

RECONSIDERATIONS OF THE BANATIAN REVOLUTION FROM THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT WAR*

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In general, studies dedicated to World War I and to the Great Union resort to a generous historical source when they make reference to the Banat and intend to explore the rural underpinnings of the manifestations that accompanied the two events: the questionnaire Nicolae Ilieșiu dispatched to the Banatian localities in 1934–1935. Rarely is there any mention made of another survey that was conducted more than ten years before and on a much larger scale than the one launched by Ilieșiu, a survey that had also targeted the Transylvanian territory, besides that of the Banat. More specifically, this was the challenge assumed by Teodor Păcățian, Head of ASTRA's History Section, a renowned historian and journalist, who had been officially entrusted, ever since 1920, with starting a project whose final outcome was envisaged to represent a monumental statistics of the human and material sacrifices made by the Romanian communities in the Great War.¹ Besides a series of quantitative questions, whose answers

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¹ Ever since 1915, the Romanian press in Transylvania had insistently advanced the idea of collecting data about the Romanian soldiers fighting on various battlefronts. Excited by this working hypothesis, Teodor Păcățian proposed the realization of such a project to the Committee of the Association because at the end of the war, in the event of a victory by the Central Powers, the Romanians would thus be able to demand their political-national rights, having already demonstrated their loyalty in the trenches. Păcățian's plan was quickly approved, ASTRA setting in motion its already existing networks, the so-called *despărțăminte* (branches), in order to ensure the massive infrastructure necessitated by this undertaking. However, given the fact that the political context was under continuous strain after 1916, the Association reorganized its priorities, this envisaged project being left in abeyance until after the war.

were synthesized and published in the volume entitled *Jertfele românilor din Ardeal, Banat, Crișana, Sătmar și Maramureș aduse în războiul mondial din anii 1914–1918*² [The Sacrifices Made by the Romanians in Transylvania, the Banat, Crișana, Sătmar and Maramureș in the Global War of the Years 1914–1918], Păcățian's questionnaires also included an annex with the following four questions:

1. What is the approximate value of the voluntary contributions in kind made by the Romanians in the commune during the war?

2. What is the total amount of the war-related damage incurred by the commune?

3. Was there a revolution in the commune in the autumn of 1918? How was it plotted, how did it progress? Was there a national guard formed in the commune? Under whose leadership?

4. How many inhabitants of the village participated in the great assembly held in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, at whose guidance and under whose leadership?³

Note should be taken that Teodor Păcățian never published in full the answers to the annex comprising the 4 questions, ASTRA constantly invoking the acute financial crisis that had prevented them from getting published.⁴

In this study, we shall focus our attention on the answers to the question regarding the revolutionary events that took place in the three former Banatian counties at the end of 1918, this question corresponding, in fact, to the most complex section of this survey.

In the ASTRA fund from the Sibiu County Directorate of the National Archives, there have been preserved 112 answers from Timiș, 41 from Torontal and 86 from Caraș-Severin, amounting to a total of 239.⁵

The questionnaires and the instructions on how to fill out the forms were sent to all the communes and the towns in the Banat and Transylvania, following an administrative route – the forms reached the prefects and from here they were distributed to the mayors of every locality.⁶ Păcățian recommended that

² This work saw the light of print both as a separate volume, at the Association's own publishing house in Sibiu, in 1923, and as a study published in the review *Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (1923): 32–54.

³ All the quotations that make reference to the answers collected by T. Păcățian's survey can be found in the ASTRA Fund\1922, 1063\1921 from the Sibiu County Directorate of the National Archives.

⁴ The "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library Cluj-Napoca (BCU), Special Collections, Păcățian Teodor, Msse. drawer 302\5, f. 7.

⁵ These are only the answers from the rural area, without taking into consideration Timișoara, a case that tends to be addressed rather superficially when the authorities send to Sibiu the information requested by Teodor Păcățian.

⁶ The answers were ordered in ASTRA's archive by Teodor Păcățian, who respected the

the respondents of this survey should be members of the local administrative elite (mayors, notaries), and of the cultural-ecclesiastical elite (priests, teachers).

