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"As you own, so shall you reap". Romanians Between the Feudal and Knowledge-Based Economy

Pieter van Abshoven, Alphen aan den Rijn

A man comes into a restaurant, introduces himself as an inspector and is invited into the owner's office. The inspector sits down and immediately starts to write out fines. Surprised, the owner asks: "Why are you writing out a fine? You haven't checked anything." The inspector says: "If you want me to check, OK, but then the fine will be double."

An external auditor told me another one. When an organization she audits gets a tax inspection, she is present to show the inspector all the documents. She leafs through the documents, to show the inspector where something has been done against the law so he can write out a fine. This way the auditor shows the inspector mistake after mistake, until the inspector is satisfied with the amount of fines.

And this way everybody is happy. Doing things exactly according to the law is sometimes completely impossible because of contradicting legal statutes, or very expensive and complicated. So it is easier and cheaper to pay fines and leave things as they are.

The only way an inspector can convince his superior that he has done a thorough control is by showing him the fines. At his department they are only interested in the amount of fines given. This way a control is rather easy. Nobody in the organization will ask the inspector how things should be improved, or how fines can be avoided in the future. He is sent there to impose fines - not to justify them - and certainly not to give away advice about how to avoid them. To visit an organization, give them a list of items for short-term improvement, come back a second time to check on their progress, and give approval after the improvements are made, all this would mean two visits, hard work, and then returning home with no results to show for it.

In 2001, two articles appeared around the same time in local newspapers about actions taken against fare-dodging in commuter trains in the Bucharest area. One article reported on how a train was stopped in the middle of nowhere, where soldiers and police with dogs were waiting. They ordered all 1,700 passengers to exit the train to be checked. It turned out that 1,500 of them had no valid ticket. Certainly many will have claimed they paid directly to the conductor, commonly called *naşul* in Romanian, meaning "godfather". So they had the choice: walk or

pay a fine. The fine was at a special reduced rate, and for a few Euros, people could continue their journey by train. After they got back on the train, a fight broke out over the available seats in the train. Having paid the real ticket price, each thought he had a right to a seat. The newspaper did not question the effectiveness of this action.

Meanwhile, Western specialists are designing projects with various sorts of control mechanisms, mid-term and final evaluations, monitoring missions, etc. etc. "Control", "inspection" - these words sound familiar to East European ears. Donors require that humanitarian organizations should be locally owned. But if you ever hear the presidents or directors of NGOs talking about "my foundation", it might make one wonder if they have the same definition of "ownership". Or how to understand the meaning of "partnership" when one sees how ministers treat NGOs as part of their own ministries.

Like the words "volunteer", "cooperative", "audit", "lobby", "fundraising" and many others, they are understood completely differently as they are in Western Europe, although in most European languages they sound the same. In Romania the word "pyramid" refers to pyramid schemes, "lottery" to the lottery for a US immigrant visa from the American Embassy, "NGO" to the illegal tax-free import of second-hand cars, and "pavement" is now the place where cars are parked. Hiring craftsmen, *mester* in Romanian, means you have to provide the tools, go out and buy your own materials, and tell them exactly what to do and how to do it. A positive exception is found here in traditional artisans and craftsmen, whose work ranges from plasterwork and roof-gutters, carpets and towels, to ceramics and religious art in the form of icons and wooden churches.

During four years living in Romania and working with a number of NGOs in rural development, human rights, street children, home care, and minorities, I have come across a great number of concepts that are understood in contradictory ways. From earlier experiences in Romania I already knew that *cooperativă* meant the opposite of cooperative. In the Communist era, there was little cooperation in a *cooperativă*. The operating principle for the workers was: "They pretend to pay us, we pretend to work." They would steal hay and potatoes from their own *cooperativă agricolă de producţie*. And of course the management had its own ways of extracting some personal benefit at the expense of their own organizations. Attempts were made to use other words, in this case *asociaţie* but this could not dispel public suspicions that others might gain more benefits than they would. My first publication about my work experience was called "a small incomplete dictionary of post-communist Romanian" explaining the Romanian meaning of some hundred words.

