

**THE FARMER – ENTREPRENEUR, THE STATE – GATEKEEPER:
INDIGENIZING NEOLIBERALISM IN THE CASE OF ROMANIAN
AGRICULTURE**

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the Common Agricultural Policy, I show how the Romanian implementation of the European Union model of *entrepreneurial agriculture* generated a paradoxical synthesis of liberal ideas with principles of state protectionism. Focusing on a case study of farmers, administrators and bureaucrats, in two communes of Cluj County, I show how, instead of providing a ground for subversion, this process was one of incorporation. Thus, building on the farmer/peasant distinction, I tell the story of the construction and deconstruction of hegemony in the postsocialist variant of real existing Romanian neoliberalism in the domain of agriculture.

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List of abbreviations

AC	Agricultural Chamber
AFAI	Agency for the Funding of Agricultural Investments
APIA	Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
EU	European Union
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NPRD	National Program of Rural Development

Introduction

One of the turning points for postsocialist Romania has been its admittance in the European Union, in 2007, an event that unveiled a significant part of the future political and economic transformations that it would be constrained to undertake, seeing that its efforts were to be directed toward its alignment with the *ethos* of the EU. Among these transformations, all part of a more general outlook on the necessary trajectory that was to trigger development – as the latter is conceived by the EU ideology –, those which were directed at agriculture have constituted a major concern within the preoccupations for *economic development*. As such, reforming national agricultural practices was an indicator of the ‘goodwill’ and commitment of Romania to the course of development that had been prefigured for it.

The present paper aims at retracing the various reverberations of the European Union discourse that defines the proper course that Romania, among the other member states, has to engage in in order to *develop*. One of the areas wherein the coordinates of this predesigned path are clearly articulated is the agricultural one, which has been, ever since the constitution of the EU, one of its major concerns. Over the past several decades there has been a radical shift in the EU discourse regarding the strategies that ought to be employed by the member states to trigger economic growth in this sector. If the first objective of the Common Agricultural Policy¹ was to foster production, and the EU acted as a protectionist supra-state which restricted imports and provided a transnational acquisition system which functioned as a safety net for the producers, the most recent version of the CAP redirects its attention from production to the producer, the *farmer*.

¹ From this point onwards, the Common Agricultural Policy will be addressed with its shortened version, as the CAP.

The farmer, no longer regarded as the defenseless baker of Europe's bread, if we are to engage in a petty casuistry, who has to be protected against the vicissitudes of the market, becomes an *entrepreneur* who needs to be competitive. Thus, if the former outlook defined the market as a counterforce which could have been set against *production* – and, in this way, food security – the latter conceives the market as the ultimate medium wherein *productivity* (i.e., profitability, with production as a fortunate by-product) can be stimulated. In these conditions, the question that imposes itself is how successful the EU discourse is in enforcing this new *farmer*. This question becomes even more ardent if one thinks of newly integrated postsocialist states such as Romania, a country whose socialist reminiscences are far from being suppressed, and whose rural population is in great part an aged, conservative one. Yet, the socialist past does not haunt the present as a simple artefactual regime that enclosed a substantial fragment of the lives of these people, but oftentimes as a graspable epoch of higher living standards, which constitutes the perpetual reference frame of the present. Although I am far from arguing that the socialist regime is idealized and nostalgia is a general mode of relating to the past, it is, I believe, hardly questionable that the assessment of the living standards during communism in positive terms when they are counterposed to the present ones is a widespread outlook among those who outlived this regime. Moreover, in what agriculture is concerned – again, as a socialist remnant – the insistence on production, during communism, as the only means of economic security and development, assuredly, secluded from commercialization and, subsequently, profitability, turned the ground on which the EU discourse falls into a marshy one.

Therefore, the puzzle that constituted the driving force of my research originates precisely in this tension between the efforts of the EU (and the state, seeing that regardless of their relative autonomy in the administration of national affairs, member states are coerced into complying with

the general orientation of the EU) to impose a particular vision about the proper course that the member states have to take, and the multifarious grassroots² discourses which are seemingly antagonistic with the former. The ultimate aim of this research, in this way, is to unravel the manner wherein the neoliberal transformations in Romania, which are far from being a novel turn, as Ban (2014) compellingly shows, have been unfolding at the grassroots level. However, Ban concentrates on the politico-economic realm and exposes the succession of political and economic reformations after the fall of communism, focusing on the struggle of various political factions to impose their agenda and showing how the advocates of neoliberalism advanced. My focal point, in contrast, is how these transformations were received by individuals and the echoes that they have produced, both in their ways of envisioning the social reality they are a part of, and in terms of concrete practices. In this way, investigating the discourse of the farmers, the administrators, state officials, and local bureaucrats is far from being limited to individual lifeworlds. The aim of this endeavor is, on the contrary, to connect these discourses to the wider dynamics whose confluence produces them.

As such, in a nutshell, with every new version of CAP, the European farmers have been spreadingly turning from beneficiaries of financial assistance (that was aimed at preventing agricultural production rates from falling) to ‘managers of the countryside’, and actors on an increasingly competitive market. However, in the case of the Romanian farmers at least, the EU discourse did not seem to engender substantive transformations of either agricultural practices, or the farmers’ ‘ethos’ (regarding the manner wherein the latter create an imagery about these practices, one that ties them to a particular signifying discourse).

² This term is merely an operational one, which is utilized here to differentiate between the national and supranational layers of discourse. The connotations that it contains regarding the homogeneity, or organicism of these discourses should be disregarded in this context.

One of the cases that I am familiar with – of one of the regions of Transylvania (Cluj County) – seems to mount a serious challenge to the endeavor of the EU of turning villagers into ‘managers’. While almost all of the small landowners of Gîrbău (an administrative section of Cluj County, comprising five villages, with a population of over 2000 people) requested EU agricultural financial aid, their vast majority did not change their agricultural practices in the last several years. Moreover, many of the inhabitants of Nădășel (one of the villages of this commune whose population is quite aged) with whom I have previously conducted research concerning the transformations of representations on landed property after the fall of communism (the process of decollectivization that was initiated in 1991), ceased to till, or ‘look after’³ their lands, while receiving the EU agricultural funds. Thus, in Nădășel roughly 80 families (from a total of 140), which met the conditions regarding parcels’ minimum length, applied for the EU financial aid, registering some part of their land in the EAGF⁴ program. However, none of those farm the land, leaving its conditioning to the local flock owner, who subleases the land around the village. This state of affairs raises the question of the relevance of this policy for the villagers, on the one side, and of the role that it played in the construction of what could be called a „passive property”, on the other side, more precisely a possession divided from labor.

Nonetheless, as this paper shows, in order to understand the reverberation of the EU discourse, a clear distinction has to be kept in mind, more precisely that between the *peasant* and the *farmer*. While the case outlined above is an instantiation of the implications of the preeminence of the first category, the case of the farmers that informs my paper discloses the other side of the coin. In chapter two, I focus precisely on these two categories of beneficiaries of the EU funds for

³ This expression appears as such in the EU discourse, referring to the situation in which the land is not cultivated, but maintained in good conditions, from an environmental point of view.

⁴ European Agricultural Guarantee Fund

agriculture, showing that while the former only applied for EU subsidies, which preserved the original lines of the CAP, the latter concentrated on the devising of rural development projects, which, in order to be funded, have to follow the principles of the enterprising farming. Following these lines, I argue that this distinction is a by-product of a development project (outlined by the CAP) that subsequently becomes a condition of possibility for the actuation of a neoliberal one. Thus, as I show in chapter three, while the peasants do not evince any definite view regarding rural development, and conceive these subsidies as a retribution founded on ownership itself, the farmers have a clearly defined view on development. Nevertheless, their view does not replicate that of the EU, even if they do envision themselves as entrepreneurs. As such, their discourse fuses the interventionist state (as an ideal-type), which ought to prevent the risks associated with the unstable market, with the enterprising farmer, whose main objective is the profitability of her activity.

Fieldwork as a Battlefield: A Brief Methodological Reflection

While my pre-fieldwork research design centered on the translation of the EU developmental discourse, and, to this purpose, I planned to talk to some farmers and to the employees of APIA⁵ Cluj, the regional commission for the administration of the EU funds that were granted through EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, the fund for direct payments to farmers, which is the complementary fund of the EAFRD, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, that co-finances the rural development projects of both the local administration, and agricultural associations, and independent farmers), the subsequent discussions with the secretary of APIA Cluj, followed by the examination of the concrete process of application for funds, revealed that there is a plurality of key actors that mediate the encounter of the EU and the farmers. First, the counterpart of APIA (whose administrative reach is limited to the EAGF), AFAI⁶, a public institution subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) which evaluates the rural development projects that request EU (co-)funding, and funds those which meet the requirements. Second, the now-called regional⁷ „Agricultural Chamber” (AC), subordinated to the County Council, is a governmental agency for agricultural consultancy, which also provides counselling for EU funded rural development projects. In addition to AC, there are several private consultancy companies in Cluj which are specialized on accessing EU funding, including in the

⁵ Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture; in Romanian, Agenția de Plăți și Intervenție pentru Agricultură.

⁶ Agency for the Funding of Agricultural Investments; in Romanian, Agenția pentru Finanțarea Investițiilor în Agricultură.

⁷ From the administrative point of view, Romania's units are, from the smallest to the largest, the following: the village, the commune (which comprises one or more villages and which is ruled by a mayor and a local council), the city (the largest and most 'urban' cities are called in a different way, that is, *municipiu*, a difference which would correspond to that between town and city; similar to the commune, every city has a mayor and a local council), and, finally, the 'county' (41 in total), that comprises a certain amount of communes and cities, and is ruled by a prefect and a county council. As opposed to the mayor, who is elected by the residents of the city/commune, the prefect is appointed by the Government, as its local representative. In what follows, the terms 'regional' and 'county' will be used interchangeably.

area of agriculture. And, finally, the townhalls (at the communal level), each of which employs at least one agricultural engineer whose attributions include, among others, updating the Agricultural Register, registering land transactions, rents, leases, etc., and releasing property / use certificates that are requested by APIA and AFAI.

Seeing that all these public institutions are interconnected, and amount to different zones of the map of the EU agricultural funding, preserving the focus on APIA without examining this institutional network would hinder a rich understanding of this issue. As such, I decided to contact all of them, and talk to some of their employees. But things went far from smooth in this respect, disclosing the fact that bureaucracy is all-encompassing, and cannot be objectified – that is, externalized, or distanced. Therefore, I found myself absorbed by it, and, forcefully, my examination turned into a participatory one. APIA asked me to write a written request for interviewing its employees, which, right after multiple insistencies, was not approved. However, my recurring encounters with it in the process of request, convinced me that they would not tell me more than what is included in the official documents that are available on their web-site. The private consultancy firms also refused to talk to me.

However, other encounters were more fruitful. I managed to discuss with one of the board members of the AC, and one of its consultants, an economist from AFAI Cluj, the vice-mayors of two communes in Cluj county, the mayor of one of them, an agricultural engineer in one of the communal townhalls, a consultant of one of these mayors who attends issues related to agriculture, and four large-scale farmers. Moreover, I was granted a one-day long privilege to undertake participant observation at one of the two communal townhalls, which proved to be a quite fecund endeavor seeing that the period of application for farmers had just started and there were six or seven locals there, discussing with the agricultural engineer about the recent changes in the

conditions for accessing these subsidies. This precise context provided me a first-hand grasp of how the EU policy is translated, and even comparatively, due to the fact that while most of the locals were villagers whom I knew already (all of them with a very low level of education – primary, previously agriculturalists who ceased cultivating their lands in the past decade, seeing their old age, and who nevertheless applied for EU funding), one of them was a large-scale farmer, the only one in the two neighboured communes of my fieldwork, wherewith I later discussed at length, himself a former agricultural engineer that has a very good knowledge of the legislation and who previously worked for the Regional Directorate of Agriculture of Cluj.

The interviews with the farmers gravitated around their activity, the difficulties that they encounter, and their relation to the bureaucrats and administrators. Those with the ‘townhall tribe’ have focused on their projects of rural development, and, in the particular case of the agricultural engineers, on the situation of farming in their commune, seeing that they have an intimate knowledge of the problems of the farmers, and thus they dispose of a global image. Lastly, in the case of AFAI and AC, the discussions focused on the specific mode of organization and activities of the agency, and, in equal measure, on their encounter with the farmers, and the ways in which they envision development. As it must be mentioned, the names of my informants are substituted in this paper with pseudonyms, in order to respect their wish for anonymity. At the same time, I will not provide the name of the two communes of my fieldwork, seeing that the townhalls have a reduced number of employees, such that they could easily be identified.

Alongside the semi-structured interviews that I have conducted with them (the average duration of the interviews was around one hour and a half), I examined several policy papers of

the EU, and the Romanian NPRD⁸ for 2007-2013 and, very briefly, due to its deferral, that for 2014-2020, which was released only a few weeks ago. Although the time limit did not allow me to inquire more in the specificities of the two NPRDs, their main provisions are expounded in various informative materials which are publicized on the official web-site of MARD, APIA and AFAI (each of the two advertise the provisions they deal with, that is, the direct payments in the case of APIA, and the projects for rural development, in that of AFAI). While the discussions with the farmers, administrators, state officials and bureaucrats disclosed their discourse regarding rural development, in particular, and through it, development in general, the examination of the above mentioned documents imposed itself in order to disclose the development discourse of the EU.

Assuredly, my research has multiple deficiencies, starting from the design of my fieldwork itself, which prefigured the type of information that I will have had access to. As I mentioned in the first part of this section, some essential categories of informants have been excluded due to their refusal to participate in my research. Even if they had preserved the official discourse of the EU as such, the discourse of the employees of APIA would have been indispensable for generating a more complex understanding of the interlacing of the different discursive layers. Furthermore, as far as the private consultancy firms are concerned, they could have provided valuable information about the extent to which farmers actually *speak* the language of the EU and, simultaneously, about their contribution in the process of designing the projects.

Thus, the actual configuration of my fieldwork was shaped, on the one hand, by these refusals. On the other side, the process of selection of these particular informants in the different agencies has also been a quite hazardous one. As such, although discussing with Miron was

⁸ National Program of Rural Development.

intentional, the consultant from the AC with whom I subsequently discussed was appointed by the former. Leo, the economist from AFAI, was also appointed by the director of AFAI Cluj. In regards to the mayor, the two vice-mayors, the agricultural engineers and the consultant from one of the two townhalls, I decided to talk to them after my recurrent visits to the APIA, where the secretary explained to me what the process of applying for the subsidies entailed, and attested that the townhall was one of the actors involved. Finally, the farmers have been selected due to the acquaintance of my parents with them, seeing that Mihai, a young man who manages a mixed farm leased some of their land, Anton, a middle-aged man from a nearby village who administers a grain farm, has been the one to whom they appealed for the mechanic cultivation of their land (since they are not farmers, but agriculture is a complementary activity), Marcel is also a veterinarian, and attended our several farm animals, and, lastly, Simina and Flaviu sell milk in our village, and they are also buying it from them.

