

## AN EXERCISE OF 'GENEALOGY' – REACTIVATING MINOR KNOWLEDGE

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**Abstract:** *In fact, we do not endeavor to disqualify any form of knowledge. We do not desire to repeat the discourse of self-sufficiency – critical with others – claiming that only this type of thinking knowledge is valid. Our intention consists in attracting attention onto the singular fact, onto the radical contingency we constantly meet in our daily lives. Consequently, we suggest the sociologist's training be oriented towards the capacity to identify a problem starting from a single fact, in other words, we request heeding minor knowledge. The large majority of graduates in sociology work with this kind of reality. Within minor knowledge the possibility of hiding the fact that power endeavors to produce both the individual and the truth it needs, does not exist. In the case we are presenting, this minor knowledge found in travel diaries has generated some of the social representations on to which major political and historical decisions were founded.*

**Key words:** *great narrative, minor knowledge, genealogy.*

### 1. The Problem Definition

We aim to analyze an event as related in a travel journal, using as source a book of Larry Wolff. [17]

### 2. The Purpose of Our Analysis:

Clarifying the meaning of and the role played by the notions of explanation and comprehension within sociological knowledge and the implications related to practicing sociology as a profession.

### 3. Describing the Fact

A French diplomat by the side of the High Porte sets out on a journey to Russia passing through Moldavia, being accompanied by a Turkish officer, ranking as an agha. The year is 1784 and the diplomat will describe the event in his travel journal, which will later be

published in France. The traveling expenses are supported by the sultan. The account starts with the dispute between the French diplomat and the Turk regarding the way to acquire food, the French wanting to obtain what they needed by paying, the Turk contradicting him: “*You won't even get bread, I'm telling you; I know the Moldavians, they want to be beaten*”

The author is trying to portray himself as a moral person, not desiring to make the Moldavians suffer. On the other hand he simultaneously intends to justify the Turk's position, given the fact that the money supporting their journey belongs to the sultan – he therefore chooses to also write down the Turk's point of view: “*do remember that it is not just for me to sleep without having eaten before; and when*

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money or your arguments will have brought you nothing, you will without doubt consider the use of my own methods to be appropriate". Hence we find ourselves with two persons legitimate in all their undertakings and all their thoughts on the one hand.

Tott, the Frenchman, searches for the village elder who, as stated in the narrative, was also the village's leader and starts negotiating "here's some money my friend, for you to buy the food we need; I've always liked Moldavians and I can't stand it when they're tortured, so I count on you to bring me a lamb and some bread fast". The old man was gesticulating, trying to say that he understood neither the Turkish language nor the Greek that Tott was speaking, while letting him also know that "there was no food to be found in the village, that people were starving". Tott was convinced that the old man spoke the truth and that they had arrived in a very poor village indeed. Now Ali-Agha comes into play: "in order for me to show you that I know the Moldavians better than you, let me talk to them". Furthermore, he promised that "if in one quarter of an hour you will not have the best dinner, you can give me the beating I shall give him". With his whip under his coat, Ali-Agha approaches the old Moldavian 'indifferently' taps him on his shoulder: "Glad to see you my friend, how are you? Oh, he continues, you don't recognize Ali-Agha, your friend? Come! Talk now!" As the Moldavian seemed not to understand Ali-Agha continued: "What, my friend, do you really not understand Turkish?". Then he knocked the Moldavian down and kicked him repeatedly: "Here you go you bastard, so you get to learn Turkish" - "Why are you hitting me? Don't you know we are poor people and that our landlords barely let us breathe?". Ali-Agha turns towards Tott: "Eh bien, Monsieur, will you acknowledge that I'm a good language teacher, he already speaks a

perfect Turkish". Then Ali-Agha pulls out his whip and starts hitting the old man: "Oh, worthless scum, don't you have anything? Well, I'll make you rich just the way I made you speak my language". The two received their meal in less than a quarter of an hour. Tott declared himself defeated: "After this proof, how can I not acknowledge Ali's method to be better than mine, how can I not be cured of my stubborn kindness?" [17]