The word *cooperativă* is used now in the Romanian press to refer to the cooperation between Romanian football clubs to fix the outcome of a match before

playing it[1]. And it is also used to refer to similar activities in other fields. For every West European working in Romania, it remains difficult to communicate with people using terms like "customer-friendliness", "efficiency", "responsibility", "planning", "loyalty", "result", "community", etc. Many terms - especially those referring to economic and social relations - create misunderstandings, causing projects to fail and rapid burnout for expatriates.

Searching for explanations in the history of the region, many people have blamed the communist period. And of course, the present situation results directly from the previous one, and much of people's perceptions are a continuation of the communist period. But were the communists really the first, and did they create something completely new? In a country like Romania it was only a very small group that within a few years would establish a regime. Granted the regime had the threat of the Soviet Union behind it, but Romanians working as functionaries at all levels understood quite well how to function under the new order.

As Romanians speak about the changes in their country thirteen years after the revolution of 1989, many complain that mentality has not yet changed. Chiefs are still chiefs, and clients still are not kings. This provides an opportunity to look further into the past, and investigate the economic system and social relations on a deeper level.

The economy

Explaining the differences in economic strategies, I have often used the concept of a library as an example. For many people a good library is an impressive monumental building, possessing an enormous quantity of books. The Western idea is that of a system; it could be a database, providing information to as many consumers as possible, preferably information with real usefulness to the consumer. In the Romanian system, accessibility is not a priority. What really counts is the possession of the building and the books. The assumption is that it will maintain its value. But nothing today in Europe is more perishable than information.

The central concept here is depreciation. In a balance sheet, the reduction of the value of the goods invested is called depreciation, and in the profit and losses accounts, it is added to the losses. So the profit must compensate for this value reduction, and the money must be maintained to reinvest when the economic lifespan of an investment has ended. In Western Europe this is common bookkeeping theory. In Romania the law on administration, which tells you how to keep your books in the smallest details, does not envisage depreciation. Investment goods must only be put on an inventory list, called *patrimoniu,* wit the original price at the time of purchase. With the extremely high devaluation of the local currency the total of such an inventory list is a senseless figure. When the organisation

[1] See e.g. the newspapers *Cotidianul* 26 November 2001, 10 March 2002, or *Curierul National,* 13 December 2002.

wants to get rid of old investment goods, it needs a notarial act to remove it from the inventory. So, for most organisations, the cheapest and easiest way to deal with old and useless computers is to store them in a corner and keep them on the inventory list for eternity. Or give them as a free loan to non-profit organisations, so that whenever the financial police come for a control the goods can be shown.

The effect is that the capital of an organisation always increases. The economic performance can not be seen from the account the bookkeeper has to make according to the law. As a consequence, there is no incentive to reinvest, or to maintain the value of the investment goods through their proper maintenance. If an asset is not depreciated, and not even a small part of its value can be put into the profit or loss accounts, then there is no point to know the value of the asset and to express it in terms of current value.

Not every asset is written off at the same time and in the same way. Nor do fixed rules exist which define in which way and how fast certain assets should be written off. Sometimes the economic life span is directly related to the use of the goods: it is only used a certain number of times or for a certain number of kilometres. In other cases only the time matters. A news item or a press photo loses its value in a few days or at most a few weeks. Within that short period it must generate income and regain the money invested. The costs for making an extra copy to sell are minimal. This means than when enough copies are sold to recover the initial costs, each extra copy sold generates a high profit. But the risks are high. If this critical amount is not reached, losses are also high.

Modern technological devices are written off in just a few years. Cars in five to ten years. Buildings in tens of years. And finally, land is not written off. Land never loses value. The price of land may vary, according to the quirks of the market. But it never loses its value gradually and steady as other assets. In Romanian administrative law it appears that every asset is treated like land. But not only the law treats assets like land. If it would have been only the law, society would have changed the law long before. It is important to look at how people perceive assets, how they think about land and the ownership of land.