Therefore, as this brief description of the offstage of my fieldwork shows, the strategies I employed for selecting my informants have been, in part – where selection has been an option – intimately connected to the position of my own family within this rural network. This is not, of course, a mere matter of choice, or alternatives, but a crucial stage in research, which dramatically reverberates over the findings and the themes that are discussed in this paper. Any supplementary interview could have radically transfigured my argumentation. However, this does not amount to arguing for an absolute relativity of this argumentation, thus its outright dependency on who my informants are. Although I cannot generalize from the four interviews with large-scale farmers the discourse of *Romanian farmers*, it cannot be contested that their discourse points at objective dynamics that are currently defining social reality in Romania and, seeing that neoliberalism is the underlying principle of these dynamics, global processes.

I. Mapping the Conceptual Map: Developing Development, Discursivizing Discourse, and Transitioning from Transition

1.1. Envisioning the Future: Development in Transitology, the CAP, and the NPRD

In the climate of glorified market liberalism permeating all spheres of life in the reform-driven societies of the former Soviet Block, privatization has become a panacea for all social ills.

(Stanilov, 2007:272)

1.1.1. Envisioning the Trajectory of Postsocialist Romania

1.1.1.1. Postsocialist Romania as the Infant of the West

Right after the fall of communism, the most ardent debate in Romania, as in most of the postsocialist states, gravitated around the idea of development. Within this debate, framed by the ideology of liberal democracy, whose absolute authority was constructed by its inherent negation of socialism, the prevailing discourse, which eventually became the hegemonic one in transitology, established the *Western* (i.e., capitalist) countries as the point of reference. In this view, development – as a process that entails the reconfiguration of the social, economic, and political

areas⁹, by following a particular strategy that would finalize, not with the attainment of a certain alluring state of affairs, but with the construction of a self-propelling mechanism in each of these areas that would lead to autonomous, perpetual progress – was defined as the engagement on a path that would remedy the harm that the socialist past has engendered, i.e., the distancing from the ‘normal’ trajectory, which led, without question, to a fully-fledged capitalist system. As such, the West, constructed as the immemorial enemy of the socialist regime, was restored as the instantiation of this ideal state of development. This way, the Western, capitalist countries have been invested with the status of adult nations, while the postsocialist states have been construed as infants who, under the surveillance of the former, will mature and join the idyllic land of capitalism, a view which engendered a renewed rapport of domination between the two (Buden, 2012).

One of the central transfigurations that constituted the first step on the reinstated trajectory was the restitution of the land, conceived as both a necessary prerequisite for the instatement of capitalism, and as a means to reconfigure the history of Romania, by denegating the socialist past. As my previous research on land restitution¹⁰ shows, this provision was understood in the symbolic terms of the restoration of genealogical continuity (landed property was, as such, conceived as a symbolic binding agent). A few years later, the land was turned into a commodity, and the proprietors became ‘entrepreneurs’ of the land¹¹. The 2007 integration of Romania in the European Union, I argue, has led to a further change in the imagery around landed property, through a

⁹ The distinction between these zones appears as such in the state discourse and it is not, by any means, accepted as a sociological one in this paper. In my view, the ‘social’ encompasses the three, as these are defined by the state.

¹⁰ Land restitution started in 1991, two years after the fall of communism and the beginning of the so-called ‘liberal democracy’.

¹¹ The limited space of this paper does not allow a detailed explanation of this process of transformation. However, it is necessary to mention that postsocialist agricultural associations and the economic transformations in Romania transformed the land into a ‘marketable’ property.

specific developmentalist discourse regarding agriculture that recently sees European peasants as ‘managers of the countryside’.

Concerning the first stage of the representations of landed property, my findings are supported by Verdery (1996), who argues that kinship relations grounded the strategies for eliciting property rights. For Lampland (2002), as for Verdery (1996; 2004), decollectivization operated at a deeper level than the economic restructuring, shaping social identities in terms of possession.

Seeing that property is one of the central concepts of this research, the perspective that I will take on it ought to be clarified. According to Humphrey and Verdery (2004), the ideology related to property must be faulted by questioning all its core concepts. The comparative analysis concerning the differences between the configuration of property rights undertaken by Marcuse (1996) completes Kornai’s (1992) – who examines the dissimilarities between socialism and capitalism by looking at how rights and liabilities, underlined by property, can vary – by stating that the core discrepancy concerns the orchestration of property for profit, which in socialism lacks legitimacy. While Von Benda-Beckmann et al. (2009) advocate the resuscitation of the ‘bundle of rights’ metaphor, arguing that it could prove to be a fecund perspective in the conditions of the widening of focus as to include the relation between the state, as a guarantor of property rights, its citizens, and local elites as mediators between the two, MacPherson (1978) contests the conceptualization of property in terms of rights, arguing that power relations shape its meanings. Following Humphrey and Verdery, MacPherson, and, partially, Godelier, who asserts that property cannot be disconnected from *appropriation*, thus that it cannot be regarded merely as an abstract system of rules, and, concomitantly, that the manner wherein this process of appropriation unfolds is configured by the system of social relations that underlies a social unit at a particular point in

time, yet without adhering to the utilitarianism that he seems to propose by arguing that the acquisition of the status of ‘property’ is dependent upon the function – real or apparent – of that specific object for social reproduction (Godelier, 1978), I consider that property ought to be regarded in terms of the power relations that configure a certain understanding of it. Seeing that each power regime is embedded within a particular ideology that becomes hegemonic, the property regime (i.e., a certain outlook on legitimate property relations and a particular normative definition that ascertains the authorized forms of property) is one of the first domains to be transformed. As such, the examination of the associated property ideology will become a practical strategy to unravel the broader power relations that dominate the social context under scrutiny.

Nonetheless, the EU integration and the subsequent development program, as it is instantiated by the CAP, partially negated the ideology that regarded private property as the necessary instrument in the generation of the capitalist development. A mere glance at the most recent turn of the EU developmentalist discourse shows with clarity that the central place that landed property occupied in the hegemonic postsocialist neoliberal discourse was substituted by that of the exploitation of the land with the aim of obtaining profit. One of the facts that support this assertion is the definition of the beneficiary of the EU funds as the person (natural or legal) who possesses the *legal right* to use the land. In this way, the definite delineation between the owner and the leaseholder, for instance, becomes irrelevant. The insistence on the centrality of the market in agricultural practices and the substitution of private property with the entrepreneurial farming and the competitive farmer is precisely what drives one into framing the transformations of agriculture in Romania as directed toward neoliberalism (and, concomitantly, what outbalances liberalism).

1.1.1.2. Retracing the Proper Trajectory: From Westernism to Europeanism

As I hinted above, postsocialism is often conceptualized as a unitary development trajectory whose point of departure is the fall of socialism and whose finality is a full-fledged liberal democracy. As such, the concept of *transition* finds its justification in the assumption of a consistent driving force that moves forward this process of *development*. Without launching here what would be a superfluous debate with the windmill of transitology, it is nevertheless crucial to put into question the latter concept, seeing that it is not utilized merely by academics, but it appertains to the ideology of liberalization that pervades the conception on the legitimate courses of development for former socialist countries. Despite of the multiple discontinuities that are disclosed by the recent history of these countries, transition remained a vindicatory frame whose invocation was meant to furnish a solid ground for the transformations that these states had to undergo.

Following Vliegenthart (2008), I assert that the case of postsocialist Romania is one of ‘transnationalization of the state’, a view that contradicts the widely accepted perspective that regards the process of ‘transition’ as one wherein the power of the state diminishes. The state, in this outlook, appears to become in itself a subject of the developmental discourse, and an active actor in the process of neoliberalization – thus, it is far from being a passive victim of the more powerful transnational agencies. The local administrative structures (such as the land commissions in the case at issue), that appear to have a high degree of autonomy, are not indicators of the devolution of state power, but merely of its transposition at the local level, a process also discussed by Rankin (2001), in the case of microcredit associations in Nepal. As such, against the dominant view, neoliberalism does not determine the demise of the state power. While it cannot be argued that the state exerts the same power on the domains that have previously been exclusively under its command, and the manner wherein it does so changed, it remains the decisive actor in these

areas. One example is the fact that while the EU designs the main lines of development, the state is still the one which sets the actual policies that materialize these general principles, in adapting them to the specific context within its borders. However, it must not be overlooked that the NPRD must be approved by the EU. Nonetheless, the state is not excluded, or marginalized, but reconfigured completely, and becomes a neoliberal state: it is, itself, entrepreneurialized (competing for EU funds, for instance).

Among the respective transformations, the integration in the EU constituted one of the major endorsements of the progress that had been acquired in this process. As regards the concept of *transition*, one which is in itself worthy of a separate analysis, due to the limited space of the present paper, I will not insist on the ideology that underlies it. It is sufficient, for the purpose of this discussion, to say that this concept is a product of a junction of liberal ideology and a moderate developmentalist discourse, reinforced by the fascination exercised by the West in the *Eastern* political imaginary. The legacy of the liberal ideology in neoliberalism is constituted by the principle of minimal state intervention, with the aim of avoiding the distortions of the market which it would engender, seeing that the market is seen as an autonomous, self-propelling, and self-regulating mechanism (Thorsen, 2010), and on the tenet of free competition – one that presumes a direct connection between personal success and entrepreneurship – in all social spheres. Within this conceptual frame, it will hardly be surprising that private property holds a privileged position and becomes the substruction of all social-economic relations. As the Comaroffs assert when depicting the neoliberal project, „[...] it is not just that the personal is political. The personal is the only politics there is [...]” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:305). Yet, Romania was not supposed to adopt a widely defined liberal base, and design its own trajectory, but to direct its efforts toward traversing the necessary stages whose finality will be a full-fledged capitalist state.

On this line, the manner in which the CAP, as a development project, is implemented in Romania can be regarded as one of the indicators that this progress is being made. In line with Von Benda-Beckmann (1989), who argues that any development project constitutes a governance plan, I will treat the EU agricultural project as a project that aims to restructure conduct and to build a particular kind of *subjectivity* (thus clinging to the Foucauldian legacy) and I will endeavor to disclose these subjectivities, bearing in mind, assuredly, how the space of subjectivity itself is constructed, thus avoiding, even in this critical sense, to assume that the self is an a priori category (Rose 1989). As such, any development program – and all the more so a program such as the CAP, that overtly proposes a process of transformation of the farmer into a ‘manager of the countryside’, or a competitive actor on the market, ideally a European one, a downright estranged identity¹² for a wide category of those who apply for funds in the Romanian case¹³ – requires a particular authorizing discourse to provide it with a rationale and, hereby, with consistency.

This discourse, in its turn, is often at odds with the local one (which is far from being unitary in itself), and at times meets resistance. Its enforcement disregarding these incongruities does not serve the interest of the implementer, since the state becomes its guarantor, and such an action would injure its legitimacy as well. On the other hand, of course, it is a project of *development*, whose positive connotations are its *sine qua non* condition of possibility (possibility, in the sense of ‘raison d’être’, legitimate reasons to exist). Development is often translated as a *progress* from one stage to the other, an equation that would result in a visible disparity between the two points in time, one that can be assessed following certain indicators that were utilized in

¹² In the sense of a profound, internalized ethos that does not require further legitimation. Or, otherwise put, a driving discourse that produces incentives for a particular genre of practice.

¹³ Assuredly, I do not refer here to the actual ‘farmers’, those who employ labor-force in the agricultural practices, which constitute their sole activity, and their professed aim is for their products to enter the market, while the finality of their endeavors ought to be a certain surplus value.

the process of designing the respective project. Thus, seeing that it is defined as a betterment of some kind or the other, its legitimacy lies in the premise of the universal desire for improvement, with the concurrent assumption that ‘improvement’ has a universal meaning (need not to be forgotten, this is solely a descriptive endeavor of a discourse, not a presumption of validity). In these conditions, the respective development project ought to be embraced by its subjects and all resistance suppressed (seeing that there is no *actual* reason for such a resistance). Thus, a paternalist endeavor. But this is only one side of the coin. The other is constituted by the direct connection between economic and social development, a conditional relationship that implies that the latter is indispensable to the former, and that the aggregate that they form is *real development*. Here is precisely where the juncture between subjectivities and development lies. Social development presumes not merely the transformation (a positive one, in terms of stages, as outlined above) of the national (and, hereby, through a top-down process of implementation, of the regional and local) institutional settings that are conceived as the core dimensions of social progress, such as education, health, or social security (Ban, 2014:14), themselves questionable, but also a more elementary transformation that uncurls on the level of the subjectivities of those that are constructed as target-agents of social development. That is to say, the construction of the subjects of development – ones that are themselves a product of developmental discourses – parallels the actions that are undertaken in the other areas that are targeted by development agencies.

Returning to the actors that are involved in the application of development projects, along with Li (2009), I assert that development projects that are imposed by transnational agencies – such as EU – are transformed in the process of implementation due to the interactions between the levels of the this process and the nature of these transformations depends upon the actual

encounters between local bureaucrats and the addressees of the respective project. At the same time, another dimension that needs to be taken into consideration – following Gudeman’s call (2001) for an economic anthropology sensitive to the influence of the ‘communal realm’ – relates to the social networks that are involved in these interactions (in the case of Nădășel, for instance, some of the members of the local commissions that dwell on the requests of financial aid and the subsequent issues that might appear along the way are inhabitants of the commune), and the way in which these communitarian relations shape the process of implementation.

1.1.2. The Dissipation of the Western Dreamland: Critical Discourses from the East

In the present times, as the discourse of my informants hints, from farmers, to local administration employees, mayors and vice-mayors, state officials, and EU funds administrators, the dominant outlook seems to be a critical one towards the EU and its perspective on the course that Romania ought to tread on. However, the criticisms that are directed at the EU oftentimes have the allure of a resigned reprimanding of a paternal figure who provides the means of subsistence, but asks too much in return, or, in other cases, as a stepmother who favors only some of her children. As such, as I discuss in the third chapter, not only farmers, as direct beneficiaries of EU funds who are subject to the strict conditions that must be met, but also some of the state officials and bureaucrats regard the EU as a suprastructure that profits from the systemic frailty of Romania. The main argument, in this respect, is that the EU funds – with the associated difficulties in accessing those which are dedicated to rural development projects, and the perverse effects of the subsidies for the land tract – are designed to hinder agricultural production, and retain Romania as an outlet for the producers from the other member states. On the other hand, the reinstatement of the ideal-type of the interventionist state constitutes a serious break with the hegemonic discourse of radical

liberalism of the second decade after the fall of communism. Thus, a slight shift seems to be unfolding, from envisioning the West as the flawless capitalist world wherein the underdeveloped East dreams of being incorporated, thus from a complete denial of the communist legacy and *Easternness*, towards a partial rehabilitation of the communist regime (through the acknowledgement of certain segments of it as being superior to their postsocialist counterparts, as it is the case of the mode of organization of agriculture) and, subsequently, towards the arrogation of this Easternness. However, as opposed to the previous self-infantilization, if we were to stretch Buden's concept a little, the critique of the assumed underdevelopment is now uttered from a more self-confident standpoint¹⁴, which assigns the East the right to a distinct, autonomous path, even if the endpoint remains the capitalist state of development. However, if we shift the focus towards the complementary discursive angle, the EU's, we will see that the latter underwent a reversed turn, from conceiving itself as a protectionist supracommunity, to a neoliberal polity.

¹⁴ Of course, the use of these terms does not amount to a psychologization of the 'nation' (that, I must admit, I consider to be inexistent outside the state discourse, seeing the heterogeneity of the social categories that compose it). The only reason why this terminology is useful here is that it allows focusing on one specific discursive strand, out of a heterogeneous multiplicity of discourses.

