

## NICOLAE PETRESCU AND COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY

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### Abstract

Nicolae Petrescu (1886-1954) was a renowned Romanian sociologist, philosopher, anthropologist, essayist who became famous during the interwar period, through a series of scientific papers which are still up-to-date. The recent appearance of his *Memoirs* (2004) was a significant editorial event bringing valuable data and information, both on the human and intellectual development of this important sociologist on an international scale and on Romania's academic world of his time. Nicolae Petrescu remains in the history of Romanian sociology for his substantiation of *compared sociology* through studies of primitive societies as well as for his rich philosophical and journalistic activity. In this article we intend to present a series of life events of this sociologist and the main ideas of his scientific work.

**Keywords:** comparative sociology, differentiation process, unity of human nature, national differences, primitive society, England

### Résumé

Nicolae Petrescu (1886-1954) était un célèbre sociologue, philosophe, anthropologue, essayiste roumain qui s'est imposé durant l'entre-deux-guerres par des contributions scientifiques qui restent d'actualité. L'apparition récente de ses *Mémoires* (2004) est un réel événement éditorial qui nous a apporté des données et des informations précieuses sur le développement humain et intellectuel de cet important sociologue de dimension internationale et sur le milieu universitaire roumain de cette période. Nicolae Petrescu reste dans l'histoire de la sociologie roumaine à travers son fondement de la *sociologie comparée*, les études sur les sociétés primitives, mais aussi à travers une riche activité philosophique et journalistique. Dans cet article, nous avons l'intention de présenter une série d'événements de la vie de ce sociologue et les principales idées de son travail scientifique.

**Mots-clés:** sociologie comparée, processus de différenciation, l'unité de la nature humaine, les différences nationales, la société primitive, Angleterre

### Rezumat

Nicolae Petrescu (1886-1954) a fost un reputat sociolog, filosof, antropolog, eseist român care s-a impus în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale printr-o serie de lucrări științifice care își păstrează până astăzi actualitatea. Apariția recentă a *Memoriilor* acestuia (2004) a constituit un adevărat eveniment editorial care ne-a adus date și informații valoroase despre dezvoltarea umană și intelectuală a acestui important sociolog cu o anvergură internațională dar și despre lumea academică din România acelor ani. Nicolae Petrescu rămâne în istoria sociologiei românești prin fundamentarea *sociologiei comparate*,

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prin studiile dedicate societăților primitive dar și prin bogata activitate filosofică și publicistică. În acest articol intenționăm să prezentăm o serie de evenimente din viața acestui sociolog precum și principalele sale contribuții din opera științifică.

**Cuvinte cheie:** sociologia comparată, proces de diferențiere, unitatea naturii umane, diferențe naționale, societate primitivă, Anglia

## 1. Nicolae Petrescu – an itinerant sociologist

The *Memoirs* of Nicolae Petrescu (2004), have recently been published, an important document both for his personal evolution and for the history of Romanian sociology in general. These memoirs were written starting 1944, when the author was 58 years old. Even though memory is inherently a selective process, the writings of N. Petrescu are very precise and detailed. I. Opreșan, who tended to this edition, specifies that the author kept a journal of notes from the very first years at university. Without these writings, the chronology of events and the minute description of many situations may not have been possible. The edition includes a chronology of the author's life, in which we learn that the future sociologist, philosopher and essayist lost both his parents as a child, and was entrusted in 1896 to his tutors, as N. Petrescu disposed of a "great wealth" which could only be used starting the age of 21. Thanks to his material conditions, N. Petrescu travelled frequently in the West, especially to Germany, England and France and later in America. Back in Romania after long journeys, he participated in the uprising of 1907, as he had enlisted as a volunteer for military service. He thoroughly describes a military intervention in the county of Vaslui, complete with terrifying details about the state of conflict in the rural world, all the while criticizing the excesses of the army. He writes in his memoirs: "I was deeply dissatisfied especially to see that a spirit of revenge from those in charge *was present in all the orders given to the military*". (Petrescu 2004, vol. 1, p. 143) Back in the capital city of Bucharest and observing the echoes of the uprising, the author noted that shallowness was the "feature of our public life."

