"That Romanian Work Ethic:" A Cultural and Social Analysis of the History of Work in Romania*

Stefan-Sebastian MAFTEI
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

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Abstract. It is a well-known fact today that *work*, as an economical, rational, social, and political attitude survives by being supported by its own ideology. Our study will try to find some answers to some questions addressed by different authors: What is there so peculiar to Romanians and their way of life that makes them so conspicuous in their "work ethics?" What are the potential causes behind their peculiar mindset towards work? And, finally, is there a link between facts and words, or is their alleged "work ethics" a mere rumor, hearsay? Is there a gap between the representation of work and work itself in Romanian society?

E-mail: stmaftei@yahoo.com

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In 2009, Jim Rosapepe, US Ambassador in Romania between 1998 and 2001, published a book describing his personal experience as a US diplomat during his 3 years ambassadorial stay[1]. The book is entitled *Dracula is Dead. How Romanians Survived Communism, Ended It, and Emerged Since 1989 as the New Italy.* The tone of the book is warm and serene, yet lucid and articulate. In sum, Romania's future is depicted in bright, hopeful colours, as its author looks with optimism at the achievements that were made by the Romanians struggling out of the murkiness of tyranny and "scientific" Communism. At first sight, his views may strike us, his Romanian readers, as being too candid. It is precisely this aspect that the author finds puzzling, in view of the mindset of the Romanians: they always have the tendency to see reality in grim, dark colours. Throughout the book, he and Sheilah Kast, the co-author of the book, embark on a quest to find answers to this puzzle.

One chapter of Rosapepe's book is entitled "That Romanian Work Ethic." The chapter shows that the legendary "corruption and laziness" of the Romanians is not just an overemphasized fact, although it still remains a cold hard fact, but also a cliché and a cultural blueprint. He actually refers earlier in his book to the alleged wide-spread, systematic corruption in the everyday economic life of the Romanians. Though he never

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[1] Rosapepe/Kast, *Dracula is Dead. How Romanians Survived Communism, Ended It, and emerged since 1989 as the New Italy* (Baltimore MD: Bancroft Press, 2009.)

denies the endurance of corruption-based phenomena in the post-Communist lifestyle, he is more interested in the *representation* of corruption in the mindset of the ordinary citizen, a representation which he perceives as bewildering. He agrees that "Romanians don't like the corruption around them," but at the same time "often seem resigned to it while talking about it incessantly."[1] The attitude towards corruption is marked by some sort of indignation, but also by deep resignation. Rosapepe quotes the anthropologist Ruth Benedict addressing the strange attitude of Romanians regarding corruption in their own country:

> The entire openness of all Romanians about corruption is more striking than the admitted venality (…) The Romanian prides himself on insight more than on what most other European nations define as virtue. He accepts the fact that people will try to 'get theirs' and sees no reason at all why that should sour him on life.[2]

The same could be said about Romanians' attitude towards work and the reluctance to work: everyday Romanians openly address the issue of "laziness," candidly admitting that almost everyone in Romania avoids hard and honest work. By the same token, they are resigned to "laziness," even though the cultural acceptance of laziness could be detrimental to themselves. A cultural acquiescence to a negative attitude towards work is what the nowadays sociologists define as "a social production of meaning" through communication of values and ideas. In a sociologist's view, it is one of those aspects of life that are roughly inter-subjective, but affect the actions and behaviour of persons, and thus affect the very texture of everyday life:

> (…) The way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed. While coercion and fear are critical sources for imposing the will of the dominants over the dominated, few institutional systems can last long if they are predominantly based on sheer repression. Torturing bodies is less effective than shaping minds. (…) Because communication, and particularly socialized communication, the one that exists in the public realm, provides the support for the social production of meaning, the battle of the human mind is largely played out in the processes of communication.[3]

In its shortest version, the idea has been straightforwardly put by the German philosopher Herbert Marcuse: radical change is dependent upon the transformation of values. Regarding work, he suggested the same argument: work depends not only on economy, consumption and politics, but also on people's attitudes. A different attitude towards work determines further a certain pattern of behaviour with certain results. This

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[1] Ibid., 23.
[2] Benedict, quoted in: Rosapepe/Kast, 23.
[3] Manuel Castells, "Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society," *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 238–239. Available online: (http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/46/35)

is the way in which *work*, as an economical, rational, social, and political attitude, survives: by being supported by its own ideology.[1]

Our study will try to find some answers to the same questions addressed by Rosapepe in his book: What is there so peculiar to Romanians and their way of life that makes them so conspicuous in their "work ethics?" What are the potential causes behind their peculiar mindset towards work? And, finally, is there a link between facts and words, or is their alleged "work ethics" a mere rumour, hearsay? These are some of the issues that the present study is trying to address.

Homo faber

Even by taking a quick look at the history of the term itself, one may easily find that there are a few moments in history that indicate a shift in the meaning of the term "work."[2] As Maurice Godelier suggested, only in the 19th century did the term *work* become central to the science of political economy. Also, there are some historical moments that point to sudden economical shifts: the 17th century, with the advent of domestic manufacture; the 15th century, with the emergence of an international trade; the 16th century, with the development of a colonial system and of banking; the 18th century, with the rise of a modern economic system and the emergence of such terms as "wage," "worker," and "capital." As early as the 12th century, Godelier suggests, the term "profit," meaning "someone who has advanced or made progress" appeared in the common language. He also observes that, throughout modern history there has been a shift in the meaning of *work:* it first referred to a painful activity, then, with the advent of modern industry, it suddenly shifted to a *positive* meaning that celebrated the dignity of the worker. It is only in the 18th century that work is considered a value (Quesnay, Adam Smith, Ricardo). Ultimately, Marx will associate modern work with the rise of the capitalist society.

Godelier also contends that, even today, societies may differ in their appreciation of the value and nature of work: "among those societies in which the economy is based on production and gift of use values, and those founded on production, sale and purchase of commodities, there are many differences which ought to be precisely studied in order to understand what would correspond, in each case, with how we use 'work,' 'to work,' and 'worker.'"[3] He also quotes Marshall Sahlins who wrote about the attitude towards work in tribal economies:

> Work is (…) intermittent, sporadic, discontinuous, ceasing for the moment when not required for the moment (…) Nor is tribal labour alienated from man himself, detachable from his social being and transactable as so many units of depersonalized labour-power. A man works, produces, in his capacity as a social person, as a husband and father, brother and lineage mate, member of a clan, a village. "Worker" is not a status in itself, nor "labour" a true category of

[1] See the discussion in: Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 97–98.

[2] See Maurice Godelier, "Work and Its Representations: A Research Proposal," *History Workshop* 10 (1980): 165 ff.

[3] Ibid., 167.