1.1.3. (Re-)Reading the CAP: The EU, from a Protectionist Suprastate to a Neoliberal Polity

Of course, our country is moving forward with its hazard lights on! And it does so not because Romanians are too smart or too stupid, 'cause they are enough of both! But because others pull it. If it wasn't for the EU, we would have been doomed! (Ovidiu, communal vice-mayor)

Thus, while the EU appears to have been what can be called a *suprastate*, or, taking a step further, a *welfare suprastate* (through social security policies, as the subsidies for agriculture have at times been denominated), its renewed insistence on development projects¹⁵ points at a shift towards neoliberal policies. These two stages (subsidies – projects) indicate a viewpoint that regards development as a process that, ironically, cannot be started in the absence of a certain level of welfare and that, once put into motion, can only take the way of entrepreneurship, which becomes the best way to transform the propensity towards development into a self-perpetuating mechanism. As such, if in the first stage the state or supra-state provides the fundament for development, in the second the agents of Development become autonomous entrepreneurs that will take development into their own hands. In these conditions, general economic development is seen as an aggregate product of individual developments.

As opposed to other European projects, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is mainly funded by the EU¹⁶ (although there are parallel national programs of co-financing), thus there

¹⁵ Which are co-financed – a crucial aspect, seeing that this condition indicates that the beneficiaries should already possess both a certain capital, and the entrepreneurship that is needed for a succesful investment.

¹⁶ As it is explained in the brochure that lists the major principles of CAP: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-overview/2014_en.pdf, retrieved on January, 13th 2015.

remains little space of maneuver for the member states in the implementation of agricultural policies. However, while the CAP provides the general lines that direct the strategies of rural development, the member states are given the liberty to decide on the specific measures they deem necessary in order to engender the established major transformations. As such, every member state is bound to design a National Program of Rural Development (NPRD), which will enact the concrete provisions that establish the conditions and beneficiaries of the EU funds, according to the specific present lacunae of each state. In this sense, the statement of one of my informants is a wise synthesis of the rapport between the national and the supra-national fields of power: „*the state is the EU, we are the state*” (Ovidiu, vice-mayor in one of the communes in Cluj county).

While the CAP was founded in 1962, it did not preserve its initial orientation (that was the stimulation of agricultural production), passing through a series of radical transformations which are explained by some scholars, such as Garzon (2007), as the product of a process of policy negotiation, and not as a response to a specifically defined crisis. The main breaking points, presented as such in the brochure that overviews the CAP¹⁷, were 1984 – when, in the conditions of an ‘overproduction’, the CAP changed its focus toward the co-ordination of agricultural production and the ‘market’ –, 1992 (when the policy underwent a major transformation, turning from ‘price support’, or ‘market support’, toward ‘producer support’ through direct aid), and, last but not least, the most recent radical transformation was in 2013, when the CAP defined as its ultimate objective the stimulation of ‘economic competitiveness’ among producers. Its most recent version, setting the stage for the next tranche of funding (2014-2020), reinforces its previous orientation, by identifying the stimulation of competitiveness as one of the means for attaining its

¹⁷ The following transformations are betaken from the official presentation of CAP, that can be found on the EU site, retrieved on January 13th 2015: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-overview/2014_en.pdf

ultimate objectives (food security, „sustainable management of natural resources” and „balanced territorial development¹⁸), translated as a market-oriented approach of the farmers:

The objective of past reforms to enhance the market orientation of EU agriculture is continued by adapting the policy instruments to further encourage farmers to base their production decisions on market signals. (*Overview of CAP reform 2014-2020*, in Agricultural Policy Perspectives Brief No. 5, December 2013, p. 5)

Competitiveness, a term which appears as such in the EU discourse, is thus operationalized as, on the one hand, an increase in profitability (interchangeable with what is termed „economic performance”) through investments and modernization of farms and, on the other, the farmers as „skilled” managers of the farm. Otherwise put, following the manner in which the new farmer is defined, the farm is entrepreneurialized and becomes a firm, with a specific activity (seeing that a parallel process is the segmentation of agricultural activities, a theme that I address later on, in the third chapter), professionalized labor force, particular investment strategies whose objective is the generation of profit, and a farmer that is no longer a mere agriculturalist, but an entrepreneur who possesses both the knowledge, and the *intuition*¹⁹ that are required for the devising of a business plan (one of the conditions for the beneficiaries of funding for rural development projects). This transformation is reinforced by the body of literature coming from political science and policy studies, which uses the two terms interchangeably and overtly supports the neoliberal project (see, for example, Ferguson and Olofsson, 2011), whose study focuses on the reasons for the diversification of the activities of the farmers in six case-studies). One of the central focal points of this literature is given by the so-called *motivations* of the manager-farmers in starting or

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/policy-perspectives/policy-briefs/05_en.pdf, retrieved on May 10th 2015: *Overview of CAP reform 2014-2020*, in Agricultural Policy Perspectives Brief No. 5, December 2013.

¹⁹ This term refers to the specific rationality that is required from the entrepreneur, a complex assessment of the strategies of investment, possible risks (both related to external factors, and the limitations that might appear during the process of implementation of the project, related to the entrepreneur herself), expected outcomes, processing options, and further strategies of business expansion, all of them divided on precise time periods for the total of five years.

expanding their business, which reinforces the principle of the rational actor as the only factor of decision, thus disregarding the structural mechanisms that shape their decisions. The same assumption underlies the explanations that some of these scholars put forth in endeavoring to identify the causes of the unequal ‘economic performance’ (of course, pursuing this theme itself is problematic and reveals the transformations that I sketched earlier) of the farms. De Silva and Kodithuwakku (2011), for instance, after examining the case of Sri Lanka, conclude that one of the factors that delineate what they call „the better-off” and „the worse-off” households is the propensity of the former to limit their expenditures on consumptive practices and use these savings for reinvestment. In stating this difference between the two categories of households, the authors draw a direct connection between the reinvestment of surplus value and long-term gain, which amounts to arguing that a ‘good’ (whatever that may mean, since it is not defined what ‘better-off’ and ‘worse-off’ entails) economic status is dependent upon entrepreneurship, which, in its turn, equates a particular ethos that restrains from spending the surplus and that stirs reinvestment (reinvestment would entail the utilization of the surplus value for the acquisition of ‘means of production’ – whether technical means, labor force, informational means, etc. – that will be the basis for a further expansion of the previous economic activity, or for a novel one whose aim is to return a higher surplus value than the previous one).

Thus, if the initial version of the CAP (in the first period after its constitution) regarded the vitalization of production as the central strategy for ensuring food security and, concomitantly, the basis for development, its most recent version concentrates upon competitiveness and market-oriented approaches of farming, as the only means of attaining the same objective:

In short, EU agriculture needs to attain higher levels of production of safe and quality food, while preserving the natural resources that agricultural productivity depends upon. This can only be achieved by a competitive

and viable agricultural sector operating within a properly functioning supply chain and which contributes to the maintenance of a thriving rural economy. In addition, to achieve these long-term goals, better targeting of the available CAP budget will be needed. (*Overview of CAP reform 2014-2020*, in Agricultural Policy Perspectives Brief No. 5, December 2013, p. 3)

Among the various provisions of the EU program of agricultural development, one of the most puzzling dimensions – that was preserved from the beginning of the program until the present times – was the one that addressed the proprietors or leaseholders, whereby all solicitors were granted a subsidy, whose value depended on the area of tenancy or of the land owned. These subsidies are granted from the EAGF, which affords direct payments and funds market measures, the complementary fund for agriculture of the EFRD, which manages the projects of rural development.

If we inquire the current conditions that the potential beneficiaries of the subsidies are bound to complete, we will see that the ‘direct aid on land tract’ will be granted if and only if the parcels that are utilized are wider than a third of a hectare and the total area is at least of one hectare, and the environment conditions (that specify the general standards of land use – agricultural practices, and environmental-friendly precepts) are strictly followed. These subsidies are divided in two main categories: land use, or cultivation, and land maintenance that presupposes only the latter (related to environment). The precise distribution of the subsidies and their amount, alongside the conditions that have to be met are established by each country, through the NPRD.

As opposed to the 2007-2013 NPRD, which afforded decoupled payments that were not conditioned by the use of the land *per se*, its new version eliminates this category of subsidies and asks the farmers (who, as it was also the case with the first NPRD, can be either owners of the respective land, or merely leaseholders) to provide evidence for the fact that they have a particular

agricultural activity on the parcels that they request a direct payment for²⁰. In regards to the second pillar of the CAP (rural development), the new NPRD opens several other options for funding, such as the support for small farms, or that for processing and commercializing activities of agricultural products, alongside the previous one, which are preserved, such as the installment of young farmers (the renewal of the farmer generations is one of the objectives of CAP, a part of a modernist agenda which is based on the assumption that young people are more efficient and that this efficiency stimulates development, as Sutherland and Zagata (2015:40) argue), or the modernization of farms.

Although the NPRD is conceived as a personalized strategy for the development of agriculture – and, subsequently, for the enhancement of general development – in terms of discourse it replicates word by word the CAP, defining the reformation of the Romanian agriculture in accordance with the EU lines as a matter that ought not to be delayed. Admitting the relevance of the specificities of this program for a complex understanding of the manner wherein the EU discourse about development reverberates on the state discourse, I shall nonetheless leave such a detailed analysis to a further research. However, my discussion of the construction of the *farmer* is partly informed by some of these specificities, that some of my informants (specifically, the consultant from the AC in Cluj, and the economist from AFAI) presented.

²⁰ http://www.madr.ro/docs/NOTIFICARI_PAC_2015-2020-.pdf, retrieved on June, 1st 2015.

1.2. Fighting the Windmill of Discourse: Conceptualizing Development

1.2.1. Using Concepts, or How Theory is Practice

1.2.1.1. Imperative Assumptions and Grounded Illusions

It goes without saying, I believe, that a research question entails, on the one hand, a corpus of assumptions about how a social reality works and, on the other, a lacuna whose suppression would enrich – however relative this ‘enrichment’ is, seeing that its assessment is dependent in great part on what is fashionable at a certain point in social research – the knowledge about that segment of social reality. If this tenet is accepted, it becomes transparent that the a priori knowledge (i.e. assumptions taken as knowledge) is in itself created by disposing of a certain theoretical ‘lens’, that is interposed between the ‘empirical’ reality (not in fully positivist terms, but as a partly flexible social configuration that can be understood in multiple ways, depending on the manner in which it is framed) and the observer (social scientist, in this case). My research is, of course, no exception from the mechanism that generates the questions that become the driving forces of social inquiry. As such, I started from the assumption that there is a relatively unified, consistent discourse on what development means, specifically in the domain of agriculture, a discourse that is generated by the European Union, as a transnational body that disposes of a sufficient power over its member states in order to impose a set of provisions, legitimized by this discourse, in each of the latter.

The second central assumption of my research is that this discourse is not delivered in its original form to the *farmers*, due to the inconsistencies that emerge at each level of implementation of these provisions. Thus, that at each level (national, regional, local) it undergoes a series of transformations, and that the most significant ones take place at the last level, that is, the local

(urban, or communal) commissions, whose members – especially in the case of communal commissions – are involved in local social networks. Therefore, I assume that the acquaintance of these members with the local community, doubled by the irrelevance of the EU developmental discourse for a large part of the villagers affect the manner wherein this discourse is manoeuvred by the local bureaucrats. This irrelevance would mostly be generated by the distinct institutional language of the development program, and by its estranged conceptual framework, but also by the lacuna between its ontological assumptions and those that are common within these local communities. An instance of such an estranged presumption is the idea of the agriculturists as ‘managers of the countryside’, or ‘entrepreneurs’, given by a transposition of neoliberal tenets in the case land owners land owners, and not necessarily ‘farmers’, as the EU addresses the villagers, because these funds have also been allotted to those who do not till their lands.

1.2.1.2. Producing the Producer: Putting Development in the Hands of the Farmer

However, the background theme – the one which points to the foundation that coagulates all these transformations – remains the alignment of the Romanian state to the neoliberal agenda, in the conditions of the ever increasing pressures of the transnational agencies. Assuredly, the European Union is but one of these, and perhaps not as influential as IMF is in its case, that imposed and continues to urge the Romanian state to observe the conditions that it imposed in exchange for its financial aid, conditions that manifestly address the stimulation of foreign investment, reduction of budgetary expenditures – thus, a reduction of social security systems, and state institutions – and an overall liberalization, i.e. withdrawal of the state, of the service sector (Vincze, 2015). These pressures become apparent, among other areas, in the manner wherein the EU directs (through economic provisions) the reconfiguration of the agricultural sector, not merely in terms of the actual agricultural practices (although a crucial aspect), but also in regards to the production

of the producer, if we indulge in a petty *jeu de mots*. That is, while the changes in agricultural practices are the visible, more superficial layer, the EU aims at generating a more profound, thus steady transformation: that of the ‘European farmer’. As opposed to the case of Australia in the late 1980s, when a similar effort was made in the direction of entrepreneurialization of agriculture, but those farmers who already had serious ‘financial issues’ had been advised to renounce (Higgins, 2001), in Romania all farmers have been encouraged (officially) to become entrepreneurial farmers. That is, no categories have been overtly excluded from the official discourse regarding the imperative transformations of agriculture. However, the provisions of the NPRD manifestly supported large farmers.

This new *farmer* is conceived as a competitive producer whose aim is to deliver good-quality (one that follows the ‘European standards’ of production, including ecological provisions, all thoroughly listed in the policy papers of the EU) agricultural products that can become competitive, in their turn, on the European, and, eventually, global market. Development, in this respect, becomes the shiny wrapping paper of neoliberalization. Concomitantly, neoliberal development is transferred at the local level, and becomes the responsibility of local elites. The state, however, plays an active role in this process, by devolving part of its authority to the local elites, thus facilitating the process of generalized marketization. A similar process is observed by Vincze (2015) in the case of urban development plans of two small Romanian towns.

1.2.1.4. Conceptual Map: Defining Discourse and Development

As it is clear by now, my research revolves around a set of concepts that constitute the lens that I appeal to in order to make sense of this particular segment of social reality (lenses that do not

belong to me, but are embedded in the angle of sight that I have adopted (Haraway, 1988), which itself ought to be the object of insight at some point in my enquiry).