The vast array of responses occasioned by this survey, which forms the core interest of our research, enables us not only to identify the extremely diverse scenarios that were enacted in the Banatian localities at the end of 1918, but also to establish certain typologies of the revolution that took place in the Banat and did not comply with a unique pattern of manifestation everywhere, in spite of the suggestions to the contrary advanced by historiography so far.

Although demobilization had not been officially announced, the end of October 1918 saw the return home of many soldiers who had fought for an empire that was already well on the way towards dismantlement. For the troops of Banat-born soldiers, who had witnessed and participated in the disastrous Battle of the Piave River, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a reality reinforced, at every step on the road back home, by the demands that were being voiced, the revolutions that were being launched and the new power structures that had already insinuated themselves at the level of the other nationalities.⁷

Even though the collapse of the front served as a catalyst of the revolution among all the ethnic groups in the Empire, the state of mind the Banatian soldiers had returned home with underwent a radicalization when they were confronted with the traumas and shortcomings experienced by those they had left back home. Having faced the inferno of the trenches, the soldiers came, at home, face to face with an ongoing apocalypse, which their families could barely cope with, having already endured, over the course of four years of conflict, severe requisitions and abusive measures on the part of the authorities, lack of employment, meagre crops, etc.⁸ The need for survival, at a time when

administrative structure of the territory from before 1918. Therefore, it should come as no surprise if some localities that are given as examples in this study are no longer to be found within the confines of the present-day counties.

⁷ On 17 October 1918, Istvan Tisza, a prominent representative of Hungarian politics, announced from the rostrum of the Budapest Parliament: "We have lost the war." This speech was to spread very quickly across all the fronts of the Monarchy, but a mere week after the population had started to become accustomed to the situation of a defeated country, the protests of the military, the students and the workers began across Hungary. Mihály Károlyi, *Memoirs of Michael Karolyi: Faith without Illusion* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 102.

⁸ Hungary's disastrous economic situation could be sensed in the very first months of the global conflict: in November 1914, the government resorted to internal loans, war obligations were issued, and in the summer of 1915 prices rose by 100%–200%. József Galántai, *Hungary in the First World War* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 83–84. The requisitions that were made in Hungary in 1917 were carried out by the military under the command of civilian authorities. In the Budapest Parliament, there could be heard voices condemning these

famine was a ubiquitous, haunting presence, and the strong feeling that this war had not promoted an equitable distribution of tragedy impelled many of these soldiers to engage, once they had returned to their villages, in a series of violent acts that eventually took the form of a revolution.⁹

The first level of their manifestations was caused by their ever more precarious socio-economic situation.¹⁰ Thus, there were attacks against the food warehouses administered by the communes or the municipalities, wood was abusively harvested from the state-owned forests, food was stolen from the aforementioned warehouses, the livestock of the small and large landowners in the rural areas was also stolen, taverns and plum-brandy distilleries were vandalized. For an image of the disaster in the territory, we shall invoke a small number of cases referenced in the answers to Păcățian's survey: 60 hectolitres of wine and 2 of hard liquor were stolen from the Winter estates in Fibiș (Timiș); 600 sheep, 300 pigs and 50 cattle were stolen from the estate of the Duchess of San Marco at Cenadu Mare (Torontal); at Vârciorova (Caraș-Severin), there were destroyed "the food store, the communal buildings, the Wertheim vault room of the commune, the locations where the peasants' association sells

campaigns, which turned into genuine military assaults against the peasants towards whom the troops behaved as if they were the greatest enemies of the Empire. Horst Haselsteiner, "The Habsburg Empire in World War I: Mobilization and Food Supplies," in Béla K. Király, Nándor F. Dreisziger, ed., *East Central European Society in World War I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 95–98.

