the national ritual. Examples for this model are the slogans, songs or poetry of that era, which tend to combine elements of political ideology with aspects of popular culture in their lyrics.

Continuing in the direction of abstract expression that try to institute national consensus as a palpable reality, I have identified the profiles or specific elements that characterise each of the grand national celebrations. 24 of January, besides being the remembrance of the Union of the Romanian Principalities is mainly a celebration of the political class itself, of its development since that time. Being the story of a collective effort that was ultimately successful over time the story of the celebration acquires a romantic, even heroic aura. The same theme of success, of the fulfilment of political goals, is felt in the discourses marking the commemoration of the Great Union of December 1st 1918. But, as opposed to the 24th of January holiday, this celebration is neither institutionalised nor is it monopolised by a single voice or a single perspective. During the '30s it transforms into a catalyst for civic memory and collective remembering and also becomes a forum for circulating discourses regarding the fear of a possible breaking up of the Great Union. The overall theme of the antirevisionist sentiment is juxtaposed to other and different interpretations of the event, facilitating a different reading of the past, providing a different lens for focusing on past events.

The May 10th national holiday, seems to be, from the perspective of discourses uttered at celebrations a privileged moment dedicated to patriotism; its a time of enumerating and adding up significant events of the past but also the present, and citizens are reminded of national symbols, with the institution of the monarchy placed front and centre within the national architecture. The National Day celebration, similar to Heroes Day that usually succeeds it, are two holidays that convey a general consensus regarding the themes and symbols used in discourse. These two days of celebration constitute through the uttered words moments of ideological harmony, and possibly more, a consensus regarding forms of building the image of the ideal homeland. At this point the paper taken up the theory that considers celebratory ritual empowering for the participants, endowing them with creative attributes. There are multiple examples that

enforce certain ideatic elements, and that ultimately converge towards the opinion that the nation is a trans-historic element, a state of ideal community.

The highlighting of the foremost ideatic elements of the national celebratory discourse captures at the same time the influence of foreign policy, of the extra national context. Nationalism, often expresses as „românism” (the nationalistic Romanian ideology), is most often interpreted as a ethnocentric state of being that has to prove its viability on the international stage, offering a firm reply to revisionist propaganda.

The same chapter also discusses the efforts of King Charles II to appropriate ceremonies a personal medium for communication. Using the Restoration celebration and the multiple contiguous festive events, the sovereign treys to monopolise the attention of all of his subjects while at the same time reorient the meaning of discourses. The principle focus must be the royal persona, and his plans for the further modernisation of the country. For this purpose propagandists (usually famous figures of the Romanian cultural arena) developed a whole new discursive level full with commendation patterns that are subsequently used throughout the country.

A characteristic of celebratory discourse specific to the Restoration holiday is the framing of political gestures in terms more of traditional folkloric tales. This can be interpreted as a propaganda method trying to compensate through festive discourse the sombre (dark) predictions that crop up more and more in everyday life as a consequence of a much more complex and blunt international context. Even more so, under Charles's guidance, there is a gradual shift not only in content, but also in the external form of political communication; national celebrations become gateways towards a fantasy world, or a passionate love story, much more then a pragmatic political message. At the same time new discursive formulae recombine in an effort to make compatible feelings of respect and reverence for ones ancestors with the gestures from areas like sporting competition, games or exhibitions. Starting with this observation, I have tried to highlight within the space of this chapter the recurring model of dialog mediated by official ritualised events. From the moment he returns to the country one can see how the king's message, his discourse, along with his prerogatives become increasingly louder and more powerful. In the second half of the decade, celebratory discourses are a powerfully praising towards the sovereign; national holidays seem to constrain forms of speech and

discourse in the same measure in which uttered words on these occasions institute and validate reality.

In retrospect, national celebrations in interwar Romania have had both a positive and a negative outcome, but beyond this it can be noted that this has been the basic mechanisms used by all the political forces to mediated and built Romania's image until World War II.

The thesis ends with a closing chapter, a presentation of the bibliography and pictures cropped from newspapers for the interwar period that help render a more compelling story of the of the constituting elements and proceedings of national celebrations during the reign of king Charles II-nd.

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