The first such concept is *discourse* that betakes here the sense of an ensemble of utterances and practices²¹, product of the power struggles within a certain social field, backed up by a set of assumptions regarding the functioning of social reality (generally bounded by spatial divisions that generate a map of difference, usually defined in normative terms) that engender a corpus of narratives, embedded in the delineation between positive and negative practices. While discourse can be contested – and often seems to be, regardless of its origin, but in most cases only by a small social category – it is imposed by an agent that is collocated in a position of power, and is presented as the only valid one. As such, in my case, the assemblage of ideas about development (in general, and of agriculture, in particular), that are identifiable from the policy papers produced by the EU, seconded by the actual provisions that are imposed to the member states of the EU, will be treated as the EU discourse about development. On the other hand, the discourse of the farmers, as it will be detailed later, does not replicate the former, such that it will be treated as one which is not independent, but clearly delineated from it. In this case, their discourse is constituted by the corpus of ideas, and the concrete practices that are informed or contradicted – in some cases – by these ideas. As such, I do not conceive discourse as a necessarily *consistent* aggregate of representations and practices, but one which, despite of its apparent coherence, contains multiple intrinsic disconnections, to the point of plain self-contradiction. Thus, to a certain degree, the manner wherein discourse is defined here is similar to Foucault's interpretation, who also construes discourse as discontinuous, undergoing constant transformations over time. In his view, the

²¹ Even though I focus on the former, it ought to be kept in mind that they cannot be conceived as secluded from the latter, whose driving force they embody.

coagulant factor is the logic of its construction, the very logic which brings these potentially antagonistic elements together. Concomitantly, I follow Foucault in asserting that discourse ought not to be objectified as an instrument *utilized* by the subject, thus that „[...] *there are not on the one hand inert discourses, which are already more than half dead, and on the other hand, an all-powerful subject which manipulates them, overturns them, renews them; but that discoursing subjects form a part of a discursive field [...]*” (Foucault, 1991:58). However, our views disjoin in what the *angle of sight* from which we look at a particular discourse is concerned. Thus, while Foucault states that he is „*not concerned about knowing what makes it [discourse] legitimate*” (*op. cit.*, p. 59), this is precisely my focal point. As such, while Foucault seems to remain within the discursive frame itself – even though he argues that he is also interested in disclosing the „conditions of existence” of such discourses, he only refers to the manner wherein these are interlaced with others, or to „discursive fields” – I strongly believe that investigating their conditions of possibility in connection to the way in which they gain legitimacy is the only manner in which this discursive level can be outdistanced and the wider dynamics revealed (as it is, in this case, the operation of neoliberalism, by scrutinizing developmentalist discourses).

The second essential concept is that of *development*, which is both what could be called ‘an organic concept’, that is, one that appears as such in the fragment of social reality that is being studied, and a sociological one, that is increasingly subject to criticism within social sciences. All these gave rise to particular genres of criticism, which have distinct sources. In regards to the first connotation of development, there are two main strands of critique that target it, both present in the academic, as well as in the non-academic realm. That is, on the one side, one which focuses on the specific dysfunctions of the implementation process of a particular development project or its perverse effects (in this sense, the concept of *uneven development* is the central argument of this

body of work), and, on the other side, one which contests the idea of development itself. As such, in the 1980s, two sources of criticism become prevalent, and development is deprecated either from the standpoint of ultramodernism, which reinstates the idea of the self-regulating market and stands against the principle of the interventionist state, or from that of postmodernism, which denounces the power relations that are presupposed by the developmentalist discourse (Cooper and Packard, 2005).

The second acceptance of the term refers to the relation between social science and development, specifically the orchestration of academic authority in developmental projects, thus to the marriage of anthropology with the narrative that construed the Third World, the East, and more recently the global South as the underdeveloped world that necessitates the assistance of the West in order to be directed on the right path towards development (synonymous to resolving poverty, marginalization etc., which are correlated with underdevelopment, in this view). While some scholars assign this connection to applied anthropology, which they deem maleficent, starting with the neo-Marxist critique in the 1970s (Leys, 2005), others maintain that this relation is inherent to anthropology itself (see, for instance, Ferguson, 1997)²².

Drawing from this meta-critical literature, I argue that development ought to be treated as an ideology – that could be defined, in its turn, as a discourse that has been generalized in a particular social setting, by being adopted by the central institutions within that social setting and, partially, that has pervaded the everyday discourse²³ – that assumes a singular, straightforward trajectory. Thus, that regardless of their peculiarities, all social entities (states, in this case, which does not equal ‘society’, of course, but as a bounded territorial entity that is subdued to the same

²² For a quite extensive review of the two categories of critical literature, see Lewis, 2005.

²³ A merely operational concept that delineates the official and the counter-official discourses, ones that often manifestly oppose the former.

political and economic conditions) should go through the same *stages*. In turn, these stages are conceived as hierarchical states of being, that create a trajectory with a fixed end-point and whose stages are comparable in normative terms. In the present case, the developmental discourse on agriculture that is promoted by the EU regards this domain in economic terms, as one that contributes to the general national economic growth, in the conditions of a wise management, under the close surveillance of the EU and the respective state. This particular vision on the ‘economic potential’ of agriculture is the source for defining the villager as *farmer*, thus as an economic actor, and all the more so for its alternative definition as ‘manager of the countryside’. The specific manner in which development is construed by the EU can be grasped precisely by examining the above mentioned discourse about it (that embodies a certain perspective on development). As such, as against a major strand of research in the area of development, I do not examine development from within, in terms of the successes and failures of the deployment of a particular project (see, for instance, Hudson, 2003), for a by-the-book instantiation of this genre of critical literature from within), but I endeavor to evade the boundaries of its frame and unravel the ideology that underlie such projects, coupled with the manners wherein this ideology reverberates on the supposed beneficiaries of these projects and on the other actors involved in the process of ‘implementation’.

II. Neoliberalism as a Divisive Mechanism: Do Farmers Raise *from* or *on* the Ashes of Peasants?

2.1. ‘How Can you Help the People While Keeping It Legal?’: An Episode of the Encounter Between Peasants and Local Administrators

As it happened during most of my recurring visits to one of the two communal townhalls which I had contacted, I was patiently waiting for the fourth time for the mayor to return from Cluj, in one of the offices, in the ever renewed hope that this time he will find some spare time to talk to me, as he had pledged during our first encounter. This time, the office was that of one of his two counselors, the antechamber of his office, a small room with a desk buried in papers, with a barely visible laptop in their midst, and a large coffee mug on one side, a glass cabinet against the walls in the back of the desk, which towered several colorful diplomas, some pictures with the mayor in the center from what appeared to be taken on the occasion of Village Days celebrations in the commune, two small flags, of Romania, and the EU, bordered by some plants, and two doors on the opposite two walls, of which one connected the office with that of the second counsellor, and the other one with the hallway. Among the other offices where I was kindly asked to wait on multiple occasions inside this townhall, this one had a particularly advantageous structure, since it seemed to be the epicenter of the townhall. Its doors were being opened and closed unceasingly by the secretary, the two counsellors (two young women who live in one of the villages of the commune, whom I will call Otilia and Ana), the agricultural engineer (a middle aged man, who will be called Dorin) and his assistants, the three women from the ‘social work’ office, and some

locals, who came there on business. After several minutes of quietness, which Otilia used to sort a part of the papers on her desk, the agricultural engineer bursts in, while fluttering some papers, and tells Otilia that he needs her opinion on the issue of a rental agreement. Through this contract, signed by most of the locals in one of the commune's villages, they agreed to rent a part of their land for five years, in a specific region of the village (thus, the contract included those who owned some parcels in that region) to a firm which supposedly was going to use it as pasture for cattle (again, supposedly, a few dozens of cows were going to be brought in the village; to this day, nobody has seen any cow around). A couple of minutes later, the secretary joins the spontaneous meeting, and, all gathered around Otilia's desk, they listen to Dorin reading the terms of the contract aloud. Dorin's bewilderment concerned the possibility of declaring the rented land to APIA by its owners, some of whom were called in his office²⁴ that day. After reading the last few lines of the contract, with stark discontent, he concludes that the contract does not specify anything related to his question. Nor Otilia, or the secretary know the answer, hence Dorin leaves the office, not before telling them that he will contact the APIA directly to untangle the matter. In response, Otilia complains that the APIA did not inform them (the townhall) properly, and that it transferred liability to the townhall, by charging them with communicating the new provisions for accessing the funds. While nobody had a definite answer, the secretary told them that she does not believe that it was possible to declare those parcels, because the previous program targeted land use, instead of possession. „I told them to mind their own business and not sign that contract with the guy”, Dorin concluded. „How can you help the people while keeping it legal?!”, Otilia retorted.

²⁴ Since the APIA program had just started, the townhall prepared a list with the last year's applicants, and summoned around six or seven of them every day, in order to give them the certificates with their parcels and animals from the Agricultural Register. This certificate is one of the necessary documents which the applicants must submit to APIA.

Right after Dorin and the secretary left, I asked Otilia if I could go to Dorin's office and ask him to allow me to stay with them for some time, as a quiet observer. As she responded that she does not think he will decline my request, I descended to the ground floor, in the antechamber of his office, where three villagers were seated on the two sides of the entrance door, while one old woman, dressed in the traditional fashion of the aged Romanian women from the countryside – a grey bulky skirt to her ankles, a brown warm blouse with long sleeves, and a beige floral headscarf – was peeping out through the small window placed on the wall that separated the antechamber from Dorin's office, puzzled by the fact that they were not calling anyone inside. After a chatter with them, I entered the office and requested the permission to spend some time with them, a request that he granted, most likely persuaded by my nagging attempts to talk to him during the previous several days. Shortly after I sat down behind a desk that was placed in one corner of the room, and promised I will not pester them with questions – seeing that Dorin appeared to be extremely busy, which became obvious since the early hours of the morning, when he started to (literally) run from one office to the other – he called in one of the women who were waiting in the antechamber. Dorin's assistant invited her to take a seat and help him revise the accuracy of the information extracted from the Agricultural Register, by looking over her parcels. After they made sure the coordinates of the later were accurate, Dorin called her at the desk where I was sitting on, and unfolded a large shabby map in order for her to identify the parcels. As I read from their discussion, she had applied for EU subsidies the years before, so she had an approximate knowledge of the procedure. She knew that she needed the certificate from the townhall, and that she will then go to a close village, where the local APIA commission was established, with the complete set of documents and write an official request for funding, after she will have been asked to digitize (this year -) all her parcels. After Dorin indicates some reference points on the map,

such as a particular forest road, a valley, the house of some of her co-villagers, which she is familiar with, so that she can identify her land, she is called back by the assistant to write the request that summons the townhall to release her data. In the meantime, Dorin leaves the room and talks to those who were still in the antechamber, endeavoring to clarify this year's changes in the conditions for funding. Above all, he utters, they need to provide the APIA with evidence regarding the use of the land – in the case of pastures, for instance, a receipt to prove that they had sold the hay – and, to this purpose, they need to register as certified 'producers' and this is „fairly complicated; you should lease all your land and that's it!“. As for their rental agreement, he says, „you can't declare it; you can't get money from two places for the same parcel“. Several minutes after he left the room he returns, and, sighing with relief, he tells his assistant that he *convinced* them not to apply for EU funding this year.

2.2. Local Bureaucrats: Facilitators, Not Translators

This episode is revealing for several reasons. First and foremost, as this case and my previous informal discussions with several villagers²⁵ attest, local bureaucrats in no wise betake the role of translators of the EU developmentalist discourse, as I had envisioned their interfacing with the villagers. Bureaucrats, that is, do not ‘operationalize’ the development discourse, or ‘make it intelligible’, but, as seen above, at times their local counterparts endeavor to identify potential legislative gaps in order for as many villagers as possible to apply for the EU subsidies. As such, although they do utilize analogies, for instance, to explain certain conditions or the availability of particular alternatives, as Dorin did in the case of the rental agreement, or use the vernacular language to state the requirements and their (purely bureaucratic) implications of eligibility for the EU subsidies, they do not make any references to either the wider frame of these subsidies, to the state, or the EU, such as to recede from the merely bureaucratic process that these projects require, with the finality of projecting a particular discourse around them. If they conclude that applying would imply a forced stretch of the legislation, they try to convince them to backtrack. However, as it will become evident when I will examine the criticisms put forward by both local / regional administrators, and farmers, this fact does not refute the observations of those development programs researchers who insist on various occasions on the distortions that spring up in the process of ‘implementation’ of these projects, often times credited on the encounter between local bureaucrats and their beneficiaries (see Li, 2009). As such, the assertion that bureaucrats do not take on the role of translators is not tantamount to arguing that they are passive agents who do not have a bearing on the manner wherein development projects are deployed.

²⁵ These discussions also included a depiction of how the interaction with the members of the local APIA commission unfolded in the previous year.

Secondly, the fact that local bureaucrats do not act as translators of the EU discourse discloses how various discursive planes interact. In the counterfactual situation wherein the bureaucrats would have embodied a discursive filter through which the EU outlook would have been readjusted and transmitted in an altered fashion, the configuration of this process would have taken the form of a top-down process of ‘inculcation’, if we were to utilize a telling organic analogy, which would have resulted in a linear conveyance of the EU discourse. However, even in this case, this linearity should not be conceived as a straightforward foisting of a definite set of principles that preserves its form and is received by the applicants, but as a process of layered transfiguration of the initial discourse whose components are partly transformed at each level. On the other side, the ‘top-down’ nature of such a process of perspectival imposition is given by the fact that regardless of the eventual transformative transmissions of the original discourse, and of the potentially diverse echoes of the latter in the applicants’ worldview, these different reverberations would have been dependent upon the previous trajectory of the discourse. Yet, this is not the case, as shown by the brief depiction above of the interaction between villagers and bureaucrats. The uttermost implication of the refutation of this assumption lies precisely in the negation of such a top-down process of discourse transference, which raises the question of the sources of those discourses that are externalized by the applicants – in the case in focus here, the ‘genealogy’ of the farmers’ couterdiscourses. Therefore, it appears that the two discursive aggregates (the EU’s and that of the farmers) are relatively secluded, or, more accurately, clustered, with points of convergence, and stark divergences, which I will endeavor to disclose in the next chapter.

2.3. Different Applicants, Different Funds, Different Subjectivities: Peasants *and* Farmers, not Peasants *into* Farmers

The few hours that I had spent in the townhall that day have brought to light another essential distinction, that is, between the villagers who only applied for EU subsidies, administered by the APIA²⁶, and *farmers*, many of whom not only receive subsidies, but also apply for rural development projects funds, administered by AFAI. In the case of the communes of my fieldwork, the former are relatively aged people, with a low level of education, and most of them equate the townhall with the state, and see the APIA itself as a state agency. Thus, for them, the source of the subsidies is the state, and their aim is to raise the living standards of the ‘peasants’, as they portray themselves. At the same time, they seem to draw a connective line between possession and the prefigured *right* to receive these subsidies, where the first determines the second. This principle is intimately tied to the manner wherein landed property was signified during communism – although merely one of the possible representations of landed property, as my previous research on this theme shows (Chiorean, 2012) – that is, the sense of possession or, otherwise put, legitimate proprietorship, was generated by the convergence of the transgenerational transmission, which supported genealogical continuity, on the one side, and the labor that was vested into the land, on the other, as opposed to the strenuous efforts of the communist state to suppress this ‘sense of possession’ by collectivizing the land.

However, in the present conditions, when the cultivation of the land was discontinued for various reasons – either the old age of the owners, the rural-urban waves of labor migration, that

²⁶ As I have said in the first part of the paper, the restoration of the land after the 1989 Revolution fragmented the land in such a way that Romania has taken the first position among the European countries in terms of national proportion of land owners.

have been accelerated in the process of industrialization in the communist epoch, the postsocialist international migration, or simply the absence of the technical means to cultivate the land which would have substituted the externalized labor force – by most of these villagers, the first dimension of this alternative manner of constructing possession faded away, while the second became the essential source. As such, while labor is no longer an authorizing principle of proprietorship, inheritance was preserved. In this context, the sense of entitlement that they evinced regarding the subsidies seems to arise from proprietorship itself, seeing that the state they envision as the purveyor of these subsidies is still one whose main onus is the generation of welfare. Thus, the communist legacy in this respect is not directly related to the sense of possession – in this sense it is quite antagonistic – but to the conception of the state in interventionist terms. Following the same line, *development* is not included within the discourse of the villagers, since everything that is related to the common areas appertains to the domain of the state, be it purely functional, such as rural infrastructure, or abstract ideals, such as paths toward improvement, however the latter is signified.

