UNRELIABLE ALLIES: THE PEASANTS IN THE ROMANIAN EARLY COMMUNIST DISCOURSE (1948-1965)

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I. Introduction

Marxism considered classes as objective entities defined by their relation to the means of production. However, the Soviet and Soviet-inspired regimes did not allow class identity to 'grow' from these objectively existing entities. Instead, they actively ascribed class to virtually all citizens[1] or, in other words, interpellated them.[2] Romania was no exception: after taking power, the communist party (named between 1948 and 1965 Romanian Workers' Party, hereafter RWP) began a process of identity ascription af-

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[1]   Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia", *The Journal of Modern History* 65, 4 (1993): 745-770; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "L'usage bolchévique de la 'classe'", *Actes de La Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 85, 1 (1990): 70-80; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks! : Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Isabel A. Tirado, "Peasants Into Soviets: Reconstructing Komsomol Identity in the Russian Countryside of the 1920s", *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 18 (2001): 42-63; Dmitri Stanchevich, "The Rhetorical Construction of Social Classes in the Reports of Stalin's Secret Police", *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 43, 3 (2013): 261-288; for China, see Eddy U, "Third Sister Liu and the Making of the Intellectual in Socialist China", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, 1 (2010): 57-83; Eddy U, "Reifications of the Intellectual: Representations, Organization and Agency in Revolutionary China", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 64, 4 (2013): 617-642; Eddy U, "What Was the Petty Bourgeoisie? Cultural Positioning and Reification of Marxist Classes in Early PRC Discourse", *Modern China*, 41, 6 (2014): 575-602.

[2]   Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

fecting older identities, from nation to ethnic minorities and from working class to women. This process was a mixture of terminological and conceptual changes (restricting use of some terms, defining new social actors and introducing new terms to name them). Using as main source a corpus containing 425 articles taken from the party daily *Scânteia* (*The Spark*)[3] on topics of class and class relations, this chapter attempts to investigate how the official discourse ascribed class identity to the Romanian peasantry[4] in the first two decades after RWP took power.

Class ascription was a form of making people visible and 'legible'[5] for the State bureaucracy, but it was also linked to procedures of establishing legitimacy. Louis Althusser viewed states ('ideological State apparatuses') as organizations aimed at maintaining a specific form of relations of production not by force alone, but also by presenting their claims as natural and unquestionable and by providing individuals with an identity as subjects of this naturalised order.[6] These subject positions or identities[7] were constructed in a discourse, that is, in a situated attempt to stabilise the meanings of terms designating the social world in a certain coherent, systematic configuration and to eliminate alternative meanings advanced by competing discourses.[8] The meaning is conferred by what Laclau and Mouffe call 'nodal points', that is,

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[3]   *Scânteia* (from 1954 on orthographed *Scînteia*) was the daily of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (between 1948 and 1965 Romanian Workers' Party). Between 1931, the year of its first issue, and 1944 it was published clandestinely. It ceased publication in December 1989, after the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu. It had a circulation of 800,000 to 900,000.

[4]   I am not referring to the peasantry as an extra-discursive, essential identity and, therefore, I am not positing it as more real in opposition to the less real communist ones. Here, I use it rather in the sense of Laclau and Mouffe's *element*, a signifier which is not yet articulated in a new discourse.

[5]   James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-3.

[6]   Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 173-174. See also, for interpellation in the Soviet context, Antony Kalashnikov, "Interpellation in the late Soviet period: contesting the de-ideologization narrative", *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 58, 1 (2016): 23-48.

[7]   I use the term *identity* to indicate the result of a prior operation of identification, which always takes place through discourse. Identity, in this sense, confers upon social actors two properties: coherence (how a certain actor can be understood to be 'the same' at different points in time) and distinctiveness (how can it be understood to be different from other actors). See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Ruth Wodak, Rudolf De Cillia, Martin Reisigl, Ruth Rodger, and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, 2nd ed. 2009). For a critique of the use of the concept of identity in social sciences, see Siniša Malešević, "Researching Social and Ethnic Identity: A Sceptical View", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 2, 2 (2003): 265-287; Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[8]   Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London; New York: Verso, 1985, 2nd ed. 2001).

higher order signifiers (such as *free market* or *patriotism*) that help articulate the other terms in a logically coherent fashion.[9]

In the communist discourse, particularly in its Stalinist phase, one of these nodal points was 'class struggle', which produced a discursive space organised in polar terms around a central conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie. All other social identities populating this space were defined in relation to this nodal point of class struggle. However, in incipient communist regimes the necessity to integrate actors with doubtful revolutionary pedigree made it necessary to allow more room between the polar categories of *us* and *them*. Thus, it is useful to conceive this space not in dichotomous terms, but as a continuum containing intermediary points.[10] The occupants of these different positions can be characterised by their relative *licitness*: they are not completely *us*, but neither completely *others*. Closer to *us*, they are more licit and less work is needed to completely integrate them in *our* world; further away, they are less licit (much work to be done) or not at all (radical change or destruction needed).[11] My interest lies in how the 'peasant identity' was articulated in this newly-created political space, particularly in relation to the positive, *us*-actors, among which the working class was the most important.