After the revolution of 1989 a process of land restitution started. But people started to cultivate the land in a rather primitive way. Clearly most people did not have the money to invest in machines, seeds, etc. But very little was done to improve the situation, or in an effective way. People were returned the original small plots they previously owned, and no redistribution followed to improve efficiency. Long disputes over property rights made redistribution practically impossible. But these were not what made redistribution impossible, rather they were a symptom why it would not be feasible. Being an owner was what mattered most. How to earn a decent living from the land was of secondary importance.

It was difficult for people to find alternatives offering a higher return on their investment. The main problem was that the alternatives were very risky. In the nineties, on average, one bank or investment institution went bankrupt every year.

In these bankruptcies and in the downfall of *Caritas,* a pyramid scheme, many small savers lost their money and their confidence in the financial system of the country. So keeping land was the safest way not to lose capital, and also the best way to secure a food supply. And in this way, older peasants could secure their relations with their children living in town. As Verdery wrote: Property is about social relations, relations among persons rather than between persons and things. It shows that one cannot set things off as wholly separate from the persons who exercise property rights, for property is also about self and definitions of selfhood (Verdery 1998). In many parts of Eastern Europe for centuries, and until quite recently, land ownership was never the normal position for a villager.

Feudal ownership

Land was owned in a feudal system until the middle of the nineteenth century when serfdom was formally abolished. A feudal estate was quite different from a plantation. The plantation owner is an agriculturist, organising the agricultural activities centrally at the level of the plantation. Feudal landowners were nobles, who received land from the sovereign as a reward for what they had done in the military or in the administration. Monasteries also received land as a gift. But what was peculiar was that they received land along with the people living and working on it. And without much further input, they intended to draw a profit from these lands. There were two different ways. The first and the oldest method was to have the serfs work the domain of the owner. This work the serfs had to do with their own tools. In exchange for this labour they could cultivate small plots for their own consumption. The other way was for the serfs to pay a fixed tax per person per year. With the land and its people the owner could in principle do as he pleased. And they needed his permission for almost everything, including marriages. They were bound to the land. To express that he was the total exclusive owner of land and people, the typical feudal way of ruling was arbitrariness. The owner had full administrative and judicial authority over his serfs (Okey 1986: 26) and could make his own rules and apply them when and how it suited him best. People depended totally on his goodwill. There was always the risk that he would reverse a measure and take back what he had given earlier. They did not receive what was their right; they received only favours, which always could be taken back. And there was no court where they could go to seek justice. Not only were peasants owned but also artisans. For owners in a country like Romania, it was quite interesting to have Gypsy slaves for specific skills that could not be found among the Romanians.

For the landowner his property was a permanent and secure thing which did not need much care. He only had to cash it in. He did not have to sow to be able to reap, as the proverb goes. His ownership gave him the right to reap. For the serf, life was not so secure. Legally he did not own a thing. Any moment he could be

expelled from the estate and everything he had gathered could be confiscated. Some serfs were successful, however, so successful that they could buy slaves. But these could only be bought in the name of his landlord. Eastern European high nobility counted their property more in terms of villages than in individual serfs. And the total number of serfs owned could run in the tens of thousands.

Such an economic order does not stimulate change. The landowner will not give up a secure income. For the serfs it is very risky to save and invest money to improve their situation, as they are too dependent on their owner. Their personal situation is very unstable. So for the serf the only logical strategy was to make the best of it in the short term, to slack off where possible, and to try to gain some small benefits, if possible at the expense of the estate. So they poached, or stole part of the harvest of the estate (see also Verdery 1983).

Change in this system came in part from the competition between the nobles and the sovereign. When an increasing amount of land and serfs came into the hands of the nobles, the sovereign needed to extract taxes from the same serfs, as the nobles enjoyed tax exemption. So any reduction in the legal obligations of the serfs towards their noble landowners is an indication of the centralisation of the central power at the expense of the aristocracy (Verdery 1983: 94). This gave the serfs the impression that they had an ally in the person of the sovereign. The results of peasant revolts in the region showed their mistake.