#### 4. The Interpretation

A first interpretation is provided by Wolff himself, who identifies in Tott's journal the sketch of a comedy "in which the three main characters represent Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Orient. The Western Europe in the end approving, and even applauding, the violence imposed upon Eastern Europe, this lesson in inhuman cruelty being so brutal, that it could only be represented as a comedy". [17] Wolff considers that the century of Enlightenment will be the foundation for a system of social representations, onto which two centuries of political decisions, of which the most striking would be Hitler's perception of the Slavs and of the East generally speaking, and also Churchill's, in his decision to accept the Iron Curtain, would be based.

We shall take Wolff's perspective further by making a structural analysis, resorting to an interpretation of the account in terms of the triad, as Simmel conceives it, a triad within which each actor is a spatial identity, Western, Eastern Europe and the Orient, and each element, as Simmel says, forms an interface between the opposing interests of the other elements, a unitary whole being thus created. [16] These relationships being able to replace the direct ones, with all the implications involved. The third element can take on different roles, acting as negotiator, having

no interests in the situation, or as a 'tertius gaudens'. Consequently, it would result that:

1. Ali-Agha points out the fact that between Western and Eastern Europe there is no compatibility, these two worlds running on different principles. And precisely therefore they can only be brought together by the Orient. On the other hand, an alliance of the Western Europe with the Orient leads to a devaluation of Eastern Europe. The impossibility of a single Europe, this would be what the story is trying to portray;

2. Tott also accentuates the singularity of Eastern Europe as a space of dissimulation. [1] As Hirschmann points out, in the 17<sup>th</sup>, but especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is an entire literature about the advantages of an interest-governed world, in terms of predictability and constancy, to be found. [11] Whereas the Moldavian refuses to make an exchange for what seems to be in his own interest. The attributes of predictability and constancy seem to pertain rather to the behavior of the Ottoman than to that of the Moldvian. Tott also indicates that only the Orient can control this singularity of Eastern Europe and that it does it efficiently by detaining the appropriate knowledge and means. Moreover, the analysis of Ali-Agha's discourse reveals his certainty relating to the way the situation is to be solved. We're talking about mastering the cause-effect relation, the prior use of violence having proven its efficiency, and the fact that results are regarded as certain. Using the terms of an organizational theory (James D. Thompson), we are facing calculation-based strategies, which portray a person, the Ottoman, as a rational being. It seems obvious for the French to prefer the Ottomans behavior to the Moldavian's 'irrationality'. On a secondary level, Tott

will have told his contemporaries something about the incontestable value of the world they live in and how in the Eastern space reason fails, violence being the only way to grasp reality. Only by means of this rupture with the eastern world can the West render its monopoly on the universal evident. [2] With the forming of the rational – violence – irrational triad we are obviously in the middle of a process of symbolization, the three concepts possessing the force needed to produce strong symbolization onto the geographical spaces involved.

3. the Moldavian highlights the fact that Western Europe, in spite of its pretensions of 'enlightenment', eventually "concludes by approving, even applauding the violence imposed upon Eastern Europe" (this statement belonging to Wolff himself) by the Orient, and that Western Europe uses a double standard, one for the interior and a different one for the exterior. Accusing the Occident because of its 'double standard' has been a method used by all those who wanted to deny its superiority and derives from the Occident's monopoly upon the universal, as established by the Age of Reason. He also shows that only due to the existence of this double standard the Occident can relate to regimes of opposing natures. Moreover, the Moldavian also illustrates the abusive, intolerant, unjust, sly and violent nature of the Oriental.