> tribal economics. Said differently, work is organized by relations "non-economic" in the conventional sense (…) Work is an expression of pre-existing kin and community relations, the exercise of these relations.[1]

The *rationalization* of work as modern-day work begins with the second half of the 18th century. Of course, there are earlier representations of work which have influenced the revolution in the understanding of work of the 18th century, representations which will be later discussed. Godelier identifies the ideology of the *homo faber* as being at the core of the 18th century rationalism and materialism. *Homo faber* reflects the ideology that interprets human being as having essentially the capacity to "*transform nature through labor* and in doing so to transform his own social being. Historians of ideas have yet to trace the exact origins of this idea that human beings transform nature and their own nature. This idea is not to be found in antiquity."[2]

In contrast with the transformative (external and internal) character of work in modern industrial society (Marx has been one of the key sources of legitimation for this idea of work) the pre-modern view on work (Godelier brings the example of the Maenge people of New Guinea) is not seeing work as something that can be alienated (brought into a commercial circuit), but as something deeply embedded in interpersonal (family, tribe) relations.[3] To the Maenge people, to cultivate something does not mean to "change" or transform nature. It means keeping the balance between humans and nature, as raising plants, for example, is making an exchange with the gods or with the ancestors: "it is not transforming matter, but rather exchanging and maintaining by means of exchange a fundamental connection with the invisible forces of nature."[4] In a pre-industrial society, there are still tasks to be done, yet these are achieved without a special timetable for work. The machine or the industrial process does not regulate time as in industrial production. These tasks are achieved without a special work discipline that sets itself with some sort of compulsion through machines, time, wage, profit or other elements of production. Work is not yet the invisible or incomprehensible force imposing in a circuit of social and economic reified relations, as Granter argues.[5] If there is a compulsion, that compulsion to work is regulated by the cycles of nature itself.

As a source of value, "work" is nowadays associated with wealth, profit, scheduled time, labour, production, machines, industry, capital, alienated products, alienated humans, commodification, urbanization and, ultimately, with what we usually mean by "progress." Even today, the attitude towards "work" still represents the basis of belief in an "industrialized," "modern," "progressive" society. As a social value, "work" structures and gives meaning to our everyday experience as individuals in a modern society. Even today, "work" is still held in reserve as a special kind of *telos* or as an end in itself for our everyday existence, publicly as well as privately.[6]

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[1] Sahlins, quoted in: Ibid.
[2] Ibid., 168.
[3] See Granter, *Critical Social Theory*, 12.
[4] Ibid.
[5] See Ibid., 11.
[6] See Ibid., 107 ff. about the resurgence and survival of the ideology of work in postindustrial societies.

Teodora Cosman, *The Human Pyramid*
120cm x 90 cm, acrylic, gouache on tissue, 2013

This type of work is related to what will be known as the Weberian "ideal type" of work, usually situated by the sociology of work within the premises of Max Weber's sociological architectonics of modern work as a conceptual model of work shaped by the advent of Protestant Christianity in the West. This "ideal type" of work, sketched by Weber in his famous *Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* is based on two features: the idea of a permanent surveyor of work, i.e. God, and the belief in the "unlimitedness of work," as work for work per se.[1] There is, however, a major shift from

[1] See Monica Heintz, *Changes in Work Ethic in Postsocialist Romania* (PhD Thesis, Univ. of Cambridge, UK, 2002), 168 ff. Online at: *http://mentalite.ro/content_docs/ exploring_mentality/ research_papers/Monica%20Heintz%20-%20Changes%20in%20Work%20Ethic%20in%20 Post-socialist%20Roma.pdf* (accessed 20.02.2013)

the way a devout Puritan sees and practices work throughout his daily existence – since he is perceiving work as a *vocation*, as a calling, therefore as an end in itself, as a moral duty – to the way the Christian ideology of work as a vocation functions in a modern, bureaucratized and rationalized society. The difference, as Weber remarks, is the difference between freedom and constraint: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling: we are forced to do so."[1] This is a major clue: even if Work is part of an ideology that stresses the virtue of work as a kind of vocation, the modern ideology of work cannot ultimately obscure, Weber contends, the forced character of labour generated by the social networking of modern everyday life.[2]

However, Weber's theory about the Protestant origins of the modern ideology of work is not far-fetched. Empirical studies[3] show that labour force participation and employment in countries with a Protestant majority are higher than in other countries. Even if religion does not have the same impact on people today, even if Protestantism has been undermined by secularism, Horst Feldmann contends that "the Protestant view on work survived into the Rationalistic, secular, *ethos* of work. The effect of Protestantism has been indirect, especially in the idea of individual, rational productivity of work."[4]

Weber identifies, as early as the 16th century, a special economic, social, and political pattern, which is characteristic to the rise of modern capitalism:[5] the separation of the individual from the household, economically and culturally, the development of a strong political authority of the modern state upon its subjects, the split between the household and business entrepreneurship, the regulation of economic life through contracts, which were legitimated by the state's legal powers; in sum, the rising independence of the individual from its community and a stronger dependence on the legal and political powers of the modern state, as warrant for a rational, impersonal distribution of power to the members of society. Labour, i.e. the work of the individual towards his economical welfare, becomes economically rationalized in a bureaucratic manner,[6] in the form of an economic contract, and socially legitimized, in the form of an individual's "duty" or "mission" to the fellow members of the society or to the state itself. In modern bureaucracy, office holding becomes a "vocation" or a "duty," often considered beyond a simple exchange of services, as in the case of free employment. The bureaucratic loyalty to the office does not legitimize a relationship to a person, but is oriented towards impersonal purposes, towards an impersonal institution.[7]

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[1] Weber, quoted in: Ibid., 169.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Horst Feldmann, "Protestantism, Labor Force Participation, and Employment across Countries," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 4 (2007): 795–816.
[4] Ibid., 796.
[5] He also distinguishes between "patrimonial" capitalism, which is politically oriented but not "modern" and "production-oriented modern capitalism," based on "rational enterprise, the division of labor and fixed capital" (Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth, Claus Wittich [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], 1091).
[6] On bureaucracy, see Weber, *Economy and Society*, 956–1005.
[7] Ibid., 959.

Critique of the modern *ethos* of "work"

Thus, work can be and should be seen both *as a means and as an end in itself*.[1] The modern idealistic work ethic will ultimately hold that "work is good" and that "all work, any work, demonstrates integrity, responsibility and fulfillment of duty."[2] As an apotheotic, grandiose *ethos*, work should be deeply influential on the values of the worker in the sense that we perceive ourselves as being *what we do*, since "we are known and we know ourselves by the work we do."[3] But this is not just in the sense that, on a social level, you are identifiable by your own work, but also in the sense that your work should be the fulfilment of your own duty as a person, that you identify *yourself* with your own work.

However, there are symptoms of work in modern societies that did not go unnoticed by the critics of the modern-day ideology of "work." Al Gini[4] identified four major symptoms of modern-day work that revealed the experience of the workplace not as a fulfilling experience, but as a traumatic and alienating one. According to him, these are: the *lack of vision* about the final meaning of our work, the rise of *workaholism* as a social problem, the "*work, debt and spend* syndrome," in which case we are encouraged to "work, to spend, and then work some more" for the money we've just spent, and so on, and, finally, the influence of workplace ethics upon the everyday life values of the working person.