In 1907 he had already enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Berlin. In 1909, N. Petrescu publishes a series of thoughts in *Literary Conversations* without signing his full name. We can recall here one of his notes, written by the author at the age of 23, a grim finding that is noted in various forms in his future diary: "A relative stupidity is the only common feature to absolutely all people." In 1911, N. Petrescu was already defending his doctoral thesis entitled "Glandville und Hume" at the University of Rostock. We find him in 1919 as a professor at a college in the USA, and a year later he returns home. On this occasion, the author's memoirs provide us with some elements of the atmosphere in academic sociological education during the interwar period.

Thus, in 1920, N. Petrescu applies for a job at the Department of Sociology of the University of Cluj, but is forced to withdraw noting that Virgil Bărbat, his rival,

was backed up politically by the Liberal Party. Even Petrescu's visit to the Minister P.P. Negulescu didn't help, because the University was autonomous. Other voices urgently asked him to join the Party in order to have access to that Department. A visit to C. Radulescu Motru was equally revealing: the great professor urged him to run for the job in Iasi, at the same time as Petre Andrei. However, P. Andrei was strongly supported by D. Gusti (who had just returned from Iasi to Bucharest), so the challenge was pointless. The meeting with D. Gusti was full of "false kindness" in N. Petrescu's opinion, and the great sociologist's character was described as "Western in appearance but Oriental in reality".

Let us remind that during all these years N. Petrescu had an intense journalistic activity, and the list of publications entitled him to hope for a university position. In the country, he extended his contact list: from Nicolae Iorga to Ion Barbu or to the visual artists of the time. His encounter with N. Iorga was revealing: N. Petrescu considered Iorga as "superior in every way" compared to intellectuals of his era. Another important name, Simion Mehedinti was a bad example, which N. Petrescu considered rather "a vulgariser of science" than a scientist.

In 1921, Petrescu receives the approval of the Ministry of Education to hold a free course of sociology at the University of Bucharest (initially as a substitute lecturer then as a lecturer), and in 1922 he joins the Romanian Social Institute, to which the author dedicates a short chapter in his memoirs. The opening of this Institute was accomplished through a series of 23 lectures on Romania's New Constitution. The next year, N. Petrescu also held other conferences, although he often mentioned in his memoirs the wish to retire. Parallel to other activities, N. Petrescu also published in *Arhiva pentru Știință și Reformă Socială* [The Archives for Science and Social Reform<sup>1</sup>] as well as in *Convorbiri literare* [Literary Conversations].

Some articles published by the author earned him considerable income, sums that would be unimaginable nowadays! In 1924 his work *The Principles of Comparative Sociology* was published in England, which will bring him appreciation among sociologists and is only published in Romanian as late as 1994. At the University of Bucharest, N. Petrescu starts a second course called *Forms of Civilisation in the Light of the Comparative Science of Society*, supported by the same D. Gusti (which the author never really came to like). N. Petrescu also reports the atmosphere of the class he was teaching, reminding us that he prepared each lecture thoroughly, writing each course and then using the written version in front of his audience. The author believed that a course cannot be improvised based on a few notes written on a piece of paper, nor can it be memorized to be reproduced.

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<sup>1</sup> An example N. Petrescu's article (1922): "Elemente de diferențiere națională în societate: limba" [Elements of National Differentiation in Society: Language]. *Arhiva pentru Știință și Reformă Socială*, No. 2; The article later appears as a chapter in *The Principles of Comparative Sociology* (1924).

He also encouraged continuous review of courses and not presenting them in their old form.

An important event takes place in 1926, while N. Petrescu accompanies the Queen Mary and her company in a visit to Canada and the USA. The following year, N. Petrescu fails to enrol in the Comparative Sociology Department at the University of Bucharest following the "machinations" of D. Gusti, and in 1928 is also rejected from the position of associate professor of the Sociology Department. However, he continues his activity as a sociologist and extends toward philosophy, by publishing successful articles and books. In 1944 he publishes the volume *Primitives. Organisation-Institutions-Beliefs-Mentality* (1944), which is considered as an important work nationally and internationally, introducing new areas such as ethnology and anthropology. After 1944, N. Petrescu tries to adapt to the new social rules imposed by the communists, but is quickly marginalized (elected member of the Romanian Academy in 1945, he is removed in 1947!). He dies in 1954.