A second perspective is offered by the language analysis. We suppose that the journal's audience, the French society of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, was marked rather by seduction than by obscenity, and would thus not approve this detailed portrayal of a person's violation. Because of this, as Wolff justly observers, Tott chooses to describe the events using a comedic register. His choice is not accidental as the comic itself expresses a type of violence. The contract used by the French,

containing the terms of the exchange, is being replaced by a false agreement (which would exist between the Turk and the Moldavian, generating a comic situation: the pat on the shoulder, the “how are you my friend?” question), anticipating the violence to come. The theatricalization serves a double purpose, that of producing a detheatricalization of reality but also of making the account believable. The cruel reality, the people's poverty, the obscenity of the real, being thus dissolved by violence and the language accompanying her. This is an appropriate example for what Foucault calls *facts of discourse*, which have to be studied as “strategic games of action and reaction, questions and answers, domination and evasion, and also fight”. [6]

In this context of 'facts of discourse', we can identify a denotative discourse, the one of the French, and a performative one, the Ottoman's. The Moldavian's refuse to enter the game of denotative language expresses a strategy of linguistic evasion, a kind of battle aiming at suspending authority. What is left of an authority if she has no object to exercise itself upon? The narration, as an expression of daily life knowledge, is made up of a multiplicity of language-games, a mixture of denotative and prescriptive - performative enunciations, moral judgments, educational instructions about how to achieve success, criteria defining competence and performance, the existence of multiple recipients. The analysis of the dialogue accentuates the agreement the Occidental and the Ottoman come to by identifying a pertinent criterion, the truth, deduced from a spirit of the people, a 'romantic' reading. However, defining this space as a romantic one represents the condition of falsifiability which validates Enlightenment. [3]

We could add another stroke to this picture. We suppose that the two

foreigners arrive in a village of free peasants, only recognizing the landlord or the occupier as 'authorities'. Relative to them, the Moldavian could act as a free person, disposing of a subjective freedom [4] based on which he chose to say 'no'. Still, the Moldavian does not pass the 'autonomy' test in which the will is sustained by maxims passing the trial of universalization. [9] He remains indifferent to the foreigners' hunger and tiredness and does not try to help them. Hereby the French discovers that the Moldavian doesn't voluntarily want to belong to the same moral community he does, the one defining itself by means of two requirements: the subjective freedom and the autonomy, which makes individuals treat each other as self-contained purposes.

The third perspective: violence. The person relating the events belongs to the spirit of the Enlightenment. Continuing the Christian tradition of Saint Augustine “significant mark in Western thought, on the way toward internalizing the relation of correspondence between the godly pole of the call and the human pole of the answer”, [14] the Enlightenment will record, as Derrida sustains, the human-animal distinction as being the one between answer and reaction, this fact marking the European civilization. What does Tott tell us? That the Eastern man refuses to use language, not being interested in any value-exchange, doesn't have an answer, only reactions. His refuse to enter the game of exchange being equivalent to his voluntary assumption of a subhuman condition. Only by being beaten, ergo treated like an animal, can the Eastern man attain his human condition. The singularity hereby finds its representation. Consequently, violence is the means to produce the animal-human's becoming human. We are talking about practices which would be derived from a truth. Hence, the comprehension follows the

explanation, and the explanation derives from practices. The practice of violence leads to the situation's resolution, her explanation and comprehension. A truth of man and a truth of the practices, as proved by the situation's resolution, would therefore exist. These two truths will stand at the base of the representations of Eastern Europe. The epistemology derives from an ideological discourse which expresses a power report.

The fourth perspective: the issue of transgression. The account is taking place in a space upon which a system of multiple sovereignties, one of the lord, another one of the 'Turk' rests. The Moldavian is not considered as a political subject, who belongs to a border-defined space, borders which transform a community to a population, and who is not submissive toward a single administrative-instance, in order to become an economic subject. The French, on the other hand, belongs to such a reality, of borders, authorities, a non-ambiguous jurisprudence, a normativity deduced from the idea of a social contract, namely that nothing is asked without offering something in exchange, in terms of 'visibility'. We find ourselves in a space of permanent transgression, an expression of Ottoman expansion and in which we find no type of limitation, of law or of Christian compassion. We open another register where we can see violence. If we do it by using the terms of the goal-means relationship, we can observe that for the Ottoman the problem of choosing his means does not have any importance as long as the goal is legitimate. For the French on the other hand, the goal, the situation's solution depends on the use of specific means. In this scene we can identify the two types of law: the natural law used by the Ottoman and the positive law used by the Frenchman – as they are classified by Walter Benjamin: “natural law tends to 'justify' its means through the