Obviously, this is precisely the opposite of what an idealist of work would assert. It shows that in modern societies work can do exactly the opposite: not fulfilling, but obscuring the meaning of a person's life. In the words of Matthew Fox, modern work has no "eschatological view," as it creates a new "teleology" for man, that of *homo oeconomicus*, "driven solely by the goal of personal betterment and well being," the primary meaning of work being based on "solely what it allows us to get or buy."[5]

This critique also shows that there is a gap between what the idealistic *ethos* says about work and what work really means in terms of workplace values. This is precisely because the workplace, as said before, is itself a setter of values:

> "In a very real sense the workplace serves as a metronome for human development and growth. The individual workplace sets the agenda, establishes the values and dictates the desired outcome it expects from its employees. Although it would be naive to assert that employees simply unreflectively absorb the manners and *mores* of the workplace, it would be equally naive to suggest that they are unaffected by the modeling and standards of their respective places of employment."[6]

Of course, this does not dismiss the ethical, personal aspects of a person's behaviour, including also the professional ethics of a certain workplace. It does, however, trigger

[1] Al Gini, "Work, Identity and Self: How We Are Formed by the Work We Do," *Journal of Business Ethics* 7 (1998): 707.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 709.
[5] Matthew Fox, in: Ibid., 710.
[6] Ibid., 713.

questions about the distance between the managerial, economic, and formalistic imperatives of a workplace and the personal responsibility of the individual that occupies that workplace, because sometimes personal moral responsibility can be obscured by the imperatives of work. In Gini's rhetorical formulation, "if work is the primary vehicle for the achievement of personal success, status, prestige and financial security, who of us is above the temptation to cut corners, turn a blind-eye or simply overlook the requirements and niceties of ethics?"[1]

The imperatives of *homo oeconomicus* are bound to obscure and sometimes even overturn the imperatives of ethics (personal or professional). This distance between the idealism of work and the real imperatives that settle particular desirable work values is explainable by the very nature of modern division of labour that may assist the emergence of a *new set of values* destined to form the rules of a workplace. It may effectively create a split between a person's ethics and the values acceptable for work. For it creates a split between a "person's life and his livelihood," in the words of Matthew Fox. This is the Marxist view about the alienation of man from his work, a symptom which is specific to modern capitalist societies.

Thus, we may keep in mind two important aspects: first, that there is a distance between the ideology of work as an end in itself and values associated with work depending on the type of work and on the imperatives of workplace; second, that personal or even professional ethics can sometimes be overridden by workplace imperatives. In this case, "work ethics" may be defined in different ways: as a personal ethic about our own work, as a professional ethic, or simply as a set of values that are related to a certain type of work environment. In addition, *"work ethic" cannot live on its own*: in order to exist, it needs a work environment, which also constantly determines the "rules of the game." These are objective determinants of "work ethic" that emerge from the modern division of work. Individuals are thus first influenced on their perception of work and of values associated with it by the objective nature of the modern division of labour. They may perceive everyday work as a (necessary) burden, as a tool for the fulfilment of lesser, more mundane, needs, and not as a fulfilment of their destiny.

Hannah Arendt's critique of labour in modern society, emerging in her 1959 book *The Human Condition*, starts from the same observable fact, which is that in modern societies the major determinants are the "ways the economy functions" and not the "processes of political communication and decision."[2] Arendt denounces the same meaninglessness of modern labour, in the way that the activity of labour in itself is not satisfying or meaningful, but it is generated by the "pure necessity of having a financial income to secure one's existence:" "It is frequently said that we live in a consumers' society, and since (...) labor and consumption are but two stages of the same process, imposed upon man by the necessity of life, this is only another way of saying that we live in a society of laborers."[3] The circularity of labour and consumption engages the

[1] Ibid.

[2] A reflection on Arendt's critique appears in: Claudia Lenz, Gertrude Postl, "The End or the Apotheosis of 'Labor'? Hannah Arendt's Contribution to the Question of the Good Life in Times of Global Superfluity of Human Labor Power," *Hypatia* 2 (Spring 2005): 135–154. The quotes are from p. 144.

[3] Hannah Arendt, in: Ibid.

whole process of production in modern-day economy, a process that has no perceivable ends outside itself.[1]

Romania: A "Work" in Progress?

Romania does not seem to be fitting the "modernity" pattern described above by Weberian sociology. The historical causes are well described in Kenneth Jowitt's general presentation of Romanian modernization.[2] In the 19th century, Romania's status as economy and society would have fitted in the nowadays "Third World" category. There were at least three obstacles that have contributed to this situation: the *social* gap between the elite and the rest of the population, mostly peasants, the *institutional* gap between the "new" Western institutional forms and the "old," Oriental customs, the *economic* gap between a "dependent economy" and its Western allies. These inadequacies pushed contemporary historians in adopting various strategies of defining this situation, as being outside of the standard "development" theory: an "arrested development," or a "development of underdevelopment."[3] Jowitt finally adopts a special approach: he defines Romanian society as a "status society," thus embracing a Weberian approach. In Weber's theory, "status" is different from "class," since the Marxist term "class" cannot properly define the standing of a society which is basically *off* the course of a Western modern society, in the terms defined by the Marxist "class:" the class situation differs from status situation in the sense that the latter is determined by a "social estimation of honor."[4] "Distance" and "exclusiveness" are the social characteristics of "status," which is not defined particularly by economic interests or the interests related to the market. Market and pure economic interests do not recognize "personal distinctions," in Weber's terms. There are consequently, Jowitt argues, several features that define a *status society*: a. A "corporate group," as "a basic unit of social identification and organization," a group which is naturally "exclusivist."[5] b. Relations inside these groups are governed by *personal* and not impersonal norms of actions. This is the feature generally resembling Weber's notion of "patrimonial capitalism." Social ties inside the *corporate group* develop towards a (personalized) economy of "power" based on a personal exchange of "gifts" that will engage as an effective "magical" economy of social control, and not just as a "symbolic basis for trust," as Jowitt argues. These are, thus, *not* modern Western social relationships. c. The *division of labour* is

[1] Arendt does make a crucial difference between labour, work and action, which I will not discuss here. It suffices to say that labour is activity that corresponds most, in Arendt's view, to "the biological processes of the human body," and that labour is the most analogous to natural repetition, whereas work is creation, "the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence." Arendt, in: Lenz and Postl, "The End or the Apotheosis of 'Labor'?", 143. However, work is still corresponding to a means-to-end rationality, appropriate only when it comes to things.

[2] Kenneth Jowitt, "The Sociocultural Bases of National Dependency in Peasant Countries," in: Kenneth Jowitt, ed., *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940. A Debate on Development in a European Nation* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1978): 1–s30.

[3] Ibid., 2.

[4] Weber, quoted in: Ibid.