Returning to our two categories of applicants, the farmers in this region have a relatively distinct social profile, as they tend to be young to middle aged men²⁷, and appear to have a higher educational level (at least high school graduates, but equally common, university graduates). On the other side, as opposed to the peasants, who are not familiar with the specific language of the NPRD, the farmers *speak* this language, which constitutes a great advantage in the process of accessing of these funds, or in receiving the related information through different mediums. Concomitantly, the mere status of farmer ensures their easy access to this information, as Marcel hinted when I asked him how he found out about the EU funding: „*Well, through different*

²⁷ Except for the family farms, which comprise both more than one generation, and equally women and men

commercials at the radio, at the TV, we were informed, they sent us notifications at home, since they knew we were breeders” (Marcel, 35 years old, mixed farm).

Here is how Simina and her husband, Flaviu, two farmers from one of the communes of my fieldwork who had received funding for a five years period for their cattle breeding farm explain the conditions of the project:

Flaviu: You know, it was also the beginning [when we applied]. The consultancy firms were not that well informed either. In the business plan, you had to write, in each year, that you will buy some land, but the land is another issue, because you can't just say you'll buy it, 'cause you need an excerpt from the Land Registry and all documents should be legal. You know, in the business plan, [to write] how you plan to further expand [your farm]. The first time, our project was made by the consultants from APIA, and then we had a different consultant, in the second and third year [...]. You had to pay [the consultant] every year, but in the second and third year he was only updating the file.

Simina: The business plan was about these UEDs, the Unity of Economic Dimension, so if you had, for instance, six UEDs... so for every farm animal there was a specific score, the milch cow, the cow with calf, for the corn crops and so on. So, all these points were summed up and they divided them and then they calculated the UEDs. So in the fourth year, if you initially had six UEDs, you had to have nine, so you had to have more animals, or lease some more land [...]. Then, you had to register as a legal person [...]. (Simina and Flaviu, cattle breeding farmers).

At the same time, one of the shared features in the case of my informants regarded the way they relate to local administrators and bureaucrats²⁸. That is, as opposed to the viewpoint of the villagers, many of whom preserve the polarity ‘state / society’, with its origins in the communism period – this being the cause of their undifferentiated assignment of the local administration, state agencies, and EU agencies to the category of ‘the state’ – the farmers

²⁸ The category of ‘local bureaucrats’ includes the employees of the agencies which administer the EU funds, and the Agricultural Chamber while ‘local administrators’ only refer to the people who work in the communal and municipal townhalls.

appear to construct a multi-leveled field of power struggles. Within the latter, the local administrators and bureaucrats are the lowest, and transnational agencies such as the EU are the highest. In this sense, their vision lies on a re-constructed political economy, whereby they set the coordinates of their own position, habitually conceived as one devoid of agency, at the mercy of state power and global forces. This conceptualization of disempowerment, in turn, beseems to stand in opposition with their entrepreneurial capabilities, giving birth to a crossbreed, a dialectic actional force that hinders development (in their view).

2.4. Neoliberalism as a *Structured Structuring Structure*: Another Way of Generating Distinction²⁹

The difference between how the two categories of agriculturalists relate to the EU funds is revealing for the diverse manners wherein neoliberalism orchestrates, and creates particular distinctions that reinforce its mechanisms. First, as it was shown in the previous chapters, while the EU funds address the *farmer*, who is seen as the ultimate agent of rural development – and, thereby, general development, since this novel *farmer* is actually an *entrepreneur*, which means that the specificity of the former is reduced to a generalizable form of actional inclinations subdued to the quest for profit, a specific type of rationality, as Bourdieu (1998) observes, that expanded to an unprecedented degree, that presuppose a complex of capabilities and potentialities which are not dependent upon the peculiarities of the domain of action – the *peasant* is the one who is in effect targeted by them. Thus, while the *farmer* is the product, and the conferment of a share of these funds is the ultimate recognition of her status of ideal subject, one who reached the completion of the process of subjectification in this sense, the *peasant* is the clay that must be hewn. However, contrary to this ambitious project of *subjecthood engineering*, the case of the region in focus here shows that far from succeeding in converting the *peasant* into her enterprising counterpart, i.e., the *farmer*, the division of the EU funds into two main categories (those from the

²⁹ Although it may appear as a gratuitous persiflage, the title of this section is actually a self-criticism, which indicates a part of what has been left out of this paper (a persiflage it remains, yet by no means a gratuitous one). While I discuss the differences between peasants and farmers in terms of how they relate to the EU developmentalist discourse, and of their praxis, I blatantly ignore the aggregate of social forces that produced these different modes of relating to the EU discourse. A look, however superficial, on this matter would unravel much of the determinants of the process of ‘indigenization of neoliberalism’ that I bring into discussion later on, in the next chapter. Despite of the vital function of the latter, due to the manifold limitations that restrain my endeavors, I cannot but leave to the reader the task of combining the intricate social forces that I already outlined (starting from the socialist remnants, and continuing with material conditions in socialism and postsocialism) with the Bourdieusian complex view of social reproduction, and formation of habitus, which would explain a great deal of how the habitus of the peasant and that of the farmer collide, thus producing different discursive configurations in each case (see Bourdieu, 1979).

EAGF, dealing with direct payments, or *subsidies* and those from the EAFRD, which provided funding for projects) engendered the construction of two categories of applicants, for each of the former.

Although referring to this objective as a *subjecthood engineering* would be criticized by many as a histrionic overstatement, I strongly believe that it could not be more appropriate. First, the CAP is overtly aiming at enhancing competitiveness among ‘farmers’ (a term which itself implies a particular ‘professionalization’ of agriculture that I tackle in the next chapter), a quality which can easily be identified as the fundament of entrepreneurship, itself intimately tied to ‘commercialization’, which presupposes competitiveness. Second, glimpsing at the conditions of eligibility for the EU funds would be sufficient to grasp the manner wherein this farmer is constructed as an entrepreneur. The fact that, for instance, she is required to design a business plan – which entails a specific way of strategic thinking, and projecting the diverse ‘opportunities’ and ‘deterrents’ that might appear, and the various manners in which the latter can be orchestrated in order to augment the surplus value – indicates the necessary ensemble of propensities she has to embody. The latter, in turn, are often contrasting with the way wherein the peasant conceives her activity in agriculture. More precisely, while the farmer is a professional, an entrepreneur who disposes of the imperative qualities of a skilled manager and, concomitantly, the necessary body of knowledge about her domain of activity, the peasant does not self-represent as an expert. For the peasant, agriculture is not a secluded activity which involves the division of the domains of the everyday life entailed by professionalized labor, but one which is imposed by land possession, on the one hand, and the exigencies of material existence, on the other. As such, the two positions seem to be irreconcilable. Therefore, transforming the peasant into the farmer does not merely entail a change in practices, or the fulfillment of some bureaucratic prerequisites. More than that,

this transformation requires a reconfiguration, not only of the representation of her activities as estranged labor (itself sufficient for supporting my formulation), but of the type of rationality she makes use of in the act of performing this labor.

Returning to more palpable matters, while the *peasants* only applied for the subsidies – which, within the previous stage, followed the principle of decoupled payments – the *farmers* mainly requested funding for rural development projects. Telling enough, the two types of funding have even been administered by different agencies (APIA for the first, and AFAI for the second) and, even in the case of the subsidies, the farmers and the peasants go to different agencies of APIA, as Mihai, a young farmer who manages a mixed farm explained to me (while the files of the former are administered by the regional office of APIA, those of the peasants are administered by its communal branches). As such, in the case of the decoupled payments, not only that the frame that was set by the EU and the state was not relevant, due to the fact that the only condition that the beneficiaries had to comply to was to clear their parcels³⁰, but also the vast majority of the villagers did not know the provenance of these subsidies and considered them to be provided by the state, or the townhall.

Yet this is not the sole dimension that reveals the discontinuities within this neoliberal development project. A no less essential one regards the consequence of these payments on the use of the land *per se*. More concretely, for those villagers who owned a small land tract, the subsidies they received were often much higher than the monetary return that they would have obtained from cultivating their land and selling the produce, since the costs of production at such a small scale (in many cases less than 10 hectares) would equal the potential returns, thus turning their endeavor into a zero-sum one. In these conditions, the (intentional or perverse) effect of the

³⁰ That is, to prevent the land from being riddled with wild weeds.

subsidies for petty land owners has indeed been – as all my informants insisted – a significant reduction of the tillage at the national level. Assuredly, this was not the only cause of this denouement. As I mentioned before, after the fall of communism, the agricultural realm was shaped by the convergence of various dynamics, such as the migration of younger rural generations, and the hyper-fragmentation of the land following land restitution³¹, or the general pauperization of the rural population hastened by deindustrialization (which affected many of the middle-aged workers who although resided in the rural area, were commuting to nearby towns). The immediate outcome of the junction of these phenomena, coupled with inflation and the opening of the market for import products, precipitated an abrupt fall in agricultural production. However, a large share of the rural population continued to cultivate a part of their land, either as a supplement to their income, or as a means of subsistence (either way, the finality was not commercialization), and an equally large fraction of the urban population furnished an additional labor force in the process. Seeing that a significant part of the latter was constituted by a first, or second generation of migrants, who settled in the urban areas following the start of an intensive process of industrialization³², their connection to the rural area was still quite firm. Due to the same phenomena mentioned above, the produce that they obtained from their rural relatives allowed them to preserve adequate living conditions. As such, at the end of each week, there was an inverse labor force flow from the urban to the rural, as these urban workers returned to the countryside to assist their rural relatives in agricultural activities. Although in the past decade these practices diminished significantly – partly because of the remittances of the international migrants which

³¹ According to an EU statistic, around 74% of the Romanian holdings have less than two hectares (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-in-your-country/pdf/ro_en.pdf, retrieved on May 31st 2015).

³² During this process which started immediately after the 1947, when communism was instituted, not only that most of the Romanian cities expanded, by the construction of new districts for workers that soon became ‘dormitory neighborhoods’, but several new cities appeared (such as Victoria, a relatively small Transylvanian town founded in 1948).

made the auxiliary produce from the countryside less imperative – subsistence agriculture remained prevalent for a substantial part of the rural population. This is the ground that the EU subsidies hit, and the result of this collision was a further eradication of much of what remained of these practices.

2.5. Developing the Developed: Peasants as the Prerequisites of Farmers

The brief detour that I have taken above draws the coordinates of the map of one of the distinctions that have been – intentionally or non-intentionally – constructed by the manner wherein the EU funds for agriculture have been set out. But if we return to the initial assertion that generated this argumentative detour – that is, to the distinctions that are created by the neoliberal system which are subsequently absorbed by it, hereby becoming intrinsic to its mode of functioning – the lacuna which remains to be filled is how this particular distinction between peasants and farmers and their distinct relation to these funds are incorporated by this system, after they are produced by it. Even at a merely speculative level³³, there are many plausible modes in which the latter process unfolds.

In what follows, I will sketch one of the latter, which is given by a critical perspective of the developmentalist discourse of the EU. Yet, as opposed to a similar suspicion that debouches in the criticisms uttered by my informants, these mechanisms would not be considered here in the terms of a conspiratorial theory, but as imperative constituents of neoliberalism, seeing that the neoliberal system is driven by the flow of capital, and not by a handful of diabolic capitalists³⁴. If one assumes that development programs are not designed for the general augmentation of the living standards of the most deprived social categories (their often stated purpose), either due to

³³ Which, of course, would necessarily be constituted by a *grounded* speculation, i.e., a set of assertions regarding the underlying mechanisms of a certain phenomenon whose dynamics are partially known (and can be known, ‘objectively’), but the explanation of their driving forces can be different according to different outlooks – thus, which are subject to debate, due to their high level of abstraction and the difficulty of providing empirical evidence to support the respective claims.

³⁴ Although this does not amount to arguing that neoliberalism is abstract to a point where it is self-regulating and ungraspable. On the contrary, what I argue here is merely the fact that the conspiratorial theory of my informants has its origins in the socialist propensity of constructing Romania as an all-time victim of other nations, which left its traces to this day. Unfortunately, the limited space of the present paper does not afford me the space to expand this issue. It is sufficient, for the purpose of this argument, to say that the hyper-nationalist turn of the Ceaușescu regime in the ‘70s (with the advent of ‘Protochronism’) the new historiography strove to reconstruct the history of Romania, as for it to become the nation of all nations, whose greatness was never admitted by the other nations. For a substantial critique of Protochronism, see Tomiță, 2007.

their limitations regarding the possibilities of flawless implementation, or to their ideatic lacunae (which would pose moral questions regarding their legitimacy), then the case of the EU funds for agriculture in Romania is a ‘by the book’ reinforcement of one’s assumptions. The manner in which the peasants and the farmers relate to these funds and that wherein the two categories benefit from evinces the internal limitations of such programs, as I have shown above. That is, the effects of the subsidies on agricultural production, have turned out to be, if we preserve the lines of the program itself, the exact opposite of the prefigured ones. On the other hand, their living conditions do not seem to have improved, which translates as the second defeat of the program. And, finally, the peasants did not internalize the principles of entrepreneurship, nor did they manifest any willingness in this respect, as the episode of the townhall encounter with the bureaucrats shows. As such, in what concerns the greatest part of the targeted population, the peasants which were supposed to become ‘entrepreneurs’, the EU development program failed.

However, the deficiencies of the EU development program do not constitute a direct evidence to support the initial presumption that I have put forth. What they do evince, in turn, is that such dysfunctions do not undermine the program itself, seeing that the peasants’ counterparts, the farmers, both accessed the funds and designed development projects which have preserved the principles of the CAP, and displayed the entrepreneurial qualities that were targeted by the program. If we add to this the observation that these particular ‘failures’ of the development program created, on the one side, a quasi-monopoly of the farmers in terms of produce, which met the ‘demand’ of the newly produce-less peasants, and, on the other side, available land for the farmers to lease in order to observe the business plan that they propounded in their application process (a business plan which needs to include, without exception, pre-designed strategies of farm expansion), the assertion that I started with becomes, indeed, worthy of consideration.

The above reasoning sheds light, in equal measure, on the justification of my focus on farmers, at the expense of peasants. While the latter appear to have conceived the EU subsidies as a sort of inversed governmental tax – that is, as a monetary emolument to which they are entitled following their quality of owners, thus one which originates in the mere possession, a similar consideration with that which justifies in their view the property tax³⁵ – the farmers, perhaps also due to the conditions that they had to comply to (which in effect operationalize the EU / state³⁶ developmentalist discourse), have a definite perspective over what rural development ought to entail, that, as it became transparent ulterior to my discussions with them, combines the CAP principles with tenets that oppose it. As such, while initially I did not distinguish between farmers and peasants, as soon as this division emerged, my decision to concentrate on the former was originated in the question regarding the terms of this differentiation relative to the EU discourse.

³⁵ In Romania, each owner is asked to pay a certain tax on property, whose amount is directly proportional to the land surface and which is not dependent upon any property of the land, such as whether it is cultivated or not, leased or not. All the owners whom I have talked to for this research and the previous one considered this tax to be unquestionably righteous.

³⁶ As I explained in the previous chapters, the CAP gives the general lines of the course of rural development that the member states have to follow, while the latter establish the actual strategies of development that will be put into practice, which include the concrete measures that specify the conditions for accessing the funds by the applicants.

