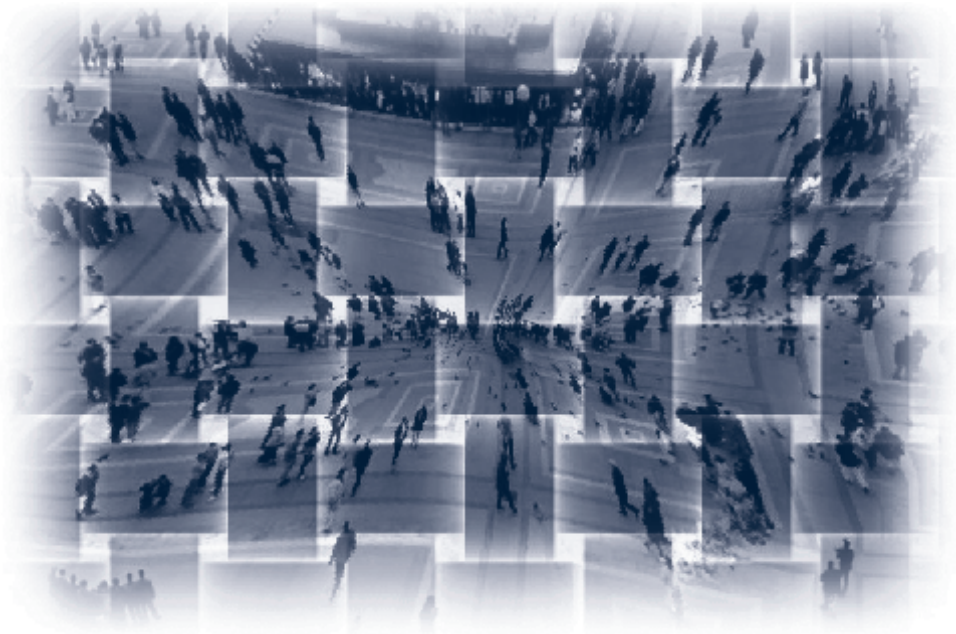




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# SOCIOLOGIA

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**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
SOCIOLOGIA**

**SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY:  
EMERGING SPIRITUALITIES AND THE FUTURE  
OF WORK**

*Special Issue. Guest Editors: Anca SIMIONCA and Sorin GOG*

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***SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES  
ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY: EMERGING SPIRITUALITIES  
AND THE FUTURE OF WORK***

*Special Issue. Guest Editors: Anca Simionca and Sorin Gog*

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## **SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY: EMERGING SPIRITUALITIES AND THE FUTURE OF WORK**

### *Guest Editors' Foreword*

**ANCA SIMIONCA<sup>1</sup> and SORIN GOG<sup>2</sup>**

This issue of *Studia Sociologia* focuses on alternative forms of spiritualities and the proliferation of literatures and programs of self-development (Carrette and King, 2005) emerging in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This thematic group organizes an extensive discussion centred on the ways in which these forms of religiosity/spirituality are constituted through bio-politic mechanisms of generating a productive subjectivity (Foucault, 2007, 2008) and through socio-economic technologies of articulating a competitive and pro-active personality in the context of a new neo-liberal order (Dardot and Laval, 2014). The participating authors explore the emergence of alternative forms of spiritualities within the new post-socialist work environment and the increasing emphasis placed on the entrepreneurial development of the self; they seek to analyse the processes that converge towards supplying the post-socialist citizens with the motivational structures needed to become more competitive and productive in the global capitalist economy into which CEE countries have been incorporated in the past two decades.

The analysis of these cultural and religious changes allows a deeper understanding of the implementation of capitalism and of the transformations it has generated in CEE countries during the last two decades and provides us with a more nuanced perspective on how economic processes are embedded and justified in the peripheries of Europe. The studies focus on a diverse set of problems ranging from the booming sector of personal development services, to startups and the local narratives of capitalism, to discussions related to shifts within the traditional religious fields and the emergence of innovative forms of spiritualized subjectivities that emphasize creativity and self-development of individuals.

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The main aim of this issue is to analyse the recent economic transformations and spiritualities, understood in a broad sense. This is why it was important to connect the papers of this issue to the recent organizational and work studies that emphasize the means through which individuals, described as being in search of professional flexibility and autonomy, simultaneously strive for the reconstruction of the unity of the self. Despite the fact that the new logic of career construction analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) explicitly refers to the 'new spirit of capitalism', spirituality is reduced in these accounts to a complex of metaphors, images and symbols that shell material and economic actions, and is not analysed as a self-sustained phenomenon. Starting from an understanding of the 'new spirit of capitalism' as a form of innovative spiritualized ideas and practices and not exclusively as a matter of significance for economic endeavours, these studies contribute to showing how the new spiritualized cosmologies constitute proximities with the recent economic transformations.

In terms of researching alternative spiritualities, these studies proceed from a criticism of the phenomenological paradigm that informed research programs focused on private and invisible religiosity, which they treated as 'neutral' transformations produced by a process of cultural post-modernity. Following the work of Carrette and King (2005), Foucault (2005) and Rose (1990, 1996, 1998) it is important to look at how these spiritualities mediate forms of governmentality and self-transformation that enable a better insertion into the entrepreneurial logic demanded by the new economic practices focused on competitiveness and flexibility.

The merging of these two analytical registers, namely the focus on economic transformations, entrepreneurial development of the self and management of work on the one hand, and alternative spiritualities, spiritual development and cultural ontologies on the other hand, allows for a promising approach in investigating the social transformations of CEE. Strong religious structures and identities still shape the integration of these former communist countries into the neo-liberal economic system.

Anca Simionca's inquiry into the blooming sector of personal and spiritual development in Romania starts from the existing descriptions of the type of subjectivity that both the neo-liberal logic and these development services have been documented to encourage. The centrality of the self and the individualization of the relation between labour and capital entailed in it lead to several consequences: the sovereignty of the self in relation to its environment, the lack of importance of social ties and solidarity, and the reduced importance of the community. Her analysis identifies the main points of ambivalence in relation to these desiderates and documents mutations that she encountered in her research.

Natasa Szabo investigates how *Bridge Budapest*, a Corporate Social Responsibility organization founded by leading Hungarian IT startups, sets for itself the mission of shaping values towards an embracing of entrepreneurship and of capitalism in general. Her analysis shows the strong investment the organization has in transforming attitudes and ideologies surrounding capitalism in post-socialist Hungary, namely to produce what the author calls a local spirit of capitalism. This consists, on the one hand, of restoring the legitimation of some of the core institutions of capitalism, such as the enterprise and the entrepreneur, and of exposing the counter-hero, the provincial 'postcommunist cheater' that comes in opposition to the risk-taking, innovative and ethical figure of the entrepreneur hero. On the other hand, through rethinking the management of work, it pushes towards the emergence of the ideal-typical autonomous and self-motivating employees.

Elena Trifan is interested in the consequences of taking part in personal development programs upon the daily lives of individuals. To this end, she describes how practitioners are applying the principles and techniques of personal development in order to elicit change in the ways in which individuals relate to themselves and to others. Based on ethnographic data gathered in Bucharest, Romania, her paper aims to show how being immersed in practices of self-development impacts upon and restructures everyday experiences. Her emphasis lays on the negotiations surrounding the values inscribed in techniques of personal development and the reconfigurations they effect.

Sorin Gog's paper focuses on the transformation of the traditional religious landscape and the emergence of alternative spiritualities among the younger generations from Romania. The paper investigates the new spiritualized technologies of the self that sacralize subjectivity and the specific mechanisms through which a new interiority is socialized, an interiority that emphasizes self-development, creativity and immanent wellbeing and authenticity. The analysed statistical data reveal a process of de-institutionalization of religious belief and an opening towards a more spiritualized understanding of religion. Drawing on ethnographic material, interviews, blogs and sermons, the author shows how the new alternative spiritualities are producing individualizing religious practices that encourages the spiritual subject to rely on their inner resources in order to be more authentic, creative and pro-active. The aim of these subjectification techniques is to instantiate a spiritual interiority that is self-referential and strives for a creative autonomy that enables self-realization and self-amplification.

Andrada Tobias's study meticulously looks at different types of spiritualities and explores the way they are embedded in a complex life-style that revolves around living in the present. These subjectification techniques enhance wellbeing



and the consumption of literature of personal development. Drawing on a post-foucauldian conceptual framework she analyses complex ethnographic material and questions if there is evidence for the creation of spiritual technologies of power which enable the formation of neo-liberal subjectivities. The author reconstructs the requirements of personal change demanded by the new spiritualities and outlines some of the main structures involved by these transformations that produce self-accountability, responsibility and personal freedom, all important features of the current neo-liberal economic transformations. The paper concludes with stressing the importance of distinguishing between spiritual development programs and generic spiritualities that do not produce neo-liberal subjectivities and which sometimes articulate an anti-capitalist critique of present day societies. The author emphasizes the need for analytical categories that allow us to see the divergent political projects embedded in the field of alternative spiritualities.

In line with this, Cristine Palaga's paper proposes a parallel between forms of spirituality that are animated by neo-liberal subjectivities and cults that aim at reviving ancient religious ideas and practices; the latter are part of the same trend of alternative religions that are critical of institutionalized Christianity. This research aims at reconstructing the way Neo-Pagan communities become critical of modernity and propose a counter-cultural lifestyle that aspires to produce alternatives to the capitalist societies which are based on individual competitiveness and consumption. As opposed to this, Neo-Pagans return to nature and spiritual imaginaries, articulate an ethic based on integrity and virtue and avoid assimilation by mainstream society. In comparison to this, the contemporary spiritual development programmes and alternative spirituality emphasize productivity, entrepreneurialism and self-realization, values which are important for the corporate world. The author brings an important contribution in exploring how the neo-liberal transformations are contested and resisted from within the field of alternative spiritualities as well, and the way Neo-Pagan groups' moral reframe moral communities in order to engage with the vast social and economic transformations taking place in Eastern Europe.

Cecilia Rubiolo's paper tackles the issue of neo-liberalism from a more complex perspective. Based on thorough and rigorous ethnography, the paper focuses on 'neo-liberalism from below' and the ways in which Evangelical groups develop practical dispositions (related to work ethic and entrepreneurial practices) that enable trans-national migration networks and the insertion in the Italian labour market. The research follows these migrants from their local communities from Vicovu de Sus in Romania to Turin in Italy and analyses their work arrangements, religious interpretations, life-style and gender roles, and the way these enable a better insertion in the global capitalist market economy to the point that they become important local entrepreneurs in Italy. The author

brings an important contribution in understanding the specific modes in which religious practices of communities in Eastern Europe shape migration networks, global markets and trans-national regimes of accumulation.