Economic developments elsewhere

The Enlightenment emerged in other parts of the world, but not very meaningfully in Eastern Europe. As Okey describes: Not labouring on the frontiers of knowledge, East European reformers tended to regard the Enlightenment rather simplistically as a set of unquestioned truisms, to ascribe all their ills to feudalism or foreign oppressors and envisage the rational society in Utopian terms (Okey 1986).

Later came the industrial revolution. In the economy it was technology that took the dominant place. Machinery had a depreciation period of tens of years at the most. So after such a period, enough money had to be earned to invest again. It was the capacity of the machinery that determined the production. Those who controlled the technology, by owning the machinery or an important patent, controlled the economy. The dependency on the market increased. The workers became dependent on wages. The whole production had to be sold, to gain cash money, which was also needed to pay for the basic necessities, such as food and shelter. In the beginning the relationship between the factory owner and the workers was quite similar to the feudal situation. Workers were treated as if they were not quite adults, without the capacity to act. But gradually, and not without a fight, they became emancipated. Their education increased, and nowadays this is the crucial asset of many organisations: the capacity to produce new ideas, new

artistic products, designs, fashions, fads. The result has been huge development costs, and sometimes extremely short time periods to recover investments.

Industrialisation did not come on top of agricultural production, but gradually became part of it. Farmers became mechanics and machine operators. Now the knowledge-based economy enters the picture, with new genetically manipulated seeds, fashionable deserts, even little designs on apples. And now we realise that the soil and mineral supplies can be depleted.

Together with the reduction of economic life span of an organization's major investment goods, we can see the major control over the economy moving from primary means of production (territory) to phases further down the production process, closer to the consumer. Nowadays, big distributors control what will be produced and where and when. An important difference is that physical resources, such as mines and land, can be controlled applying force. And people can also be forced to perform simple tasks. But the same brute force cannot force people to produce in a creative way and consume at today's levels of consumption. The best way to reach customers is no longer for every single producer to set up a stall along the main road through the village. With the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, these producers have to compete with Western European producers putting a lot of effort into marketing. These small producers' physical closeness to major cities such as Bucharest does not compensate for their lack of marketing strategies and lack of cooperation.

For the most part, this development can not be resisted. This is not much different from the example often used by anthropologists - the agricultural revolution - when hunting and gathering gave way to agriculture. The later stages in this development allow higher population densities, higher organisational levels, faster investment turnover and larger markets to sell more copies of the same product. Not participating in this development means isolation. Where agriculture was feasible, hunting and gathering disappeared, surviving only in isolated areas. The same fate now awaits traditional agriculture. Where industrialisation is feasible, resources are not invested in intensive cultivation and not the traditional ways of agriculture. In cattle breeding we speak about factory farming. But the lack of alternatives will leave people continuing to work in the old ways.

Developments in Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe history did not follow this course. The feudal system maintained itself centuries longer than in other parts of the continent. In Russia, serfdom was abolished in 1861, and the Redemption Operation finished in 1907, just ten years before the communist takeover. But no social reforms followed, with any subsequent emancipation of the masses nor an industrial revolution. By the end of the roaring '20s Stalin and the Communist Party with their forced collectivisation returned to a very familiar system.

In a country like Romania serfdom was abolished in the mid-1840s and the communist regime took over in 1948. One hundred years is not very long if we consider the amount of time which passed between the abolition of slavery in the United States of America and the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. Instead of social reforms, forcible Magyarisation and later forcible Romanisation followed. This again shows that the abolition of feudalism was not a liberation movement, but rather the result of competition between the nobility and the state over control of the masses and the corresponding tax revenues.

Comparing the situation of the feudal estate and the agricultural cooperatives in the communist period shows very little difference. The position of the members differed little from the position of the serfs. The party behaved as the permanent owner of the whole country. Land, factories, people, none made much difference. It was property that did not lose value, so maintenance and reinvestment was unnecessary. And it was also absolute ownership, as the party had no accountability to anyone. No one else had anything to say about their property. And here as well, the party ruled by arbitrariness and favours.