III. Hybridizing the State: The Social Neoliberal State, or the Encounter Between the EU Developmentalist Discourse and the Farmers in Two Romanian Communes

While the first chapter shows how the Romanian state has become neoliberal following its integration in the EU – as a consequence of the transfiguration that the EU itself has undergone in the past decade – this chapter tackles the echo of the latter in the discourse of various agents. Seeing that rural development is the lens through which this research looks at the recent transformations of the state, farmers and several other key actors in the area of agriculture – generally termed as ‘bureaucrats’ – will be those whose discourse is examined. Thus, in this section I argue not only that the EU developmentalist discourse has not been introjected by its different subjects, and that this discourse was not resisted by a remanent vision given by a previous form of the official discourse (such as the socialist one, with its insistence on the welfare state), but more than that, that these agents evince an endemic discourse, whose hallmark is the agglutination of a view of the entrepreneurialization of farming, and that of the interventionist state. The former is born out of a neoliberal outlook, while the latter regards the state as the main regulatory agent of the market, hereby assuming the necessity of an interventionist state, a view that should probably be credited to the remnants of socialism.

3.1. Global Players, National Victims: The Rebuilt Political Economy of the Farmers and Bureaucrats

While for the most part, the interviews with the bureaucrats tackle the manner wherein their institution works and their attributions, the second area of concern regards the problems that impede the agricultural sector from achieving its ‘potential’ – a recurring term in almost all the interviews, and that do not seem to be necessarily related to development, or the EU, but to the national and, in some cases, international political relations. The farmers not only brought these issues up, but they dominated their discourse. But more than merely listing the hindrances that they encounter as individual agriculturalists, they seem to have a global frame of reference, explaining the mechanisms that underlie their issues in economic and political terms at an international level, a matter that requires a close examination. As such, while initially I planned to concentrate exclusively on the connection between economic development and neoliberalism, as it is manifested in the agricultural domain, these discussions impose a slight deflection towards the imageries of the state (or, in other words, towards the state as a structure of perception, in Bourdieu’s terms (1994)), local administration, and international agencies, and the manner wherein the latter are tied to the prefigured ‘trajectory’ of Romania after the fall of communism. While I was wary in what concerns the socialist past, and I tried to preserve the frame of reference to the past few years, a great part of my informants introduced a diachronic perspective, comparing the state of agriculture in the present days with the socialist one. This section will also attend this issue, and will try to account for the implications underlying this comparison. Last, but not least, this section will endeavor to unravel the manner in which the farmers and the bureaucrats conceive the EU and the state, as virtual decisional agents – thus, the manner in which the power structure is imagined – and, if it is not too ambitious, the reasons they do so.

3.1.1. Nations Clash on the Market: The State as a Regulative Agent

One of the recurrent ideas uttered by both farmers and some of the bureaucrats, specifically my informants from the Agricultural Chamber and the economist from AFAI, declaims that one of the most serious issues of agriculture in Romania is the absence of an outlet (a sales market) for the products of the farmers. As such, they argue, while the producers are the less fortunate in the chain of production-commercialization-consumption, that is, those who endure the most inefficient rapport between costs and benefits, the ‘racketeers’ (the negative connotation of the term is the same in Romanian) are their most privileged counterparts, seeing that they buy the produce very cheaply from the farmers and they sell them with a value added, often for export:

[...] the acquirers come, all sorts of acquirers; they are the ones who eat us, to say so, parenthetically. So they offer you a price. They come to an agreement before, ‘cause there are lots of them, obviously. I don’t have the possibility to go, I give an example... they work with a Turkish firm, or, I don’t know, a Greek firm, ‘cause there is where most of them took them [the products]. Well, they took around five-six thousands of lambs, they loaded them on the boat one time. I don’t have the option of offering five-six thousands of lambs to go on the ship with them. So I have to give [what I have] to the... dealer. The dealer comes [to me] and has a fixed price [non-negotiable]. Maybe it was not the right price [fair price], but they set it such to have a gain themselves. And we lose a lot because of this (Mihai, mixed farm, centered on sheep, 40 years old).

[T]he outlet is the greatest issue. So, beginning from the fact that you’re struggling, you work, and you can’t make long term contracts.... So to know from the beginning, I seeded 50 ha, and I am sure that the outlet is there. Because right now we are groping. Maybe that the very large ones [farmers] can make it, but those of us who cultivate around 70-80 ha, and I sell with by sack... [...] Yes, and who benefits from this are the middlemen. This is the way it goes. Anyone who buys, buys by truck [i.e., large quantities], and they offer me a dumping price (Anton, grain farm, 55 years old).

According to Anton, one of the reasons why Romanian agriculturalists lack a proper outlet for their products is the way in which supermarkets and other potential (big) buyers are supplied (that is, by farms with foreign capital that actually produce in Romania):

[K]aufland³⁷, for instance, I will tell you now. They don't buy potatoes from Romania, the potatoes are brought from Germany. What happens? They have a German firm in Romania which produces potatoes, allegedly. There's Europlant, which produces potatoes in Avrig³⁸, and the seed, 'cause I buy it from them too. And I asked them, where do you sell your potatoes? Ok, this firm sells to Kaufland [...]. So potatoes come from Germany, 'cause the firm has the headquarters there. The same firm! [...] And these store chains, supermarkets, they are all supplied this way, through this system (Anton, grain farm, 55 years old).

Yet the latter is merely a marginal mechanism, one that only adds to the defectiveness of the above mentioned chain. The most influential cause of the deficient commercialization of the products is, for my informants, the inefficiency of the state in this domain, which is proved by the fact that it does not provide an 'acquisition system'. In this way, the state is seen as a passive actor, which should reprise its active role in the economic field – in this particular case, through the acquisition of the grains, which would ensure an outlet for farmers, and, at the same time, unfluctuating prices. The latter respect is a crucial discontentment of all the farmers I have talked to, who assert that the state should ensure price stability for their products, in order to counteract the unceasing fall in prices in the past decade. While some of them, such as Mihai, attribute this problem to the absence of a state mechanism of price stabilization, i.e., the opposite of price float (the free fluctuation of prices according to the market – as the liberal ideology assumes to occur once state intervention is suppressed; the state is not the only agent which hinders the free movement of the market, monopolies are another mechanism with the same result), some others, such as Anton, explain this

³⁷ One of the supermarket chains in Romania.

³⁸ A small Romanian town, situated in the South-Eastern part of Transylvania.

in the terms of the international market dynamics, disarranged by the off the books import of certain produce from other countries:

It's because of the import. What do they say, these guys? We import a great deal from Poland, on the black market. They have a much higher subsidy than us, and I talked to those who bring [products] from Poland, so it suits them to bring them [the products]... so they brought potatoes from there and they sold them for 25 bani [equivalent to 0.06 euros per kg]. So for them it was enough to sell, so not to...they produce, and the subsidies they receive are so high, the state covers the production and gives them subsidies just to produce [as much as possible]. So, he [the producer] is not interested almost at all in the selling price (Anton, grain farm, 55 years old)

Even though it appears from his reasoning that the collision of global market forces disregards the national frame, the state remains both the key actor in regulating these forces, and the responsible agent for the eventual dysfunctions of the cycle production-commercialization. If produce is imported at low prices that determine imbalanced competition on the market (if we were to utilize the terminology of classic economics, disloyal/unfair competition, which simply expels Romanian farmers due to the fact that the prices set by their international counterparts are below the costs of production, and the former do not afford to cross the zero-sum line), that is not due to autonomous market dynamics, but to the intervention of the state, which subsidize them more than the Romanian one, thus making production the center of the production-commercialization-consumption chain. As such, through these high subsidies, the interference of the state turns the entrepreneurship of the farmers from countries such as Poland into a bland concept, seeing that the surplus value is guaranteed, regardless of the market dynamics that supposedly determine prices. The state becomes, in this way, the counterforce of the market, which not only sets the conditions of commercialization, but also makes common cause with its farmers, who, in this perspective, are not conceived mainly as individual enterprising agents, but as the indispensable economic agents

that ensure the wellbeing of national economy – who, consequently, have to be protected by the state:

Don't you think that the ministry encourages this move? Well, it does! 'Cause otherwise they wouldn't have done that [refers to import]. There are others too. Try going to Poland and take potatoes there. Last year they took potatoes from us. But try going now and take them potatoes. Do they let you? You won't be allowed to enter the country with potatoes! (Anton, grain farm, 55 years old).

The state is blamed by both some of the farmers, such as Anton and Mihai, and some of the bureaucrats, such as Leo and Miron, for not supporting large-scale production. According to Mihai, this support can be materialized, among other things, by renouncing the progressive levy and applying the flat tax system. As such, this set of prescriptions – at times quite specific, as it is the case of Mihai's view of taxing strategies – for the workings of the state indicate that the latter continues to be conceived by some as an interventionist state, thus as the responsible agent for the regulation of economy. If the prices tend to drop, disregarding the causes, the state needs to take action and itself assume the role of the buyer (the acquisition system). Moreover, the fact that the state should make use of a flat tax system, points at a view of the state that is framed by the socialist remnants³⁹, but, at the same time, the idea of the flat tax itself is originated in a view that divides profit from income (seeing that the income is the one which is taxed, not the profit), infusing the former with a particular legitimacy that emerges from the individual effort, such that the state cannot claim a share of it. The reconciliation of the two antagonistic principles creates a dialectic that reports the peculiarity of the imagery that has been constructed by the meeting between neoliberalism and socialist remnants. On this particular plane, this dialectic translates as one which envisions the division between, on the one side, the individual entrepreneurship and the subsequent

³⁹ Strictly related to the form of the taxing system – one that reinforces the right of the state to demand a certain part of the income of its citizens.

righteous claim to the surplus value that is generated because the entrepreneur embodies the inclination/disposition towards identifying the most *efficient* strategies of reducing the costs of production while augmenting production itself (quantitatively), and, simultaneously, the returns following commercialization and, on the other side, the protectionist state and his legitimate claim to a part of the income of its subjects, given precisely by his projected ‘protectionist’ nature, which is manifested in the eventual economic provisions which are to balance the inequitable differences between the conditions of production and commercialization of Romanian farmers and those of the farmers from other EU countries.

3.1.2. The State Should Arbitrate the Game: The Bureaucrats Meet the Farmers on the Market

Although Leo has a quite definite neoliberal stand in regards to the course that Romania ought to engage in in order to become a genuine competitor on the international market, dominated by those countries which have attained a high degree of development, he advances a similar critical view on the distancing of the state from its putative economic role. In his case, however, the latter is rather implicit than overtly stated:

A Polish or a Hungarian farmer – let’s compare with our owns⁴⁰ – receives a subsidy both for export, and for piglet breeding. So the costs, let’s say they are the same. Although the technology of the peasant is not the same with that of a piglet breeding complex⁴¹. But let’s say that the costs are identical. But the subsidy is high, higher both in Poland, and Hungary, and then that one [the Polish/Hungarian farmer] comes with a lower price. Since there are no more taxes, he goes straight to Mariflor, Unicarm, those who... right? And they give him...

⁴⁰ As the use of these terms shows, as opposed to those farmers who draw a clear line between the EU countries (whether identified in general as Western, or Eastern) and Romania, Leo places the latter within the Eastern nations, along with Poland and Hungary, and contrasts them with the Western developed ones. In this sense, when I asked him why the labor force should migrate to the service sector, as he asserted, he said: „Well, why do I need people in agriculture? In the USA, under 1% of the population works in agriculture!”. Seeing that the USA was only referenced in this context, the above implication is transparent. The connective principle of the East would be, in this sense, their transitional status, as postsocialist countries.

⁴¹ Referring to a large-scale farm.

plus, if you have a large amount, you get a discount. ‘Cause they buy tones, not pieces. And then these ones [the Romanian farmers], poor bastards, if they don’t create an association, a cooperative, if they don’t process themselves [their raw agricultural products], to take on the story of five, ten years ago, with the traditional products, they have no chance! (Leo, AFAI economist)

As such, the free movement of the producers on the international market is conceived as a hindrance for national development, seeing that productivity lies at the heart of development, in Leo’s view. As it is transparent from his assertions, the state – through taxation, in this particular case – ought to impose certain restrictions in the area of commercialization. In this way, the state would become, once more, a regulative agent, through the construction of particular conditions of accessibility for its farmers, a function which propagates a conception of development that construes it as a national one. This mode of conceptualization reveals a crucial dimension of the connection between development and neoliberalism in the Romanian context. First, development is, with necessity, a national development. That is, it cannot be created outside the national boundaries, whether it constitutes an end in itself, as all of my informants conceived it, or its finality is a global one, as it is assumed by the dominant official developmentalist discourse. Second, general national development is dependent upon productivity, which turns the latter into the all-time objective of the farmers, and their ‘protector’, or at the very least, ally, the state. In its turn, productivity can only be generated by technologization, as Leo argues, that is, by a significant reduction in the labor force that is utilized in the process of production. The benefits of the latter are not limited to an increment in productivity, but, perhaps more decisive, lie in the renewed availability of this labor force, which can now be transferred to the service sector, whose expansion is – quite oddly – an indicator of development:

Now, productivity is given by technologization, because when I produce, I can produce a consumer good, a pen, right, I can produce it with some machinery which is a decade old, and a German, a Japanese, an American,

produce it with the latest machineries. If I had cash flow, and money, and financing, I would use the latest generation of equipment, but I don't have them [...] It's just that we didn't migrate to... although from the point of view of the sectors that reflect in the GDP, we started to get to the tertiary sector, with the employees. 'Cause here half still work in agriculture, 40%, as a population [...] The point is for me to get him [the worker] out of the industry and agriculture, through retechnologization, and put him in the service sector, in order to generate surplus value [...]. Why would you still need people with a hammer?! That's a 19th century thing!

(Leo, AFAI economist)

While his constant references to 'technologization' in the context of a discussion on economic development would lead one to read a subtextual 'modernization' discourse – and with good reason – this fragment disproves this interpretation. Technologization, here, becomes merely a mediator, since the actual end point is precisely the boost of the service sector, the only one, as Leo seems to assert, wherein labor force would meet its potential in the production of profit, i.e., wherein this labor force would be utilized in full. While the above excerpt does not imply anything that might support my final assertion, if it is coupled with Leo's conception of production, what is revealed is precisely this presumption. Thus, productivity can only be regenerated through the usage of advanced technology, while the service sector can only be profitable through the absorption of labor force. If one assesses this distinction by concentrating solely on how the labor force is assigned to the two economic areas, it will become transparent that the leading principle of Leo's view is that while in production human labor is a hindrance to growth – due to its limited physical capabilities – in the tertiary sector it turns into a *sine qua non* condition for obtaining surplus value. What this means, in effect, is that the advancement of technology provides the means to ensure the necessary material conditions for living, which ultimately enables the unleashing of the entrepreneurial potentialities that would be held back if the respective labor force would remain in the primary sector (seeing that the attention of the workers would have to be directed towards

uncreative, mechanical activities). As opposed to production, the service sector opens spaces of consumption that, on the one side, allow this labor force to become a creative labor force, one that activates its latent potentialities (be it due to the diversity of these planes of consumption, or the inherent creativity that is required by entrepreneurial activities⁴²) and, on the other side, warrant the production of surplus value, which ought to be the finality of any economic endeavor. On the other hand, in what production is concerned, what is preserved of it has to concentrate on the same principle, that is, extending the focal zone on the chain of exchange, more precisely by spotlighting the eventual consumers of the products that are being fabricated:

You have to start from the idea that you won't keep anything in stock of what I produce. In Ceaușescu's times, they were producing and... I remember that I had all these problems in college, costs of storing and I don't know what else. Now it doesn't work like that anymore. Just in time. You have to start backwards, first you find your clients, and only then you make the factory. (Leo, AFAI economist)

The creed that assigns profit generation to the tertiary sector rests precisely on the premise that is denegated by the farmers, that is, the inescapable connection between surplus value and commercialization, which is intimately tied to consumption⁴³. This premise, in turn, is the one which differentiates between the plain neoliberal discourse and a rather utilitarian one, which instruments certain neoliberal principles, which, in the absence of those associated with this particular conception of surplus value, remains a counterdiscourse, one that is assumed by the farmers.