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## PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA: IN SEARCH OF AMBIVALENCE

ANCA SIMIONCA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This paper is an inquiry into the blooming sector of personal and spiritual development in contemporary Romania. It is based on interviews with providers of such services, on content analysis of blogs and books dedicated to the topic, and on participation in several workshops. The critical literature linking the proliferation of the field of personal and spiritual development with the increasing pervasiveness of neoliberal logic has highlighted some of the features of the subjectivity invoked in these programmes: the sovereignty of the self in relation to its environment, the lack of importance of social ties and solidarity, and the lack of importance of the community. This analysis explores the empirical material in searching for the main points of ambivalence in relation to these desiderates, as well as the mutations that can be identified in the privileged sites of production of individuality that are personal and spiritual development workshops and trainings.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** personal development, spiritual development, neoliberal subjectivity

The most superficial glance at the shelves in any contemporary bookstore in Romania cannot fail to notice the predominance of titles pertaining to self-help, personal and professional development, and alternative spiritualities. At the same time, interviews with employees about their working life experiences and careers (Petrovici, 2015; Simionca, 2015) are brimming with references to people's commitment to personal development, their desires in this direction and the concrete actions they undertake. While most visible in the accounts of the young and educated, the same imageries of a constant need to "develop" oneself are structuring the accounts of both skilled and unskilled workers (Petrovici, 2015). Interviews and public declarations of employers also abound in references to the importance of the soft skills of employees, among which the desire to

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learn new things and to grow as a person are central. Social media is flooded by reposts of blog entries describing various techniques to reach one's goals, and motivational entries explaining the need to achieve a state of mind that directs the self towards constant evolution and mindfulness. Equally present are advertisements that invite people to experience first-hand the benefits of various techniques and strategies: Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), Theta Healing, holotropic breathing, familial constellations, coaching sessions, professional development, or personal trademark techniques of various providers.

This phenomenon has not failed to capture the attention of critical literature. On the contrary, it has received increasing attention both from religious studies scholars, interested in the transformations of the religious and spiritual fields and their relation to the economic sphere, and from a variety of critical social scientists questioning 'the new spirit of capitalism'. The commonality of all the programs of personal development despite their variety is the centrality held by the individual self, its resourcefulness, and the type of object of crafting that it becomes. Scholars question the consequences the scripts for subjectivity embedded in the personal and spiritual development programmes have on contemporary possibilities for solidarity, commonality, and policy.

For this paper, I rely on twenty interviews conducted with providers of services of personal and spiritual development, participant observation in three workshops (two of them between two and three hours long, and one that lasted for seven days, nine hours a day), between July and November 2016. They were complemented with content analysis of 20 blogs and several personal development books. Given the logic of the overall research project this material is part of, all the above were selected under the condition that they would have at least a minimum opening towards spiritual development, not simply personal development. Therefore, I interviewed psychologists whose services included spiritual development, yoga trainers, coaches, NLP practitioners, spiritual and professional development providers.

One of the first findings of our study was the diversity of the practices that are subsumed under these generous labels and the fact that despite this diversity, they do constitute a field: actors are aware of and constantly try to position themselves in relation to the others, either in opposition, or in direct continuity. Critical voices, both in the blogosphere and in actual workshops or interviews are easily visible, despite a more general agreement that "diversity is good, there is place for all these different ways of trying to do these things"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This exact formulation or close variations of it were used by a majority of my interviewees, and is recurring in the blog posts discussing the field of personal and spiritual development itself.

There are ongoing debates about what is and what is not personal development, what is the role of the scientificity of the claims made by providers or authors, what is the optimal relationship with the Orthodox Church, with mainstream psychology, with oriental religions and practices, with medicine. Even within the same niche of practice, like NLP, there are several varieties of relating to the theory, and each trainer attempts to personalize their approach, so as to situate themselves in relation to the alternative providers. The professionalization of these services is a great stake for all the actors involved (Bondi, 2005; George, 2013; Makinen, 2014). All the providers that I interviewed incorporate in their visions and techniques explicit elements of spirituality. However, none of those I studied have as main speciality highly spiritual practices such as Theta Healing, Reiki, shamanism, or familial constellations.

The analysis in this paper follows the logic of trying to identify outlier cases in relation to the theoretical expectations set by the literature. It is therefore not an attempt to offer a description of the whole field, and it is from the onset an account of a minority of situations. All the examples I offer are from workshops I participated in, as it is in these instances that involve interactions and challenges on the part of participants rather than in the neat descriptions in blog entries that ambivalences can be documented.

It is beyond doubt that the empirical material analysed offers abundant support for the concerns raised by the authors in the literature review. However, as this paper is one of the first attempts to analyse the wide diversity of material, I start from those elements observed that do not neatly fit into the descriptions highlighting the perfect overlap of the neoliberal scripts for subjectivities and the practices of personal and spiritual development. Therefore, this article explores the empirical material in searching for the main points of tension and ambiguity, as well as the possible mutations that can be identified in the privileged sites of production of individuality that are the personal and spiritual development workshops and trainings.

First, I briefly discuss the centrality of initiative employability in today's understanding of the sources of equilibrium in the relationship between the labour market and individuals and highlight the main points of critique against this hegemonic understanding. Second, I refer to some of the recent literature looking at a variety of practices of personal development by questioning its relationship to the neoliberal economic vision. Finally, I take three of the main conclusions of the critical literature I engaged with and discuss them in relation to my empirical material: the sovereignty of the self, the irrelevance of social ties and the lack of importance of the community within these practices.

## **Employability, neoliberal subjectivities, and personal development**

Achieving good rates and quality of employment is one of the central topics of political, policy, and social debates of our times. One of the most visible trends in the main parameters of discussions surrounding the appropriate and feasible ways in which to achieve the desiderates of prosperity for both individuals and businesses is the shift away from the structural aspects of the demand side towards the supply side of the labour market. Employability is a concept with a long history and different nuances (Chertkovskaya, 2013; Chertkovskaya et al., 2013; Fejes, 2010; McQuaid et al., 2005). After the 1980s, however, it is its least complex and most one-sided version that became dominant in the public and policy discourse: the 'initiative employability', a vision of the relationship between individuals and the labour market that makes the former the main target of employment policy. This involves trying to influence the economy in such a way as to provide plentiful and good employment for the population; the mismatch between the supply and demand of labour is thought to be solved by making the individuals more dynamic and capable of adjusting their life trajectories, skills, and understandings of their role to the changes of the economic environment. The gist of the argument is that individuals should think of themselves as an ever-expanding bundle of skills and abilities, always amenable to refashion their professional identity, willing to change geographical locations and to show the capacity to adapt to new situations. The key to security is 'flexicurity', namely the way for individuals to make sure they have security in their lives lays in their capacity to adapt to whatever the structural conditions bring about (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004). The lack of such capacity is deemed as the failure of individuals, and leads to their lack of employability (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013; Ten Bos and Rhodes, 2003).

There has been a consistent wave of criticism towards the hegemony of initiative employability as the main lens for understanding the employment relations and venue for policy. The first line of argument focuses on the technical difficulties of operationalizing or measuring in a reliable way the concept of employability and therefore the incapacity to gather empirical evidence to support or refute the hypothesis. Chertkovskaya and her colleagues argue that employability on the ground is rather synonymous with 'communication', 'adaptability', 'enthusiasm', 'openness to others', 'creativity', or 'autonomy' (Chertkovskaya, 2013; Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). However, it is very difficult to assess the extent to which in any given situations it was indeed the presence or absence of these 'soft skills' that made the difference between success or failure in getting a good job, or in having high levels of performance in it. Permeating much of the current education system as well, the emphasis of soft skills

coupled with the capacity to learn new skills on the job is the taken for granted truth. Yet, it is not really possible to test the reality of these assumptions, thus making the paradigm of initiative employability visibly a mere ideological construct (Fejes, 2010).

The second problematic aspect with the initiative employability paradigm is the way in which it casts the responsibility: employers and governments have the role of facilitating the encounter between the demand and the supply of labour, but the ultimate responsibility is of the individual, their capacity to foresee and grab opportunities, to adapt and to change in order to accommodate the ('natural') instability of the economy. Thirdly and most relevant for the current discussion, the structural barriers that individuals are facing, the inequality of opportunities and the sources of privilege and oppression are swiped under the rug of personal will and willingness to have a good life (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013).

Scholars such as Nicholas Rose have made convincing arguments about the emergence of a particular type of subjectivity within the hegemonic neoliberal governmentality, which refers to

the ways in which subjects are governed as market agents, encouraged to cultivate themselves as autonomous, self-interested individuals, and to view their resources and aptitudes as human capital for investment and return. Neoliberal governmentality presumes a more or less continuous series that runs from those macro-technologies by which states govern populations, to the micro-technologies by which individuals govern themselves, allowing power to govern individuals "at a distance," as individuals translate and incorporate the rationalities of political rule into their own methods for conducting themselves (Binkley, 2009:62).

The booming sector of personal development discourses and related practices has led researchers' interest towards making use of this theoretical framework in order to illuminate the particular ways in which individuals become embedded in a life-view that is centred on their own agency as the single most important factor of success. An abundance of books, audio and video material, blogs, courses, workshops, trainings, and retreats invite people to reconceptualise their lives in a manner congruent with these principles. This sector offers a good insight into the 'micro-technologies' of self-government and the way they are produced on the ground. Katariina Mäkinen's discussion of working life coaches as crucial actors in the process of the individualization of the relation between capital and labour is very convincing. Her account echoes the criticism brought to the paradigm of initiative employability, and shows in an empirically dense manner the way in which social contradictions are translated in the process of coaching into individual contradictions.



As long as one has to work for a living (the proletarian condition), even the best resources will not save one from being penetrated by the antagonism of how to be certain of one's worth as an individual if the worth of the individual is measured in terms of the increasingly precarious labour market. This I suggest is the class antagonism that structures the individual lives of those involved in coaching. [...] In other words, coaching encourages one to internalize the labour-capital relation and its inherent contradictions, and once this relation has been internalized, then self-reflexivity and self-development are offered as a solution to the insecurities that follow (Makinen 2014: 838).

A consistent and growing body of literature started documenting empirically the terms in which the neoliberal subjectivities are constructed (Binkley, 2011; Bondi, 2005; Makinen, 2014; Pagis, 2016; Türken et al., 2015; Trifan, 2015). An eloquent example is the study of Türken and colleagues, who have analysed two newspapers, one in Norway and one in Turkey, in order to describe the way the "interrelated discourses of rationality, autonomy and responsibility, entrepreneurship, and positivity and self-confidence [...] constitute the neoliberal subject in ways consonant with neoliberal governmentality" (Türken et al. 2015:1).