⁹ In this study, we do not intend to enlarge upon the complex issue whether the term "revolution" is applicable to the manifestations that occurred in the Banat at the end of the year. Mention should be made that this label was imposed during the occurrence of these events among most of the peoples in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, these nations going through relatively identical transition schemes at the end of the war. Recent historiography maintains the same perspective, acknowledging the revolutionary characteristics of the events from the period 1918–1919 (See the study signed by Pieter Cornelis van Duin, *Central European Cross-roads: Social Democracy and National Revolution in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867–1921* (Berghahn Books, 2009). If we take into account the succinct definition advanced by Charles Tilly, who sees revolution as "a forcible transfer of power over a state involving a break in the polity," we can admit that the term can adequately describe the movements that began in the Banat and in Transylvania at the end of October 1918. Charles Tilly, *Revoluțiile europene (1492–1992)* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 26.

¹⁰ Besides the disastrous realities they encountered on their return home, the soldiers also came bearing the burden of explosive accumulations from the front line. The food crisis affecting the army had its roots in the blockade imposed by the Entente and the proportions it reached were disastrous – in the decisive year 1918, the soldiers receiving just water and a few slices of bread for nourishment. The confession from a letter written by a soldier on the Galician front is relevant for the proportions of the disaster: "I think we will die of hunger before a bullet gets us." Mark Cornwall, "Morale and Patriotism in the Austro-Hungarian Army 1914–1918," in John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 182.

various products, the residence of the former mayor, who was deposed in the spring of 1918, while at Denta (Timiș) the revolutionaries entered the houses of the wealthy and robbed them”.

The revolutionaries then moved on to a political-symbolic level of manifestations, destroying archives¹¹ and defiling the portraits of the imperial family, downgrading the officers, punishing in exemplary manner mayors, notaries¹² and individuals who had compromised themselves under the old regime, attacking the very levers through which the former political power had ensured its authority.¹³ These characters who had been the accomplices of a regime which had adopted an abusive conduct during the war had to be removed in compliance with a “peasant mentality that personalizes, to a great extent, social relations – it is not the state that is responsible for the disaster, but the human agency through which the state imposed its policy.”¹⁴

The manifestations that – in this initial phase, captured by Păcățian’s survey¹⁵ – resembled a millenarist uprising or a Jacquerie, characterized by the spontaneous outbursts of peasant-soldiers who managed to rally the enthusiasm of the masses, quickly took on the aspect of a revolution with a political program and with structures designed to achieve its primary objective: the transfer of power.

The answers to ASTRA’s survey concerning the events that had taken place in the Banat at the end of 1918 can be divided into four categories, as follows:

– There was no revolution, nor was there a national guard.

This was an answer found especially in localities with a majority non-Romanian population, some of them appearing as islands that were by-passed

¹¹ The archive represented a common ground for the manifestation of revolutionary impulses, its destruction being tantamount to the cancellation of an oppressive past. At Jebel, Timiș, “The horrid revolution broke out in the autumn of 1918 and the archive of the commune, which was purposely set fire to, burned down so completely that not a sheet of paper was left”.

¹² By the beginning of December 1918, over 300 notaries from the Banatian counties had taken refuge in Timișoara. Ioan Munteanu, Vasile Mircea Zaberca, *Banatul și Marea Unire 1918* (Timișoara: Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1992), 48–49.

¹³ Under the legislation drafted during the Balkan Wars, in case of war, exceptional powers in Hungary were to remain in the hands of the civilian government, even requisitionings having to be conducted under the supervision of the political authorities. At the same time, the Hungarian war legislation stipulated that during the period of mobilization, the government could demand personal and material services from the civilian population for the needs of the army. József Galántai, *Hungary in the First World War* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 76–81.

¹⁴ Eugenia Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra Primului Război Mondial* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2004), 267.

¹⁵ Since the question in ASTRA’s survey made reference strictly to the formation of the guards, there are relatively few allusions to the Serbian occupation, most of the questions actually describing the situation from before 13 November 1918.

by the ongoing tempest, as places that would only later become connected to history, as in the case of Periam-Torontal: “Since the inhabitants are, in their overwhelming majority, German, the prelude of national revival arrived here only after the accomplishment of the national ideal”.