Officially, the peasantry was designated as an ally of the working class, contributing voluntarily to the transformation of the country, and this alliance was celebrated and enshrined in the constitution.[12] This is the image of an autonomous, conscious political actor. But given the Soviet experience (the distrustful attitude of Bolshevik leaders, the NEP and the collectivization) and the fact that, as in the early Soviet state, RWP had no real experience in rural problems, the position of the peasantry in this newly-created space was not guaranteed in the above-mentioned terms. My concrete aim is to see if the discourse constructs the 'peasant actors' as licit and endowed with their own capacity to act.

As we will see, the communist discourse splits *peasantry* (itself an already allocated identity) in a number of other 'peasant identities', marked textually in different ways and representing social actors[13] participating in different practices. I am interested in

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[9]   Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 112.

[10]   Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 33-48; Mads Bielefeldt Stjernø, "Vicissitudes of Post-Communist Identities. A Discourse Analysis of Czechoslovak and Czech Constructions of Political Identities, 1989-2000" (MA Thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2001), 31-32.

[11]   I adapt here the discussion in Bielefeldt Stjernø, "Vicissitudes of Post-Communist Identities", 31.

[12]   In its second article, the 1952 Constitution listed the alliance between the working class and the working peasantry as the basis of popular power in the country. See *Monitorul oficial*, 1, 27 September 1952.

[13]   To designate the referents of these identity-allocating terms, I hereafter use the term 'actor'.

providing a 'contextual definition' of the terms used to refer to these 'peasant identities', using an analytic framework developed within the discipline of social semiotics by Theo van Leeuwen for investigating the representation of social actors and their actions.[14] I want to see, first, how these actors are represented in discourse as *being* in the first place – whether they are interpellated as individual or collective, specific or generic, single or associated in groups, what are their boundaries, relations and so on. Second, I am interested in how these actors *act* – in what actions are they involved and in what roles are they distributed – are they performing the action or undergoing its effects? Van Leeuwen makes several distinctions between types of action: *doing* (material action), *meaning* (semiotic action), *behavioural* (*feeling* and *thinking*, mental processes).[15] Particularly important for my analysis are the material actions. These usually involve a transaction between two participants, following the schema *agent – action – patient* (or "who does what to whom"[16]). Since "the ability to 'transact' requires a certain power",[17] the involvement in these actions indicates how much the actor can affect the world around it or, in other words, if this actor is represented as having *agency*.

Selecting one lexico-grammatical option over the other to represent a certain reality helps solidifying and naturalizing the reality in a particular way (compare 'x *killed* y' with 'y *was killed*' or 'y's death'). This selection is, thus, a mechanism that enables ideology to operate.

I will supplement this with an analysis in terms of metaphor, particularly important when collective actors are interpellated. Representing the *working peasantry* as doing or being something signals a metaphoric transfer: the target domain, related to the complex social world (*working peasantry*) is conceived in terms of a better known, simpler source domain (gravitation, motion, human body, living being, movement along a path and so on). Metaphoric representation has effects not only on its target domain, but it spills over by "inferential generalisations",[18] facilitating the understanding of other aspects of the situation in terms of the selected metaphoric framework. In addition, the

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[14]   Theo van Leeuwen, "Language and Representation. The Recontextualisation of Participants, Activities and Reactions" (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1993); Theo van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Theo van Leeuwen, "The Representation of Social Actors", *Texts and Practices. Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 32-70; Theo van Leeuwen, "Representing Social Action", *Discourse & Society*, 6, 1 (1995): 81-106.

[15]   van Leeuwen, "Representing Social Action".

[16]   Deirdre Burton, "Through glass darkly: Through dark glasses", *Language and Literature: An Introductory Reader in Stylistics*, ed. by Ronald Carter (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 200.

[17]   van Leeuwen, "Representing Social Action", 90.

[18]   George Lakoff, "Contemporary Theory of Metaphor", *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. by Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 209.

use of metaphors is not limited to the deployment of a neutral cognitive mechanism to facilitate understanding, but performs ideological functions too,[19] since, as in the case of representing actors, the choices made in selecting the metaphoric framework encourage particular 'takes' in the discourse about social world.

In this chapter I discuss, first, how the 'peasant identities' were constructed as social actors, particularly in relation to other identities undergoing change at the same historical moment, trying also to chart their use in time. Next, I examine how the various actors were represented as performing actions in order to establish their 'action profile', from which I draw conclusions concerning their agency and discuss the link between their agency and licitness. But before I move on to the analysis, I will briefly sketch the historical context in which this process of class ascription took place.

II. Historical Context

At the end of the Second World War, Romanian rural population, comprising 76% of the total, faced numerous problems: fragmented and polarised land ownership, poor productivity, poor medical assistance, all compounded by the effects of the war.[20] In the first post-war years, the pro-Communist regime tried to establish a 'friendly relationship' with the peasants, enacting in 1945 a land reform which expropriated the large estates and redistributed the land to poor peasants, similarly to other reforms taking place in Eastern Europe at the time.[21] The declared goal of the law was "the establishment of strong, healthy and productive agricultural holdings which are the private property of those owning them", but, given the lack of other supporting policies, its effects were limited. In parallel, due to the post-war food shortages caused by war, drought and payment of war reparations, a system of quotas was introduced.[22] In the summer of 1948, after the Cominform conference in Bucharest discussing the strategy of collectivi-

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[19]   Andrew Goatly, *Washing the Brain: Metaphor and Hidden Ideology* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins 2007), 3.