[5] Jowitt, Ibid., 5.

rigid and stereotypical, organized by caste, and not open to the impersonal forces of the market. d. The "concrete and discrete – i.e. discontinuous –" qualities of social reality are more important than the "abstract" qualities. e. In this case, in which the concrete and discrete dominate the social world as "indivisible units," the distribution of "resources" or forces (economic, social, cultural, political) is scarce, and the social mobility is poor. Each social stratum seems to have its own corresponding, unique, and immobile "essence." As different from the modern Western societies (particularly for the 19th century), the status society is not dominated by the "market" forces of economy. Thus, the economy of a status society is not a "free" economy, in liberal terms, but biased by "status."[1] Following Weber's conclusions, Jowitt argues that in a "class society" (which essentially upholds the features of a modern Western division of labour) the central role goes to the individual, and this shapes the "mode of organization and adaptation," whereas in a "status society" it is not the individual, but the *corporate group*, as a basis of social action, which institutes the economic and political orderings of society. A peculiar example for this kind of difference between ground rules of social action which create different approaches to certain aspects that possess a social value is *wealth*: acquisition of wealth in status societies is a sign of personal prestige, guarded by the capacity to "calculate" and by "economic intelligence." Yet, the *mode* of the acquisition of wealth in status societies, its *use* and the *perception* of the economic acquisition is very different from the presence of wealth in the class societies:

In status-based societies there is calculation for gain, but not the calculation of individuals based on impersonal, procedural norms. Economic behaviour is informed by an *heroic-plunder-largesse mentality* (emphasis mine). This behaviour takes a variety of forms, but it differs in kind from the impersonal-procedural mode of continuous and exact transactions that characterize modern or class societies.[2]

Proofs of socio-economic *praxis* that transgresses the "modern" norms of economic and social action can be found throughout the 19th and 20th century history of economic relations in Romania. The peasant-based economy was functioning on the model of the corporate peasant family household, showing reluctance towards a framework of impersonal rules. Abstract economic rules were simply "unintelligible" to this type of economic setting. Romanian society subordinated wealth to *status*. It explains the "conspicuous display of wealth" that anthropologists found as a permanent feature in the rural and urban Romanian economy, up to the end of the 20th century.[3] Society, which was organized and differentiated by rank, subordinated wealth, dress and power, including language, to corporate status.

This feature of economic *praxis* also explains, at least partially, the more or less autocratic force by which the Romanian state acted upon economic and financial policies. The flow of the market economy was regulated by the state's policies. The

[1] "In a market-class society a fundamental change in the framework of social action is complemented by a change in the basic units of social identification, organization, and action. In a class society the basic units of social identification, organization and action are the individual and the nuclear family, not the corporate group (familial or otherwise)." (Ibid., 7)

[2] Ibid., 11.

[3] Ibid.

economy was tactically dependent on the state, which often intervened with protectionist policies.[1]

The situation described above reflects a strict and categorical *division of labour*, subordinated to a "status economy," with different categories (ethnic, occupational, religious) playing a "rigidly assigned role."[2] Playing by the rules of the "discrete and concrete," not abstract, organization of society, a specific kind of labour was more or less *imposed* on various groups. Also, a "gap in culture," by which we must understand, accordingly, a "gap" in the *work culture* of Romania's citizens, contributed to the country's peculiarity in treating the division of labour not as a class division, but as a division in *status*. Thus, worker and employer belonged not only figuratively, but also literally to different worlds, and sometimes, even to different nations.[3] The *status* became a "principle"[4] of social and political organization in Romania, which permitted the *corporate* and *personal* arrangement of economic relations in Romanian society.

"Work ethics" in Post-1989 Romania

It is now the occasion to address the issue of "work ethics" in Romania. In the course of our argument, we will use the terms "work" and "labour" indistinctively, although we are aware that sometimes these terms may have different meanings, depending on the authors and the theories they put forward, as in the case of Arendt. Also, during our study we have found out that "work ethics" is a loose term that can designate either a personal moral attitude towards work, or a particular set of behaviour rules and procedures related to a professional environment, or, generally, any attitude that may refer to values associated to work in a workplace environment. We will start with some case studies about the practices of work ethics in Romanian work environments as they are reflected by empirical studies. We will then proceed in trying to quickly summarize a history of labour in Romania, in order to be able to better understand the causes that have been leading to this "gap" in work culture in the peripheral economies, in comparison to their Western counterparts. In the end, we will try to summarize the arguments that could answer the question of why is it that the "work ethics" and the way they are perceived are so different in a country such as Romania in comparison to other locations.

A new study[5] about businessmen in post-1989 Romania that have been asked to explain their attitudes in relation to some business practices that involve their ethical judgment have shown that there are differences between their ethical perception and the Western managers' perception about certain phenomena, especially related to bribery. The different cultural background has been a major explanation for this situation. However, the study has also shown that Western managers that have been exposed for a long time to a working environment different from their home environment might start to adopt new ethical attitudes, which may be considered unethical in their home countries.[6]

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[1] On protectionism, see John Michael Montias, "Notes on the Romanian Debate on Sheltered Industrialization: 1860-1906," in: Jowitt, ed. *Social Change in Romania*, 53–71.
[2] Jowitt, "The Sociocultural Bases of National Dependency," 17.
[3] Ibid., 18.
[4] Ibid., 29.
[5] Zhan Su & Andre Richelieu, "Western Managers Working in Romania: Perception and Attitude regarding Business Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 2 (1999): 133–146.
[6] Ibid., 133.

This is not the whole picture, though. There are also several material aspects identified that may have contributed to a different "business ethic:" "the lack of respect for contract liabilities and a person's word, and the absence of trust; the plague of corruption; the phenomenal bureaucracy; the limited capital market; the confusing property right legislation; the low privatization process; the inflexible labor market; the unproductive badly remunerated work force; the non-existence of a bankruptcy law; the copyright 'bazaar'; the high taxation on wages; the embryonic banking system; the inadequate infrastructure."[1] These are objective aspects that were related to the first decade of the post-Communist Romanian economy. They explain some work ethic attitudes at some certain point in time. In the meantime, there have been major changes, at least as far as some of these aspects are concerned.

The biggest difference observed regarding ethical values at the workplace was bribery, seen as "a way of life, essential, accepted and efficient."[2] However, there are more business practices that are differently perceived by Romanians in comparison to Westerners, and these are: "denouncing the colleagues' activities to superiors," "borrowing the company's resources for a personal use," "employee abuse," "favoritism or patronage, conflict of interest regarding a project, and postponement on payment of financial obligations," "playing on ambiguity when a situation appeared unfavorable to them," and bribery.[3] During the 1990's, Western managers in Romania were asked to create a description of what they have seen as specific aspects of Romanian business practice that were not acceptable in their definition of a normal business practice. Some features emerged: "not respecting the contract liabilities or one's word," "unfair competition between firms," "maximizing the profit of the firm against the company's interests," "denouncing the colleagues' activities to their superiors, thus showing that people are not accustomed to collaborate," "borrowing the company's resources for a personal use, very frequently," "laziness or unproductive behavior," "breaking the law or the regulations," "using the black market," "violating intellectual property rights and commercializing counterfeited products," "offering small favors to an official or a business partner."