However, even in localities with a majority Romanian population, there appeared numerous answers that denied the existence of the revolution. We cannot reject the possibility that there were, indeed, cases where the exemplary mobilization in the territory obstructed any acts of revolutionary violence, but when the authorities from the same locality confirmed – ten years later, in the questionnaire administered by Ilieșiu – the existence of revolutionary events at the end of the war or when the actions of the National Councils and of the National Guards support the same idea, the researcher is entitled to take into account the self-censorship of the authorities. Thus, the attempt to downplay the turmoil in the Banatian villages from the end of 1918 represented an exercise in camouflage that came in handy to the civil servants, a socio-professional category that was still insufficiently coagulated in 1922, the year when Păcățian’s questionnaire was administered. What should not be omitted from this explanation is one of the coordinators of this remembrance project: the fact is that ASTRA conducted this survey in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior. This detail is far from negligible, because it is very likely that when the local authorities answered this question, they took ample precautions, for fear of potential retaliations on account of the acts of violence they might have committed in the past. For some of the mayors, notaries, priests or teachers in the Banatian communities, social desirability¹⁶ and historical amnesia prevailed over the need to reconstruct the atmosphere from the end of the war as accurately as possible.

– There was no revolution, but there was a guard.

There are two scenarios that may be included in this answer category.

The absence of a nucleus of dissenters was also due to the fact that in these areas, the local Hungarian authorities controlled the situation in the territory (many of these localities had a majority non-Romanian population or an ethnically mixed structure) and the citizens’ loyalism was unquestionable at the rural level (we have not taken into consideration urban centres where projects like the Banat Republic of Otto Roth were shared by a part of the Hungarian population). In the localities where the Hungarian authorities still exercised their authority, the aim was to establish preventive civil guards, which were ethnically mixed, as a rule. These could settle any disputes and were led by the

¹⁶ Traian Rotaru considers that social desirability is a type of error that is specific to surveys. Traian Rotaru, Petru Iliuț, *Ancheta sociologică și sondajul de opinie* (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 115.

well-known representatives of the previous administration – the notary, the mayor etc.¹⁷

In the case of localities with a Romanian majority, the absence of revolutionary movements was directly related to the actions of the local elite (mainly the priest, the village teacher and former military), which oversaw the organization of the population into structures of the National Guard and National Council types.¹⁸

– There was a revolution, but there was no guard.

The absence of guards in localities where revolutionary events occurred may suggest the existence of a vulnerable elite whose authority was minimal and whose representativeness was rather vague. In some cases, however, the explanation invoked for this situation concerns the lack of the time required for establishing these structures of control, as the Serbs' intervention blocked these attempts at organization. As a rule, these revolutions without a guard were crushed by force (either by the Hungarian authorities, from the very first manifestations,¹⁹ or by the Serbian authorities).²⁰

– There was a revolution and a guard was also set up.

Shortly after the appearance of social disorder phenomena, National Councils and National Guards were established either as a community reaction or in response to the impulse received from the centre in Arad. These authorities aimed to put an end to the violent manifestations and to control the situation in the territory. Still, even the institution of the guards should be analysed in terms of the stages through which it progressed: in the first phase, the guards were led by the village priest and the village teacher, who attempted, by force of words, through inspiring speeches (*vorbiri însuflețitoare*), to placate the anger of the crowd. Subsequently, those who were co-opted in this leadership formula were former high-ranking military officers, who were much better connected to the centre of power represented by the Central Romanian National Council.²¹

¹⁷ Tolvădia/Livezile-Torontal: “There was no revolution, the guard was formed under the leadership of the former, dismissed notary, Grausz Gheorghe”; at Ciacova-Timiș, there was organized a mixed guard that included Romanians, Germans, Serbs and Hungarians and was led by Prime Praetor Zoltan.