justness of its goals, whereas the positive law tries to 'guarantee' the justness of goals through the legitimacy of its means”. [5] As for the Moldavian's relationship with the Ottoman, we can include her in the way Pascal sees the relation between justice and force: “justice without force is powerless; force without justice is tyranny.” [13] Violence hence represents the 'synthesis' of two images: the exterior one, which the Orient and Western Europe have about Eastern Europe, namely that of the natural state of the place where only natural law applies, and the interior image, pertaining to the Moldavian, that of the injustice he constantly faces and the incapacity to oppose an unjust power.

The dialectic we are facing is that of the just-unjust, visible-invisible, reality dissimulation, body soul oppositions. Whenever power uses its right to transgress any limit, the body's right to autonomy is canceled. Violence is an attempt to cancel the limit. Yet no kind of transgression can dissolve the limit, regardless of the quantity of violence involved in the process. Facing bodily transgression the limit builds itself within the soul, remaining invisible, ergo uncontrollable. This is the source of the obsession of the person causing transgression, the existence of something eluding her, the soul. That is the cradle of evil which can only be controlled by means of violence. In short, a clear example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, produced by the both the Occidental's and the Oriental's need for self-confirmation. Eastern Europe had to be presented and understood as an example of a great lesson in teaching, where applying violence is the means to remove a person from its natural state and to introduce her to the world of 'relationships'.

The fifth perspective: game theory. I was asserting earlier that language, the contract and also money belong to the same world

of the visible and of a single round game, typical of open societies. The Eastern man doesn't believe in this world of the visible and he knows that if he were to play by its rules, on short or long term, he will lose. Hence, our Moldavian prefers his resources to be taken now and to be beaten, in order to save his future. Not talking, refusing money represent his first essay to protect himself, salvaging the current situation. The Moldavian knows that if he joins the contract, he will enter the memory of those possessing power. In the future he will therefore be a dispossession's object, a dispossession he will no longer be able to control because the power will be based on this very information, during her usual practice of lowering transactional costs. Ergo, he prefers to enter the Turk's memory now, because no moral or juridical instance will help him control the situation. In other words, power has to know that it's possible to have bigger costs and insignificant results if she were to return with its request for products in the same village, because there might be no more of them. In short, the Moldavian's tactic consists in making the powers holder not return. Therefore, the Moldavian knows that the most important thing is not the present, in the gain or lost it may offer, but in securing the future. The visible difference between the Frenchman's and the Moldavian's reasoning exemplifies that in this space events don't possess an universal significance, that they cannot be understood outside an contextual analysis. In this space, communication is contextual. To this contextual aspect the hypothesis according to which the French is speaking for himself and the Turk, whereas the Moldavian represents the village and that they represent two different logic, individualistic in the first case, collectivistic in the second, also belongs.

The sixth perspective: the issue of government. Montesquieu made the observation that in despotic regimes people try to save their fortune, whereas in democratic ones they try to increase it. The despot's will is limitless and threatens property. Consequently, the thinker managed to identify a relationship between the nature of government and the way prosperity is regarded. Starting from this point we can say that, in fact, the narration illustrates the confrontation between two worlds: the Western one, defined by the characteristics of disciplinary power and a mechanism of security, and the Eastern one, a world governed by the power of sovereignty and a mechanism of limitless appropriation. The power of sovereignty is typical of feudal societies and expresses itself by means of the relation "connecting the sovereign to the subordinate in function of a couple of asymmetrical relations: on the one hand appropriation, on the other, expense" [7] The sovereign appropriates resources, without giving anything back, just expending them. Foucault maintains that in exchange for appropriation, the sovereign offers protection or privileges. This fact implies the existence of a single power instance within a given geographical space, which was not the case of 18th century Moldavia. Consequently, the feudal history of the East differs in this essential aspect of government from the Western one, a fact which will hinder the Occidentals from understanding this reality, which is not to be found in the past of Occidental countries. On the other hand, if Tott would have wanted to see, he could have found analogies to his own history, namely what Foucault defines as the 'relation of sovereignty', the beating as a ritual gesture, aiming to prevent the crumbling of the relationship between authority and its subject, wherefrom "the necessity of a certain supplement of violence or threat with violence, behind the