[20]   Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania; Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951).

[21]   Dumitru Şandru, *Reforma agrară din 1945 în România* (Bucharest: Institutul Naţional pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000); Irwin T. Sanders, "Changing Status of the Peasant in Eastern Europe", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 271, 1 (1950): 78-93.

[22]   Constantin Iordachi and Dorin Dobrincu, "The Collectivisation of Agriculture in Romania, 1949-1952", *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements*, ed. by Constantin Iordachi and Arnd Bauerkämper (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2014), 256.

zation in the Eastern Bloc,[23] the RWP re-focused its discourse on the countryside, which was presented as a place of deep class divisions and conflict. In March 1949 a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the RWP launched officially the collectivization of agriculture. As in Soviet Union, it targeted several goals simultaneously: controlling the land, the last means of production outside of the control of the regime, securing food for the growing urban population, pushing a part of the rural workforce to town and industry and harnessing the agriculture to the effort of producing the capital needed for industrialization. In Romania, this process had three distinct phases. The first stage (1949-1953) was characterised by a wide range of strategies meant to determine the peasants to set up collective farms: persuasion, economic incentives (a quota system aimed to ruin the richer peasants and push the other peasants towards the collective farms), destruction of solidarity networks in villages, mass arrests and demonstrative violence.[24] This generated widespread discontent and violent revolts[25] and achieved mediocre results (in 1953 only 10% of the total arable land was collectivised). After Stalin's death, a phase of retreat ensued until 1957: quotas were eliminated in 1956, softer policies were implemented and looser forms of association were favoured (peasant associations instead of *kolkhoz*-type farms). The third phase (1957-1962) was characterised by targeted campaigns mobilizing thousands of party activists simultaneously, a tougher legal framework and, again, widespread violence, which had as result the complete collectivization of agriculture in 1962.

III. The Peasantry: from Homogeneous to Heterogeneous and Back

In the first post-war years (1945-1948) the rural population was referred to by only one term, the *peasantry* (*țărănimea*). The social actor designated by it was regarded as a container with opaque boundaries: the discourse did not 'look' inside it and no effort was made to actively define it. It was also homogeneous: its individual members, *the*

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[23] *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences, 1947/1948/1949*, ed. by Giuliano Procacci and Grant Mkrtychevich Adibekov (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1994), 617.

[24] Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 215-317; Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land", *East European Politics & Societies*, 25, 2 (2011): 361-87; Iordachi and Dobrincu, "The Collectivisation of Agriculture in Romania"; *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*, ed. by Dorin Dobrincu and Constantin Iordachi (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

[25] Iordachi and Dobrincu, "The Collectivisation of Agriculture in Romania", 271.

peasants, were regarded as similar, doing the same things and having the same goals. The *peasantry* existed in a world of similarly unitary and homogeneous actors, with well-defined boundaries – *working class*, *intellectuality*, *bourgeoisie* (*clasa muncitoare*, *intelectualitatea*, *burghezia*). Most frequently, the *peasantry* was represented as a victim of past injustices perpetrated by the exploiting classes and a recipient of help from the state after 1945. By virtue of its subaltern status, although the *peasantry* was not considered a revolutionary class, it was considered a "similar Other"[26] and a potential ally of the working class.

In the summer of 1948, the unitary and homogeneous character of the peasantry began to be questioned. The resolution of the Central Committee of the RWP in March 1949 that decided the start of collectivization called peasantry "the ally of the working class", but at the same time identified five strata of rural population: (1) rural proletariat (or landless peasants); (2) poor peasants; (3) middle peasants, considered as having a central role, since they detained half of the means of production and produced three fifths of the grain production; (4) the *chiaburi*, the bourgeoisie of the villages and (5) the remnants of the landowner class.[27] Thus, this fragmentation warranted the verdict that "[t]he peasantry is not, first of all, a class, but inside it there are deep and sharp class differentiations and contradictions".[28] As a consequence, after 1948 the term *peasantry* entered a period of restricted use, being replaced with terms designed to interpellate its various sub-members.

Two forms of categorization appeared in the first stage of collectivization, both Soviet imports. The first is the so-called "tripartite categorization",[29] based on the above mentioned categorization of rural population, according to which the peasantry was composed of poor peasants (*țărani săraci*), middle peasants (*țărani mijlocași*) – reunited under the umbrella term *working peasantry* (*țărănime muncitoare*) – and kulaks (*chiaburi*). The tripartite categorization was, by itself, a direct negation not only of the unitary character of the *peasantry*, but also of its licitness, because the *chiaburi* were simultaneously members of the peasantry *and* of the exploiting classes.