## 2. The Principles of Comparative Sociology

The most important volume of the author – *The Principles of Comparative Sociology* (1924) – is preceded in the 1994 Romanian edition by a generous *Foreword* signed by Maria Larionescu. The author guides us towards understanding the intellectual and scientific context in which N. Petrescu accomplished this work, focusing on the impact of the comparative method used in various social and natural sciences. In this work N. Petrescu mentions E. Durkheim from the very beginning, to which the comparative method in social sciences is inseparable from any sociological research. The author then tries to develop a comparative sociology. First, he highlights, based on numerous quotations, "the unity of human nature" understood as an "identical foundation of human manifestations", regardless of culture or religion. However, there are certain specific differences: for example national or ethnic grouping. N. Petrescu believes that stopping at this level would be superficial, because understanding social life involves studying the national spirit or character, which is the psychological factor. In conclusion, the organisation forms of social life are just ways of existence of a generic human nature. In fact the author proposes a distinction between the *underlying cause* (unity of human nature) and *surface* of the social life (based on differentiation).

Having made these remarks, the author wishes to define comparative sociology as "the science of the social differentiation process." The author specifies three sets of distinctions: local, historical and national. The three sets are easily identifiable: starting with local conditions (space), to the differences between successive eras (time) to national differences (which N. Petrescu understands as "a summation of the complexity of conditions and conceptions that are found in a distinct ethnic

group"). These three sets: space, time and nation are in turn influenced by other reasons which act at a more profound level: physical and moral reasons (named *conditions* and *conceptions*). These reasons should be thought of as being interrelated (such as those found in social institutions). The author adds a distinct chapter regarding "national differences in language". In N. Petrescu's view, a (national) language cannot be perfectly understood by those who were raised in a different language; however a part of it can be transmitted through translation. A universal language is also mentioned, a language which N. Petrescu thought was possible, noting that it could lead to the disappearance of ethnic differences between languages, leaving only local differences (dialect). Furthermore, this universal language would not halt the creativity of peoples, although it would contribute to a harmonisation of national differences. N. Petrescu attaches special importance to *habits*, which are also differentiated by nations, races and cultures; *habits* are followed by *moral beliefs*, *prejudices* and *traditions*. In this case, N. Petrescu also mentions a common foundation, which belongs to all people and which forms the basis of social life. This foundation lies within common institutions, since, according to G. Vico quoted by N. Petrescu, "all peoples have a religion, contract marriage and bury their dead." Another factor is *mentality* (way of expressing thought and feeling), which differs from people to people, although feelings and logical thinking are the same everywhere! The author points out that the differences in mentality between peoples are found in anonymous productions, such as the great lyrical poems, but behind them one always finds the same identity of thought and the same reasons for action: love, hate, revenge etc. The same specific differences are found in proverbs or individual productions (literary, philosophical) but not in scientific creations (one can recognize a scientist, says N. Petrescu, "by the degree at which he can detach himself from the national mentality"). After many other examples given by the author to strengthen his arguments, he returns to the notion of comparative sociology (the science that looks at social phenomena in the light of the differentiation process) and the idea of the existence of a same human nature regardless of society. Incidentally, the author points out that difference between nations replace local and time differences, which lead to a certain methodological state of confusion. Another point of interest to N. Petrescu is the difference arising from diverse organisations concerning laws. The author distinguishes between the legal concept of law ("the conception that subsumes social reality to rigid forms, notwithstanding the process of differentiation") and the sociological notion of law (referring to legislation "that takes into account local and time differences"). In fact the author wished to recall that the general laws applied to large groups of people become "artificial" if not imposed by force. This explains the success of 'regulations' with an average level of generality, imposed by local authorities. "The sociological concept of the law takes into account the reality of social life" concludes N. Petrescu. Finally, the author boldly presents a series of conclusions which are rather relevant nowadays,

in the context of globalisation: "we can no longer believe in the existence of a national unity as something absolutely distinct" and immediately adds as inevitable "the dissolution of national values into differentiations of place and time". In this context, the author confesses that he does not long for the abolition of the state nor for its extension, but rather its adaptation to the human nature. The aforementioned dissolution turns out to be a "moral progress".