Within this larger interest area, there are a few voices that argue for a more careful analysis of the phenomena. Having a similar starting point, that of analysing the practices of counselling in relation to the neoliberal logic, Liz Bondi reaches only a partially overlapping conclusion with the above-mentioned studies (Bondi, 2005). Her position in the debate internal to the field of psychology and psychoanalysis referring to whether psychotherapies are inherently individualising and de-politicising or actually have subversive openings is "to argue for a more ambivalent reframing that is neither condemnatory nor celebratory of the politics of counselling" (Bondi 2005:497). She further explores the ambivalences and the straightforward oppositions to the neoliberal scripts that the practices of counselling she studied entail.

The study of Türken et al. I referred to above ends with a rather similar call for further investigation, despite their own study's conclusions, which did not leave much space for ambivalence. They argue, following Morgen and Gonzales (2008), for the need to pay special attention to the existence of counter-hegemonic moves within the neoliberal discourse and practice. Jaramillo and Carreon (2014) ask the uncanny but crucial questions regarding the relationship between activism and political movements, and some of the values that are central in the neoliberal subjectivity script as well. In their discussion of revolutionary and decolonial praxis of social movements, they look into "the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and subjectivity as it pertains to the emergence of new social actors in revolutionary movements and its influence

on the emergence of a pedagogy of *'buen vivir'* (Jaramillo and Carreon 2014: 394). Dassinger (2013) discusses in a very provocative manner the situation of unions trying to put forth pedagogies of resistance for the unemployed in the context of the strong neoliberal subjectivation processes inscribed in the programs of re-professionalizing directed at them.

While it is beyond the scope of this exploratory paper to engage with the ramifications of the questions raised, I find the insights of the last cluster of authors crucial in guiding the relevance of analysing the empirical instances in which processes of subjectivation undoubtedly occur. Researching the phenomenon of personal development is at the same time a matter of documenting the resonances or direct instances of neoliberal logic, as well as a matter of making visible the ambivalent ways in which both providers and consumers/clients of services of self and spiritual development relate to the normative milieu in which they operate. In the following sections, I will refer to three of the main expectations of critical literature in relation to the continuity between the neoliberal personhood script and the services of personal and spiritual development and I will highlight the ambivalence that actually characterizes the empirical sites of subject production.

### **The sovereign individual and her relationship with the environment**

The central preoccupation of the critical literature could be summed up in the concern with the way the relationship between the individual and the wider structures in which she is embedded is conceptualized: the individual is invited to think of herself as possibly independent of her environment, as having the capacity to shape her life and conditions around her solely as a result of her will and actions.

This means that the practices of coaching rely on the figure of the sovereign individual in a manner which makes all questions of the structural limits of the individual and social bonds fade into the background as if they did not exist at all, even though they do (Makinen 2014: 829).

True as these statements might hold when reading self-help materials, the processes at the empirical sites of production of such individuality are, however, more ambiguous than that.

I will take NLP as one such example of an ambiguous relationship to the idea of the independent individual. On the one hand, even the briefest analysis of the promises that a workshop of NLP makes highlights the centrality of the individual self as the main agent in one's life, describing transformations of

the self and of the attitudes of the self towards the world as directly translating into improved quality of life. None of the blog entries or ads for workshops that I came across mentioned explicitly the power of structural forces over individual lives as a way of tempering statements of the ultimate power of the individual to shape their livelihoods. On the other hand, the actual experience of such a workshop cannot be described in a satisfactory manner as an occasion in which the structural limits are ignored and unbounded individual autonomy declared.

The first idea that the trainer presented in the introductory lecture of the NLP course I took part in was “the map is not the territory”. The ‘map’ quickly became one of the main tools used by the trainer and a shortcut to reminding the participants about the situatedness of their experiences. A great deal of effort was put in making sure that each participant realizes that there is a sharp distinction between the representations of any reality that we operate with internally and the reality itself. Consistent with sociological wisdom, the idea of “the map is not the territory” places from the onset the individual in the centre of preoccupations, not only as the source of all solutions and resources, but also as the source of all distortions. We were explained that there is no such thing as objective knowledge, or a complete, correct, or objective description of any reality, that the mental constructs we operate with are the result of the filtering done by each of us through our senses, and therefore will never equal reality itself. One of the consequences of this ontology is indeed that people are invited to think that it is not necessarily reality itself that is problematic in any given situation, but their representation of it and that, therefore, the solution is to change the representation, the ‘map’.

There was, however, another consequence that became apparent in the way the workshop was conducted, namely the fact that due to the limitations of our own representations (‘the map’), we must have very limited confidence in our understanding of the others and what their life situations are, and must question that understanding. This principle was actually used by the trainer not so much to foster an image of the sovereignty of representations over reality, but to temper the participants’ sense of understanding everything about the other’s problems and their quickness in offering solutions. The ‘filters’ that mediate between reality and our mental constructs are not simply described as ‘individual differences’, but as systematic ones, stemming from the structurally different positions we have, that actually shape the very experiencing of reality: gender, age, level of education, geographic position, wealth, family, networks, values, profession etc. Consequently, the work of ‘personal development’ starts with and keeps enclosing what the trainer called “the purification of our filters”, namely becoming aware of the fragility

of our mental constructs and the small likelihood of being capable to grasp the hardship and problems another person goes through, followed by a constant effort to transcend these limitations.

For example, in one of the practical exercises, Ioana<sup>4</sup>, a 40 years old woman, with a rural background, having now graduated from university and working in a firm, was discussing her desire to be more assertive with her boss. Mircea, a 32 years old man, holding a middle management position in a firm, coming from an intellectual background was reminded of his own 'status filter' when voicing an unsolicited piece of advice on how easy it would actually be for Ioana to "just be more self-confident" in relation to her boss. Mircea was told by the instructor that he viewed the situation through his own filter of an educated person coming from a privileged background, who consequently does not have a representation of the difficulties a person not having this background faces in that situation. Ioana was later indeed encouraged by the trainer to change her perception of the situation and mobilize internal resources, but not by denying the inherent structural barriers that were there due to (what I now here call) her lower class background or gender. Our male colleague's intervention was sanctioned exactly because it assumed the sovereignty of the individual, failing to be sensitive to the non-individual factors that were structuring the situation.

### **The role of social ties**

Another dimension of the centrality of the individual inscribed in most of the personal development scripts refers to the encouragement the person is given to make herself the centre of her preoccupations, thus inviting a world in which social ties and solidarity are not valued (see for example Makinen, 2014). However, it is not necessarily the case that the transformations called for by the programs of self-development take clients in the direction of a lack of interest, care, or nurturing for others. While the idea of personal responsibility and boundaries is clearly instilled, it is often times turned around towards describing the responsibility of the others, an exercise in which the subject/client is made aware that they too should be the focus of the care and nurturing of others.

Much of the discussions of the personal problems brought up in the various exercises by the participants in the same NLP course were in line with what Bondi noticed in the case of the counsellors she analysed:

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<sup>4</sup> All names appearing in the paper are fictional and details that are irrelevant for the purposes of the argument have been slightly modified in order to insure the anonymity of the subjects.

Although these counsellors focus on the effects of counselling for individuals, they do not imagine these people in isolation from others. They do not necessarily assume that empowering individuals is about supporting them to prioritise their own needs over others, because they assume that most people's needs are fundamentally relational (Bondi 2005:507).

I recall two cases of women participants, above 45 years old, having grown-up children who were dissatisfied with the relationship they had with them. Andreea did not know how to do a better job in helping her daughter with her daily responsibilities and how to offer better guidance in relation to the job choices she was currently facing. Andreea was a mother worried that her daughter was making poor career-related choices and wanted to handle the situation better. What the trainer did with the idea of the responsibility of the individual is that she painted a world in which intentions are not the same as actions: the good intentions of the mother were recognized, as well as the importance of the tie with her daughter. However, the trainer asserted the limits of the responsibility of a person towards their children and the necessity to recognize their own lives and decisions, their own autonomy. What the trainer told Andreea was that it was not in her power to change the situation, as if it were completely in her hands, but she could change her attitude in such a way as to acknowledge the autonomy of the other person and to think of herself as an autonomous individual to whom attention, care, and interest should be directed at. This did not challenge the values of parenthood of the clients, rather drew some boundaries of responsibility. In regard to the patriarchal norms of the individuality-less mother, this is actually an empowering move, calling for mutuality, not for disconnectedness.

Given the socially pervasive script for motherhood that makes care for children and husband central, and assigns little importance to the mother's own emotional needs, or her space for individuality, the workshop actually worked towards establishing a sense of boundaries and of mutuality between children and mothers, as well as between husband and wife. This was not done in the spirit of families lacking the function of nurturing and help, but insisted on a more balanced division of emotional work. In no occasion were the participants invited to imagine themselves as disconnected from the others, and healthy, deep, and thriving relationships have consistently been presented as desirable.

### **Community and changing the system**

One of the elements severely missing from most of the visions of change that the subjects in our research project discussed is that of the community. While many of the practices of spiritual and personal development happen in

groups, the role of the group is transitory and does not have a purpose beyond the moment of the encounter. The interactions between participants in a workshop are most times viewed as crucial for each person's development. However, this importance is limited to the confined space of that interaction, and individuals are interchangeable: in any group of unknown people one would find the type of alterity needed to interact with in order to achieve the purpose of self-knowledge.

Out of the entire fieldwork experience within the research project, it was only in the discourse of one particular trainer that I have identified a significant difference on this dimension. Throughout the public presentation of her future working group and in her later on-line posts, she emphasized the importance of the community created around these meetings outside the context of the meetings themselves. Letiția, a 34 years old business graduate, with a significant experience of working in multinational companies and for a business consulting firm, was starting a spiritual development group, which explicitly valued both business success and spiritual development. The way she encouraged the participants in this first meeting to bring friends was not only a way to increase the number of participants, but was important in her vision about what her work consisted of. She thought of the participants not only in terms of interchangeable individuals who shared the purpose of self-betterment and therefore benefit from each other's presence in the workshop, but because they potentially represented concrete resources for the other people in order to start projects together (either businesses or any type of policy).

There will be new people coming at each meeting. My intention is to create a community. A community that will most likely keep in touch most easily virtually, if at some point we'll end up being a very large group. You know, from different domains, with different businesses. This is what I do now – I go from place to place and I connect people amongst each other, so that they share ideas, they share resources. Because we want to change the system, but we don't know what to do... we don't have a shared vision. [...] it's so important to meet people personally, to make sure, before you start a project together that you share the same ideas, to know them, to develop in these meeting a shared understanding... some shared principles on how to be in the world, how to do things. The community is so important, you can't do things alone, you get tired. We must reach out to others who are the same as we are (Letiția, 34 years old, female, business background).

Another interesting mutation from the standard discourse was the way she referred to the "system". It was not only presented as a construct used by people to delegate responsibility, but an actual area on which intervention can be legitimately and even imperatively sought. The majority of the discourses I have encountered refer to identifying problems with 'the state', 'the government',

‘the country’, ‘politicians’ as a misleading move, as a fallacy through which individuals deflect their own responsibility for their life situations. Both in interviews and in the live discussion in the workshops I refer to, such diagnosis were singled out and then a restatement of the importance of the individual level followed. For Letiția, however, actual change could be achieved only by combining careful crafting of the self with interventions at the systemic level. This is a very different emphasis that I have only briefly encountered in other interviews.