This position was also a model for other citizens. The party bound them to a certain place. They needed special permits to move to another town. Jobs were assigned. In town, the administrator of the flats had many ways to control the inhabitants. Gas, water, heating, etc. were all paid centrally by the administrator and divided between the apartments on the basis of the number of rooms and inhabitants. Any visitor staying for longer than a few days had to be reported to the administrator. All the contracts for the telephone, cable television, the maintenance of the apartment, were in the name of the owner of the house. Tenants had no capacity to act.

The communists started a programme of rapid industrialisation, but organised it in terms of traditional feudal estates. Technology was not updated to contemporary levels. But it still came as a surprise to many when these factories had to close in the ‘90s because their technology was completely outdated. People demanded investors come with a lot of money to provide raw material so workers could continue to produce just as they had done before. Production was the keyword, not selling or profit. Quotas established by the regime were in terms of production. Apart from internal problems, an important external factor for failing to reach the quota was the lack of input, because the suppliers of inputs did not have a great incentive to sell. They had their quotas only to produce.

Thus in socialism it was not the clerk - the provider or “seller” - who was friendly (they were usually grouchy) but the procurers, the customers, who sought to ingratiate themselves with smiles, bribes, or favours (Verdery 1996: 22).

At the workplace, the director had far-reaching judicial power over the workers. Although it was difficult to fire them, he could punish for whatever reasons by withholding part of the salary. The workers had no right to appeal. But the result was that workers reduced their efforts to a minimum, and no form of surveillance

could change that. Often on Sundays and other religious feasts, workers and students were put on overtime shifts so they could not attend church services. Students were driven in trucks to the countryside to "voluntarily" do their patriotic work in the harvest or on construction sides.

Medical doctors played an increasingly similar role in controlling the population. For almost anything a person needed a declaration from a physician. Until the present day, after each school holiday and other periods of absence from school, children must undergo a number of medical examinations and take signed and stamped declarations to school. Of course with a little gift here and there to the right person you can spare your little child the burden. The word of a parent still has little value.

During the period that abortion was forbidden gynaecologists frequently had to check whether female workers were pregnant. Gail Kligman describes in great detail the effects of Ceauşescu's policies in this field, and how after 1966 when suddenly the regime outlawed abortion by decree, the regime tried to control private lives - especially those of women - even more than a feudal landlord would do (Kligman 1998).

There are plentiful examples of how adults were treated as if they were underage, like naughty children involved in mischief without the capacity to act. Recent examples can also be shown. I also spend my time in queues waiting to be treated as an ignoramus. This shows how inflexible social reality can be.

People's strategy

The strategy of many is to behave as ignorant as possible, like the good soldier Švejk. They do not argue with the chief, even when it is obvious he is wrong. They work according to the letter of the rules, doing only what the chief has literally told them to do. Anything the chief forgot to say will not be done. The result is that they do not do the job well, and waste time and money. But the chief is again given the opportunity to show that only he knows better.

If somebody of higher status makes a demand, the answer is immediately *"nici o problema"* or "no problem!". When I accompanied a serious investor in the field one day, he continuously got this as an answer. He concluded that the people were unaware of the difficulties one could encounter in a project like the one he wanted to set up. People know that a discussion with respect to content is not possible with a higher-up. They confide in the stubbornness of reality that will furnish them in due time with a good excuse why results did not follow. And the more vague are their promises on what and how they will do the job, the easier it will be later to justify themselves for the lack of good results.

If, on the other hand, the person demanding something is in a more dependent position, such as a customer in a shop, the standard answer is a long-drawn-out *"nu se poate!"* or "it cannot be!". Verdery cites Campeanu saying: "Thus if

capitalism's inner logic rests on accumulating surplus value, the inner logic of socialism was to accumulate means of production" (Campeanu 1988: 117 f., cited in Verdery 1996: 26).

The word "logic" may be confusing here, as control over resources was perceived as the best and only strategy to control the whole economic chain and the best way to serve the interest of the communist regime. Not only the communist regime, but everybody was mainly preoccupied with obtaining and controlling resources. The idea was to have and keep resources without investing in maintenance, and to defend them against intruders, as if they were land. Social relations were established in which the other was only seen as a "resource-person". People tried to monopolise these relations - not to share them with others. Social relations are owned, not maintained. When people sought our company, we gradually became increasingly suspicious that they saw us merely as a resource from which they could extract at least an invitation needed for a visa for a Schengen country. Introducing Romanian friends to other Romanian friends resulted in a icy atmosphere more than once. Afterwards we received accusations from one side that the others were not good enough for us, and that we only should be friends with them.

