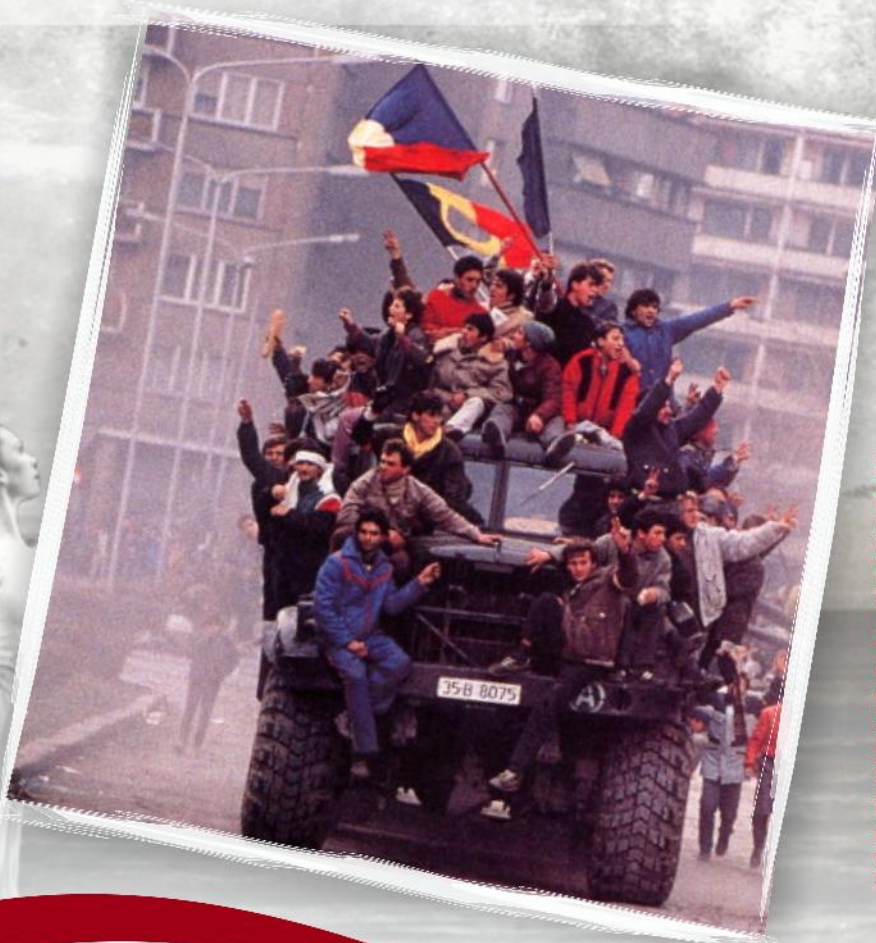


Cristina BUCUR

# The weight of historical patterns, collective memory and historical legacies over the evolution of the Romanian democratization process



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CRISTINA BUCUR

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**Lumen**

Iași 2006

**Cristina BUCUR**

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EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANIAN DEMOCRATIZATION  
PROCESS**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. General framework and research methods

While there has been extensive research into the “third-wave” democracies and many scholars have addressed the weight of these countries’ political culture within the democratization process, to date little research has been carried out with a view to produce a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the political and civic participation patterns of the Eastern people and their attempt to adopt a democratic political system. The aim of this essay is to evaluate to which degree the political institutions and action models that have been proposed for adoption in the aftermath of the Romanian 1989 revolution were consistent with the political culture of the Romanian society. The analysis of the Romanian political culture will thus be accompanied with an assessment of Romanian people’s ability to engage in common actions, to act collectively in order to reach their common goals by adopting a democratic political system. It will be shown that the roots of the difficulties encountered in the Romanian democratization process, at least during the early 1990s, lie in the incompatibility between the traditional political culture and the democratic political system that was to be adopted. Furthermore, it will be proved that some of the obstacles that the democratization actors, such as the post-communist mass media, found impossible to surmount can be explained by the little attention they paid to the political and civic participation patterns of the public they addressed.