Returning to the statement that generated this discussion, Leo's standpoint sheds light on the missing link between development and neoliberalism. Until now, I examined the first two chain

⁴² Assuredly, this creativity is a very specific one and ought not to be conceived as a general, inborn one. Its specificity lies in a certain genre of rationality, one that I briefly examined in the previous chapter, when I talked about the subjectivity of the farmer.

⁴³ Section 3.2 details this connection.

links: development is a national development, and development is engendered by the raise of productivity. Let us pass, in what follows, to the final ring, one that affixes them. If something is unequivocal in Leo's view, that would be the direct connection between productivity and development. Yet this liaison has one more actor:

We are still in the third world in agriculture. Even if we only consider the average production on land surface, in hectares. We have 3500 – 4000 kg/ha, while Netherlands has 14000 kg/ha. But this is also because of – and this is not something I say, 'cause I'm nobody, so I can't opionate. In my opinion, this generation should disappear and a new one should rise, one which would follow the principles of market economy. (Leo, AFAI economist)

Thus, preserving his frame, Romania is an underdeveloped country – only relative to production – a state of affairs which can be redressed by technologization. Paradoxically, although it is a condition of possibility for development, it is not a sufficient one. That is to say, while technologization is conceived as the ultimate imperative for outstripping the underdeveloped stage, the inversed reasoning is not valid: development does not equate technologization. In other words, technologization appears to be a finality, but is, in effect, merely a second-stage end point that, in order for real development to be attained, has to be surpassed. Thus, technologization is an objective inasmuch as it resolves the issue of the material base that allows for the immanent entrepreneurial potentialities of the creative labor force to emerge and be substantialized in the zone of consumption, whose expansion signifies essential development. The final statement of the penultimate interview excerpt wraps up his conceptualization of development, by stating its red line: „Why would you still need people with a hammer?! That's a 19th century thing!” (Leo, AFAI economist). Development presupposes, without question, the transition from an economic system which is centered on production, to one which concentrates on the tertiary sector, that is, consumption. With this principle, there remains no incertitude regarding the relation between

development and neoliberalism: the former is the process of transfiguration whose finality is the latter. Yet, this ideal end state ought not to be envisioned as a segment of the global neoliberal system, as his previously examined arguments show. On the contrary, what he indicates is that the optimal neoliberal system remains so only insofar as the final objective is national development. As such, while until now his reasoning pointed to a straightforward, unidirectional rapport between development and neoliberalism, reinserting the initial presumptions regarding the role of the state as an active agent on the market transfigures the former preceding one-way relation into a spiry one. More precisely, while development, conceived as the migration of the labor force from production to services, mediated by technologization, constitutes a means to attain *real development* (as the latter is operationalized above), interchangeable with neoliberalism, neoliberalism is, in an equal measure, a means to induce *national development*. In this particular sense, Leo's view is contiguous with that of the farmers, with the amendment that while he concentrates on the structural transformations in the neoliberal direction (the service sector, the market etc.), the latter focus on the individual ones (entrepreneurship).

3.1.3. So How About the State? The Developmentalist Discourse of a State Official

3.1.3.1. *Multiple Discursive Roots: Filtering the Farmers' Discourse*

As it became transparent by now, the normative discourse of the farmers regarding the course that the Romanian agriculture ought to take in order to induce its development, and through it, economic development, which would eventually lead to the enhancement of the living conditions for all 'Romanians' betakes a rather peculiar form, in that it brings together entrepreneurship, as the most reliable driving force for the generation of profit (which is conceived as the ideal finality of farming), and the interventionist state which ought to take the role of a safety net, whose

intercession is imperative in the conditions of a malfunctioning of the market. As I have hinted in the previous section, their vision is framed by the national reference plane, such that when they speak about the dysfunctions of farming, or those of the market, the issues of the political apparatus, social issues, or any other themes except for the functioning of the market itself, which they envision as dependent on international encounters, they place all these within the national boundaries, and the potential resolutions to the problems they discuss imply, without exception, the state as a strategic planner to whom both the capacity, and the responsibility of designing these resolutions are accrued.

The first impetus when faced with this observation is for one to declare the incontrovertible inner antinomy of its ideatic admixture. However, to advance such a sentence would be a hasted decision. Rather than a ripe opposition, the two standpoints reside in a dialectical space wherein their apparent contradiction is subdued to the endpoint of perfect blending. As it becomes clear by looking at the discourse of the farmers (and some of the local administrators/bureaucrats) in its entirety, while paying particular attention to the flow of causality, the former operates with argumentative fragments extracted from each of the two and combines them in such a manner that they coagulate in a logical, consistent discourse (a similar coherent antinomy, to say so, is discussed by Geschiere (1992), in the case of the discourses about the market in Cameroon, which, according to him, combine the Western and the indigenous ones, even though at a first glance the two would be irreconcilable). Assuredly, it must be stressed that these two are not the only ones that compose their discourse, but merely the two strands of thought that are in focus here. A whole discursive universe, permeated by multiple dissensions, which arise from other points of converging narratives, whether related to the ‘official’ political discourse or not, informs their

seemingly monolithic visions, and will unwillingly be excluded from the present discussion, due to the limited space of this paper.

The presence of multiplex discursive inconsistencies which have been emphasized throughout this chapter, becomes understandable only if they are regarded as what they are, that is, second-level, or meta(-) abstractions whose polarity is outsourced through the assignation of the various discursive layers to conflicting discourses. The fundament of these latter conflicts, in turn, is the identification of at least two discursive planes, mutually antagonizing, more precisely what could be termed ‘official’ versus ‘grassroot’ discourse, a binary which itself is the product of a particular discourse about the ontological legitimacy of the state that engenders a set of assumptions which assemble the baseline for any eventual reasoning regarding social reality. More concretely, the fact that I delineated these discursive layers is originated in the manner wherein I envision the different modalities of the structuration of power, with agents – such as the state, or transnational agencies such as EU – that not only strive to impose a particular worldview on those which become their *subjects*, but which, at the same time, actuate the naturalization of this worldview on their subjects through the process of framing their spaces of praxis (a capacity given by their position not only of authority, or power *per se*, but that of generating power), a process which sets the conditions of action and in-action to which they are subjected.

Although in this section I only referred to the farmers’ discourse, my discussion regarding the ideatic mixtures of these developmentalist discourses alludes the bureaucrats, administrators, state officials and agricultural engineers. While the multiple limitations of this paper hinder a more complex discussion regarding the sources and the interplay between the various strands that converge into a seemingly unitary discourse, it is nevertheless imperative to keep the above considerations in mind. More precisely, although my conceptualization around the central

discursive areas of my informants intermittently appears to be founded on a certain essentialization, the fundamental assertions are the above mentioned ones, such that my analysis is nothing but a struggle to identify points of convergence and dissension between these discourses, ones that substantiate the confluence of broader dynamics.

3.1.3.2. Development as Technologization and the Remnants of the Socialist Past: The Developmentalist Discourse of a State Official

Seeing that it is defined as a state agency, particularly one which functions as a consultancy organization in agriculture, one would expect of the Agricultural Chamber employees to replicate the official state discourse on rural development. However, the two informants that I discussed with, a board member, whom I call Miron, and a consultant, Sonia, who is also the public relations appointee, addressed the issue of development in a peculiar manner, one whose points of convergence with the official discourse are outbalanced by the divergent ones. This section is centered upon their discourse, and will diversify the discursive map of development that I endeavored to sketch in this paper. If one ventures in creating a visual representation of the developmentalist discourses regarding agriculture, the image that she would obtain is that of a two-dimensional⁴⁴ coordinate system. The horizontal axis would indicate the degrees to which the state is conceived as an interventionist state, while the vertical axis assesses the extent to which the neoliberal principles that gravitate around entrepreneurship and commercialization are integrated in a particular discourse. I argue that the discourses that my paper focuses on are disposed as follows: the EU discourse (instantiated in the CAP) on the vertical axis, in the higher section, that

⁴⁴ As I mentioned in the previous section, the dimensions that I put into question in this paper are merely a selection from the discursive realm wherein the two emerge. The two-dimensionality of this coordinate system is a reflection of this selective process, and does not, by any means, pretend to exhaust the latter.

of the state is quite near to the first, on the same axis; Leo's discourse is placed at the same level as the first two, but distanced towards the first half of the horizontal axis (as I showed in the previous section); the farmers' discourse is situated in the lower half of the area, close to the end of the X-axis (yet also close to center of the area); and, finally, the board member of the AC is located in the far right side, but in the upper-most part of the graph, seeing that in his discourse the two outlooks are insisted upon in equal measure.

First and foremost, rural development is conceived by Miron as a twofold process, targeting the two essential areas of the rural, as he puts it, that is, the farms, on the one side, and the public space (rural infrastructure), on the other. In what the first dimension is concerned, he assumes that there is a direct connection between farm *modernization*⁴⁵, and development – assuredly, with the former as the *sine qua non* condition for the latter. Although at a first glance farm modernization could be equated with what Leo denominates as *technologization*, a rather astute look at his discourse reveals a distinction that distances the two. More precisely, Miron differentiates between *technology*, which would translate as the utilization of advanced agricultural machinery, and *technologies*, a term which denotes the corpuses of knowledge and praxis which are orchestrated in the agricultural arena. The latter appears to be conceived as a set of practices which, far from being secluded from functional knowledge⁴⁶, are informed by scientific principles. As such, his conceptualization of agricultural practice could be translated in Scott's terms (1999) as the advance of *techne* to the detriment of *metis*, as the only approach which could enhance development:

And through these demonstrative plots we show, along with our partners – the seed suppliers – the superior qualitative and quantitative level of production, compared to the seed they perpetuate in their own household.

⁴⁵ The term that he utilizes.

⁴⁶ When I use the term *knowledge* in this section, it will preserve precisely this sense, of *functional knowledge*, that presupposes the intricate connection between knowledge and practice.

For us there are very scientific aspects which imply, when we use a hybrid seed, what results from it, we cannot... [produce as much] [...]. Because, with the same effort, using a superior genetics, we can obtain better results [...]. You know, the greatest majority of our farmers are those with small land tracts, subsistence farms, or even semi-subsistence, and many of them are reticent to these advanced seeds [...]. Of course, the training courses are very important, because many of them [the farmers] know from their father, who knows from his grandfather, and they follow the same line. (Miron, AC board member)

As such, one of the guidelines of Miron's view of development is modernization, conceived as both technologization, and rationalization of agriculture. The last-mentioned is equated with the usage of renewed *technologies*, which entail not only advanced genetic material which would enhance productivity, but also a *professional* farmer, who possesses the (deemed) necessary body of knowledge that is obtained through intensive training⁴⁷, which will endow her with the capability of orchestrating technology in a rational, i.e., strategic, i.e., efficient manner. This phenomenon, which could be referred to as the *professionalization of agriculture*, presumes a segmentation of both knowledge (by the passing from *metis* to *techne*), and practice as *informed praxis*⁴⁸, whose conflation produces the specialized farmer. Unlike the traditional agriculturalist, the *peasant*, the latter concentrates on a confined area of production, which is hereby rationalized, a transformation that implies a strategic instrumentation of the available means of production, whose finality is a positive outcome of the rapport between costs and benefits (which translates as *efficiency*). Contrary to the patterns depicted by Upadhyia (1988) in the case of Coastal Andhra Pradesh, where farmers reinvest their profit in complementary non-agricultural activities (this is also one of the objectives of the CAP, termed as the *diversification of rural economy*) the passing from small farming to large farming seems to be, here, one from a mixture of economic activities

⁴⁷ The AC provides different training courses, covering the various zones of agriculture: fruit-growing, plant cultivation, vegetable growing, apiculture, tractor driving etc. All of them require of the farmers a certain fee.

⁴⁸ Although this formulation has the appearance of a contradiction in terms, it is not so if one conceives *praxis* as being the product of a particular knowledge regime.

(as it is the case of most villagers, who cultivate their land, but as a secondary occupation), to their confinement to a corpus of activities that is strictly related to agriculture. Thus, a specialization of agriculture, or its ‘professionalization’, a tendency that appears to be advocated by all the agencies that constitute the major players in the decisional processes in this area. So it is, for instance, the AC, which organizes specialization courses in agriculture (overspecialized ones) – although not free of charge – which are mostly attended by those who will apply for EU rural development funds (projects).

This line of reasoning brings us to the second guideline, which is farm commercialization:

So, some aspects of technological detail which at the end helps them to improve the productivity of their activities and, through this, their lives [...]. Then, as I already told you, if they process, if they try to increase the value of production, then when it becomes a commodity, of course it will generate a higher income, it will generate a higher profit, and his life virtually improves. He can invest, he can extend his business, he can invest in his house [...]. And then, one of our objectives is to convince them to develop their activity, be it through associations, or investments, in order for them to become a *micro-farm*, even if it's a small one, but a *commercial* one. (Miron, AC board member)

As this fragment shows, the transposition of development into the neoliberal frame is much more transparent in Miron's case than in Leo's, although the starting point seems to be more distanced than the latter. However, contrary to Leo's focus on the direct link between commercialization and national development, in this case the ultimate end point is the amelioration of the living standards of the farmers, such that the structural reverberation of farm commercialization remains a positive by-product of individual entrepreneurship.