Any system – even the system that we have now – was generated by some people, who were confronted with realities being different than what they would have wanted, and they came with their genius, with their expertise, with what they knew, what they wanted, what they were good at and they wrote some papers that they then named The Declaration of Independence, or a law, or... All things were generated by people, by individuals. If we want something new today, it’s still going to come from the people who are in the systems, those who are in the administration, they are the ones who know what is going on there, what needs to change. And maybe they need an impulse. Maybe the moment you are a tiny person, you’re like a dot, you feel crushed, you have the feeling that no one can hear you, it’s very difficult to change the system. But if you find someone similar, someone who thinks the same in all that system, it’s that person that you need to meet. And do things (Letiția, 34 years old, female, business background).

Due to her personal experience in trainings with people working in the state sector, she discussed how actually these people were caught in the logic of the system, even if they might see things differently and want to act upon their vision. Therefore, in her view only by acting upon the system from within can actual change be achieved.

*Letiția:* [...] But not with the old mentality of “fine, fine, but what do I get out of this”. I have a friend who...

*Interruption from the public:* This is exactly what I was thinking about – your project is a very brave one. I mean if you talk about the people from the state sector... how are they going to work with one another?! “What am I getting out of this” this is how they think. Because us, the rest, I think we’re more open to volunteering, because we live in the real world. You see you can’t just stay in muddy water, and that even if you do it for free, you need to contribute to cleaning it... simply because you can’t stand yourself like this... But them... I’m not sure.

*Letiția:* I’ve worked with politicians. The consulting firm I worked with had to work with politicians, with local administration on some projects. And it is like this that I had the chance to get to the *person*, to the *person* behind the position.

They are people too, they have their values, their desires, and they do the best they can in the system they are in. Don't think it's easy to change the system just because you want to! Many of them would want to, but... So whom they interact with matters, it can lead to change (Letiția, 34 years old, female, business background).

What is interesting is rather the fact that the system itself is the object of change, not only the self. What we have in this case is not the typical vision that one should only focus on bettering their own lives, as the benefits will trickle up (and down) from there to others as well ("many happy selves make for a happy universe"), but include the preoccupations for actively intervening in changing supra-individual entities in the realm of legitimate objects of change.

And the moment everyone is involved in a small betterment, 1% in each life, the moment there are a few hundreds of thousands, you'll see a change globally. In five years that's where you'll get [...] How do we change things, how do we stay confident in the fact that we can change something. As you were saying: "I go to a course, then I go back to my life and what happens?" Entropy! Resistance to change, any system has entropy, it does not want to change. Why? Because the brain works on the principle of energy saving. If my brain worked for ten years on some neurological paths and I went once and I lived a new experience for five days... what happens after that new experience is over? My brain prefers to take the walked path because it costs less. What needs to be done in order to encourage your brain to expose itself to new ways of doing things? Presence. Mindfulness. Mindfulness puts the brain in alert and keeps you on your path [...] And then you see results, in your life, in the life of others, in the system you're in (Letiția, 34 years old, female, business background).

However, the vision is that of incremental change stemming from changes in subjectivities, albeit with the orientation towards the supra-individual level. Nonetheless, this does not guarantee the direction in which the system is to be changed, but it does go against the conventional wisdom that these practices of subjectivation completely shut down the individual from the systems she takes part in.

## **Final remarks**

The intention of my analysis was to document some of the mutations that can be identified in the actual practices of subjectivity production within a loosely defined field of personal and spiritual development. The material above can be questioned (like any religious/marketing practice) in terms of the authenticity of any move that takes distance from the economic pursuit of



profit. For example, Letiția's emphasis on the importance of community can easily be read as a novel PR strategy for her business. Indeed, as the field of providers of services of personal and spiritual development becomes denser with time, it is often the case that consumers meet in more than one such workshop or course. Therefore, a rational strategy for a provider could be to make use of the networks that might form in this way, to try to incorporate them into their strategy, instead of attempting to reach out for untapped new publics. However, the ambivalences I refer to are not only relevant insofar as they would prove to be completely outside of the logic of the market for the producers. This complete separation would be inconceivable, as the very logic in which the subjects were selected for this research involved them being providers of services.

The importance of taking notice of these ambivalences comes from the openings they offer for the clients in relation to the world view they foster. The very power of such practices of subjectivation is said to emerge from the type of definition of themselves it invites individuals to adhere to, definitions of others, of the system, of the link between the individual and the system that they instil, the actions and the ways of being that it presents as desirable or acceptable and those that it paints as incorrect. The underlying assumption of the critical literature focusing on the formation of neoliberal subjectivity is that these types of representations constituting the scripts for subjectivity have a real effect in the ways individuals act and participate in society. The same should hold true for those elements that fail to align themselves to the neoliberal logic, and therefore ambivalences should not be thought of as inconsequential.

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## NEW SPIRIT AND NEW HERO: HOW HUNGARIAN STARTUPS REDEFINE THE IDEAS OF LOCAL CAPITALISM

NATASA SZABÓ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The present paper investigates how the *Bridge Budapest*, a CSR organization founded by leading Hungarian IT startups, attempts to shape the values of Hungarian society towards capitalism in general, and towards entrepreneurship in particular. In my paper I argue that the central aim of the organization is to facilitate Hungary's catching up with the core capitalist countries through the transformation of the attitudes and the ideologies surrounding capitalism in the Hungarian context, i.e. *the local spirit of capitalism*. This consists, on the one hand, of restoring the legitimation of some of the core institutions of capitalism, such as the enterprise and the entrepreneur, and of confronting the risk-taking, innovative and ethical figure of the entrepreneur hero with the provincial figure of the 'postcommunist cheater'. On the other hand, it also consists of propagating a new management of work that aims to produce self-controlling and self-motivating employees. In the narrative of Bridge Budapest IT companies appear as the perfect moral and economic subjects – the bearers of the new spirit of capitalism – that have the expertise to offer solutions to the problems of Hungarian society, and around which the local capitalism should be built.

**Keywords:** startups, ideology, digital capitalism, management of work, entrepreneurship, post-politics

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Startups, defined by the U.S. Small Business Administration (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d.) as typically technology oriented businesses with high growth potential, are the cutting-edge industries of the core capitalist countries. However, in the second half of the 2000s, these knowledge-intensive

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and innovation-centred companies appeared on the semi-periphery of the global economy in Hungary. Today the key actors of the Hungarian startup scene are Prezi, Ustream, LogMeIn and NNG. It would be quite natural to ask on what basis we are defining these start-ups as Hungarian, because Prezi and Ustream have their headquarters both in Budapest and in San Francisco, while LogMeIn's headquarter is located in Boston. The common trait of these companies is nevertheless that they were partly or totally founded by Hungarians, and regardless of where and for which markets they produce, their public initiatives are focusing on Hungary.

In the last years several public initiatives have been launched by these startups, such as *Nyitottak vagyunk* (We are Open),<sup>3</sup> *Így dolgozunk mi* (We work like this)<sup>4</sup> and *Bridge Budapest*.<sup>5</sup> The common characteristic of these initiatives is that they are reflecting on the Hungarian social context and are directly addressing different parts or groups of the Hungarian society. On the one hand, these projects could be interpreted as part of these companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, because through them the startups can make a positive appearance to their social and economic environment. On the other hand, through these public initiatives the startup companies are also producing knowledge and narratives about the Hungarian society and capitalism, and also about themselves. The aim of this research is to contribute to the critical sociological understanding of this new phenomenon by embedding it into the local social context. I believe that this is important for several reasons. First, because in the public sphere the dominant discourses on startup companies are currently shaped mostly by the startups themselves. However, it is important to analyse these narratives from a critical angle, by taking into account the positions and interests of these companies. Second, it is worthwhile to reflect on the role that startups play in the semi-peripheral context and to understand how this context shapes their vision on the local society and capitalism.

In my research I use the Bridge Budapest Association as a case study through which I investigate the relationship of the startup companies with the local society. I chose Bridge Budapest as a case study for two reasons: first, because the founders of the Association are the most successful Hungarian startup companies, which are influential in the Hungarian public sphere and have the potential to shape public discourses. Secondly, because they do not miss this opportunity: Prezi, Ustream and LogMeIn consciously created Bridge Budapest in order to communicate their social values through it. Therefore

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<sup>3</sup> <http://nyitottakvagyunk.hu/hu/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.igydolgozunkmi.hu/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://bridgebudapest.org/>

Bridge Budapest is suitable for investigating the founder startup companies' discourses on the Hungarian society, capitalism, and on their own social role. My first research question seeks to investigate what kind of narratives are produced by Bridge Budapest on the Hungarian society and capitalism, while my second research question asks how the Association represents the ideal society and capitalism, and how it tries to realize these representation in the local context.

I used two types of sources for this research: the public materials available on the website of Bridge Budapest, and semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the key figures of the Association. My interviewees were Veronika Pistyur, the CEO of Bridge Budapest, Balázs Varró, the Communications manager of Ustream, and Csaba Faix, the International Communications manager of Prezi. I selected them based on the fact that the projects of Bridge Budapest are managed by the CEO of the Association and by the communications managers of the participating companies. As my aim was to investigate the startups' discourses on the local society and on their own social role, I focused only on their own narratives and self-representation, and I did not analyse media appearances, or other external representations of the Association. My reason to interview the communications managers was also that their tasks include the transmission of their companies' official narratives concerning the Association, its goals and social role. Of course, this does not mean that the positions of the communications managers are not subjective. However, subjectivity should not cause a methodological problem, because on the one hand they are personally involved in the operation of Bridge Budapest, and on the other, because their person and communication – due to their positions – are approved by their companies. Apart from Bridge Budapest's CEO and the communications managers I also interviewed Bence Tordai, who was a participant of the Association's programme *Bridge Builders*. This was necessary because there is very little public information available concerning the training happening during the programme. I did not conduct interviews with the other participants because my goal was to gain information about the structure of the programme and not the detailed investigation of the participants' experiences.

### **The Bridge Budapest Association**

The Bridge Budapest Association was founded in 2013 by Prezi, Ustream and LogMeIn, and a year later NNG joined the project. According to their self-definition, the common trait of these companies is that they are *quickly developing internationally successful companies, emerging from Budapest* (Bridge Budapest, n.d.).