We considered that a cultural approach is strongly required by any analysis that aims to evaluate the way countries from the third wave of democratization embarked on the new transition processes. As pointed out by Russell J. Dalton, the political institutions and the basic principles of a political system usually have a constant nature, which makes difficult any investigation of the way

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institutional changes interact with the cultural ones.<sup>1</sup> But given the fall of communism in late 1980s, new opportunities arose for the study of the consistency between institutional and cultural choices. Thus, it is very important to take into consideration to which degree the prospects of a successful democratic transition in these countries was contingent upon their accommodation with a political culture consistent with democratic policies. It is obvious that the more consistent the political culture of a transition country with democracy, the more successful was that country expected to be in completing its transition.

Nevertheless, our intention is not to prove that a society with a political culture which does not appear to be compatible with a democratic system is bound to meet fatal difficulties in its democratic transition. We will rather attempt to emphasize the difficulties that a non-democratic culture may bring about in the democratization process.

As emphasized by David E. Apter, the political systems, irrespective of their democratic or authoritarian nature, are important to the extent that they are “configurative”, in other words to the extent that they establish rules and principles capable to regulate the political behavior.<sup>2</sup> However, when individuals or groups of individuals from the civil society attempt to change or to elude the pattern of behavior already established by either legal or revolutionary means, the values and principles of that society also change as well as the general social goals. As a result, any comparative political approach has to take into consideration the analysis of the real “configurative” nature of various political systems and also the way in which such configurative types can be effectively established and maintained and how the discrepancies

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<sup>1</sup> Russell J. DALTON, “Politica comparată: perspective microcomportamentale”, in Robert E. GOODIN, Hans-Dieter KLINGEMANN (editors), *Manual de știință politică*, traducere de Irina Ana Kantor et al., Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 302-3.

<sup>2</sup> David E. APTER, “Politica comparată: vechi și nou”, in Robert E. GOODIN, Hans-Dieter KLINGEMANN (editors), *Manual de știință politică*, traducere de Irina Ana Kantor et al., Polirom, Iași, 2005, p. 329.

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between the recommended political behavior and the real political behavior can be accommodated.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, when the democratization process of the third-wave democracies comes into discussion, the question that has to be answered regards the way democracy can be established, adapted and maintained despite the various threats that may come from the social or political levels.

Any comparative approach that addresses the democratization process is bound to adopt a specific research strategy, the most important of which are the institutionalist, the developmentalist and the neo-institutionalist ones. As the institutionalist strategy is focused of the functioning mechanisms of a political system, we will turn to the developmentalist strategy, which is more concerned with the study of social changes.<sup>4</sup> We consider that this research strategy is more appropriate for our investigation as we have already emphasized that in this study we are more concerned with the way a non-democratic political culture can become accommodated with democratic institutions and with the democratic functioning mechanisms. All of which does not mean that we consider the latter less important, but rather that we believe that an initial analysis of a transition democracy is likely to produce more conclusive results when a developmentalist approach is adopted precisely because it pays considerable more attention on the social and cultural changes. In this context, we should also emphasize that the institutionalist theories were not underestimating the weight of political culture in those countries that democratic institutions, constantly pointing out that these institutions can function properly only to the extent that they are consistent with the democratic values, norms and principles.<sup>5</sup> The developmentalist theories are however less confident in the configurative powers of democratic governments and constitutions and placed more emphasis on the necessity of a simultaneous and mutual process of enforcing the democratic institutions through top-bottom as well as bottom-top

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> Apter, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 334.

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levels. They considered that the democratic development was sooner or later bound to generate the same values and socio-cultural institutions as those characteristic to industrial societies.<sup>6</sup> As a result, a greater attention started to be given to social structures and the way democratic values could be effectively rooted in previous non-democratic cultures. A key question regarded the way individuals could be determined to adopt these values and to reach a consensus regarding the democratic rules and institutions and hence the focus of developmentalist studies on the institutionalization, internalization and socialization of democratic norms.