The membership in these three categories was governed by a set of criteria. Peasants were *poor* if they owned up to five hectares, *middle* if they owned between five and ten hectares and *chiaburi* if their land surface was over ten hectares or if they fulfilled one of the numerous supplementary criteria (owning means of production, employing paid

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[26] Bielefeldt Stjernø, "Vicissitudes of Post-Communist Identities", 31-32.

[27] *Rezoluția ședinței plenare a Comitetului Central al P.M.R. din 3-5 Martie 194*9 (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1949), 12-14.

[28] Nestor Ignat, "Clasa muncitoare, forța conducătoare", *Scânteia*, 12 July 1948, 1.

[29] Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class", 751.

work and so on, all these correlated with soil quality, productivity, family size or geographical area). These criteria were touted as objective and clear, but they were changeable and extremely interpretable[30], allowing the party activists involved in collectivization much leverage in how they categorized the peasants.

The tripartite categorization was directly linked to the start of the collectivization and had practical importance, because it prescribed distinct fiscal duties for each category, in a steep progressive quota system designed to push peasants to form collective farms (their members were exempt from contributions). It thus was a way of embodying class in daily practice, reifying it.[31] Moreover, the discourse attempted to transform the members of this categorization into full-fledged collective actors (*poor* and *middle peasantry* and *chiaburime* – an equivalent to Soviet term *kulachestvo*) with clearer boundaries and more homogeneous contents than the now-backgrounded actor *peasantry*. In other words, it tried to introduce a 'classification', which, in van Leeuwen's terms, is a form of identifying social actors as "what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are",[32] in terms of "major categories by means of which a given society or institution differentiates between classes of people".[33]

The second form of categorization was 'administrative'. It distinguished the peasants based on their membership in various associative or institutional organizations promoted during collectivization. Its categories were the *individual peasants* (*țărani individuali*), the *collectivist peasants* (*țărani colectiviști*) and the *associated peasants* (*țărani întovărășiți*, members of agricultural associations, similar to the Soviet TOZ, considered a precursor of the full-fledged collective). Unlike classifications, which categorize people in terms of what they 'are', this type of categorization, termed by van Leeuwen *functionalization*, occurs when "social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, for instance, an occupation or role".[34] Differently from the tripartite categorization, which had legal and fiscal weight, these were not linked to categories of class and class struggle and their boundaries were less significant from the point of view of licitness: for example, the category of *individual peasant* was not attached a negative value. Consequently, they were 'softer' forms of identity ascription and no effort was

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[30]   Robert Levy, "The First Wave of Collectivization Campaign: Central Policies and Their Regional Implementation (1949-1953)", *Transforming Peasants*, ed. by Dobrincu and Iordachi, 27-48.

[31]   David L. Hoffmann, "The 'Peasantisation of the Soviet Working Class: Peasant Migration's Ebb and Flow, 1917-1932", *Transforming Peasants. Society, State and the Peasantry, 1861-1930*, ed. by Judith Pallot (London: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 125; Stanchevich, "The Rhetorical Construction of Social Classes", 269.

[32]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 42.

[33]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 42.

[34]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 42.

made towards constructing a positive identity, even if some of them were represented as collective actors (the *cooperatist peasantry*).

Differently from both the 'administrative categorization' and the pre-1948 *peasantry*, much effort was invested in constructing a positive identity for the sub-classes of the 'tripartite categorization', this becoming the focus of peasant identity construction in the Stalinist phase (up to 1953). The umbrella term *working peasantry* intended to designate a totally licit actor reuniting *poor* and *middle peasantry* and was defined as "the peasantry that does not exploit the work of others".[35] The choice of the qualifier *working* signaled both the break, and the continuity with the now backgrounded pre-1948 identity of *peasantry*. Moreover, it was a clear reference to the working class and marked politically, not only in terms of stratification, the difference between itself and the *chiaburi*, defined as peasants having an illicit relation to work – they did not work or used the work of other people.

In my corpus, the terms *working class*, *chiaburi* and *progressive intellectuality* are frequent collocates of the term *working peasantry*. The first two were distributed in polar roles, as ally and, respectively, enemy, while *intellectuality* appeared associated with the *working class* and *working peasantry* in the so-called 'two classes and a half' formula.[36] The third frequent collocate is the *party*, whose role was to realize "the policy of strengthening the alliance between the working class and the working peasantry".[37] The alliance was thus conceived in two contradictory ways: a direct relation between classes as two human-like and self-conscious actors, via the metaphor 'social group as an individual' and as physical entity having its own, open-ended dynamics – it hardened, it solidified, it could be weakened by other actors, hence the need for party assistance. This foregrounded the role of the party and emphasized the lack of autonomy of the two class actors involved.

Within the tripartite categorization, the main target of interpellation was the *middle peasantry*. The *poor* and the *middle peasants* were frequently represented as associated,[38] that is, as involved together in the same actions, which signalled strong connections and a certain convergence of their identities. However, the association is asymmetrical: in my corpus *poor peasants* are associated in 67% of cases with *middle peasants*, while the latter are associated in only 27% of cases with *poor peasants*. In other words, *poor peasants* were represented as more dependent of the middle peasants

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[35] "Cu privire la lupta de clasă la ţară", *Scânteia*, 16 July 1948.

[36] Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 84.