"Laziness and bribery" were considered "substantial problems," being extensively identified during the interviews that were conducted with Western managers in Romania. However, lack of efficiency in the system was the most probable cause of the unproductive behaviour at the workplace, and not the laziness itself. Bribery has been acknowledged by 54% of the respondents, thus showing that foreign companies have accepted the allegedly unethical Romanian "model" of doing business. This is a clear case of workplace values overriding personal ethical values. Interestingly, only 8% of the Western managers thought that bribery "was a problem of consciousness," while 86% of those interviewed thought it was not.[4] This is not to say that they accepted being unethical; it is more that they took bribery to be acceptable as a functional, means-to-end

[1] Ibid., 135.
[2] Ibid., 136.
[3] Ibid., 139.
[4] Ibid., 143.

workplace behaviour. The authors of the study ask whether this is related to "custom" (local mentality) or "necessity" (interest at stake).[1]

In our perspective, this is a clear indication that the entire issue of *work ethics* in modern societies cannot be easily dealt with and that values associated with work behaviour have at least a double source: first, an objective one, as it has been shown, that is specific to all societies in which the modern model of labour exists, and which feeds the global ideology of *homo oeconomicus*, – which, as noticed, is a surrogate for the ideal Weberian "work" ideology – an ideology that sometimes puts the economical necessity of production and profit above all other work values; second, a customary, cultural source, which comes from peoples' inherited attitudes towards work practices that involve ethical decisions.

Bribery is thus a case of Romanian unethical behaviour explained by a coincidence between economic interest and local values. It is not just a case of "necessity" or "mentality." In bribery, these attitudes are inter-dependent: economic necessity is dependent on "custom," "custom" would not be put into practice without the economic interest.

The authors seek a way out of the deadlock of bribery and other unfair practices. Their answer is that real economic development cannot be achieved without the changing of people's attitudes towards these practices. The risk of continuing to accept corruption, bribery, inefficiency, unlawfulness will bring the economy into a stagnation or even deeper crisis and will increase inequalities. Ethical consciousness, in the end, "cannot be seen as a luxury option,"[2] since its lack could affect our own lives in an irredeemable way.

Orthodox Religion and Work

Many attitudes towards values of work of the Romanian population were shaped by their Byzantine-Orthodox traditions and by the way in which Orthodox religion saw work in the life of a devout Christian. As historian Daniel Barbu[3] indicates, the Church condemned "laziness" as a sin, and spoke about work not as a personal moral obligation, but rather as a social obligation.[4] In terms of its value, *work* is seen, in the spirit of Orthodox religion, more as a part of the "law" (*lege*), which is the social acceptable norm, and not as a personal duty. As a part of a social code of values, the accepted norm of "work" in the case of the Orthodox Christian was not a practice that should fulfil the

[1] Ibid., 144.

[2] Ibid., 145.

[3] Daniel Barbu, *Bizanț contra Bizanț. Explorări în cultura politică românească* (Byzantium versus Byzantium. Exploring Romanian political culture) (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001), 89 ff.

[4] This appears because of a specific feature of Romanian Orthodoxy, emphasized many times by Barbu: In Romania, Orthodox religion imposed a sense of order which was not so much religious, spiritual, as social and judicial. This comes from the fact that the Byzantine tradition itself saw religious practice more as a social norm than as a spiritual, personal attachment to Christian values, in the sense that conformity to public, external, religious practices as a social accepted norm was more desirable – in respect to the whole body of religious believers – than the private devout attitude of the Christian who fights for the salvation of his own soul. This aspect is essential, since it will influence an Orthodox ethics which is basically an "ethics of unanimity," in Barbu's terms, rather than an ethics for the individual. See Barbu, *Bizanț contra Bizanț*, 96 ff.

personal, spiritual needs of the Christian, it was not part of his *intimate ethics of personal responsibility* towards God – as in Western Christianity –, but was included into the Orthodox regulation of time, a regulation which was followed in terms of living your life and organizing your everyday actions strictly according to the Orthodox religious calendar throughout the year. In other words, living your life according to the Orthodox religious calendar was not a matter of personal devotion, in terms of a moral acceptance, but a social norm, a part of the "ethics of unanimity," an item in a code of social acceptance, as it is still today.[1]

Work (household activities and agricultural labour) was thus regulated by the Orthodox calendar, as this calendar mentioned which days were working days and which were not. The Orthodox calendar also separated between profane time and sacred time, which was the time of the religious celebration day. Thus, work was always allowed during what was considered to be profane time by the Church and always prohibited during religious celebration days. Due to the fact that the majority of the Romanians up to the 20th century were peasants living more or less in a natural economy, their working time was defined by the rhythms of the natural economy and by the Church. "Work" was perceived as a social norm, according to the Orthodox tradition, but it is precisely because it was a norm, that it was a collective task. The character of work was obviously pre-modern: it was a matter not of alienation, but of interpersonal relationships. It did not mean transforming nature, but working with it. There was not a timetable for work outside the religious and natural timetable. At least up to the 17th century, work was not performed with the aim of profit. Industrialization came very late, at the end of the 19th century. Thus machines, time, wage, profit were not matters essential for work. Also, work was not seen as a positive thing, as in the Western countries: it was perceived as a burden, and as a painful activity, as everything was done through painful manual labour.

Natural time was the main instrument of measuring time and work in these archaic communities. *Professional* time, as well as a professional attitude to *work* was first introduced by traders, craftsmen and merchants, and it was mostly connected to urban communities.[2] With the flourishing of commerce near the end of the 17th century, work began to be measured in terms of profit, and agriculture also began to be practiced on an industrial scale. Daniel Barbu described the first signs of change in the perspective of time with the flourishing of commerce and agriculture. This kind of time meant another kind of work, which was also regulated and taxed by the State. Work will begin to be associated with wealth, living a good life, profit and efficiency. Barbu registers also the reaction of the Church to this professional work: the Church commenced to

[1] This practice of regulating (modern-day) work by the religious Orthodox calendar is still carried out today by Romanian governments and it is regulated *by law*. Apart from Easter and Christmas as "legal holidays" (*sărbători legale*), other important Orthodox celebration days (*sărbători*) are being imposed *by law* as "legal holidays." This shows that the Orthodox calendar is still seen by the Orthodox majority in Romania as an important source or social normativity. Even in everyday conversations, if someone says to you "Today it is a religious celebration day" (*Azi e sărbătoare*), this will inevitably mean: "I/You should not *work* today."