Prezi develops presentation software, NNG offers navigational and infotainment-technology, while LogMeIn offers cloud-based remote connectivity services. The Association is funded by the participating companies and by private individuals. The president of Bridge Budapest is Péter Árvai, the co-founder and the CEO of Prezi, while the Association's CEO is Veronika Pistyur. The programmes of the Association are developed by Pistyur in cooperation with the communications managers of the participating startups. The programmes of the Bridge Budapest are approved by the Board. The Board, formed by Péter Árvai, Péter Halácsy and Ádám Somlai-Fischer, founders of Prezi, by Gyula Fehér, co-founder of Ustream, by Márton Anka, founder of LogMeIn, and by Péter Balogh, co-founder of NNG has a meeting every three months. Besides them, Stephen J. Luczo (Seagate Technology), is also a board-member, although Seagate Technology as a company does not participate in the work of the Bridge Budapest Association.

The idea of the Association dates back to 2011, and according to Veronika Pistyur the proposal came from Prezi, more specifically from Péter Árvai and Juli Pécsi. The motivation to found Bridge Budapest was that they

did not understand why is there a contrast between the world of their companies and that of the streets, and they did not understand why are people walking with their heads down, why are they afflicted by a malaise, why are they always looking for excuses, and why referencing to circumstances is the first reaction to anything instead of a solution-focused approach? (Interview with Veronika Pistyur, Budapest, 2016).

As Pistyur continues, the founders did not understand that

while the New York Times writes on Prezi, HVG<sup>6</sup> does not, and even if it does, it writes about it only in the Tech section, while the founders believed that these are creative and innovative companies which could work as an engine for an economy (Pistyur, 2016).

Therefore, the initial motivations arose from the difference the startupper felt between their attitudes and that of the rest of the country, and from the country's incomprehension towards the economic role of startups and other creative and innovative companies.

Bridge Budapest currently has four programmes: *Bridge Basics*, *My First Million*, *Bridge Budapest Fellowship for Talents* and *Bridge Builders*. Besides these programmes, since 2013 Bridge Budapest has conducted a representative, telephone-based survey every year in collaboration with Kutatólabor, a marketing research agency, in which they are investigating the work values, entrepreneurial inclination and future career plans of the 20-35 year-old generation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> HVG (in English): is the most important Hungarian weekly economic and political magazine.

<sup>7</sup> The results of the survey are not public; however, Veronika Pistyur sent me the résumé, made by Kutatólabor.

## Theoretical Considerations

The theoretical starting point of my research is the axiom of the inseparability of economic systems and the ideologies that justify them (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), and my inquiry will focus on this relation in the case of the Hungarian startup companies. However, I do not aim to create a generalized description of the spirit of capitalism, as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello did in their seminal work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007). In this book their attempt was to theorize the changing spirit of the French variety of capitalism, but besides this their unconcealed aim was to describe the general tendencies of the core-capitalist countries. They assume that in the core-countries of the world economy, capitalism has a general, widely accepted societal representation, which despite its temporal and spatial limits can be described as a *spirit* accepted by many. This approach is well represented in their concept of ideology. According to them, ideology is embedded in institutions and actions, and is a widely shared set of experiences and beliefs. They argue that ideology is not about oppressive social relations, but everyone, both the weak and the strong “rely on these schemas in order to represent to themselves the operation, benefits and constraints of the order in which they find themselves immersed” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 10–11). Therefore what results from the concept of ideology used by Boltanski and Chiapello is that the representation of capitalism is uniform for the majority of society, regardless of social position or any particular context.

In my own research I do not aim to describe the general representations and spirit of the Hungarian variety of capitalism; rather, I will interpret the activities of the Bridge Budapest Association as an attempt to establish a new spirit, a new representation of capitalism in the Hungarian context. However, this angle makes it necessary to rethink the concept of ideology used by Boltanski and Chiapello too. In their approach the ideologies justifying capitalism are not the products of any single class or group, therefore they are not connected to any purposeful actor. However, in this case, as we are talking about an attempt to establish a new spirit of capitalism in the local context, the ideologies and the content of this new spirit will be the discursive product of a specific group.

Due to the theoretical problems discussed above, I use Karl Mannheim’s programme of the sociology of knowledge. In Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge the particular and situationally determined nature of any point of view has a central role (Mannheim, 1998). Therefore I argue that the ideologies of the new spirit of capitalism are also situationally determined and particular.<sup>8</sup> This argument

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<sup>8</sup> In this case I am not using ‘particular’ in the sense of the mannheimian concept of particular ideology, that is, not as an expression concerning the critique of ideology, but rather as the foundation of his programme of the sociology of knowledge, according to which all points of view are particular, that is ideological.



theoretically strengthens my approach, according to which the attempt to establish this new spirit is connected to a specific group, and the ideologies of this new spirit are their discursive products. This specific group is formed by the members of the Bridge Budapest Association, by the loosely connected startupper, journalists, and by anyone approached and convinced by the Association. However, the use of Mannheim's concept implies that due to the situationally determined and particular nature of ideologies, in the Hungarian context only a small part of the society will imagine capitalism according to the new spirit. The overlap between them and the producers of this ideology, that is the circles of Bridge Budapest, is hardly measurable. Nevertheless, I argue that even though these ideologies are particular and situationally determined, as their objective is to establish a new spirit, they are aspiring for universality, for a status, in the frame of which they could serve as the justifications and representations of capitalism for the whole society.

Besides the elaboration of the content of the new spirit and the concept of ideology, one should also consider the local context in which the establishment of the new spirit is taking place. Whereas I agree with the argument of Fourcade and Healy (2007) that markets are more than economic systems as they are always relying on, and are universalized by a moral order, we should also pay attention to the local particularities of these regimes. While Boltanski and Chiapello elaborated their theory in a core-capitalist country (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), Bridge Budapest functions in the semi-peripheral Hungary (Éber et al., 2014). This divergence raises the question whether it is possible to identify the core, the semi-periphery and the periphery of the world system according to nation state borders, if these concepts represent most of all relations of production processes and not states. However, as far as the state is concerned, these concepts refer to the expression of the hierarchical global division of labour as reflected on the level of the national economies and state infrastructures (Éber et al., 2014). Therefore, even though capitalist production does not function according to national borders, the state works as an organization that in a certain area provides infrastructure and legal framework for capital, and thus the inequalities produced by the world-system appear within its reach.

Unit of analysis will also be the state, because the Association's programmes aim to develop the Hungarian national economy. Positioning the Hungarian state within the world-system is necessary, because Bridge Budapest aims to help the country catch-up within the global division of labour. However, the Association does not primarily imagine this catching-up through changing the composition of the Hungarian economy or the economic policies, but rather through shaping the attitudes and ideologies of the Hungarian society. For this reason I will engage with the concept of semi-periphery not in an economic sense, but as related to the ideology of catching-up attached to it (Böröcz, 2012).

Nevertheless, world-system theory's original economic focus is also important to understand the idea of development, as it shows the economic context and the global division of labour in which the ideology of catching-up is rooted.

### **Talking of business, silencing politics: the construction of the entrepreneur, society and politics in the discourses of Bridge Budapest**

According to my interviews, I classified the three central objectives of Bridge Budapest, as (i) shaping the entrepreneurial thinking (or as my interviewees said, the entrepreneurial mindset), and the attitudes of Hungarian society towards entrepreneurship; (ii) shaping the social context of the enterprises, and (iii) help the country catch up. In the following I am going to examine Bridge Budapest according to these objectives, and I will embed their projects into these categories.

#### ***Bridge Budapest and the making of the entrepreneur hero***

The first objective that I investigate is the shaping of the entrepreneurial thinking, and of the attitudes of Hungarian society towards entrepreneurship. This objective appears in *My First Million*, just as in *Bridge Basics*, in *Bridge Budapest Fellowship for Talents*, and also in the researches of the Association, thus it can be argued that it is one of the most important objectives of Bridge Budapest.

In *My First Million* Bridge Budapest conducted a research with the Kutatólabor agency to examine the values Hungarian society associates with entrepreneurship. The research was entitled *Two faces of the Hungarian entrepreneur: The hard-working innovator and the cheater* (Első millióm, n.d.). The conclusion of the research, in accordance with its title, was that in Hungarian society there are two representations of the entrepreneur:

on the one hand the image of the cheating, gangster-entrepreneur, who is driving luxury cars and is looking for loopholes is still in the minds of people, but on the other hand the image of the creative, innovative and courageous entrepreneur is already spreading, primarily in the younger generations (Első millióm n.d.).

It is worthwhile to focus on the temporal placement of the two entrepreneur-images: the cheating, gangster-entrepreneur is located in the past by the phrase *is still in the minds*, while the image of the creative, innovative and courageous entrepreneur is *already spreading* thus it is located in the present and in the future. In this sense the phrase *already spreading* refers to the expansion

of the representation of capitalism that the Bridge Budapest considers desirable, but which is still incomplete. Hereupon, the chief goal of *My First Million* is to change the representation of the entrepreneur, the key figure of capitalism, within the local context. The programme positions itself against the image of the cheating entrepreneur, and aims to associate the image of the entrepreneur with the values of creativity, innovation and courage.

At the same time Bridge Budapest aims to realize this goal by tutorial videos, targeted to entrepreneurs. Thus the Association is not only trying to change the image, but also the practice of entrepreneurship. Part of this project is the spreading of the idea of ethical entrepreneurship by videos on entrepreneurs' stories about their first million. As Csaba Faix says,

there is a saying that one should never ask an entrepreneur about their first million, because after that every company has an excellent pedigree. But we were looking for entrepreneurs, who were ready to talk even about their first million, by saying that 'I had an idea, a team', or anything else that makes the story transparent (Interview with Csaba Faix, Budapest, 2016).

Therefore the concept of ethical entrepreneurship on the one hand means transparency, and on the other hand it also means, as Balázs Varró says, that 'you should accept the legal frames and regulations in which you run your business' (Interview with Balázs Varró, Budapest, 2016). By the idea of ethical entrepreneurship, in the Bridge Budapest's imagination the entrepreneur becomes the central figure of the Hungarian public sphere as the driving force of the economic and social development. According to Bridge Budapest, ethical entrepreneurship contributes to the development of the country in three ways: by improving its competitiveness, by developing infrastructure and by making the local enterprises more successful.

As a consequence, we can understand *My First million* as the foundation of *Bridge Basics*: *My First Million* is not only targeting entrepreneurs, but also potential entrepreneurs and the wider public, for which the image of the entrepreneur should be changed. In contrast with this, *Bridge Basics* is targeting those who already have specific problems with launching an enterprise. However, as Bridge Budapest's aim is to promote the idea of entrepreneurship, the representations produced by *Bridge Basics* and by *My First Million* should be seen not as conflicting, but as complementary. *Bridge Basics* offers a more concrete know-how for the ideal entrepreneur and enterprise, while *My First Million* approaches it primarily from an ethical angle. The specific entrepreneurial culture and know-how promoted by *Bridge Basics* nevertheless cannot be separated from the idea of ethical entrepreneurship, and my interviewees argue that *Bridge Basics* presents the corporate culture that is arising from ethical entrepreneurship.