sovereignty relation, making her live and last”.[7] This power has biological properties: its level of violence rises with the expense made for finding resources. Put differently, the costs of a sovereign power are in direct proportion with its violence, a violence which is a cost generator itself. The person upon which power is exercised will stay out of its way, thus leading to an increase of the power's 'interfacing' costs. The refusal to recognize the Turkish language is part of this game of increasing interfacing costs and of producing a state of 'autonomy'. The East opposes an expanding Western world, built on the principle of economization, by means of a withdrawal, an 'autonomy', an avoidance to relate by producing costs, a defensive spirit. This withdrawal, avoidance to relate is therefore the 'irrational' answer with which this part of Europe has been, historically speaking, associated.

The event stresses, in the same field of government-structure, the power distance. The Frenchman's initial position expresses a low power distance. It is hard to believe that the reality he observed could have been another one than that of poverty. Given this condition of generalized poverty, Tott searches for an 'institutional' solution, an exchange (money for goods) similar to a contract. The Ottoman, on the other hand, is the carrier of a culture based on a high power distance and also displaying another property: situations of failure or deadlock are of dispositional nature and identified in the behavior of the poor (Hoffstede). Moreover, the incident accentuates the fact that Tott abandons what we would call the Aristotelic theory of truth, as correspondence between an enunciation and reality, adopting the perspective of truth as a problem of language and imposition by means of power, this being encouraged by the Moldavian's defensive behavior. A

domination relationship between the foreigner and the native is coupled with a government-principle based on a high power distance and with the indication of a guilt on behalf of the subordinate and with the creation of a cultural representation as a production of an ethnic identity deduced from the double domination of the Moldavian, both social and ethnic. Here we can identify two sides of the same reality, on the one hand, truth regarded as a problem of enunciation made by a power disposing of force and a defensive way to report oneself to power, characterized by dissimulation, generating the creative self-fulfilling prophecy of the person making the enunciation, on the other hand.

### **5. An Epistemological Analysis**

A level of the researcher's common sense does exist, it is the way in which he uses the knowledge obtained in education, which operates in the following way: explanations belong to causal representations (usually to quantity-based research) and comprehension takes on individual cases (the exclusive space of quality based research). Riedel assumes a position of compromise, stating that “we name an explanation a procedure in conformity with a series of principles by means of which something unique, particular is subordinated to something general. Therefore, instead of speaking of a deduction model or of a model based on a law, we prefer the denomination of subsumption-based explanation model”. [15] In our case, the 'general' is the Moldavian's 'different' nature. 'Comprehension' is a procedure in accordance with some principles whereby the particular has to be not subsumed but identified as such. We call the identification of the particular, in his particularity, 'interpretation': “hermeneutical knowledge – whatever it may mean from the point of view of

content – is based, from a logical point of view, on a presumption. It is the presumption of grasping a particular in its own particularity – which means: in its individual particularity – through an empirically controlled deduction of the generic. We call this operation – fundamental for hermeneutical science – the model of comprehension by presumption”. [15] This means that when we analyze a specific situation, in which an actor takes a decision, hence using a hermeneutical procedure, we all refer to a 'general'. In the given case the comprehension of the Moldavian's 'odd' behavior is to be subsumed to the general context of every peasant's life in those times, a 'general' defined by the social, economic or social rules of those times, a practical general. This general is represented, for instance, “by the rules of convention and of custom, of economic, juridical, social order, of political institutions and constitutions, eventually by moral, artistic and religious regulation, which altogether, represent more or less maxims of action and often take the shape of principles and practical laws”. [15]