[2] The analysis of professional time vs. natural time is summarized from Barbu, *Bizanț contra Bizanț*. 101 ff.

criticize this individual, professional time. It blamed the wealthy person, the rich boyar, the modern entrepreneur for his lack of interest in respecting the religious time regulated by the Church. It started to associate wealth and profit with sin, and also started to blame the wealthy person for his wealth. It considered that material wealth is a divine gift, which should be repaid by the financing and erecting of churches, of places of worship. It was a kind of "spiritual interest," as Barbu explains. Profit, above all, was seen as a "Mamona of injustice," as the Metropolite Antim Ivireanul preached in his sermons at the end of the 17th century. Barbu shows that, in the eyes of the Church, gain, profit should not be personal, and should be redistributed within the community in form of gifts to the church precisely because it was blameable. The only admitted work was natural work, i.e. agricultural work, which is in accordance with nature and with the law of God. The only permissible gains are the gifts of natural economy, the fruits of the earth. What is beyond that it is considered as unjust and undeserved, and seen as a kind of exploitation of your fellow Christians.[1]

Barbu also contends that gift in a form of bribery is a historical phenomenon in Romania and that it is a part of a "social economy of gift," which is actually the counterpart of the old natural economy of the land in the old Romanian social system. Bribery, Barbu asserts, is a remnant of archaic societies, and of Romanians' attempt to cope with the modern, although arbitrary, administration of the State which saw them as *subjects*, not as citizens: "the gift is a social technique by which the powerful person is constrained to share his power, to divide, to distribute it (...) It is also the only possible way of living in a society of subjects (...) the gift creates mutual social obligations, as it symbolically anticipates a profit (...) bribery is a constitutive myth of the old Romanian social order (...) it was an accepted social practice (...) [corruption] is an instrument of producing power."[2] This also goes in agreement with the kind of status economy that was practiced in Romania during the 18th and 19th centuries. In status economy supported by a pre-modern social structure, wealth, money and gain do not have a pure, economic, impersonal exchange value. They first and foremost have an interpersonal value, since it is a sign of status, power and influence.

In the eyes of these archaic communities "work" or "labour," besides being the fruit of a natural necessity, is either a gift to God (in a form of participating to a social event) or a gift to the state or to its representative, the boyar, in the form of a *corvée*. It

[1] The Church, as early as the medieval times, established the so-called "ecclesiastical seigniories," a layer of feudal ecclesiastics whose economical life relied on – sometimes immensely generous – alms (*milostenii*) from the boyars or the voivode, and also on natural goods, as a form of regulate taxation that was paid in kind, from the peasants who worked and lived on the lands that were owned by the monasteries and that have also been given as 'alms' by the *Domn* or by the boyars. According to historian C. C. Giurescu, in Wallachia, at the beginning of the 19th century, 27% of the entire rural surface of the province belonged to the monasteries. In Moldavia, 22% of the rural surface of that province belonged to them. The monasteries owned also hundreds of *drinking establishments* and tens of *mills*, *groceries* and *inns*, from which they drew also huge money profits.

[2] Daniel Barbu, "Iertarea şi dreptatea sau despre economia socială a darului," (Forgiveness and justice or on the social economy of the gift), in *O arheologie constituțională românească* (A Romanian constitutional archaeology) (Online at: http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/StiintePOL/ arheologie/ studii4.htm)

has not, yet, a strict, impersonal, exchange value. Its value is not negotiated on the free market; it is assigned by the relation between the subject and his master. It has, as well as money, an interpersonal value, being the clear sign of a status.

A Short Romanian Cultural and Social History of Labour

We have already discussed the difference between pre-modern and modern views on work as a basis for the differentiation between the nature of work in modern societies and the archaic relation of the individual to his work. What Maurice Godelier has shown in his study about the representation of work will serve as a reference point in our short inquiry into the history of labor or work in the historical provinces of the nowadays Romania.

What has been already explained in our study about the nature of Romania's modernization during the 19th century remains valuable, since it emphasizes the difference between a *status economy* and a real *market economy* in terms of economic and social relations. The peculiarities of these developments during the 18th, 19th and 20th century show that the differences between Western and Romanian views on work are real and come from historical, social, cultural, as well as economical reasons. Real and palpable are also different practices of work in working environments. Negative phenomena related to the experience of work, such as unproductive behaviour, lack of a work *ethos* in working environments, delaying work, disrespect for the regulations of work, lack of cohesion and team spirit in working environments, distrust for your fellow co-workers, corruption at work, etc., are all real and have been documented by sociological studies, as shown.

During the last three centuries, the provinces inhabited by Romanians (Moldavia, Wallachia, Transylvania) have gradually developed from forms or archaic economies with archaic models of work dominated by agriculture into modern emerging economies.[1] Obviously, the delays and the gaps in the emergence from archaic economies to modern economic systems were enormous, and the effects of these delays are felt even today in Romania's rhythm of economic development. The way in which this development has been made was also different, and this explains the peculiarities of the system of social and economic relations from the 19th and 20th century. The social and political systems of these provinces have also endured a very slow development, so that a quasi-feudal system has survived in all these provinces up to the first decades of the 20th century.

The first written accounts about work and its representation in Wallachia and Moldavia appear from the 18th century on, and they are accounts of foreigners travelling

[1] There are, nevertheless, differences between the rhythms of economic development among the three historical provinces (Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania), especially related to Transylvania (which has been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire up to 1918) and its particular social, historical, political and economic shaping, differences which are not unimportant. However, this issue of Transylvania will not be addressed here. It suffices to say that Transylvania had a different historical, political and cultural outlook than the other two provinces and that this outlook also shapes the more modern-oriented, more "Westernized" attitude towards work of its inhabitants, in terms of values of work. The German and Hungarian minorities in Transylvania, educated in a Protestant environment, many of them part of an urban population which was already involved in craftsmanship and trade, contributed also with more Western attitudes related to work.

into these provinces. One of the written accounts about labour is the travel journal of a German officer, Erasmus Heinrich Schneider von Weismantel (1688– 1749). At some point in his writing he contended that the inhabitants of Moldavia "resent work." During his passage through Moldavia, he was rather critical about the work habits of its inhabitants: "This country [Moldavia] (…) has the most fruitful and beautiful land and it is not less valuable than Hungary or Podolia, under the condition that this territory would have had better, more industrious inhabitants (…) they are endowed with everything, except hard-working, honest people (…) they resent work."[1]

However, this is just half of the picture on the history of labour. The other half that should define the big picture is the economic and social perspective. This can be found in one of the most intriguing accounts on Romanian sociology of labour, produced by the sociologist Henri H. Stahl.[2] Stahl's theory is based extensively on facts and numbers. His major thesis is that, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the countries of Eastern Europe endured a "second serfdom," precisely at the moment when serfdom had been eliminated in the West. This "second serfdom" is not a medieval serfdom *ipso facto*, but an *economic* serfdom which placed the peasant class into a new status of serfdom, and coincided with the advent of capitalist economic relations in Eastern Europe. He explains this as follows: "At first sight this might seem contradictory, for it implies that the same cause, capitalism, might have had two opposite effects: the elimination of serfdom in the west, and its creation in the east. Nevertheless, these are the facts: the same social phenomenon of the advent of capitalism can take forms and have effects which are very different depending on the local and historical conditions in which it takes place."[3] Stahl's thesis is not very far from Marx' view in his *Capital*, where it is mentioned that countries that still rely on peasant labour or serfdom will enter the international markets by overworking the same serf class or peasant class to increase production. Stahl actually quotes one of Marx's essential passages:

> "But as soon as people whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labor, *corvée*-labor, etc., are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilized horrors of overwork are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc."[4]

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[1] *Călători străini despre ţările Române* (Foreign travelers about the Romanian countries) vol. 8 (Bucharest: Ed. Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983), 351 (my translation).