¹⁸ Giulvăz-Torontal: “The revolution from the autumn of 1918 was not launched here, thanks to the power exerted by the guard, led by the teacher Ștefan Vulpe”; Cuptoare-Caraș-Severin: “The National Guard was formed under the leadership of the priest Ilie Jurescu and of the teacher Ioan Stolojescu, together with the former sergeant Iancu Jurescu”.

¹⁹ Sinersig-Timiș: “the revolution was over when Hungarian soldiers came and shot three villagers from Sinersig and 6 from Hungarian Secăș”.

²⁰ Stamora Română-Timiș: “the revolution was eventually suppressed by the Serbian army. The people did not set up a National Guard”.

²¹ In Cârpa-Caraș-Severin: “The first guard was formed by the leading villagers at the proposal

In the cases where the respondents spoke about the existence of the revolution, it should be noted that they referred only to the “revolution from the first hours”, not to the national revolution that continued it and entailed the transfer of power from the Hungarian to the Romanian authorities through the establishment of councils and guards. On the contrary, the revolution had come to an end, as many of the survey answers suggested, with the establishment of the guards²² or with the Serbian occupation²³, and had not reached a stage of maturity that would have crystallized the ideological motivations of the revolution.

In the collective mentality, the revolution clearly had negative connotations, being associated with the looting and violence in the area, committed either by soldiers who had become contaminated with anarchic ideas on the front or by the marginals and misfits from the villages. Still, there were also cases where the revolutionaries were people with a good social status, suggesting that the revolutionary phenomenon did unleash a genuine mental contagion in the region: “Some of the wealthiest inhabitants, who had not even been to war, took part in the lootings” (Slatina-Timiș, Caraș-Severin); “What was painful was the fact that even well-off people took part in the burglaries committed in the village” (Cenadu Mare, Torontal). At Cornea (Caraș-Severin), following acts of revolutionary violence, 150 individuals from the community were arrested and taken to Timișoara by the troops of the Hungarian gendarmerie.

When there was not enough local reaction or an elite that could manage the situation peacefully, the revolution was crushed *manu militari* by the Romanian county guards (the guards from Timișoara and Caransebeș), by the Serbian army or by the Hungarian gendarmerie. One of the most interesting cases happened at Văliug (Caraș-Severin), a Romanian-German locality, because there the revolution was feminine, in the sense that seven of its eight leaders were women of both ethnicities. They were executed at the scene of the place by the Hungarian gendarmerie from Reșița.

Some of the answers described the revolution as a confrontation between the soldiers who had returned from the front and the Hungarian military authorities (the gendarmerie, the military guards or even the paramilitary troops

of the undersigned, who secured weapons for the guards from the county. Several weeks later, Mr. Dr. Al Morariu, attorney at law, and Mr. Iuliu Vuia, a teacher, came into the commune, set up the National Council and reorganized the National Guard”.

²² The answers to ASTRA’s survey speak about revolutionary movements and the organization of the guards during the first two weeks of November, up until the entry of the Serbian army in the Banat. After this period, the information provided by the authorities is extremely limited. Cebza-Torontal: “The revolution died out when the National Guard was formed in the commune”.

²³ Murani-Timiș: “The National Guard was not formed because the Serbs came right away and occupied the commune”.

organized by the Hungarian power holders in the area). At Denta (Timiș), “On 6 November, there came a military company recruited by the son of the former notary Unger and shot nine revolutionaries, order being restored afterwards”. At Murani (Timiș), “The former secretary Henrich Hajos was assaulted by soldiers and, urged by his wife, he telephoned Baron Manasy in Timișoara and came out with 30 soldiers (the Hungarian National Guard) and shot Pavel Ognar”. At Jdioara (Caraș-Severin): “Ioan Vasii was shot by the former Hungarian head of the gendarmes, aided by the Hungarian Guard from Nădrag”. At Vălcani (Timiș), the revolutionaries were killed by the Hungarian gendarmes, but also by employees of the MAV Railways Guards, who had been summoned there by the former secretary of the commune.