Finally, N. Petrescu makes a plea for comparative sociology and its necessity as an academic discipline. Its purpose would be precisely to explain social differences in time, place and ethnic groups in the conditions of the universality of the human nature ("the conception of mankind as a whole"). Such an approach would also lead to understanding of the relationship between nations (and even to improving the work of the League of Nations), harmonisation of national cultures with the universal culture, the socialisation of nations. In terms of methodology, comparative sociology uses the "principle of translation of differences", according to which we shall try to determine "the fundamental reason that lies behind an institution".

### **3. The interpretation of national differences**

The title of this sub-chapter is that of another of N. Petrescu's works, originally published in London (1929) and in Romanian only in 1994. In this volume the author has a critical starting point regarding the nations of the world and the way they are perceived, because there is an emphasis on the (sometimes irreconcilable) differences between their macro-social organisations. Emphasizing these differences is normally the prerogative of nationalists, however a sociological analysis, says N. Petrescu, may rule out any essential differences. The author distinguishes between society and nation, the latter being the result / effect of the former. Also, N. Petrescu criticises the metaphysical theory of the State, with direct reference to the ideas of Hegel, who claimed divine will was embodied in the Prussian State, theory which Petrescu views as a result of the enforcement of the idea of *national sovereignty*. On the other hand, the author relativises the idea of national unity, which is a strong argument among certain theorists.

In fact any nation is the result of social conditions specific to certain nationalities and races inhabiting the same territory, therefore the state's "unity" is relative. N. Petrescu observes the role of the state in subjecting its citizens; however the state can never ensure a complete homogenisation of the people. Incidentally, N. Petrescu states that "national unity is never quite strong enough to bring about unity of thought and action in group members". (Petrescu 1929, p. 201) If, however, we can find a unifying element, it is the language spoken in a territory. As for a "national consciousness", the author sees it rather as a result of common interests or education than as an expression of natural spontaneity. In turn, "national values" can also be questioned, in that one should distinguish between the values of a particular social group and the values that transcend national

boundaries, intersecting the values of other nations and sometimes coming into conflict with them. An example would be the case where a sovereign state aims to broaden its territory in order to recover citizens of the same nation situated outside its boundaries. Conflicts of values between nations thus derive from competing interests related to material and cultural domination. Therefore, says N. Petrescu, "national differences appear as the central problem of modern civilised society" (*Ibidem*, p. 207), and not understanding them in depth may cause anxiety and confusion. Incidentally, social differences are regarded by theorists from two perspectives: the static perspective (differences are seen as stabilizing, formulated) and the dynamic perspective (differences seen as moments of social evolution). The first perspective reveals the necessity and the stability of institutions, but cannot explain complex social developments. Therefore, the second perspective proves closer to the truth, as the author stresses the continual transformation of institutions, even of those that appear immutable. The only thing that remains permanent says the author, is "the social process, with its human psychological substrate". (*Ibidem*, p. 221) As for national differences, they are none other than local and time differences. The author returns here to the idea of a "common substrate" for all social groups- hence for social differentiations. This substrate is represented by a common "human nature" with similar traits within different social groups, which was already demonstrated through ethnographic or anthropological research. N. Petrescu spoke of the "universal expression of human nature", which is difficult to imagine, precisely because of individual differences. N. Petrescu finally speaks of "the unity of the human nature", an idea that he finds in religion but also in the scientific spirit of man. The author also provides a history of the idea of "unity of human nature", concluding with placing this idea in the context of today's civilized world, where it is reflected for instance in the fields of art, science and philosophy. "The unity of the civilized world is further evidence of the unity of human nature" the author concludes. (*Ibidem*, p. 255)

On the social organisation of the world's countries (1924) the author identifies four kinds: fragmentary (in primitive communities), stationary (in Asian countries), sporadic (e.g. a large part of the Latin peoples) and unified (peoples of Western Europe). These four categories can be reduced to two: the first and last of those mentioned, the rest being intermediate stages. In this context N. Petrescu talk about social re-organisation in Romania, which should be based upon two pillars: education and administration. But these pillars must also be reformed if Romania is to exceed its current sporadic organisation. Education reform, says N. Petrescu, must start from the bottom up, originating from the society and not by importing external systems. As for the administration, its operation must be "unified", but also take into account local characteristics. The link between society, education and administration is illustrated by the author: "Only when we have a better social organisation, will school be an incentive to good administration". This verdict was necessary in order to introduce the idea that social organisation needs social

education, and the latter must contain the following: awareness of belonging to the community, knowledge of rights and duties, individual initiative in public affairs and finally personal example (with deep religious significance). The social agents of social education should be members of the teaching staff, clergy, civil workers, men of culture.