The main research approaches that will be adopted in this essay are the cultural and the rational choice models, which in our view provide the best theoretical framework that can be employed in order to determine the pattern of political participation characteristic to a given society. From the first point of view, to analyze the political culture of a nation is to view political behavior as learned behavior and thus to examine the cultural factors that have determined that particular pattern of political behavior.<sup>7</sup> The other main approach that addresses the issue of citizen participation in politics, the rational actor theory, seeks to explain individuals' decision to involve in common actions by using rational choice explanations. Our main interest in exploring this debate is on the one hand to determine which approach gives a better insight into the Romanian society's pattern of political participation, and on the other hand to emphasize why the adoption of one of these models provides the political scientist with better analytical tools for the study of the democratization process. The inner premise from which this study starts, and which has determined us to examine more carefully the Romanian political history while evaluating the Romanian transition process, can be summarized by quoting D. Rustow with his

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 337.

<sup>7</sup> Sidney VERBA, "Culture, Calculation, and Being a Pretty Good Citizen: Alternative Interpretation of Civil Engagement" (July 1, 2001). Center for the Study of Democracy. Paper 01-01, p. 1.  
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groundbreaking article that put forward a new theoretical approach designed to analyze the “advent” of democracy: *“the study of democratic transitions will take the political scientist deeper into history that he has commonly been willing to go”*.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2. An outline of the main chapters

The opening chapter “**A theoretical framework for the study of political participation patterns**” starts from the assumption that any investigation aiming to determine the political participation patterns of a given society should start from an analysis of the way individuals are used to join their efforts by establishing interest groups and associations as a means to pursue collectively their common goals. In this context a difference has to be made between democratic and totalitarian societies. While we will present some of the most important Western theories addressing the issue of interest groups and collective action from both cultural and rational choice perspectives (as put forward by David B. Truman, Arthur Bentley, Mancur Olson and Terry M. Moe) we will also point out what makes these theories inapplicable to Eastern European countries. Following Gordon Skilling’s theory we will nevertheless aim to determine whether a collective action pattern could be identified in the Eastern European space during the communist regimes. Afterwards we will concentrate on three variables of social capital as defined by Elinor Ostrom and T. K. Ahn that we consider to decisively determine the collective action pattern of any society: the degree of trustworthiness between individuals, the social networks and the institutions. In this context our aim will be to point out what is the relevance of considering trust as a variable that influences the quality of social interaction, social networks and institutions and how this relationship is reflected in different types of political systems.

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<sup>8</sup> Dankwart A. RUSTOW, “Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model”, *Comparative Politics*, 2(1970): 337-363, p. 347.

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The hypothesis tested in this chapter is that each type of political system is likely to find its correspondent in the collective action pattern of the individuals and as a result each change in the political system has to be accompanied by a correspondent variation in the political participation patterns. For instance, in democratic regimes individuals interact and form groups that can be representative for their political or economic (private) interests or for both economic and political interests. However, this is not anymore the case in non-democratic societies, and one has to identify the changes that occur in the collective action patterns once a society is forced to adopt a non-democratic regime. It is therefore expected that when such non-democratic regimes last for a period of time considerable longer than previous democratic experiences, the collective action patterns that individuals eventually institutionalize will not be able to undergo an instant accommodation with a democratic political system once the latter is reinforced. From this perspective, the following chapters will aim to emphasize why the change of a political system has to be followed by a change in the collective action patterns if the institutionalization of that political system is to be considered effective. In this context, the comparative analysis of the social capital variables above mentioned will reveal why the political culture of the countries that undergo such transformations is one of the main factors that may support or prevent such a quick and successful democratic transition. Nevertheless, in order to be able to put forward a sustainable theory in this regard, it is important to have a clear view of the political socialization and civic participation patterns supported by the political culture of a society before attempting to determine what type of democratization model best fits the democratic transition of that country.