The level of violence recorded by this survey was high. The survey registered a total of no less than 115 casualties from the ranks of both the revolutionaries and the anti-revolutionary forces over the first two weeks of November 1918 alone. Therefore, statements such as the one made by Cornel Grofșorean in 1946 should be regarded with a minimum degree of circumspection, because the situation in the territory was far from the idyllic picture painted by the Banatian leader: “The transition of power from the Hungarians to the Romanians was made almost imperceptibly, without the slightest turmoil, because the Romanian peasants did not seek to avenge the injustices committed for centuries by their now defeated enemies.”²⁴

On the other hand, Păcățian’s survey should not be regarded as an absolute historical source. Ultimately, what is at stake is a dialectic of memory, a discourse about the revolution that will stand or fade in the confrontation with factual history.

There is, in fact, a case which suggests that the willingness of some of the Banatian authorities to engage in acts of remembrance was questionable. Thus, the answer that the people from Gătăia (Timiș) gave, on 1 April 1922, to the third question of ASTRA’s questionnaire was this: “A revolution began in the autumn of 1918, but it quickly died out without any bloodshed. The Romanian-Hungarian National Guard was formed under the leadership of Dr. Gyulai, a former lieutenant of the Austro-Hungarian Army”. Six months later, when Teodor Păcățian made numerous appeals to the prefects to call upon the mayors who had not yet sent the filled-out annexes, the authorities from Gătaia resubmitted their answer to the survey administered from Sibiu. On 27 October 1922, they modified their initial version as follows: “In the autumn of 1918 there was a revolution in the commune, plotted by the soldiers who had returned from the war; travelling home through our village, they destroyed objects in 3 privately owned houses. The army arrived

²⁴ Cornel Grofșorean, *Banatul de altădată și de totdeauna* (Timișoara, 1946), 43.

from Timișoara and created order in the commune, killing Borzoicu George. The National Guard was formed under the leadership of Dr. Gyulay Ioan, a former lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian Army”. The latter version brings a series of new elements compared to the initial answer (the scenario of vandalisms, the soldiers being cast as protagonists of the events, the army from Timișoara as an order-restoring agent), but contradicts the first version that spoke of a bloodless revolution, mentioning the existence of a victim.

The example above can justify a cautionary approach to the source represented by Păcățian’s survey, which practically has all the specific limitations of an undertaking that intends to scour the collective memory of a community

Although as a historical source ASTRA’s survey is characterized, as already stated above, by a series of constraints that prevent its transformation into statistics, we have attempted to approach this source from the perspective of cultural history, a niche that may open other avenues of interpretation. Thus, since the survey presents the advantage of an impressive coverage and since the answers provided by the administrative-cultural authorities in this area built a system of representations for the Banatian revolution, we have endeavoured to establish some typologies, some patterns followed by this revolution from the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which are evinced by Păcățian’s survey. In what follows, we shall try to highlight the categories of the “revolution as representation” from the 239 localities under study, in full awareness that the situations analysed are marked by individual peculiarities and by an array of nuances. Obviously, there were cases in which these typologies merged, generating the most diverse manifestations.

The most frequently encountered typology in ASTRA’s survey is that of a *justice-driven, socially-motivated revolution*, which unfolded along the following coordinates: Duleu (Caraș-Severin) [the villagers, our note] “were very annoyed because during the war, their harvests were requisitioned by force, year after year. They seized cattle, lard and bacon. All of these were subsequently paid for at a very low price and, to this day, some have not received any money. War subsidies were often paid with a 6-month delay. Harvest during wartime was rather poor. Nothing was stolen from individuals, only the buildings of the large landowner got dilapidated and everyone stole from him. No one was killed”. This revolution was also a manifestation of freedom that fell outside the scope of legality. Valeapai (Caraș-Severin) “There was a revolution. The soldiers came home breaking and stealing everything, and when they arrived in the commune, they continued their so-called freedom, breaking, in the first instance, into the communal house, the notary’s house and the subnotary’s house, stealing the notary’s and the subnotary’s entire fortune, and vandalizing the notarial chancellery”. When they broke into food pantries and shops, the