As Csaba Faix argued, ‘when I develop a software for all the users of the world, I cannot corrupt anyone, because I am judged only by the market’ (Faix, 2016). According to Veronika Pistyur, the tutorial videos of *Bridge Basics* are showing the corporate culture of the founding companies of Bridge Budapest (Pistyur, 2016). The goal of this programme is knowledge transfer, and the promotion of the corporate culture of Prezi, Ustream, LogMeIn and NNG. Pistyur states that a central characteristic of these corporate cultures is that ‘they are thinking about their employees in an ethical way’ (Pistyur, 2016); however, in what follows I will argue this is not only for moral reasons, but also serves the productivity of the companies.

The image, emerging from Bridge Budapest’s tutorial videos and from my interviews, shows several similarities with the spirit of capitalism that Boltanski and Chiapello name as the *projective city*. In the description of the spirit of capitalism Boltanski and Chiapello use the concept of the *city (cité)*, which was developed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in their book *On Justification* (2006). The concept of city is important for Boltanski and Chiapello inasmuch as it functions as a normative support for the ideologies which are justifying capitalism. Boltanski and Chiapello link the projective city, the new form of capitalism that is based on new justifications and on methods of organizing work, to the neoliberal turn that was preceded by corporate capitalism that flourished from the 1930s until the 1960s in the Western World. In Hungary corporate capitalism has never existed, but the discourses of new capitalism can nevertheless arise, because the initiating startup companies are embedded into global networks and are producing for global markets. For example Balázs Varró says that for Ustream the role model regarding corporate culture is Silicon Valley (Varró, 2016).

The corporation remains one of the key institutions in the projective city, yet this is not the hierarchic corporation of corporate capitalism any longer, but instead the lean firm that organizes work in autonomous, flexible and adaptive teams (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Adaptability as a crucial characteristic of enterprises was also emphasized by Veronika Pistyur, who linked it to the global technology market, where fast response time is crucial (Pistyur, 2016). Boltanski and Chiapello are referring back to the roots of this approach when they are highlighting that the discourses on adaptation appeared in the management-literature of the 1990s and became important because of the intensification of global competition (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). For proper adaptation to the changing environment, it is not only the destruction of the expensive hierarchies that is critical, but also the establishment of a new corporate culture, based on new motivations and justifications.

According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the critique of hierarchies emerges from the criticism of the bureaucratic nature of corporate capitalism. However, the dismantling of hierarchical control gives space to new forms of discipline, such as market-based control, which forces companies and employees towards higher adaptability. This resonates with the words of Csaba Faix, who argues that ‘we are trying to build Prezi as a big startup, in which many small startups are operating, thus we are trying to preserve the flexibility and ownership that we had at the beginning’ (Faix, 2016). Faix links flexibility to the small, autonomous teams working within the company, and according to Boltanski and Chiapello the idea of autonomy has the function of providing the moral justification for market-based control. They argue that the cessation of the hierarchical control led the managers towards looking for new corporate control mechanisms. Due to fact that market control did not offer enough motivation for employees, there was a need for introducing new, moral and psychological motivations (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). In the management-literature the higher degree of autonomy is a form that allows the non-hierarchical self-realization of the employees (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Gergely Hodicska, Ustream’s Vice President of Engineering argues similarly when talking about the motivation of employees. He defines motivations as internal factors, which are more important than the external ones, such as money. According to Hodicska, autonomy is one of the factors of motivation that makes possible to give employees problems to solve, rather than simple tasks (Bridge Basics, 2015). Csaba Faix also emphasizes autonomous problem solving as a motivating factor:

if there is a task or a problem we do not tell the team, or the engineers working on it to code Prezi in this way, or to do this task, or to write this down, because that would fit more or less to a semi-skilled job. We rather say that we want Prezi to be better in this and that (Faix 2016).

This network of unstable relations is called by Sennett ‘concentration without centralization’, after Bennett Harrison, and he argues that the freedom of this model is only seeming, because the fall of bureaucracy does not mean less institutional structure, but rather the establishment of a new, more complex, but not pyramid-type structure (Sennett 1998: 55-57). According to the startups, these changes make work more creative and give space for one more internal motivational factor, which, according to Hodicska, is the sense of self-development (Bridge Basics, 2015).

Autonomy and self-development as motivational and justifying factors are fostering self-control (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), therefore self-control within these enterprises functions as a complement to market-based control. Besides autonomy and self-development, the atmosphere of trust also plays a crucial role

in the implementation of self-control. According to Boltanski and Chiapello 'trust is in fact the other term for self-control, since it designates a trustworthy relationship where the only mechanism that exists is the pledged word and moral contract' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 83). Trust builds the team, strengthens the ties between employees and managers, and because it is a moral question, it makes work a matter of conscience. The importance of trust is also emphasized by Rita Hambalkó, Prezi's former Recruitment Manager, in a tutorial video made for *Bridge Basics*. She argues that trust is required for the liberty that Prezi offers to employees in the form of flexible working hours and the lack of other direct bureaucratic controls. According to her 'if we give liberty, responsibility and trust, people will be motivated in their work' (Bridge Basics, 2015). Gergely Hodicska mentions trust as the most important part of corporate culture too, the base of cooperation that facilitates experimentation and innovation on the part of the employees (Bridge Basics, 2015). Due to the atmosphere of trust, in the corporate culture of these companies interpersonal relationships are re-evaluated and appreciated (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). While the previous spirit of capitalism with the help of rational calculations aimed to rule out personal relations, personality and charisma from recruitment and promotion in the name of fairness, in the new spirit personality and personal relations are becoming important (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). As Veronika Pistyur argues,

performance and knowledge have an exponential value. Thus neither from me, nor from many other employees was any certificate required, because it is not the certificate, but rather face-to-face situations, problem solving abilities, and reactions to certain situations that matter (Pistyur, 2016).

From this quotation we can see that the emphasis is not on objective criteria, but on personality, attitude, performance and knowledge. However, these are not measurable in the traditional way through certificates, but are perceptible only through personal relations.

Personal qualities are not less important in the case of managers and entrepreneurs either. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, in the projective city successful people should be charismatic, able to motivate others and should have a vision that is convincing enough to be followed by employees. These abstract qualities are strongly present in the tutorial videos of *Bridge Basics*. As Péter Halácsy, the co-founder of Prezi says, as successful leaders they should not dictate the direction, but rather motivate employees and 'help others to create the product, the business' (Bridge Basics, 2015). Veronika Pistyur formulated it similarly by distinguishing two management models:

A leader just stands at the top and waits for the employees to follow him/her, or stands at the bottom and pushes and helps to create an atmosphere and environment for employees in which they can fulfil their own potential (Pistyur, 2016).

Besides motivation, Gergely Hodicska highlights the importance of the vision, and argues that leaders should provide an objective for the employees, for example the idea of making the world a better place (Bridge Basics, 2015). As Péter Halácsy states in one of the tutorial videos, 'think about the long term goal, the mission of your organization that should be realized and tell it to everyone, put it on your website' (Bridge Basics, 2015). In contrast with Halácsy or Hodicska, Ádám Somlai-Fischer, the co-founder of Prezi, does not refer to the mission as a factor of the motivation of the employees, but instead takes the role of the inspiring, visionary leader by stating that in designing a product it is not worth to focus on the problems to be solved but it is better to imagine 'an inspiring future that we desire', because the product will be part of a lot of people's lives (Bridge Basics, 2015).

The ideas examined above, such as autonomy, trust, self-development and interpersonal relations are functioning as psychological motivation within the projective city because they are breaking with the alienated work that characterized corporate capitalism and was based on hierarchy and rational calculation. The visions of the leaders, the image of the inspiring future, of a better world, or any other mission can function as a psychological motivation that is able to strengthen the internal cohesion of the company and to give meaning to work. Moreover, these ideas are also justifying the projective city from the perspective of the common good, because the goals set can be social ones, as Hodicska emphasizes. In the projective city another form of referring to the common good is the justification of market control by emphasizing the primacy of consumers. According to this argument, the primary goal of companies is to serve consumers, thus the real control should be removed from managers and given to consumers themselves (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). In this discourse the company serves the consumer, and this makes necessary the continuous adaptation to the consumers' demands, thus to a higher degree of market-based control. Gábor Vészi, Prezi's former Director of Engineering, in his tutorial video uploaded to the site of *Bridge Basics* emphasizes exactly these standpoints. According to him, in the product design consumer feedback is crucial because this guarantees the success of the product and the satisfaction of the consumers (Bridge Basics, 2015).

In the discourse of Bridge Budapest the references to the common good appear also from the perspective of the social and economic development, as we also see in the case of the ethical entrepreneurship. This image of the enterprise is present in *Bridge Basics* too. The techniques of motivation appearing in the tutorial videos, such as the autonomy of employees, the opportunity for self-development, trust and the primacy of consumers, are not self-serving, but are fostering a higher degree of market-adaptation, and therefore 'productivity,

creativity and innovation’ (Pistyur, 2016). According to the discourse of Bridge Budapest, these are important for the success of the company and crucial for the competitiveness of the country at the same time. As Pistyur formulates it, ‘creative and innovative companies can serve as an engine of the economy, and from the perspective of the country it is important how many of these do we have’ (Pistyur, 2016). According to Faix

Hungary can stay in competition with the world if it creates companies based on ideas like this. It is clear that Hungary does not have oil reserves or any natural resources on which it could build on, or any traditional industry, but the ideas, like Prezi, are available to us as well (Faix, 2016).

*My First Million*’s representation of the entrepreneur who contributes to economic development by ethical entrepreneurship is supplemented by the perspective of creativity, innovation and idea in *Bridge Basics*. Therefore *Bridge Basics* represents the ideal Schumpeterian entrepreneur. According to Joseph Schumpeter, the most important characteristic of an entrepreneur is innovation: the entrepreneur introduces new products, new production methods and new industrial organizations (Schumpeter, 1928). In *Bridge Basics*’ tutorial videos, the innovative activities of the entrepreneur appear in the designing of new products and in the introduction of new, creative organizational cultures that in the local context count as innovative too. As Schumpeter argues, the most important consequence of innovation is that the previous equilibrium of the economy changes, which leads to economic development (Schumpeter, 1928). We can observe the same approach in the interviews analysed above, in which interviewees evaluated idea, innovation and creativity as the keys of Hungary’s competitiveness.