#### **4. Primitives. Organisation – Institutions – Beliefs – Mentality**

Published in 1944 and reprinted in 2003, the work *Primitives. Organisation-Institutions-Beliefs-Mentality* was considered N. Petrescu's most important contribution to social and anthropological research.

From the very beginning of the book, N. Petrescu tries to define the term 'primitive', categorically rejecting all the associated negative expressions, through which primitive peoples were called simple peoples or peoples of nature etc. Primitives are "those groups of people who are in a primary state of organisation and do not show signs of material and spiritual progress as much as so-called civilized peoples."

Once the definition above is clarified, the author recalls the European missionaries and travellers, the first to write explicitly about "primitives" in America or on other continents, while the descriptions we have left of ancient peoples are rather simplified. The discovery and description of the primitives brought significant changes in the perception of these communities, either by highlighting the elements of novelty, or by attributing visible differences to different degrees of economic development. These differences, says N. Petrescu, have sparked heated polemics over the centuries. It was reminded, for example, that only superior races were capable of such progress, which is obviously false. Also, it was thought that primitives cannot defeat the powers of nature and are not capable of abstract thinking; however this is also largely the case in "civilized" nations. N. Petrescu notes where the differences lie (the amount of knowledge, technical advances, etc.) but also where the similarities lie (the actual human features). Specifically, the author states that "the multiplication of technical and intellectual means does not take the accomplishment of the civilised so far as to essentially differentiate him from the primitive as a human being." (Petrescu 1944, p. 45). Investigating primitive peoples does however raise important issues as to the organisation of the studied material as well as the method used for its study. Firstly, one must address the issue of differentiating writings based on fact from those based on interpretations. Thus, distinctions should be made cautiously, in order to understand the degree of objectivity of those stories or interpretations. Secondly, N. Petrescu believes, for instance, that although the comparative method is very useful, the volume *Primitives* presents a more general standpoint based on specific classifications and typologies. Further, the author carries out a thorough analysis of primitive societies in a number of suggestive chapters: elements of



organisation, totems, political organisation, hierarchy and government, family, marriage, the system of kinship, behaviour towards relatives, women's issues, justice, property, magic, religion, mentality, moral concepts and customs etc. Our article's length does not allow us to detail all these aspects; we shall only introduce here the elements of organisation and of the kinship system.

### *Elements of organisation*

The everyday life of primitives was (is) heavily influenced by physical, natural conditions. The economic dimension of primitive communities was the most important one, and food was a major concern. The author links the size of communities to economic conditions: lack of resources made the primitives divide into smaller groups in order to survive. Migration increased the possibility of changing lifestyles, of race mixing etc. The social organisation of primitives preserved rudimentary characteristics specific to hordes, says N. Petrescu, with a chief concerned with the survival of the group, a set of rules of conduct, and peaceful coexistence among equals. Following the trail of field research classics, the author recalls the mechanical solidarity of primitive populations, which ensured "total" integration of their members. If, however, some differences do exist, they are based on gender, age, occupation and personal qualities. If we stop at gender-specific differences – citing various sources – the author shows that women in primitive communities were rather focused on family relationships, while men were concerned about social relations. As for role differentiations, they were settled from ancient times. Age-related differences were characterised by transgressions through "rites of passage". The author cites many examples where people of similar ages form "classes" or strongly cohesive groups.

A distinct trait was to be found in the wizards, doctors and priests of primitive communities, usually one and the same person. This person exerted great influence over the community, as he was thought to be endowed with supernatural forces. N. Petrescu also details a number of aspects of secret societies which were in many cases responsible for indiscriminate practices of infanticide. Other such societies were involved in various acts of justice, cult or politics. The early political organisation of primitive society in those times only involved a *chief* and a *council of elders*, however social control was ensured by customs and traditions which actually enforced the collective will! Early forms of organisation had a vital function: to maintain social life!