[37] Alexandru Moghioroş, "Întărirea partidului clasei muncitoare, chezăşia victoriei socialismului în Romînia", *Scânteia*, 6 June 1952, 2.

[38] Van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 38.

than inversely. The collocates of the terms designating each actor are different: for the *poor peasants/peasantry* they are *middle peasantry* and *relying on* (as in "our party is relying on the poor peasantry"), while for the *middle peasants/peasantry* these are *chiabur (kulak)*, *policy*, *alliance*, *poor peasants/peasantry*. This suggests that *middle peasantry* was situated in a wider social environment, surrounded by other actors (*party*, *chiaburi*) and involved in other relationships (*alliance*, *policy*). As in the case of the superordinate actor *working peasantry*, the *party* played also an important role for the two actors, but in a different way: it *relied upon poor peasantry* (see the above-mentioned collocate), while with the *middle peasantry* it was *allied* or followed a certain *policy* towards it. In addition, compared to the *working peasantry* – allied with the *working class* –, the *middle peasantry* was allied directly to the *party*, signalling its prominence in the official discourse during collectivization.

The presence of the *chiaburi* among the relevant actors of the *middle peasants/peasantry* is due to the need to differentiate between the two. Over 20% of the total occurrences of the term *middle peasant* dealt with how to correctly classify one as such or as *chiabur*. In comparison, there was no sustained effort to differentiate the *middle peasant* from the *poor peasant*, the stratification boundary being considered sufficient. Thus, the biggest stake in drawing the internal boundaries within the tripartite categorization was to determine who was on the right, respectively wrong side of the border of licitness.

The need to clearly define the *middle peasants* is highlighted by the use of generic reference, or what van Leeuwen calls "genericization".[39] This consists in abstracting the typical features of a class of actors and attributing them to a prototypical actor, in this case *the middle peasant*.[40] Its features were presented as the essence of that identity, suggesting the respective group was homogeneous.

Not all actors were genericized in Romanian discourse. At the top end of the scale are *the middle peasant* (26% of occurrences), *the chiabur* (10%), *the woman* (9%) and *the enemy* (the highest score of all analysed actors, 34%). At the bottom end are *the worker* (2,8%), *the intellectual* (2,3%) and *the poor peasant* (3%). This distribution of genericiza-

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[39]   In van Leeuwen's words, genericization is a according to which "generalized essences, classes, constitute the real and in which specific participants are 'specimens' of those classes"; van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 35.

[40]   As Petre Petrov convincingly shows, the Stalinist cultural model included what he calls the "gnomic" statement, which refers to concrete events, situations and social actors, but has also an intrinsic generic value derived from the timeless truth of the Marxist-Leninist theory, this leading to the fusion of the generic and the specific. Here, however, I use a narrower criterion, considering as generic only the prototypical reference, indicated by the use of the singular (the middle peasant) and simple present tense. See Petre Petrov, "The Soviet Gnomic: on the Peculiarities of Generic Statements in Stalinist Officialese", *The Vernaculars of Communism. Language, Ideology and Power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Petre Petrov and Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 40-62.

tion allows detecting the important sites of interpellation: the higher the score, the more strategically important the respective actor was as subject of interpellation. What is significant for our discussion is that no other 'peasant identity' is so intensely genericized.

The prototypical middle peasant was described in terms of mental processes and psychological life: hesitant, but calculated, reluctant to offer support to the regime and joining the collective farm only after having proof of its advantages. He was considered capable of reaching conclusions rationally and making marginal utility calculations, but this placed him in a dubious position, as unreliable ally, by difference from the *poor peasant* or *worker*, who sided with the party without waiting for the benefits to become evident.

Genericization was not used to neutrally give information about a social actor, but to provide to party activists a 'code of conduct' towards it:[41]

> The middle peasant is a practical man. He wants to see the advantages that he has if he follows this path. To convince the middle peasant, we have to pursue towards him a policy based on FACTS. To get him rid of indecision, we have to show him by FACTS the advantages he has if he joins the working class and the poor peasantry.[42]

By genericization, the production of identity came full circle and had a strong essentializing component. The first step in the process was what Underhill calls "personified reification": individuals are objectified (the *masses*), then "the objectified assembly of people is conversely personified" by resorting to metaphors,[43] which flesh out the new identities by giving them psychological traits. By genericization, these traits were then attributed to a prototypical individual, who functioned metonymically and had the role of expressing the essence of the class.

However, there was a discursive undercurrent representing these identities as unstable. A litmus test for this was the perceived upward mobility involving members of the tripartite categorization, described and decried frequently up to 1953. It was maintained that, under the 'propitious conditions assured by the party', many poor peasants became middle peasants and many middle peasants became *chiaburi*, crossing the boundary of licitness. However, the premises of this evolution were in-built in the process of class

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[41]   Stanchevich remarks the insistence of the early Bolshevik informative ChK materials (svodkas) in emphasizing "the consistency and intensity of this class division and the attitudes associated with each class". Stanchevich, "The Rhetorical Construction of Social Classes", 277.

[42]   "Să întărim alianța cu țăranul mijlocaș", *Scânteia*, 25 June 1949, 1, capitals in original.