revolutionaries' gestures were justified by the sentiment of forcing a time of social justice into existence, this sense of justness being an unavoidable ingredient of the social imaginary of any revolution. When attempting to explain the violent actions of these ex-soldiers, the respondents referred to a series of causes that had accumulated and spurred the soldiers' gestures. Although the revolutionaries resorted even to murder in the autumn of 1918, exemplary punishments were enforced in those moments, eliminating from the community those agents who were considered to be a threat to tranquillity in the village, those who had created tension and those who had not adopted a humane conduct during the war. Here is how the case of the notary from Jădani/Cornești was recounted: "The revolution was incited by the arrogant stance of the notary from the commune, as he deprived the population and, respectively, the soldiers who had come there, of bread, giving the requisitioned wheat, destined for the commune's supply, to a swindler who was to sell it; the soldiers came, they held the notary accountable, beat him and drove him out of the village. And then there was peace". Exclusion from the community was regarded, in many cases, as an exemplary punishment, the vicious members of the social body being ousted accordingly. There was a moral practised by the revolutionaries who felt mandated by the community to lay down the law against those who had behaved inhumanely and abusively during the war. The violence they manifested towards their victims was not limited to those of a different ethnic origin, as there were also cases in which the revolutionaries' fury was levelled at Romanians: "On the 12th day in the month of October, a hand that is still unknown killed by gunshot the former communal juror by the name of Ștefan Țundrea, a Rom[anian], of Gr[reek] Cat[holic] rel[igion]. The said man had been very harsh to people in his line of work, and he was the most dazzling supporter of the former administration and the idea of a Hungarian state, crossing the line into downright unconsciousness. During the war, he had shot a young man, by the name of Adamescu Atanasie, for insubordination".

„The revolution imported from the front. Macedonia (Torontal): The revolution began under the influence of the spirit brought back from the front". This is a plausible assumption, since the most of the soldiers who returned to the Banat in 1918 had fought on the Italian front, where they had experienced extreme violence and a terrible famine as I mentioned before. For this humiliated army, the journey back home served as a catalyst that unleashed all the frustrations they had endured.

The revolution as imitation, as a community-sanctioned norm. Cenadu Mare (Torontal) "In the autumn of 1918, the soldiers from the village returned home

with their weapons and heard that the revolution had started in Szeged, so they were waiting for the moment when they could start plundering in the commune”, Saravale (Torontal) “There was a revolution, triggered as follows: seeing and, above all, hearing what others had been doing in the neighbouring communes, the inhabitants of the village also started to wreak damage”. There are quite a few cases where reference was made to the outbreak of a revolutionary epidemic that had seized the entire region and had proved impossible to keep under control by the national guards, especially during the first days of November.

The hijacked revolution. Silagiu (Timiș): „The revolution started for a national cause and degenerated into the complete destruction of communal order.” Some of the respondents spoke about a revolution whose national ideology had been confiscated by the violent manifestations that had cast into shadow the efforts of the political leaders from Arad and created an unstable situation in the Banat region. On 6 November 1918, in the manifesto *To the Romanian Nation* signed by one of the leaders of the Romanian National Central Council (Consiliul National Roman Central), Ștefan Cicio Pop, attention was drawn to the disruptions that put the national revolution at risk: “Every Romanian has the duty to contribute to maintaining the order. The looters are in fact the greatest enemies of the Romanian people. Lend us a helping hand so that we can present to the world the young and beautiful Romanian nation, in its untarnished purity, immaculate, in its entire splendour”.²⁵

The revolution as a ceremonial or as a community celebration. This was a situation encountered especially in the important centres, where mobilization was less difficult since the population that could be conscribed was more consistent numerically. This was a revolution that swiftly operated the translation from a national to a social focus. This kind of revolution could only be assumed by a charismatic elite, with a faultless rhetoric of national survival. At Mehadia (Caraș-Severin): “In the autumn of 1918, the revolution broke out here too, but it did not degenerate into acts of abuse, robbery or murder: it turned into a grandiose expression of religious and national sentiment, the population being absolved, by the priest Coriolan Buracu, from the oath sworn to the fallen Empire and submitting the new oath of allegiance to the Romanian nation and homeland”. At Coșteiu Mare (Caraș-Severin): “In the autumn of 1918, there were some movements similar to a revolution in the commune, but they were generated by the enthusiasm of the time, by the joy of liberation from the Hungarian regime”.