For this reason, in the chapter “**Romanian patterns of political socialization**” we will put forward an evaluation of the pre-1989 Romanian society’s accommodation with a democratic political culture. Our main concern in this regard will be to determine whether in the short history of the Romanian constitutional

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monarchy a democratic political culture had enough time to become rooted in the Romanian society. If such were the case, it would mean that the individuals also succeeded to develop a democratic collective action pattern, enabling them to become used with creating groups and joining their efforts whenever they aimed to reach a common goal. For these reasons we will analyze the most important political discourses in the inter-war period so as to determine what where the values promoted by the political and intellectual elite and whether these values were consistent with the previous Romanian political culture or presented in such a way as to determine individuals to believe that liberal democracy was the best form of political system that they could adopt with a view to accomplish their own collective and individual interests. Afterwards we will make an analysis of the way the post-war communist regime affected the Romanian patterns of political socialization and participation. This analysis will be made with the use of a theoretical framework of the civil society concept in Eastern Europe as made up by the perspectives of Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, Grzegorz Ekiert and Janina Frentzel-Zagorska.

Taking into account the high instability of the Romanian political institutions throughout its history, we believe it is essential that one should evaluate how such alterations in the institutional structure also affected the individuals' perspectives over their participation in the political life. Naturally, the existence at a certain moment of time of a stable democratic regime forces us to determine whether this institutional stability succeeded to find its correspondent in the individuals' adoption of democratic values and in their ability to involve in the political life by abiding the democratic rules and principles. In other words, the existence of a pre-communist democratic experience binds us to examine on the one hand whether any transformation occurred in the social capital variables and on the other hand whether such transformations, if any, gives us the right to conclude that a democratic political culture succeeded to root itself in the Romanian society. Moreover, the further and decisive change in the political system that took place

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once the communist regime was enforced determines us to expand our investigation to the changes that took place in the social structure with a view to determine what kind of political socialization and participation patterns remained affordable in the Romanian society. As a result, this chapter is based on the hypothesis that an evaluation of the Romanian democratic transition and its prospects of success cannot be made unless we are able to identify the type of political culture that the Romanian society had developed. In other words, we believe that in order that the democratic transition could have been successful, the political change in 1989 should have been accompanied by a correspondent change in the collective action pattern. This is usually the case when the popular upsurge is preceded by a phase of liberalization, when individuals start to mobilize and to give signals that that they want something to change. To this end they usually form various trade unions, grass-roots movements, professional and intellectual associations and support each other in carrying further their common desire for democratization. By and large, the popular upsurge takes place in a euphoric moment “*when a vast majority of the population feel bound together on equal terms, struggling for the common goal of creating not merely a new polity but a new social order*”.<sup>9</sup> But when the popular upsurge is not the direct consequence of a popular mobilization and when the civil society had always been repressed and was inexistent even in an underground form, a deeper analysis of the society that embarks on the transition path is required. And this analysis has to be focused on the political culture that the individuals from that society are accustomed with and should aim to determine whether this political culture is consistent with a democratic political system. As a result, it seems that in order to analyze the democratic transition of a third-wave country that falls in the second category of popular upsurge, we should identify a democratization theory that pays considerable attention to the role played by historical

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<sup>9</sup> Guillermo O’DONNELL, Phillippe C. SCHMITTER, *Transitions from authoritarian rule. Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1986, p. 54.

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determinants in shaping a political culture that allows individuals to view the democratic political system as “the only game in town” and to quickly proceed towards the democratic consolidation.

In order to reach this goal, the fourth chapter, **“Democratization theories. Identifying a suitable model for the Romanian case”**, will start with a brief account of the most important theories of democratization that have usually been used in order to explain the democratic transition of the Southern and Eastern European countries. Our main focus will be on the interactive theories, as put forward by Geoffrey Pridham, and on the importance assigned in this context to historical determinants that on the one hand are considered key factors for the way collective memory is formed and on the other hand are viewed as playing an important role in determining the type of transition models and theories that are to be applied in each national case. Within the category of historical determinants we will include historical patterns and historical memory, historical legacies (with a view to assess ways of overcoming the past) and political learning from history (with a view to emphasize how such a political learning process may facilitate democratic consolidation). Within this framework, in order to determine the weight of political culture over the Romanian democratic transition, we will analyze the influence that major historical events have had over the collective experience, cultural values, attitudes and behavioral patterns of the Romanian society; afterwards we will deal with historical legacies and their potential perception as negative or positive factors in a successful democratic transition; and finally we will try to determine whether a political learning pattern did function within the Romanian society during the transition period.