[2] Stahl's book, *Traditional Romanian village communities*, has been internationally acknowledged as one of the main references for the Eastern European social history of labor. Consequently, his book has been translated into English and published by Cambridge University Press in 1980 in the prestigious *Studies in modern capitalism* series, which included works by Immanuel Wallerstein and Pierre Bourdieu. Our study will refer to this edition. See Henri H. Stahl, *Traditional Romanian village communities. The transition from the communal to the capitalist mode of production in the Danube region*, transl. by D. Chirot and H. C. Chirot (Cambridge: CUP, 1980).

[3] Ibid., 2.

[4] Karl Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, ed. by Fr. Engels (New York, 1967), 236, quoted in Stahl, *Traditional Romanian village communities*, 6.

Stahl's conclusion to his argument is thus: if we will find more serfdom in the 17th or 18th century than in the previous centuries, this is connected to the contacts with the capitalist world. In other words: serf labour will serve capitalist interests in backward countries that rely heavily on agriculture made by primitive, archaic means. Stahl will follow this lead into the history of two Romanian provinces, Wallachia and Moldavia, where he will find sociological and historical data to support his theory: there was an increase in the practice of serfdom in the two provinces from the end of the 17th century on, even up to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. For example, the great economic disaster of the 19th century, which came from the sudden decrease in the price of grain on the international markets, led to more serfdom, to the increase of transformation of peasants into serfs in the mass of the peasant population, to more social tensions, more inequalities, etc.

The second main thesis of Stahl's theory is his thesis about the "ancient free village," the basic Romanian rural community, that was, during the Middle Ages, completely autonomous from the central political power of the state (*Domnie*) and where the land was the collective possession of the community who worked that land. Stahl's theory contends that these "free villages" were the oldest form of rural community in the Romanian provinces, and that these villages pre-dated even the formation of the Romanian states in the Middle Ages. Moreover, he states that these villages were basically self-sustainable and that the only connection between them and the political and administrative power of the medieval state were the taxes that the state collected from them. In other words, these communities were free to organize themselves, their only responsibility to the state being the tax they owed *collectively* to the state's representative.

Stahl will show how this kind of community began its slow decline at the end of the 17th century, when their lands began to be bought from them or taken from them by force by the voivode of the province or by the local boyars. Being left without their lands and, thus, their livelihood, these peasants became properly serfs on their own lands that had been bought or captured. They also fled their lands, leaving large areas of these provinces depopulated. This phenomenon was triggered by the flourishing of commerce between East and West at the end of the 17th century, by the increase of the demand for agricultural goods, and by the need of the boyars, the only major agricultural entrepreneurs of the country, to begin the large scale production of agricultural goods on larger surfaces. This need for more agricultural land (it was the only mean to increase production, since the cultivation of lands was made in the same archaic way) either chased the peasants out of their lands, or turned them into potential serfs. Either way, the "free villages" of the Middle Ages slowly began to disappear.

The situation turned from bad to worse at the end of the 18th century, when serfdom was abolished by the voivode Constantin Mavrocordat. It was not an abolishment out of consideration for the lives of the subjects; it was done for economic reasons: slavery itself became uneconomical. The Sultan from Constantinople urged the Romanian boyars to free their serfs, and to repopulate the large freed areas.[1] The freeing of the serfs was made upon the condition that the peasant should repurchase his freedom from his master. This move created the so-called "free contract peasants," who should have been basically

[1] Ibid., 204.

free workers who should live in a village. Nevertheless, this move backfired. The freeing of the serfs created actually a "second serfdom," a serfdom of the *corvées*.

Thus, first, every local lord became absolute master over his lands. Because of the primitive way of agriculture, the production did not increase, but the amount of labour increased, as well as the level of the *corvées*. Yet production had to increase, at all cost. Because the peasant was not a serf anymore, but a "free" worker, the boyar did not have responsibility for his life; he had only rights upon him. First and foremost, he had the right of increasing the taxes as he pleased on his own lands. The peasants could not complain to the voivode anymore. They were technically "free." As it appears, the right of the master to ask for the *corvées* was more atrocious than the right to have serfs.[1]

It was a "seigniorial economy by direct exploitation," as Stahl explains. And it was "the major base of the life of the country." After Mavrocordat, the so-called "urbarial" rules[2] increased the power of the boyars. Because of these rules, the boyars will calculate the *corvée* days "not in hours but *in quantity of work*." This situation will develop into a major crisis and a conflict between the peasants and their land masters in the 19th century. It was the conflict between the "communal" way of life and the "new latifundia, of mixed style, larger domains of capitalist production worked by *corvée* peasants."[3]

This generates a paradoxical situation. At the very moment when, in the 19th century, the liberal ideas of democracy, propriety, equality of rights, worker's rights, abolition of slavery, etc. began to be discussed and put into practice in the Western countries, in Eastern Europe propriety rights became a question of class distinction. The first to be declared "proprietors," i.e. landowners in the Romanian provinces, were the boyars, the owners of great *latifundia*. A universal right, such as "propriety" becomes thus a discriminatory right, as it was class-biased. *Only* the boyars became "proprietors," the rest of the peasant population living on their lands became in fact the *propriety* of the boyars. Stahl explains: "In a serf village, the feudal lord of the village, substituted for the council, has a legal status which is almost the exact copy of the council's. But by the very fact of this transfer of powers, the whole series of rules which formerly acted to preserve liberty and the population's rights to use the land becomes just as many means for breaking up the community, to subject and reduce it to serfdom. Going through the rights of the council, as we have described them, gives us the inventory of the lord's rights and explanation of the means by which he transformed his 'chieftainship' into ownership."[4]

By extension, the same thing is supposed to have happened (although it did not in the 19th century, since universal vote was introduced by the Romanian Constitution as late as the 1920s) in this kind of state of affairs along with other "democratic" rights, let alone the basic democratic right, which is the right to vote: as soon as, let's say, democracy as an established rule transfers the power from the "citizen" to the "representative," the "representative" becomes a substitute of the people's powers. Yet, at the same time, the rule which preserves "democracy" by "representation" becomes the means for breaking up the "democratic" character of the relation between "representative" and his "electorate".

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[1] Ibid., 207.
[2] Ibid., 208.
[3] Ibid., 209.
[4] Ibid., 100 ff.

The right to work, as suggested earlier, was part of the same economy of rights of the 19th century. Yet, because of the *nature* of Romanian economy, which was not based on the principle of free market, but on the principle of status, the "free labor" became just another occasion for the control of the labourers.

The agrarian legislations from 1864, 1921, and 1945, have attempted at solving the major issue of the dispossessed peasants. The agrarian law of 1864 just tackled with the problem. Because of expropriation,[1] the State became the proprietor of the lands – although the great *latifundia* remained almost intact – which were then sold to the dispossessed peasant (the peasant was obliged to pay up his land in a period of 15 years). The *corvée* (clacă), at least officially, was abolished by law.[2] But his reform was not enough: a lot of peasants still remained dispossessed, taxes to the State were very high, and the State didn't promote a fiscal policy to help these newly impropriated peasants to efficiently work their lands.