²⁵ The Cluj County Directorate of the National Archives, Fund: The National Guards Collection 1918, f. 1.

The peaceful revolution or the revolution as a euphemism. Mодоş (Torontal): „There was a revolution in the commune, but it was gently defused.” Toager (Torontal): “In the autumn of 1918, no historical event happened at the revolution; as they were all peaceful Romanian people, they had no clashes with anyone; In the commune Ohabița, there was only a sign of revolution was, but no damage was caused”. There were answers to this question that attempted to tone down the effects of the revolution, presenting it as an almost innocuous period. At Berecuța (Timiș) “The revolution began in the autumn of 1918, but it quickly died out without bloodshed”; at Vălcani (Timiș) “the partial revolution lasted 2–3 hours in the commune Vălcani and came to an end before it even started”; at Voiteg (Timiș) “the revolution died out by itself”. Even though such expressions have a touch of humour in their attempt to minimize the turmoil in the Banatian villages, revolutionary violence was a reality at the end of the war and was intensely experienced by the rural population, which had been liberated into a world marked by large-scale transformations and by the power vacuum from the aftermath of the global conflagration.

Such approaches to the manifestations from the end of 1918, in terms of the discourse they generated and the cultural-political stake they represented, may offer the chance for a recalibration of the historical interpretation related to this topic. This knowledge may reach beyond the usual descriptive-evental horizon and this direction may be supplemented, in the future, by a necessary prosopographical analysis of the Banatian revolution.

As mentioned before, the survey conducted by Păcățian represents a source that ought to be cautiously addressed (for what it ultimately appeals also to an administrative memory, which is confined, sometimes, to legalistic clichés and is cursory, in most cases). This source should, moreover, be correlated with other historical sources (the official documents issued during the events, the documents of the National Councils and of the National Guards, Ilieșiu’s project, memoirs and the press). Notwithstanding all this, despite the caution with which researchers should investigate the results of ASTRA’s project, we cannot ignore the fertile interpretative nuances that the all-encompassing gaze made possible by this experiment in remembrance may bring.

Translated into English by Carmen-Veronica Borbély

RECHESTIONĂND REVOLUȚIA BĂNĂȚEANĂ DE LA SFÂRȘITUL MARELUI RĂZBOI

Rezumat

În anii `20, Teodor Păcățian, președintele secției istorice a ASTREI, reia un mai vechi proiect, acela al unei anchete monumentale care să ofere o scanare complexă a evenimentelor ce s-au consumat la sfârșitul Marelui Război în Transilvania, Crișana, Maramureș și Banat. Prezentarea noastră, axată pe ultima regiune, analizează, pe baza răspunsurilor la chestionarele ASTREI, un interval provocator, ce realizează de fapt translația puterii în teritoriu, proces mult mai intens resimțit de o lume bănățeană aflată “la graniță” în care se confruntă mai multe proiecte naționale concurente. Radicalizarea soldaților întorși de pe front, traumele celor de acasă, tensionarea relațiilor cu alteritatea, efervescenta soluțiilor de supraviețuire puse în joc creează astfel cadrul propice pentru o serie de mutații politice și sociale.

Deși ancheta ASTREI suportă, ca sursă istorică, o serie de încorsetări, de limite care vor fi luate în considerare, meritul demersului lui Teodor Păcățian constă în amploarea avută, în raza de acoperire impresionantă ce permite stabilirea unor tipologii, unor tipare sub care se desfășoară această revoluție de la sfârșitul imperiului, ce dezvoltă scenarii mult mai diversificate decât cele consacrate.