Notwithstanding, the straightforward position he assumes when it comes to the micro-level, that is, the farmer, who ought to become a professional one, and the farm, which ought to advance

on the route⁴⁹ of production to commercialization – the implication being, undoubtedly, that the produce can only be capitalized on the market – is counteracted by an equally unequivocal, yet antagonistic stance on the ideal protectionist state (principally in economic terms, but also in those of social security). This discursive strand is instantiated by Miron's manifest positive assessment of the socialist state and the mode of organization of agriculture during communism:

Another aspect: our land was grouped, until the '90s. As they were, agricultural units, or Agricultural Cooperatives of Production, 'cause the ACPs were the so-called private type, or cooperative, as I said, they were formally private. And the other ones, the state ones, were grouped, put together. Well, they came after the 90s, and we fragmented it all [...]. It would have been great if we managed to convince the people that it is better as it was [...]. But then the melee came, and let's destroy everything [...]. They worked well, the ACPs [...]. Of course, it's possible, 'cause you see that they talk about it, that this was their [the West's] interest, maybe, to destroy us as a competition, right? And then, they needed an outlet, not a competition. Because we had a quite developed agriculture [...]. Yes, it was a joy [the restitution of the land], but I believe [...] that we could have proposed anything to the people back then and they would have accepted it. Because, first of all, they didn't have a very developed sense of property. (Miron, AC board member)

Although indirectly, the endorsement of the principles that lie at the fundament of the communist organization of agriculture denotes a quite transparent positionality in terms of the ideal economic role of the state. The fact that Miron argues for the collectivized agriculture, does not merely amount to praising the high level of productivity that is generated by the cultivation of large portions of land and its subsequent mechanization, but, more than that, as his last statement shows, it encompasses an advocacy for the advantages of state property. As such, the critique of the 'fragmentation of the land' that he puts forth ought to be read as a critique of private property, not *per se*, but to the extent to which the latter is a basis of production. Since, as he stated at some

⁴⁹ The term 'route' points here at the inherent connection that is prefigured in this view between production and commercialization. The former cannot be thought of outside the latter.

point in our discussion, the idea that the so-called private cooperatives of production (the ACPs) are not conflicting with the sense of possession should have been part of the postsocialist polity. Yet, the more important productive sector was constituted by the state property associations (the Stations for the Mechanization of Agriculture), which should not have been dismantled, in his view. Therefore, Miron goes even further than the farmers in regards to the state as a regulator of national economy, by advocating not merely for the state as an agent on the market (by assuming the role of a buyer, as the farmers put it), but, additionally, as the main economic actor. The term ‘actor’ should not mislead one into reading his argument as one which assigns a divisible role to the state in the economy. Following the same metaphor, the state would be rather a director than an actor, or, in other words, both the owner, and the administrator.

3.2. Imageries of Development: The Farmers' Developmentalist Counterdiscourse

The above depicted viewpoint regarding taxation constitutes a perfect instance of a more general pattern in the case of my informants, that is, a sort of 'indigenization' of neoliberalism. This phenomenon is instantiated in the case of the farmers by a paradoxical conceptualization of agricultural entrepreneurship. That is, entrepreneurship is regarded as the foremost strategy for acquiring development in agriculture, but these 'entrepreneurs' should not be the pray of the arbitrary dynamics of the market. International competition should be suppressed, and the state should become a guarantor of demand and fixed prices. In other words, at the individual level entrepreneurship is imperative, but this entrepreneurship is not connected in any way to the commercialization on an autonomous, somewhat capricious market. Therefore, the stage that follows after production should be a 'secure' one, that is, one that does not raise any risk that could endanger the profitability of the enterprise (preserving the double connotation of this term). Thus, oddly enough, while most of the built-in components of entrepreneurship remain (such as the principle of initiative, strategic investment, fragmentation of capital preceded by a rigorous cost-benefit analysis etc., profit as the ultimate aim – that is, the externalization and standardization of what now constitute 'secondary' objectives, of a different nature, such as production as the central aim, or kinship obligations etc.), an essential one is suppressed. More precisely, the one that relates to 'risk-taking', that refers not merely to the initial strategies of investment, but the ultimate condition to acquire surplus-value, that is, commercialization, or trading. If the latter is a 'safe-bet', that is, if the prices are known in advance (or, at the very least, there are no actual reasons to suspect that they will not fall into a particular 'acceptable' range, since the state would ensure that everything that is produced enters the market), the rapport between the cost of production and return is constant. As such, the main preoccupation of the producer will be to reduce the cost of

production in order to ‘optimize’ this rapport, or, in other words, to increase its outcome. This can be done, for instance, through technologization, as a long-term investment that diminishes the amount of labor force needed, and increases production itself while maintaining the invested capital constant. In regards to the relation between technologization and production, there is one more factor that needs to be introduced in the equation, as Harvey (1991) shows. According to him, the effects of technologization have to be assessed in connection to the economic status of a certain country, due to a differential impact on various categories. Thus, he asserts, for those countries which have a thriving economy, therefore influencing the prices on the world market through imports and exports, technologization has negative consequences for the farmers, seeing that their production will increase, in the conditions of a stable demand, such that there will either be a higher production for the same price, or the same production for a lower price (Harvey, 1991:189-191). On the other side, in the case of what he calls ‘small trading countries’, technological change would have positive effects on the farmers’ income, seeing that the price would be fixed (*op. cit.*, p. 192). Although it may be useful to take into account how a particular country is positioned in the global system, and despite the fact that Harvey’s economic argumentation contains a grain of truth (specifically, when he refers to the former category), his scheme is rather reductionist, as he builds it on a vision of the reified market. The classical liberal argument is that the market is self-regulating, and that in the conditions of perfect non-intervention (that is, if there are no intruding agents, such as the state), the ‘natural’ dynamics of the market will stabilize it (prices will be fixed by the rapport between demand and supply). As such, that there is an ‘invisible hand’, an impersonal, objective mechanism of regulation. Even if he does not seem to argue that this is the case, Harvey’s idea of the imperturbable ‘laws of the market’ (*op. cit.*, p. 202) seems to imply that the latter has an autonomous driving force (produced by its own

mechanisms), that is, that it is self-propelled. This view, however, obliterates the multiplicity of actors that create the market, which ought not to be reified, i.e., conceived as a supra-field of economic exchanges that operates according to its own actional principles, as such, as an agent (instead of a product of political clashes).

However, even if we accept the above detailed premises and we continue to let ourselves driven along with this cold calculation of strategies, costs and benefits, and surplus-values, it becomes quite clear that increasing the surplus-value in this manner is limited to a certain ceiling, beyond which growth is no longer possible (in the conditions of a minimum cost of production that remains – at the very least – constant). The bottom line of the above reasoning is that, on the one hand, this paradox does not annul the nature of such an undertaking (assuredly, one that remains a desideratum, which does not, by any means, erode its significance), that is, entrepreneurship, be that in the conditions of the suppression of one of its core principles, and, on the other hand – and this is a reinforcement of this very paradox – that this eventual, yet inescapable, capping of surplus-value deprives this undertaking of its very driving force, which is the unceasing rise of profit.

The above reasoning – specifically, the disruption of the cycle of production-commercialization-consumption, by yearning for the state to become an acquirer and to offer fixed prices – has one more implication, namely that development lies in the first stage of this cycle (since the second ought to be secured by the state, and the third is completely disregarded in their discourse). One of the ideas that arose in both the discourse of the farmers, and in that of most of the local administrators and bureaucrats that I have talked to – surprisingly, along with the criticisms pointed at the political class, which has repeatedly accused of corruption, the only reasoning that was shared by the vast majority of my informants, which, seeing the diversity of the

social categories they appertain to, is indeed quite puzzling – argues that the reduced (agricultural, but not only) productivity is to be attributed to a coalition of the EU countries against Romania, whose aim is to hinder its *real* development, so that it does not become an actual competitor on the market. At a closer look, an underdeveloped Wallersteinian explanation of the functioning of the world system, in which after its EU integration, Romania passes from the class of ‘peripheries’ to that of ‘semi-peripheries’ (Wallerstein 2004). In other words, Romania would have to preserve its function in the EU market, that is, as an ‘outlet’ for the products of these countries:

So the polity of the West is this: we should not produce! They gave us subsidies for uncultivated land. That’s the greatest nonsense on the planet! (Anton, grain farm, 55 years old)

Their interest [...] is for the Romanian state to be an outlet, we have to be an outlet, this is what I saw. From my point of view, we are an outlet for others. Even though they [our products] are better, we can’t get them on the market. (Mihai, mixed farm, 40 years old)

This reasoning is also closely tied to a discrete nostalgia for the communist times, more precisely for the collectivized agriculture and the concurrent high rates of productivity following this mode of organization of agriculture. Their insistence on productivity, in this context, does not equal what it may designate in the EU discourse, that is, profitability, i.e., a positive rapport between costs and returns, such that at the end of the period for which it this rapport is assessed, the outcome of the enterprise is a certain surplus value. Contrariwise, productivity betakes here a literal sense, referring exclusively to the augmentation of production, that is, of the quantity of agricultural products that are obtained at the end of the agricultural cycle. Thus, when farmers talk about the fact that the decoupled EU subsidies which were proffered during the last tranche of funding were designed as a hindrance of development, their argument hints precisely at this understanding of productivity. Seeing that the decoupled subsidies were given to land owners and leasers regardless of whether they cultivated their land or not, as a direct payment on land tract, and that a significant

share of those who received these decoupled subsidies did not apply for other types of funding – nor did they cultivate their land – this genre of criticism took this connection forward, and asserted that the decoupled subsidies have been the *cause* for the reduced production rate of the last several years. Yet this argument does not close the causal chain at this point: the direct connection sketched above is not a desultory correlation, or an unintended set of causes and effects, but quite on the contrary, a wilful one. Thus, the EU is seen here as the powerful coalition of Western (sic!) states which protects its own interests against the exploitable Eastern countries such as Romania:

Anton: When I have a surplus and my country encourages me to produce, it encourages me for theirs [the EU's] to be farmed. And for us, there is no such interest; only [for us] to buy.

Me: But why? Romania is in the EU as Germany is!

Anton: No! We are those at the bottom, like the gypsies at the edge of the village, that's how we are!

Although Anton expresses this concern overtly, nearly all my interlocutors referred to the EU as an alien structure, be it a paternal one which has the most honorable intentions for Romania, or a hostile one, which exploits it. Therefore, the EU integration does not seem to have engendered a sense of appurtenance to a larger 'community' and altered, in this way, the sense of nationhood by transfiguring the frame of reference. Furthermore, this sense of nationhood appears to have been fortified, in some way resurrected since Romania's integration. Following the fall of communism, perhaps as a backlash toward the aggressive nationalism that was promoted by the regime starting with the 1970s, the dominant popular discourse in Romania has rather been anti-nationalist, and pro-Western. However, the latter assertion is valid only if it is accepted that nationalism does not have a single, unitary form, but there are multiple *nationalisms*. As such, if the postsocialist pro-Western discourse coagulated as a counter-narrative to the socialist anti-Western one, this genre

of anti-nationalism gravitated around development, and coexisted with the renewed nationalism that centered around ethnicity (for a revealing account of the latter, see Brubaker, 2006).

One of the patterns that support this speculative assertion is constituted by the generalized skepticism among my informants (including those who are the representatives of the state in the agricultural domain) towards the hidden principles behind the EU funds, seconded by their deploring of the limited production after de-collectivization. As such, an argument that implies a positive assessment of an economic regime that insisted upon national economic development and sustainability, by progressively divesting itself from foreign intervention – for instance, in the form of loans. The second is the concern expressed by some of them regarding the ever more manifest (in their view) phenomenon of land grabbing. As Anton puts it, „this is the finality! We will lose out lands. Unfortunately, this is the polity. And you see it from down here, and you’re helpless”. When he argues that land grabbing is, more than merely a tendency that would be the product of a manifold aggregation of forces, an intended consequence of the dynamics of the political field, he does not only point to the international actors, or transnational agencies which defend these interests of some of these actors, but also to the corrupt political apparatus of Romania, which goes against national interests. As such, in his case, the sense of nationhood replicates the widespread socialist projection of the abyss between ‘state’ and ‘society’.

All in all, the developmentalist discourse of the EU – more precisely, the enticement of particular sectors over others – is not ‘internalized’ by farmers. Farmers appear to have an unambiguous vision regarding the ways wherein agriculture is to be developed: through the stimulation of production (and productivity). As such, development is not merely one discourse that is or is not accepted by its subjects, but these subjects resist it through their own discourse

about development, thus advancing a counter-discourse⁵⁰. Thence, a clash of discourses that creates an agonistic space wherein different actional strategies are deployed by different actors, with the aim of finding some niches wherein the two discourses can be reconciled, in the practical purpose of making use of the instruments that each of them can provide in securing the ideal outcome of the other. In other words, farmers endeavor to comply with the EU conditions for accessing funds for their farms, although they critically evaluate these conditions as maleficent (not merely inefficient), while the state agencies which set these conditions seek to draw a strategy for adjusting the CAP principles to the specific Romanian agricultural sector.

⁵⁰ Everlasting gratitude to Prof. Ju Li for pointing this out!

Concluding Remarks: Seeing the ‘Big Picture’ by Thinking Relationally and Taking Steps Back in History

Construction....

Compelling as my argumentation may appear to be, the ground wherein it sinks its roots is a miry one. Throughout this paper, regardless of my constant leaps from one level of abstraction to the other, ranging from a seemingly peripheral statement, or even phrasing, of my informants, to the global neoliberal dynamics, the underlying theme has always been the collision of visions, and, thereby, echoes and resistance of and to neoliberalism on the subjects it craves to create. Neoliberalism, I argue, ought not to be regarded either as a global *system*, which by its very systemic nature would be integrated, cohesive and consistent with itself, or as a macro-process that unfolds in the realm of the national and the supranational. Neoliberalism is an all-encompassing propensity – produced and reproduced by the national and supranational forces, yet seizing the ‘grassroot’ realm, to use a technical term⁵¹ – towards a generalized commodification, thus towards subduing more and more social zones to the principles of the market, a process upheld by the necessarily complementary one, the generalized entrepreneurialization of the individual.

Therefore, what I aimed at through this research was to disclose one of the ways in which these processes unfold, specifically, how a developmentalist discourse which started from a welfarist perspective appropriated the language of entrepreneurship in order to promote neoliberal policies, and the aftermath of this shift in the case of Romanian farmers, administrators and

⁵¹ By this term I do not imply, by any means, that there is a definite separation between the political structures and what is often called ‘society’. The social is political, as the political is social. I only utilize this term as a descriptive one for what cannot be subsumed to these national and supranational forces, which are driven by high-level decision making processes in which ‘the common people’ do not have a say.

bureaucrats. What this case reveals is precisely the above mentioned negations regarding neoliberalism. The ideatic amalgamation of neoliberal principles and the interventionist state, seconded by other specific ideas of each of my informants, which have different sources, attests the discontinuities and resistances of neoliberalism. On the other side, as the distinction between the *farmers* and the *peasants* shows, these discontinuities, or incongruities, instead of rising the seeds of subversion, are subsequently incorporated within the logic of neoliberalism and orchestrated against themselves. If there is one fundamental idea that I endeavored to assemble by combining the argumentative pieces of this paper, this is precisely it.

... And Deconstruction

Assuredly, the focus of this small-scale research is extremely confined and it amounts to nothing more than a fragment of a much wider picture. While time is the greatest enemy that my research had to withstand, there are multiple further factors that constricted it. One of these is given by the imbricated structures that configure the deployment of this process of implementation, ones that ought to be examined relationally – more precisely, the analysis of the ways in which the EU and then state and local decision-making structures interlock and the power struggles within the matrix generated by their points of encounter, an undertaking that is beyond the means at my disposal. Another facet of this wider picture is that of the position of EU as a bounded agent within the global landscape, and its relation to other strata of this magnitude, so that the manner in which this position determines its ‘lifeworld’, if we are to stretch the metaphor of agency, thus also its corpuses of provisions would be another central dimension to be inquired. Again, this type of analysis exceeds the bounds of possibility at this time.

Yet another such dimension is the diachronic one, which should canvass the multiple transformations of the interplay of all the above processes, at least after the end of the Cold War, the only outlook that would provide the chance to grasp the present developments of the submission of the state against over higher units such as the EU. But this is not the only historical viewpoint that is called on by an endeavor similar to that of this research. Another one regards the specific sequence of politico-economic regimes in Romania (the interwar period, the communist epoch, the passing to liberal democracy, and the recent neoliberalization), the assessment of which would offer a sort of genealogy (in Foucault's terms) of property. Once more, this remains to be tackled in a further research.

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