According to Schumpeter, economic development needs figures who can break with the previous economic practices and can recognize the new opportunities (Schumpeter, 1982). The break with the previous practices in the narrative of Bridge Budapest appears as ‘risk-taking’. In the research that Bridge Budapest and Kutatólabor conduct every year, they argue that risk-taking is the precondition of innovation and creativity. The research confronts employee-existence with autonomous existence, and extends this dichotomy to the opposition of the boring, but safe work versus the risky and joyful one, and to the average salaries of the employed versus the high, but uncertain incomes of the entrepreneurs. Thus boredom, safety and average incomes are becoming the epithet of employee status, in contrast with the joyful, risky and autonomous life of the entrepreneurs that offers high but unpredictable incomes. According to the analyst of the research, choosing the latter option signals the risk-tolerance of the respondent. According to Balázs Varró today risk-tolerance is very low, ‘in Hungary the frustration



after a failure lasts for a lifetime, while in the US, where from ten attempts only one works out, people try for the ninth time too' (Varró, 2016). The positive framing of risk-taking, such as its association with enjoyable work, also contributes to the image of the entrepreneur that Bridge Budapest is building. On the one hand risk-taking increases the positive aura of the entrepreneur by emphasizing its sacrifice. Thus entrepreneurs are not only creating new products and functions as the engines of the economy, but they do this with an incredible courage. Moreover, by promoting the merits of risk-taking, uncertainty and instability not only for entrepreneurs but for the whole society, Bridge Budapest extends the characteristics of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur to the ideal Everyman of the present, just as Sennett argues (1998).

From another perspective we can also understand the discourse on risk-taking as a meritocratic element that justifies the entrepreneurial success by linking it to sacrifice. This aspect is called by Boltanski and Chiapello the 'formula of investment', and according to them all the regimes of justification need something like this to maintain the semblance of truth (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Therefore, according to Bridge Budapest the entrepreneur should take uncertainty and the risk of failure to achieve success, since this is the way that leads from the boring to the inspiring and creative work.

By concluding the analysis of Bridge Budapest's representation of the entrepreneur, I argue that the Association tries to change entrepreneurial thinking and the image of entrepreneurship in the Hungarian context on a number of fronts. The entrepreneurs of Bridge Budapest are ethical, creative, innovative and risk-taking heroes. They are responsible for the good mood in the workplace, for their employees, and even for the country's welfare. They break with the attitudes of the cheating entrepreneur and with the paternalistic approach of the Hungarians, they are not afraid of failure, and they do not look for safety. Therefore Bridge Budapest not only changes the image of the entrepreneur, but also sets it as a role model for Hungarian society: the model of the perfect moral and economic subject.

### ***Bridge Budapest as a technocratic post-political project***

Among the programmes of the Bridge Budapest Association, *Bridge Builders* is the only one that is not focusing on the enterprise and on the entrepreneur. In this programme the Association invites ten people in their late twenties or early thirties, who are considered as influential opinion leaders in their own fields. According to Pistyur, *Bridge Builders* focuses primarily on the social context of entrepreneurial thinking. As she argues,

an enterprise is not understandable without its environment. We can try to do anything for change, but if people at the executive levels of different fields of society do not understand these ideas that are important for us, decisions will be made without seeing through these questions (Pistyur, 2016).

Thus the goal of *Bridge Builders* is to change the social context of the enterprise, and to help the diffusion of the Association's ideas and values in society.

*Bridge Builders* consists of five weekends of workshops in Hungary, and one in Sweden. During these weekends Bridge Budapest offers leadership training for the participants to make them better leaders (Pistyur, 2016). According to Pistyur, in these trainings

we are trying to improve the interrelations of the individual and the world, for which a high degree of self-awareness, self-knowledge and vulnerability is needed. We also believe in many other things that could make someone a better leader. We are trying to inspire the participants to embrace these ideas through different practices (Pistyur, 2016).

Bence Tordai, one of the selected participants, recalls the structure of the weekends:

On the first days there were guest speakers from the Board members of Bridge Budapest, who are successful leaders, and they highlighted important aspects through their own stories. They also brought us related practices about how to relate to your own life by looking back from a hypothetical endpoint, about how to create something from nothing and about the function of interpersonal relations in these processes. On the second weekend there were coach-led tasks [...] The essence of it was to make us freer by choosing an appropriate position and approach with which we can handle a problem or a situation. And this was the gist, the multiplication of our potency (Tordai, 2016).

According to Tordai, the coaching focuses on the structuring of the situations which participants regularly encounter, and on the reflection on and change of their own roles in these situations. As an example, Tordai mentioned that when a leader prefers battles and consequently has many conflicts, it is probable that these conflicts are generated by the leader himself/herself, thus he/she can also work against it (Tordai, 2016).

Although the trainings had a micro-level focus, such as the relation of the self and the world, self-development in decision making, and development of problem-solving skills, *Bridge Builders* also has a macro-level mission. The mission of the programme is to 'empower Hungary's future leaders to inspire and build a Hungary that is proud of its achievements and knowledge' (Bridge Budapest, n.d.). Achievement and knowledge are the key elements of Bridge Budapest's social vision, in contrast with the attitudes of the present-day Hungary, where, according to them, personal relations are too important, and the success is linked to cheating. As Pistyur argues,

researches shown that luck, political connections and personal relations in general have an exponential appreciation in the system and in attitudes, and these are obstacles for someone to believe that they can start a successful enterprise, although the global market is an evidence that it can be done with knowledge and performance too (Pistyur 2016).

Since in *Bridge Basics* the changing of the social environment appears as the shaping of the entrepreneurship's context, for its success the meritocratic myth of the entrepreneur and the enterprise should be shared by the wide society. Meritocracy justifies the differences in social status with the principle of performance, thus it is an appropriate concept to justify the higher status of entrepreneurs too (McCoy and Major, 2007). As Balázs Varró stated, the mission of the Association is

to show what can be achieved with great ideas, entrepreneurial attitudes, and of course, with hard work, because it was never a secret that the idea is not enough in itself, the major part is work and teamwork (Varró, 2016).

Besides the emphasis on hard work, a further meritocratic element is the association of risk-taking attitudes to entrepreneurship. However, while risk-taking is the 'formula of investment' that is directly associated with the figure of the entrepreneur, performance and knowledge, arising from hard work are broader principles, which are valid beyond the economic sphere. According to Tordai the mission of *Bridge Builders* is to change the Hungarians' attitudes towards success 'to make us believe that we are able to create things and to make a hit', to popularize a positive approach that states that hard work will pay off (Tordai, 2016). Thus meritocracy justifies the success of the entrepreneur and the establishment of the uneven social statuses, and at the same time, according to Bridge Budapest, fosters success by giving confidence to the ones who have knowledge. This attitudinal change is intended to create a business-friendly social environment, thus it is a precondition for the realization of Bridge Budapest's further goals, such as economic well-being or keeping of the Hungarian graduates in the country (Varró, 2016).

The shaping of the social environment, namely the building of a knowledge and performance based society, is imagined by Bridge Budapest in a networked structure. The Association distinguishes five important social spheres, which are covering the society and which they consider as important. These fields are media, politics, economics, NGOs, and the cultural sphere (Pistyur, 2016). However, the Association does not aim to directly address a wider audience connected to these spheres, only its young leaders. According to Faix the goal is 'to find those 30-31-year-old people who within 10-15 years are going to be

among leaders of the country in a political, economical or academic sense' (Faix, 2016). 'When selecting these young opinion leaders we pay attention to represent all the five spheres' (Varró, 2016). According to Pistyur, 'if they [the young leaders] start to work, to make decisions, to build organizations, to take positions, to cooperate differently, it will create a network within the system' (Pistyur, 2016). Therefore Bridge Budapest divides society into coequal spheres, and imagines social change through a network that interlaces them. Henceforth, the Association represents society as a *network* that is similar to the representation and logic of society in the projective city (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). It is an exciting contradiction that while according to Bridge Budapest a meritocratic society should reject the importance and use of personal relations for any goal-oriented reason, they see that this society can be established only through an interpersonal network. However, the idea of the network, the myriad of weak ties, is not only the central characteristic of Bridge Budapest's vision, but also more generally, as Richard Sennett argued, of New Capitalism. He emphasizes that while corporate capitalism was based on strong ties and long term employment, the current one is typically based on the greater number of weaker ties (Sennett, 1998). This web, built in *Bridge Builders*, is not only the network of young leaders, but functions also as the network of the Association, because by coaching these opinion leaders they can find valuable partners in several parts of society. Besides these, it can be argued that the network-logic is a technocratic-logic: the idea of the society that can only be addressed through opinion leaders splits society into leaders and followers, moreover imagines social change only in a top to the bottom way.

The knowledge that *Bridge Builders* aims to give to the selected leaders is openly technical and apolitical. According to Russel Prince the definition of technocracy includes that its knowledge is apolitical, rational and technical (Prince, 2015). Bridge Budapest, apart from a certain level of (social) psychology, does not aim to pass on theoretical knowledge; rather, it focuses on decision-making and on the techniques of implementation. According to Faix,

[the programme] is not about the economic concepts along which a company should be led, no, it is about what to say to people to empower them to solve problems... Here we help these people to make better decisions, to understand a problem, to involve new angles in problem-solving. Thus it is not a theoretical training (Faix, 2016).

The main selection criteria for *Bridge Builders* are that each participant should be an influential and good professional in their own field. According to Varró,

as an impartial organization our unconcealed aim is to express that we are inclusive. Thus for us political positions do not matter if someone is a great chat partner, a good professional, it does not matter for whom they will vote (Varró, 2016).

However, this self-proclaimed ideological neutrality still leads the Association to pay attention to the ideological diversity, and not only to professional qualities, during the selection process. They select the participants ‘from the most different professions and from the most different political and ethical value-systems’ (Varró, 2016). As Faix stated, their goal with this conscious selection is

to make these people realize – while there are still no power-constructions between them that would hinder dialogues – that there are more things that bind them together than those that separate them (Faix, 2016).

Consequently, the programme is not only apolitical, but goes beyond politics with the help of instrumental rationality, thus it is *post-political*. According to Varró, politics just hinders higher purposes:

We should show them that “hey guys! you are not enemies, but partners in certain things”. Because probably I am not the only one who sees that people’s thinking, their political orientation hinders cooperation and higher purposes than the individual ones (Varró, 2016).

This quotation clearly demonstrates that in Bridge Budapest’s approach these higher purposes are not ideological, but rational objectives, superior to political ideologies. Consequently, the achievement of these can only be possible with an advanced technical and goal-oriented knowledge, but this requires consensus and the cooperation of experts and leaders. If we use the term of politics following Jacques Rancière, it can be argued that even the objectives of the programme are not political ones (Rancière, 2004). According to Rancière politics is about the formulation of common issues and objectives, and not about the execution of the objectives, set by a group of experts. He argues that politics is not a struggle over the solution of a situation, but a debate over the meaning and interpretation of it, and about the question of what is the situation that should be solved (Rancière, 2004). In the programmes of Bridge Budapest the higher purposes, such as economic well-being, the future opportunities of the young generation or the meritocratic society are already set, and there is no space for politics, namely for the disagreement about the situations and the goals. This way, the assigned objectives are not political, but are reduced ‘to the management of the local consequences of global economic necessity’ (Rancière, 2004: 4). This referencing to the necessities is able to justify the pre-setting of objectives and the importance of consensus. Although in the discourses of *Bridge Builders* little is said about necessities, their goal is to shape the social context of the enterprise, and thus the support of goals stems from economic necessities, such as the improvement of the country’s competitiveness and economic development. Faix underlines the most important goals in this spirit by saying that

there are fundamental questions that we should discuss, independently from the current regime. For example, the question of how to encourage innovation, what kind of business-friendly environment we support, or what type of programmes we are launching to help businesses to enter the European market (Faix, 2016).