### *The kinship system*

From previous research, N. Petrescu recalls that, in primitive societies, the foundation of kinship relationships is the marriage-based family. A basic principle was that of exogamy: marriages were settled with people outside the family. This principle was likely initially of a religious nature, which is why a series of rules and taboos were created in time, related to kin relationships in general. In primitive

societies, in a certain respect, all are "brothers", just as the father can be represented by all of his "brothers". Any elder of the tribe is "grandfather". These denominators are the same for women. Generally, cohabitation involves kinship and not the other way around, the author reminds. Kinship is significantly separated by gender. It can also be linked to "eating together" but also to the fact that certain members have different diets. Blood kinship can be added to the previous kinds, but we can conclude that the meaning of kinship is far more extended.

Parent kinship is also significant. For instance, in matrilineal tribes, the first rank of kinship is represented by the mother and the maternal uncle, while the relatives on the father's side are of second rank (the father is not a blood relative). The same pattern also applies to patrilineal tribes, bearing in mind that the son often follows the paternal lineage and the daughter – the maternal lineage. N. Petrescu notes that matrilineal does not necessarily mean that the mother holds the authority in the family. The parent who is considered the ascendant will also decide on the way assets are transferred from one generation to another. The author further develops a set of criteria for the classification of kinship, the definition of blood kinship, and established conducts between relatives. Without further insisting on details, we care to highlight the ways in which the author presents a rich bibliographical material and his capacity of summarising the main results from the perspective of the history of such studies.

## 5. England-Society-State-Civilisation

In 1938, N. Petrescu published a special volume, *England-Society-State-Civilisation*, a book regarded by the author as important, as he thought the Romanian people had much to learn from it.

The author starts by explaining how much the organisation and development of England depended upon its physical environment, and describes the "insularity" of the English people and other physical factors: climate, soil etc.

As for the ethnicity of the English, the author observed the diversity of those who integrated the English Isles while the "purity of the English race", a term circulating at the time, referred rather to "the consciousness of the unity of social life". As for the specific English patriotism, it is viewed by N. Petrescu as the consciousness of their superiority over other nations. The English, the author states, have the "consciousness of individuality".

The author's notes regarding English history cover several time periods: Anglo-Saxon, medieval, pre-modern and modern. Starting 1820, the author states, England as we now know it began to take shape. After this detour, N. Petrescu points out that all evolution is marked by a series of constants (invariants) that characterise the English across the ages: traditionalism, formalism, pluralism and irrationalism.

The author then proceeds to a historical analysis of English social classes. Regarding economic development, N. Petrescu points out that the English have a true cult of work, both as a source of enrichment and of "spiritual uplift", while economic life is marked by honesty. Unfortunately, says the author, powerful unions sabotaged, through their actions, the very interests of those who they meant to defend, in the conditions of economic crises followed by chronic unemployment over long periods of time. The author especially emphasises the existence of free trade, an English characteristic rooted in the economic theory of A. Smith. The economic development of many European countries led to the denial of free trade and the acceptance of protectionist policies.

N. Petrescu also analyzes the political organisation of the English society. To do so, he starts from the older idea of the Protestant influence on democratic development. However, according to his analysis, other causes must be taken into account. Similarly, N. Petrescu examines, from a critical standpoint, the idea that the English people enjoyed the right to govern the country. The author presents a number of arguments proving the contrary, since in many cases the ruling classes acted rather in their own interest and rarely in a democratic concern. In this context, "representation" in Parliament was only meant for the nobility, clergy and bourgeoisie, and until the nineteenth century, only 5% of the country's population was allowed to participate in its management. N. Petrescu highlights that, even in a democratic country like England, democratic development was a gradual and slow process. The relationship between aristocracy and bourgeoisie is a characteristic English feature, as the two classes were not antagonistic. "The survival of an aristocracy which is active in the country's politics, in the centre of a perfect democracy, however absurd it may seem, embodies the very spirit of English society." (Petrescu 1938, p. 88). A further step to democratisation was recorded when the electorate was broadened by the introduction of universal suffrage, confirmed in 1928 by extending the right to vote for women of any age. N. Petrescu points out the political education of the English, which leads to a better functioning of public institutions, patriotism and setting up a national consciousness. As for the lack of a written English Constitution, the author states that the different charts (e.g. *Magna Charta*) or laws (so-called *Statutes*) as well as existing customs in the practice of governance – acted as substitutes. Also, the Constitution was and is reflected in public institutions.