Even in relations between partners we can see a shift similar to that in the economy. In Europe, marriage meant the transfer from father to husband of anything which might be owned by a woman. Women did not have any legal capacity. She was a resource owned. Now, as in economic life, she expects more client friendliness from her partner.

The educational system still shows many of the social relations mentioned above, as in the banking system described by Paulo Freire. The teacher is the all-knowing, the pupils know nothing and never will know anything. The teacher is the one who pours data into the heads of the passive pupils. The result is learning by memorizing exactly what the teacher wants them to know. When you meet a university graduate for the first time with an average mark of 9.7 you are impressed by this. Gradually your impression decreases, as you realise that the exams have only been an exact reproduction of what the professor has said. Insight and real comprehension is not needed to pass an exam. Students are not stimulated to discover and rediscover. And after years of training in the banking system, they find it difficult to function in another system, and demand from the teacher that he tells them only how things are. So that when he becomes a teacher he can also tell his pupils exactly how things are. They are used to being treated as minors, and it is very difficult to behave as responsible adults. It becomes very tempting to maintain the status quo, in which one knows how to move. Recently a good short description of how this kind of education functions was given by Hellinga in an article in *Trouw* about plans to change the system in Hungary, under the title: "Not to recite, but to understand" (Hellinga 2003). She noticed that in Hungary, the same as in many Romanian schools, the recitation of facts has

already started at kindergarten, where children are taught to recite as many famous poems as possible.

Until now I have tried to portray an image of the relations between chiefs and employees, teacher and pupils, etc., as a continuation of older models dating from feudal times, and re-established on a national scale during communist times. But people did not only take part in the party structure or in party-controlled organisations such as factories or schools. There was also the church. I will now describe social relations of people both with and within the church, and compare it with the relations mentioned before. Such a look will show that there really is not such a big difference between Sundays and weekdays.

The Church and social relations

For forty years the communist party had the monopoly on truth. In their eyes, communism was the *perfect* theory, the only right teaching. It could not be improved. When they announced a plan, its execution was guaranteed. This was beyond discussion. And if the final result did not correspond with what was announced, the error could never be sought in the theory. Rather, reality had to be adapted, at least on paper. If that still did not succeed, then there was still the possibility to place all the blame on one person, let him fall in disgrace and punish him severely for undermining the national economy or endangering the security of the state. So the reputation of the party and its leader as all-knowing could be kept intact. It is very hard to underestimate the effect of the assumption of perfection. Its perpetuity makes any change or suggestion of change a blasphemy. Past, present, and future, it is all the same.

As there is no difference between theory and practice, the information only flows in one direction, from top to bottom. Feedback is unnecessary, it is senseless. Criticism is disregarded by higher levels, and explained away as ignorance. Just as Freire's teacher used the banking system to pour in the theory of Marxism-Leninism. But if something is perfect, it is not necessary to understand it completely. To really comprehend it is necessary only when you expect to find an imperfection that needs improvement. Or when you expect an adaptation will be needed to use it in a different situation. In the other case, you content yourself knowing just the "basic users' instructions". And that is exactly what most people know where religion is concerned. They know when and how they have to fast, how expensive different ceremonies are, when they have to go to confess, and all kinds of details about rituals.

Central to the Orthodox religion is the liturgy, and the church as the building where the liturgy takes place. The liturgy is seen as a mirror image of heaven. This is another way of calling it perfect. Victoria Clark, on her travels through Orthodox Europe, describes a consecration of a new church by Metropolitan Daniel from Iaşi: "In a sermon that blared out, marred by a crackle of feedback,

over the bowed heads of that impoverished crowd, Metropolitan Daniel referred to the painted monasteries. 'When we go into a painted church', he reminded his flock, 'we think we are going into Heaven because a church is Heaven on Earth"' (Clark 2000: 247).