[43]   James W. Underhill, *Creating Worldviews. Metaphor, Ideology and Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 105.

ascription. Membership was defined administratively by the state,[44] using rigid, but in practice easily surmountable criteria: a hectare of land could make one a poor peasant or a middle peasant. As the class was essentialized and thought to be inscribed in the *psyche* of individual members, Party officials interpreted change in the above-mentioned designators as change in class consciousness, which was dangerous because it blurred the distinctions between licit and illicit.[45]

The use of terms designating 'peasant identities' evolved in time. The tripartite categorization was intensely used between 1948 and 1953, in the first stage of collectivization, after which the use of the terms *poor* and *middle peasant* dropped steeply, virtually disappearing after 1955. The term *chiabur* continued to be used until in the final stage of collectivization (1957-1962), albeit less frequently than before. The *working peasantry* had a longer and more consistent career, starting in 1948 and continuing until mid-1960s, albeit with decreasing intensity after 1960. The 'administrative' categorization (*individual*, *associated* and *collectivist peasant*) started to be used in parallel with the tripartite categorization, but its use did not fluctuate in time, registering only a small increase after the 1953 strategy shift in collectivization − consisting in abandoning temporarily the constitution of collective farms and favouring the looser 'agricultural associations' − and disappearing in the last phase of the collectivization.

The term *peasantry* had a sinuous trajectory. As an immediate consequence of the introduction of the two categorizations (tripartite and administrative), it entered a period of restricted use. It was used in negative contexts, to highlight the lack of unity and purity or the backwardness of its referent, in historical accounts or as a background identity for its sub-groups, as in 'the working masses *of the peasantry*'. From 1956 on, in a period of relative relaxation of the collectivization, the rules of restricted use changed: the term was used again to refer to present events and in positive contexts, in parallel with the terms *working* and *collectivist peasantry*. As these latter terms underwent a slow decline after the end of collectivization in 1962, the term *peasantry* completely replaced them in all contexts. This evolution coincided with the 'purification' of its ranks: since the *chiaburi* were considered annihilated as a class towards the end of the 1950s, the class struggle within the peasantry had no point anymore. On the other hand, this ascendant course in the construction of the new peasantry was made possible not only

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[44] Hoffmann, "The 'Peasantization' of the Soviet Working Class", 124-125.

[45] Adding to that, social mobility in the peasantry was considered potentially malignant if not evolving out of the peasantry, but within. Moreover, the mobility was taken into consideration only if it was ascendant, thus capable of offering arguments for a disadvantageous (from the point of view of the individual) re-classification, since once a *chiabur* was classified as such, it could not become middle peasant even if he sold the land. See also Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120.

by the disappearance of *chiaburi*, but also by deemphasizing its internal divisions, loudly asserted before (the existence of the poor and middle peasantry). This paved the way for a new paradigm in the construction of political community as composed of two non-antagonistic classes, the working class and the peasantry, which was the mainstay of the official description of the class structure in Romanian late socialism.[46] Occurring almost simultaneously with the discursive reintegration of other older identities (such as the *nation*), this is an instance of what Jowitt termed "selective reintegration of tradition" after the relevance of this tradition has been decisively altered.[47]

Class ascription was, thus, an ebb-and-flow process, complicated by the inherent indeterminacy discussed above. In this process, identities appeared, gained clear-cut boundaries and class essence, only to suddenly drop out of use as result of a change in RWP's strategy (for example the *poor* and *middle peasant*). In this 'mixed-mode inter-pellation', sudden changes in establishing subject positions alternated with slow, gradual evolutions or with periods of stabilization and 'normalization'. Thus, in a communist State, the ideology worked both covertly, as a naturalizing and 'soporific' alternative to coercion, as Althusser described it, but also overtly.

IV. Peasants as Agents and Patients

The next part is devoted to analysing the agency conferred in discourse to the 'peasant actors'. There is a certain similarity in how the agency of all peasant actors is constructed. On the other hand, in several respects *middle peasantry* stands out, showing small, but relevant differences. I will first present the common features and then discuss the differences between these actors.

First, the 'peasant actors' affected the surrounding world very little. They performed mostly standard instrumental actions, which by definition take as patient an object, not an animate actor:[48] they *harvested* their crops, *sowed* and *worked* the fields, *sold* their produce, *joined* their lands or *handed over* their quotas. They performed few interactive

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[46]   Călin Anastasiu, "Premise teoretice ale abordării structurii de clasă în socialism", *Structură socială. Diversificare, diferenţiere, omogenizare*, ed. by Honorina Cazacu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1988), 27-55; Elisabeta Trăistaru and Ion Trăistaru, *Omogenizarea societăţii româneşti* (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 1979); Honorina Cazacu, "Mobilitatea socială şi structura de clasă", *Dinamica structurii de clasă în etapa construirii societăţii socialiste multilateral dezvoltate*, ed. by Ilie Rădulescu (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1972), 159-214.

[47]   Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1971), 115.

[48]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 60.

actions, that is, actions accepting only animate patients[49] – the most significant was the *unmasking* of the *chiaburi*. The collective actors (particularly the *working peasantry*) performed instrumental actions having as object rather abstract entities: they *supported* the democratic popular regime, *took* the power in their hands, *conquered* the freedom. As we can see, most of these actions were specific – no other actor performed them –, were circumscribed in time and space or extended upon abstract patients.