In the second part of this chapter we will test the hypothesis according to which a genetic theory of democratization is the most appropriate model that one can use in order to analyze the Romanian transition to democracy. We will thus apply Rustow’s genetic model of democracy to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Romania with a view to identify the components of the democratic background

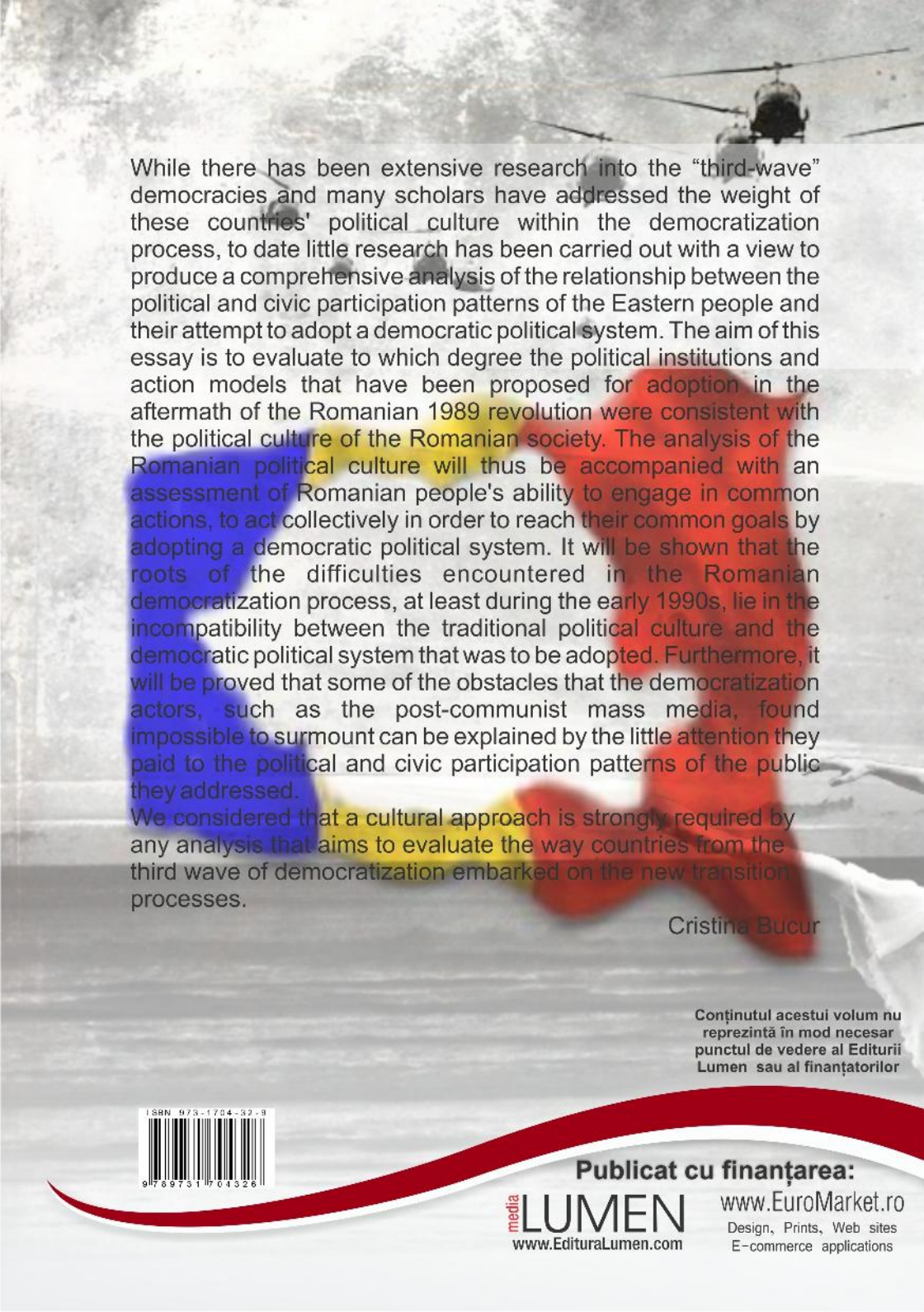
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