Further, N. Petrescu devotes separate chapters to very accurate themes in the description of England, which we cannot expose here in length: monarchy, parliament, cabinet, political parties, local government, justice, education, church, the English State, the British Empire, public opinion, the English character, English influence in the world.

We will add some ideas on public opinion and the English character. On public opinion in England, N. Petrescu sees it as "the decisive factor in social and political actions." The fact of having a public opinion is explained by the author as follows:

England possesses "a dense population, improved means of communication, a higher cultural level, democracy and the individual's right to initiate public discussion." Even though the right to any initiative is guaranteed, the English remain conformist to a whole series of traditions. Paradoxically, individualism and conformism are two features that can co-exist in harmony, the author stresses out. Public opinion is directly connected with the development of free press.

Finally the author assigns a whole chapter to the "English character", as "the English show the most profound individual traits." The author makes a long detour dedicated to highlighting those psychological features specific to the English, saying that one cannot support, for instance, the idea that the English are unimaginative.

Conversely English are innovators: from the industrial revolution to the historical novel or the art of intelligence, their contributions are crucial. The English seem to have "an exceptional will", a spirit of adventure and initiative, a balance between *self control* and *self help*. Another quality of the British nation is the love for truth, says N. Petrescu, noting that "the English government is the most honest in the world". The classical British "fair play" (treating all peers fairly) was extended to trade through what was called "fair dealing". The English are also distinguished by practicality, which N. Petrescu considers innate and not acquired. Any Englishman says the author, regardless of social class, aspires to become a *gentleman* (qualification earned through education, manners, behaviour, wealth etc.). Finally N. Petrescu makes a *sui generis* exposure on English women from a history of their emancipation to the current feminist movement.

## 6. Reception of N. Petrescu's works

After the Second World War, during the difficult times at the beginning of the communist regime, N. Petrescu has very intense journalistic activities and public conferences. While in June 1947 N. Petrescu publishes an article on President H. Truman and the American people, in 1949 he already publishes another article on the functional school and British Imperialism. We have already mentioned that, after 1944, N. Petrescu tried to adapt to the new social rules imposed by the communists, but finds himself marginalized. After his death in 1954, we suppose that his name, like those of other important sociologists, was banned. It was the mission of one of the most important communist leaders, Miron Constantinescu, to regain an academic status for sociology after 1965. In a collective volume published in 1973, M. Constantinescu already mentions the contribution, interwar, to the so called "chair sociology" (in fact *sociological theories* based on documentation and meditation) of some important names: P. Andrei, M. D. Ralea, N. Petrescu, E. Speranția, C. Sudețeanu, G. Em. Marica etc. According to the authors of the collective volume, N. Petrescu had failed to conduct a scientific substantiation of his theses.

During the communist regime an important book was published by T. Herseni (1982), who was a member of the *Sociological School of Bucharest* lead by D. Gusti in the 1930s. Although the author admits having been taught by important professors like C. Radulescu-Motru, P. P. Negulescu, M. Florian, I. C. Petrescu, T. Vianu, N. Petrescu etc., he unfortunately does not cite any book or article written by N. Petrescu in the entire volume.

St. Costea dedicates an entire chapter to N. Petrescu in his *History of a Romanian Sociology* (2005), where he starts by analysing what he thinks is Petrescu's representative work: *Primitivii* [Primitives] (1944). St. Costea believes that, in this work, N. Petrescu tries to critically answer to the two sociological trends of the era: the historical trend (F. Boas) and the evolutionist trend (F. Taylor, Frazer etc.). St. Costea admires the originality of N. Petrescu's comparative sociology as applied to the comparative study of nations.

In turn, I. Badescu et al. (1996, p. 165 and following) refer to the comparative sociology of N. Petrescu as an exemplification of the distinction between form (given by the differentiation process) and background (substrate of a society).

The authors show that the founder of comparative sociology had been marginalised by the communist regime precisely during the period when this particular specialisation was spreading worldwide. Restitution and recovery of N. Petrescu took place only after 1989. Finally we mention an entire chapter dedicated to N. Petrescu written by I. Ungureanu (1990), which is an excellent starting point for reassessing this important Romanian sociologist.

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