A thorough land reform came in 1921, after World War I. In hope of achieving a social unity and stability in the newly enlarged Romanian kingdom, the Parliament passed a Law that impropriated almost 1.400.000 peasants with less than 4 million hectares of land. It was also a compensation for the veterans who fought in World War I. However, the State did not succeed in implementing an economic policy to support these small proprietors. Many of them had to live a life of shortages and poverty because of the taxes they had to pay up (e.g. peasants were to repay 65% of the expropriation costs over 20 years). Corruption, the lack of farm implements, overpopulation, and lack of credit institutions and fragmentation of the land were serious setbacks of this reform. Also, the productivity was low because of the rudimentary farming methods. The 1930 census revealed that 24% of the land was held by 6.700 landowners, while 2.8 million farmers held 28%, so the situation was far from projected.[3]

The 1945 Communist land reform, in the name of a fair redistribution of lands to the peasants, abolished all the large proprieties that exceeded 50 ha, depriving all remaining aristocracy from Transylvania and the Old Kingdom and all the German and Hungarian churches in Transylvania from their source of income. However, Orthodox monasteries and churches, cooperative holdings and the proprieties of cultural associations escaped expropriation, for political reasons. But in 1949 the Communist State introduced the *collectivization* process, depriving virtually all the impropriated peasants from their lands. This policy was forcefully implemented; about 50.000 peasants were arrested on charges of "sabotage" for refusing to give up their proprieties to the newly formed GAC (*Gospodării Agricole Colective*), Collective Agricultural Institutions. This process of collectivization, of transforming proprietor peasants into virtually serfs of the state-ruled agricultural institutions destroyed the peasant sense of community and virtually all the old, ancient forms of "free villages." This process was irreversible: it destroyed the old,

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[1] A major part of the expropriated lands came from the lands which had belonged to the monasteries, lands that had been confiscated one year before, with the occasion of passing a Law for the Secularization of Monastery Estates. See "Secularization of Monastery Estates in Romania", online at: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularization_of_monastery_estates_in_ Romania*.

[2] *Istoria României* (History of Romania), vol. 4 (Bucharest, 1964), 348.

[3] The data appear in "Land Reform in Romania," online at: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Land_reform_in_Romania*.

ancestral means of farming and agriculture and it definitively alienated the mass of peasant population from their work. It also paved the way for the forceful industrialization process of the 1960's on, which altered completely the social structure of Romania, alienating former peasants from their villages, and sending them to the newly built urban areas, the "workers' districts" (*cartiere muncitoreşti*), in search for work in the newly industrialized centres of the 1970's and 1980's.

Despite the official ideology, not even Communism succeeded in restoring real dignity to workers in Romania. Although the figure of the worker should have been the cornerstone of people's power in Communism, free labour and the respect for the labourers' interests were far from reality. The only "proprietor" of work became the State itself, as an administrative entity, and it was the State, not the working individual, that decided the way in which work should exist in a Communist economy. Actually, the real "proprietors" were its representatives with decisional powers in the system. Despite the fact that the regime needed the creation of an urban working class to justify its presence as a political power and that it created that urban working class through a massive and forceful urbanization of an agrarian class that was two times bigger than the urban population at the end of World War II, communist leaders from the upper echelons of the Party showed their indifference and contempt towards the workers of the Romanian "classless" society. This is evident especially in the case of work strikes, which were silenced precisely in the name of social equality. Labour has been ideologized as propaganda of labour, yet the interests of the working class were not the system's priority.[1]

Studies have shown that the alienation of the worker from his labour was experienced also in the factories of Communist industries. The "means of production" were not in the hands of landlords or industrialists anymore, they were in the hands of "party managerial elites," who were actually a "ruling class," with status privileges in the economy, just like in the old status economy.[2] Although this happened in a Socialist state, the real system of work still depended on a hierarchy of status.

The first years after the collapse of the Communist system in Romania led to a "marginalization" of the working class in the official economic policies of the post-Communist elites. Massive unemployment and the collapse of the welfare system have deepened the political and economic alienation of the working class after 1989. Moreover, the workers were regarded with "suspicion and sometimes hostility by the more progressive, liberal, and intellectual sectors of society."[3] This means that the workers were considered "conservative," "backward" by the liberals, and unfit for the "exercising of democratic rights," and that they were also targeted by nationalists and populists who speculated their fears and anxieties against the newly established "democratic" order.[4]

All these objective aspects of labour explain the general tendency of Romanians to see labour (or work) in general as lacking the social and individual respect it deserves

[1] These aspects are described in Monica Ciobanu, "Reconstructing the Role of the Working Class in Communist and Postcommunist Romania," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3 (2009): 315–335.
[2] Ibid., 319.
[3] Ibid., 316.
[4] Ibid.

in a modern society and to tolerate a certain "work ethic," i.e. certain behaviours that are seen as unethical practices in the West. For so many years, especially after the slow disintegration of all ancient forms of collective work in the pre- and post-war period, labour has been integrated into modern society as an external, painful necessity, as mandatory labour, and not as free labour, sometimes poorly paid – as in the case of the peasants – that the majority of workers (industrial workers and peasants), despite the official propaganda, have not only been alienated from their work as any other modern worker, have but also been considered as socially inferior by the peculiar, status-oriented character of Romanian economy and society. Against all odds, this pattern survived throughout all the Communist decades, up to post-Communism.

Conclusion

In her explanation of "work ethics," Monica Heintz renounces the macro-cultural "mentality" approach of the Romanian cultural media, focusing on a rather different path: a micro-cultural social and behavioural approach, stressing the "belief in a behavior which is socially and not ethnically determined, leaving space for changes in values and attitudes, promoting agency, opening the possibility of detaching individual will from national agency."[1] Thus, the common "anti-work" attitudes (superficiality, corruption, no respect for punctuality, etc.) can be explained individually, by economical, historical, and social factors. These attitudes do exist, however, "they are not caused by a macro-cultural pattern, but by a special complex of factors, each dependent on the historical background, personality, education, motivation, and attitude and on the behavior of each individual."[2] She finally discovers a "lack of self-respect in relation to the ego of the individual and of the nation itself" as the cause for the current status of the "work ethics" in Romania, since "self-respect becomes a social factor by its power on the actions of the individual." The lack of self-respect "feeds back into the Romanian crisis, perpetuating it through misunderstandings or lack of will to change." A primarily subjective factor becomes, through social projection, a mass social perception.

However, the lack of "self-respect" cannot account for the whole picture. This is just the individual and social effect, not the *source* of the collective social attitude towards work. This collective attitude comes from the nature of work itself. Obviously, nobody will disagree that, socially, every individual is influenced differently by historical, economical, social factors. Our intention, however, was not just that, but to inquire into the deep historical, social, and economical mechanisms that have objectively determined a certain social and economical existence of labour and a certain pattern of working behaviour that has been sociologically explained as forming more or less collective attitudes, social expectations and social prejudices towards work. In other words, the answer lays in the general *nature* of modern work, which produces alienation, the separation of man from his work, universally, but also in the different historical, social and economical features that have influenced the nature of work as an economic and social phenomenon in Romania.

[1] Heintz, *Changes in Work Ethic in Postsocialist Romania*, 14.
[2] Ibid., 207.