Nothing can be more beautiful, more sacred. Performing the liturgy is restricted to professionals, to clergymen. Everything in the liturgy is fixed; it gives the impression of long difficult magic formulas, especially as they are rattled off. Laymen participate only in the choir. Byzantine music is magnificent but singing it is very difficult; it takes a lot of practice. Members of the choir are semi-professionals and are therefore, like the priest, already at a distance from the common people in church. The moment when church goers really join in is during the Easter midnight mass after the proclaiming of the resurrection of Christ: *Hristos a înviat din morţi.* Transitions Online published an article about Orthodox Easter this year by Dumitru Balaci, about the Easter celebration and its huge and somewhat unorthodox attendance. In the end he summarizes the view the Church has on properties, rites, and the relationship with the faithful:

> "The Orthodox Church says it needs all of its properties back to perform its social work functions. Critics, however, say that may just be a pat answer the Orthodox Church gives to those who compare its work with that of the Protestant or Catholic churches in Romania. Some even say that the Orthodox Church cares too much for rites and too little for helping the poor… But that criticism of the Orthodox Church may indeed be one final twist to the story of Romanians and their dealings with religion. While it is true that the faithful - especially of the well-dressed, young reveller variety - stay mostly aloof in their relationship with the church, it is also perceived that the Orthodox Church has kept its flock at arm's length" (Balaci 2003).

Verdery dedicates a whole chapter to the communist perception of time. She concludes that time was flattened out and she cites Campeanu: "Becoming is replaced by unending repetition, eviscerated of its substance, history itself becomes atemporal, perpetual movement gives way to perpetual immobility… History… loses the quality of duration" (Verdery 1996: *57,* Campeanu 1986: 22).

Clark, in what she calls a portrait of Orthodox Europe, speaks of "Orthodox time" (Clark 2000: 69, 81, 100 f.); this corresponds to descriptions by Verdery and Campenau. Visiting the Monastery of the Birth of the Mother of God near Tirgu Mureş, Clark asks an old monk:

> "Father, Romanians seem to me the most devout of all Europe's Orthodox peoples… "Of course", he nodded, "because we were born Christian. We are Christians grown, like grass which has never been cut. Hungarians tell us that they were here in Transylvania before we were but it's nonsense!

> They were only christened a thousand years ago. We Romanians have always been there and we have always been Christian!" (Clark 2000: 211).

A few years ago the Orthodox Church organised a protest march in Cluj. Thousands participated, but only priests and monks. The church is viewed as the building and the professionals. There is little attention paid to what happens outside the church building. When a priest in Bălţi received coal as humanitarian aid for the elderly, he was absolutely convinced that he could use the coal to heat the church building. From his perspective, it was the most normal thing that the elderly would come to the church to get warm.

Churches are very much linked to certain ethnic groups and it is taken for granted that people from one ethnicity belong to the corresponding church. Romanians are by definition Orthodox. Saxons are Lutherans, and Hungarians either Roman-Catholic or Calvinist. A result of this is a strong sense of feudal-like ownership among priests. This has resulted in a Roman-Catholic priest chasing a Jehovah's Witness from his village after being warned by a villager. Also, a prison priest who regards all prisoners as his, requires that pastors from other denominations obtain his permission to enter the prison and contact the prisoners.

People have contradictory impressions about priests. On the one hand they are regarded as holy men, but at the same time, they complain that the priest is exploiting them, asking too much for rituals such as baptisms or funerals. Monks have a better reputation, and in particular the *stareţ,* an older monk, to whom people go for spiritual guidance.

Organisations doing humanitarian projects are quite reluctant to cooperate with the Orthodox church. They complain about the lack of transparency and accountability and that as donors they are only allowed to give money, without hearing how it was spent.