Second, these actors were passivized, that is, they were patients of actions performed by other actors, who were implicitly constructed as more powerful. It is significant that these powerful agents were situated on both sides of the border of licitness (negative – *landowners*, *kulaks*, *exploiters* – or positive – *the party*, *the working class*). Also, there was a difference in the temporality of their actions. In the past, the *peasants* were defenseless victims of radical interactive actions aiming at their physical integrity or welfare, which were performed by actors such as the landowners, the old regime and their agents: they were *robbed*, *killed*, *oppressed*, *played off against each other*, *hurt*, *shot*, *forced*, *herded*, *pushed* and *exploited*. In the 'present' time the *chiaburi* (the actualised enemy) performed also interactive actions, but these were not radical: the *peasants* were surreptitiously *influenced* by the *chiaburi*, suggesting they were in a state of semi-consciousness,[50] easily manipulable.

In relation to licit agents, the 'peasant actors' were passivized in three main ways: (a) they were patients in 'soft' interactive actions – they were *convinced*,[51] *educated* or *stimulated*; (b) they were represented as receiving benefits from the party and the working class (they were *supported*, *helped*, *freed*, *delivered from the yoke of the exploiters*); finally, (c) they were patients of instrumental actions performed by positive actors, the *party*, the *working class* and *the state*: they – in particular the *poor peasants* – were *led*, *attracted*, *supported*, *lifted* or *moved* towards the working class. The instrumental actions typically accept objects as patients, but here these objects were animate (either as individual or as anthropomorphised collective actors), meaning that they were treated *as objects*, further diminishing their status.[52] These actions were inscribed within two related metaphoric frameworks, spatial and inertial. In the spatial metaphor used here, the defining positions (*up – down* and *center – periphery*) were attached ethical values: *up* and *center* was good, *down* and *periphery* was bad. As in all modernization discourses, 'peasant actors'

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[49]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 60.

[50]   Referring to the representation of peasantry in Chinese official discourse, Ann Anagnost observed a similar tendency of passivization: "The Chinese peasantry, it would seem from post-Maoist representations, is an 'object' that must be awaked from a state of torpor". Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times. Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 86.

[51]   For this, see Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants".

[52]   van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 61.

were placed *down*, particularly in relation to the *working class*, or they were presented in the process of being *lifted* or *attracted*, suggesting they were inert, heavy bodies. The agents (the party and the working class) were implicitly more powerful and licit than their patients, whereas the peasantry was 'excentric' and immobile. The typical patient of these actions was the *poor peasantry*, thus its high level of licitness was coupled with a low level of agency – it was treated as a fixture rather than as an autonomous actor.

A third common feature is that the 'peasant actors' were represented as having mental states and affective reactions: they *had suffered* in the past, they *wanted* justice, *desired* change, *were happy* about the favourable policies directed to them. These behavioural reactions construed the *peasantry* as an affect-dominated actor. It is significant that the positive affects were characteristic of the 'purified peasantry' after 1955, in the context of a discourse which highlighted the raised living standards.

There is an exception to this general picture: the *middle peasantry*. This actor was not presented as benefitting unconditionally from the actions of the powerful positive actors, was less passivized and represented as victim only when associated with the *poor peasant/peasantry*. It engaged in actions denoting superior mental processes (*to see*, *to bear in mind*, *to realize*, *to think*), which elevated it to a superior status as compared to the *poor peasants*. These actions clustered around the topic of economic reasoning mentioned above – the *middle peasant reasoned* about the benefits of entering the collectives and acted only after he *saw* the benefits.

Also differently from the *poor peasantry*, *middle peasantry* was represented as capable of meaningful interaction, *understanding* the favourable policies implemented and becoming an ally of the party. The *middle peasantry* had more features of a human-like, rational actor compared to other 'peasant actors' and particularly to poor peasantry. In the hierarchy of possessing human-like features, the *middle peasantry* was accompanied by the *working class*, but also by *chiaburi* and *enemies*, represented too as powerful actors characterised by *thinking* and *doing*, albeit in a totally deviant framework.[53]

To put it in a nutshell, 'peasant actors' were largely passive – either victims, recipients of benefits, or inert actors in need of guidance and administration.[54] The *middle peasantry* was marginally more activated and autonomous, but in a deviant way, since its autonomy was expressed as economic rationality. By virtue of their passivation, they occupied the same structural position in the discourse as *the women* and *the youth*,[55] also

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[53] Călin Morar-Vulcu, *Republica își făureşte oamenii: construcţia identităţilor politice în discursul oficial în România, 1948-1965* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2007), 209-210.

[54] Olga Velikanova, *Popular Perceptions of Soviet Politics in the 1920s: Disenchantment of the Dreamers* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 98.

[55] Morar-Vulcu, *Republica își făureşte oamenii*, 209-210.

very passivized actors, by difference from the essentially active actors of the communist discourse: *the party*, *the working class*, *the enemy*, *the bourgeoisie* and *the kulaks*.