We believe that the history of sociology holds some answers to the problem of explanation-comprehension: one of which is based on Marx's notion of practice, an approach of genetic structuralism, in which people “don't know it but they do it”; another one belonging to Weber's construction of the ideal type; and lastly, the foucaultian perspective of 'genealogy', according to which comprehension is obtained through the knowledge of the way an actor takes a decision in a given context. Concretely, from the perspective offered by the concept of 'genealogy', the explanatory model is associated with the perspective of a subject having entered a relation of dependence, within a structure defined by the logic of power, in which the individual is regarded as an effect of

power, understood as a sum of strategies and tactics working in a social network. To orient oneself toward comprehension means at the same time to accept that “what in reality leads to a body, some gestures, some discourses, some desires being identified and formed as individuals represents one of the basic effects of power, one of its main effects”. [8] Accepting the violation of his own body is therefore part of the Moldavian's power strategy to protect future life, a fact not understandable by those for whom accepting violence represents a shortage of power and force.

In short, we maintain that significant epistemological aspects, like the relationship between comprehension and explanation, are not independent of one paradigm or another, of an ideology or another. The Enlightenment has established a certain monopoly on the comprehension of the world, and has declassified as being irrational any reality not fitting in the mold of the power-knowledge dyad, which is based on explanation, making this knowledge valid because it can generate predictions, through the practice of power. Moreover, Tott acknowledges the fact that the Ottoman is right in the knowledge he holds and which is the result of an exercise of power, namely that governing the others is not connected to our inner world. Putting 'comprehension' between parentheses along with the orientation of science toward explanatory models derives from the great schism, produced by Descartes and continued by Kant, between self-knowledge and knowledge of the world (Foucault).

## 6. Some Conclusions

The account has been 'attacked' from multiple paradigmatic perspectives, has imposed the use of diverse concepts and notions, not belonging to a 'single grand

narration', it has required multiple theoretical competences. 'Minor' knowledge, like the one identified in the travel journals, is realized by the actors involved, who create it through storytelling, it is thus a narrative knowledge. It cannot be framed in a single perspective. Question: do the mentioned analyses have the properties of scientific knowledge? For what does 'scientific' mean today, in a world of radical contingency, of hazard dissolving the subject's role, of the ephemeral visual, continuous in its ephemerality? Does the tendency to bring within the field of qualitative research elements of the measurable ensure that the qualitative discourse is scientific? Doesn't this tendency relate to something else? Quoting Hayek we can assert that "the sum of all individuals' knowledge never appears as a whole", [10] and "scientific methods of knowledge research are not able to satisfy all the needs for explicit knowledge, manifesting themselves in society". Moreover, "not all knowledge referring to particular facts in constant change, that man uses, is suited to organization and systematical exposure". [10] Fearful of the common sense's assimilation of knowledge, the sociologist avoids this reality of "knowledge decentration". In other words, it is precisely due to ignorance that a space of freedom exists of which the sociologist should take advantage by occupying it. Why should sociology not deal with the knowledge which is not suited to systematic exposition? [12]

#### Notes and references

1. "to dissimulate means to pretend that you don't have what you do have" Baudrillard states in *Simulacre și simulare (Simulacra and Simulation)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Idea Design&Print, 2008, p. 6.
2. "not for a single second do we think that the universal could be nothing more than the Occident's particular way of thinking, its specific product, original of course, but just as difficult to export, as any of its originary products" Baudrillard asserts in *Paroxizmul indiferent (Paroxysm: Interviews With Philippe Petit)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Idea Design&Print, 2001, p. 16.
3. "a theory which cannot be rejected by any possible event is unscientific. The unrefutable character of a theory is not a virtue (as is often believed) but a vice" in Popper K. R.: *Conjecturi și infirmări- Creșterea cunoașterii științifice (Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge)*, Editura Trei, 2002, p. 55.
4. "in the case of subjective freedom, the will is sustained by the maxims of prudence or, in other terms, of any preference or rational reason of a particular person. Here, the act of liberty seems to pertain to the conscience of a single subject" in Habermas, J.: *Etica discursului și problema adevărului (Ethic Discourse and the Problem of Truth)*, Editura Art, 2008, p. 20.
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