The Church, the Party, the State: people did not and do not expect profound changes in the situation. For them, the situation is given by God and will never really change. Certainly they will have no influence over it. They are not used to taking the situation in their own hands. Instead, they demand that their superiors take care of things. They feel themselves very small in the presence of people of higher status. And they cannot imagine that the small short-term advantages they go for will do any serious harm. They behave like parasites, believing that their host has eternal life, and can not possibly die because of their activities, so they can go sucking forever. This is the basis of corruption. To pull out a little advantage at the expense of the institution one belongs to.

A mover told me his experience. When people ask him to quote a price, he visits their house to estimate the amount of household goods. Clients can then indicate which pieces of furniture will remain in the house. It commonly happens that on the moving day these clients approach the lorry driver with a bottle of something. They ask him would he please not tell his boss, but if he could please

take more furniture with him than was on his list. But the attitude towards social equals is not without problems either. Freire calls it horizontal aggression. In Romanian the saying is: *"că moară capra vecinului!",* "May my neighbour's goat die!" Farmers' associations projects have failed, collecting milk from small farmers, because of the water, flour, pork fat, and other things farmers put in their milk to cheat on their fellow members and jeopardise the project.

A Dutch consultant, trying hard to set up such co-operatives for the collecting of milk, told me the joke of a poor peasant, a very poor peasant. One day his only cow dies in his yard. When he finds out, he starts crying loudly: "Oh Lord, my poor cow is dead. What must become of me? I'm a poor peasant. How can I feed my children now?" God hears his lamentations, and comes down from heaven to see if he can help: "Good man, what is your problem?" "Oh dear Lord," says the peasant, "my only cow has died, and now I don't know where to get the milk from to feed my children." "What can I do to help?" asks God. "Please, Lord, I beg you, bring back my cow." As soon as he says it, the cow is already standing up. The peasant, delirious with joy, starts dancing around the cow, astonished by the miracle. Before he can thank God for his kindness, God has already disappeared.

Hiding behind a fence and watching, is the equally poor peasant neighbour. After the happy ending, he sneaks to his stable as quietly as possible and takes out his only cow. He takes it to the woods and hides it there. Then he hurries back to his yard and starts lamenting just as he had seen his neighbour do. He doesn't have to wait long before God appears again, asking what disaster has occurred to him. "Oh Lord, my cow, my cow! What a misfortune! It's terrible, my cow, my cow!" "My good man," says God, "I can see your heart is broken. Tell me, what can I do to help?" "Please, Lord, I beg you, let my neighbour's cow die."

Conclusion

In this article I connected feudalism, the Orthodox Christian Church and communism. Their physical and historical closeness has clearly left its marks, sometimes making it impossible to see what caused a specific feature. Communism in the form we have seen it in Eastern Europe was not brand new in every aspect. In many things there was continuity, and in many ways there still is continuity. The conflicting world views and images of man between the communist regime and the church was not so great because their views had a common ancestor in feudalism. Central to the social relations is the idea that one group owns everything and pretends to know everything, with exclusive access to the perfect and absolute beauty, while the others are like young dependent children who own nothing and are and will always remain ignorant.

The role of the anthropologist in such a situation is a difficult one and not to be envied. He is often the bearer of bad news. He must often tell to the West how things are not so simple. If they were simple, people would have changed

things themselves. There needs to be more effort on their part to improve things. But writing thicker instruction manuals and sending more inspectors is not the way to do it.

To the East he has the painful message that the days of acting like children are coming to an end, and that everyone will be held responsible for their actions. Also, that there is no chance of foreign investors coming with huge sacks of money allowing people to continue working and producing exactly as they did before. And it is no longer cute for small children to rattle off long and complicated poems without any understanding of what they are saying.

The economy is changing as is the culture. I have seen a lot of changes, including positive and promising ones. Many technologists and economists, however, want things to change even faster. As a reaction, each side digs in their heels. Both have good arguments, and both mistrust the arguments of the other. One cannot function well in both a modern knowledge-based economy - which most highly values the intellectual and creative capacity of its workers - and at the same time in a feudal system of total subordination. To encourage such assets to produce, it is not possible to use brute force as feudal landlords used to do to make their serfs work their lands. In improving the tortured communications between the two sides, anthropologists have an important role to play. I therefore wish them and myself a lot of wisdom, endurance and perseverance.

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