V. Help, Alliance and Moral Debt

We have seen that help was a major topic involving 'peasant actors' as patients. First, we can notice the pair 'past victimization'-'present beneficialization',[56] which was inscribed in a narrative whose agents (both positive and negative) were allocated the actantial roles of Subject and Opponent, while the passive peasants were the Object. This narrative facilitated the inference that all 'peasant actors' had a moral debt and implicitly requested the payment of this debt by acquiescing in the goals and policies promoted by the RWP.

Second, there was a special 'dynamics of help' between the *working peasantry* and the *working class*. The *working peasants* were helped by the *workers* not only in political, but also in concrete matters. For instance, they helped the *working peasants* to perform agricultural work at peak times or repaired their tools, while the *working class* helped by producing machinery and putting it at the disposal of the *working peasantry*. This framing – collective actors helping other collective actors – indicated the functionalist nature of the envisaged political community. In it, each actor was allocated specific roles and areas of competence – the *working peasantry* in agriculture, the *working class* in industry and in politics, the two being distinct. In this functionalist framework, the helper not only fulfilled its specifically prescribed role, but provided help to another, who failed in fulfilling his. This elevated the helper on a superior moral position compared to the recipient. What is more, unlike the *working class*, the *working peasantry* was never represented as offering help to anyone.

It is useful to link this discussion with the topic of alliance between the working class and the peasantry. This alliance was presented, on the one hand, as generated by the consciousness of the two classes, engaged in the pursuit of a common goal, building socialism. On the other hand, it looked like a contractual relationship between the two classes, viewed as agents providing each other goods and services. The working class produced industrial goods[57] and political freedom for the working peasantry which, in

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[56]   Beneficialised actors are the ones that benefit from the action of other actors, van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 33.

[57]   As Kenneth Jowitt wrote, the central site of the alliance between the working peasantry and the working class were the Machine and Tractor Stations, "organisations imposed on the countryside to perform control functions" and implement the official policies of containing the kulaks and manipulating support for poor peasants. Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs*, 123.

exchange, produced foodstuffs and political support for the working class, again in a functionalistic schema:

> An important factor in the strengthening of the alliance is the goods exchange between village and town, exchange that ties together the working class and the working peasantry through their mutual economic interests. The workers [...] provide to the working peasantry ever more agricultural machinery, tools, clothing and all sorts of goods peasants and their households need. By selling to the State the quotas foreseen to be collected [...], the working peasantry ensures the supply of foodstuffs to the working population in towns.[58]

Thus, the alliance was motivated by class self-interest, and this (in fact, Joseph Stalin's position) was repeatedly asserted until 1953 and in a more attenuated way later. But, as in the case of help, the contribution of each actor was valued differently: for the peasantry it was a *duty*, while for the working class it was a *bonus* awarded to the *working peasantry* (its output was conceptualised as *help* or *gift* to the peasantry). In a broader sense, what the *working peasantry* did was seen as following the logic of the contract and economic calculation (here the middle peasantry was the case in point, as we have already seen), while what the working class did was seen as altruistic behaviour, which feeds back into the topic of help discussed above. To sum up, the discourse of help and alliance placed the *working peasantry* in a morally delicate position, that of debtor which has to repay its benefactors, but cannot or does not want to. Thus, although the working peasantry was presented as a trusted ally, its full engagement of for the cause was implicitly questioned.

VI. Conclusion

The answer to my initial question has to take into account the multiplicity of the 'peasant identities', which were different in terms of licitness and evolved in distinct ways. In the first phase, the peasantry was a unitary actor with an unclear position on the licit-illicit continuum (which was itself in process of forming). In the second, hard collectivization phase (1948-1953), this unitary identity split in many sub-identities with different levels of licitness: totally licit (*poor peasantry*), less licit (*middle peasantry*), totally illicit (*chiaburi*). The partner of the working class was the working peasantry, composed of two actors with different levels of licitness, which implied that this actor was permanently undermined by its heterogeneous nature and was represented as mo-

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[58]   "Alianța între clasa muncitoare și țărănimea muncitoare", *Scânteia*, 23 May 1951, 1.

rally indebted and politically inert. The third phase witnessed the slow ascent of a new unitary actor, designated by an old name (peasantry), which replaced all other categories in a context where the licit character was not discussed in the same terms as in the first phase of collectivization.

Despite the many forms of interpellation, the resulting actors had a common feature: they were non-autonomous – they had very little agency and were intensely passivized. The middle peasantry, less passivated and marginally more activated, was less licit in part due to two factors: the marginalist economic rationality – which conferred it a modicum of agency – and its proximity with the *chiaburi*. Thus, it seems that the licitness did not correlate linearly with activation. At the totally licit end of the spectrum, the correlation is direct – licit actors are powerful and autonomous actors. Outside it, this correlation is inverse: the most licit actors are the most passivized, reinforcing thus the hierarchical view of the society in which the revolutionary centre activated the periphery. If we see the interpellation in its productive dimension too, describing, but also prescribing roles, this representation did not encourage the subjects to see themselves at the same time as autonomous, licit and conscious actors, but always as dependent and deriving their political legitimacy from their dependence.