Therefore, according to Bridge Budapest, in the setting and the execution of the goals there should be an unquestionable consensus, that in Rancière's interpretation bears the technocratic dream of hoping that conflicts over the 'common' and consequently the political can be eliminated as outdated ideologies (Rancière, 2004).

### **Conclusions: Strategies of moral and economic catching-up on the semi-periphery**

In this article I investigated the relation of the Hungarian startups to their local environment through the inquiry of the discourses of Bridge Budapest that is founded and funded by the most important Hungarian startups. In answering my research questions I argued that their discourses on the ideal society and capitalism are technocratic and post-political attempts for the *establishment of a new spirit of capitalism*. The Bridge Budapest Association in the Hungarian context aims to change the representation of the enterprise and the entrepreneur, the central institution and figure of capitalism. Therefore their aim is to make the new spirit of capitalism universal and obtain a status for it that could (re)justify the enterprise and the entrepreneur for Hungarian society.

However, this attempt for establishing a new spirit is neither self-serving, nor happening in a neutral space, but it aims to change the country's position, to help it catch-up in the hierarchy of global capitalism. Economic catching-up in this context means both the improvement of competitiveness and the expansion of the technological and creative sectors, typical in the core countries. As Faix stated, 'we want to put Budapest on the startup map, next to London, Stockholm, Berlin, Barcelona and Tel Aviv. This is our goal, to be the most important hub in the region in the first step' (Faix, 2016). Consequently, the role model of the catching-up is Silicon Valley, which carries the spirit of the projective city that I presented in the section on *Bridge Basics*. The other example is Estonia, famous for its startups, and where economic dynamism, according to Pistyur 'can be dated back to the success of Skype' (Pistyur, 2016). However, for the catching-up Bridge Budapest does not offer a programme of economic policies, but instead aims to shape the ideas on and attitudes towards the enterprise and capitalism. Therefore, according to them, the final objective, the economic catch-up, could be achieved through a moral and attitudinal catch-up. They consider necessary for the moral catch-up the spreading of the idea of ethical enterprise, and for the attitudinal catch-up the increase of risk-taking and the change of the Hungarians'

paternalistic attitude. Besides these, their goal is the establishment of a meritocratic society, where 'that is proud of its achievements and knowledge' and not of the achievements through (political) relations (Bridge Budapest, n.d.). Meritocratic society, attitudes and moral change are all imagined in the context of the enterprise, and their objective is the formation of an entrepreneur and enterprise-friendly society. In this context the central figure of the catch-up is the entrepreneur, who as a Schumpeterian innovator contributes to the expansion of the creative and technology sectors and to the improvement of the country's competitiveness (Schumpeter, 1928). This frame provides additional justification for the entrepreneur, because it presents him/her as an essential figure of the common good.

In the narrative of Bridge Budapest the formation of a business-friendly environment that indirectly contributes to economically catching-up, appears in a technocratic post-political frame. This is visible primarily in *Bridge Builders*, which aims to shape the social environment only in a top to the bottom way, through the young opinion leaders. Therefore this programme tries to establish a network of the leaders of the future that bridges ideological breaks and is able to create a social environment in which there are no competing political goals, but everyone works for the commonly shared objectives: for technological knowledge, for positive entrepreneurial attitudes, for a business-friendly environment and for the catching-up of Hungary. This is the essence of the Bridge Budapest's post-political ideology: in the context of their programmes, politics does not disappear, but the subject of real political disagreement, namely the question of what kind of world we want to live in, is being formed into an unquestionable consensus.

Nevertheless, Bridge Budapest not only aims to change society and to (re)justify the enterprise and the entrepreneur, but more specifically intends to justify the Hungarian and the international startup scene. By stating that they are working for the transparency of economic life, for real market competition, for the catching-up of the country and even for the introduction of a new, more exciting and flexible organizational culture, startups are appearing as the bearers of the moral and economic principles and practices that can be exemplary for everyone. Therefore startups and startupperes are taking the burden of the new spirit of capitalism and are presented as the perfect subjects of catching-up. It is not accidental that selected young leaders in *Bridge Builders* are trained and taught directly by the CEOs of the startups, because according to Bridge Budapest startups are the organizations that could function as role models for the other spheres of society. Consequently from the perspective of Bridge Budapest the startup scene is the complex of the perfect economic and moral subjects, for whom the shaping of the local society is more than an opportunity, it is a duty.

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## I AM WORTHY, I WANT, AND I CAN: THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF PRACTICING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

ELENA TRIFAN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This paper addresses the consequences of practicing personal development upon the daily life and interactions of individuals. In this context, I will describe how practitioners are applying the principles and techniques of personal development in order to transform the way individuals are relating to themselves and to others. In parallel, I will analyse how the ideology of personal development is assumed, by negotiation, in connection with the neoliberal project. This article aims to bridge a gap in the literature by showing how practicing personal development can restructure everyday experiences, emphasizing the negotiation of the intrinsic values of personal development techniques and how it (re)configures relationships and social interactions.

**Keywords:** personal development, neoliberalism, everyday practices, relationships

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The most common expression in books, courses, or workshops for personal development is “You are the most important person in your life!” At first glance, the discussions with people involved at different levels in the practice of personal development – from employees for whom personal development trainings are part of their job to individuals passionate about the field – are devoid of political content, as there are no explicit references to various doctrines or ideologies. Practitioners make no assumption that such practices are connected with political or ideological goals. However, during my fieldwork<sup>3</sup> I noticed the

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<sup>3</sup> The article is part of my PhD fieldwork for which I have employed different methods of research. I have attended sixteen personal development workshops and presentations; I have conducted thirty interviews with practitioners and participants in personal development activities; and made a content analysis of personal development blogs and sites.

reproduction of a certain type of rhetoric related to an ideology. This rhetoric goes hand in hand with the broader political landscape in Romania, with views favouring technocracy, and the public rejection of politics in general and of political parties in particular. Following the definition of Antonio Gramsci (1971), I understand ideology as a field of practices, principles and dogmas that have a material and institutional nature through which individuals are constructed; personal development is therefore shown to be a form of ideology that is closely related to the neoliberal project. Thus, the motto “You are the most important person in your life!” can be translated as “You are responsible for your own life”.

The premise underlying my argument on how changes are brought forth by personal development practices is that such practices are tools through which self-governing individuals are constructed in a neoliberal context, with consequences requiring the reconfiguration of social relations.

### **Personal development: culture, governmentality, globalization**

Neoliberalism is an intensely debated concept in anthropology and the social sciences, especially from a critical point of view. Mathieu Hilgers (2010) distinguishes between three approaches to neoliberalism in anthropology. Comaroff and Comaroff (2003) see neoliberalism as culture: for them, culture is moulded by an ethics of life, and for neoliberalism this is the belief that wealth can be magically acquired. The second approach sees neoliberalism as a system. David Harvey (2002, 2005) is the most famous proponent. In his classical work, *The condition of postmodernity* (2002[1989]), he analyses how the time-space compression interferes with the transformation from a fordist system of production to a post-fordist system, based on flexible accumulation. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey (2005) defines the concept:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (2005: 2).

The last approach sees neoliberalism as governmentality. It was developed by Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2007) and describes the implementation of the modern non-repressive forms of disciplinary power of the state, through institutions that determine individuals to govern themselves. Rose (1998) argues that psy-sciences are forming self-governing citizens that are learning to govern their own lives. Ong (1987, 1999, and 2006) argues that neoliberalism is

at the intersection of the Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives. For Ong (2006), following the discussion initiated by Rose and Miller (1992), neoliberalism describes a new relationship between government and knowledge through which the activities of government are reformed as non-ideological and non-political issues in need of technical solutions. Thus, neoliberalism as technology governance is a thoroughly active way of rationalizing governance and self-governance.

Among the first works that investigated self-help practices (part of personal development practices) are those of Anthony Giddens (1991). In his analysis of self-help groups, like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and self-help books, he argues that such practices comfort the self because they offer more possibilities than traditional practices. According to Giddens, the society is undergoing a process of de-traditionalization: religious values are debated and replaced, hence things are not pre-given anymore, but they must be constructed. Self-help literature and other self-help practices play a very important role in this process. Giddens's sociological approach is not critical of self-help, questioning how the latter helps its subjects. If for Christopher Lasch (1979), who accomplished one of the first analyses of the therapeutic culture in the United States, the on-going self-monitoring was a sign of narcissism, for Giddens (1991) such a phenomenon contributes to the development of the reflexive self.

Distinct types of researches analyse personal development as part of the therapeutic culture. Building on case studies from justice, education, social security policy and political rhetoric, James Nolan (1998) develops the argument that the therapeutic gaze has become a form of cultural capital present in state institutions. He criticizes this phenomenon considering its consequences upon the replacement of the traditional values and upon the transformation of public life. Nolan (1998) defines four characteristics of the therapeutic ethos. The first one is an emancipated self, which is based on efficiency, productivity and cost-control effectiveness, alongside self-actualization, self-fulfilment and human dignity. The second one has to do with the pathologization of human behaviour, accomplished through the invasion of public sphere with expressions of personal manifestation. A third characteristic is victimization, where individuals are defined as victims of an oppressive past or of a social environment. The last characteristic is the emotivist ethic, according to which emotions are the underlying reason for moral decisions and for understanding the relationship with others and with oneself. However, Dana Cloud (1998) argues that the therapeutic ideas are used to pacify and weaken the criticism of modern capitalism. Her approach is based on a Marxist rhetoric analysis of several types of cultural products - films, news and feminist politics. The argument she proposes is that the language of therapy has become hegemonic because it is being used by politicians, managers, entrepreneurs, feminists and neo-Marxists. They use what Cloud (1998) called

personalized and privatized explanations that reject determining systemic social problems such as discrimination, exploitation, poverty and wars. Personal development is an extension of the patriarchal discourse, and the books are a form of consolation, not of strength. On the same note, for Lauren Berlant (2008) self-help writings function like safety valves for feminine anger because they allow women to position themselves in opposition with men without the fear of losing their position and without changing the social order. Also from a feminist perspective, Wendy Simonds looked at the reading of self-help books, concluding that readers do not believe everything they read (Simonds, 1992). She identified several factors that are considered by readers when evaluating a self-help book: whether they are too easy, whether they oversell what they promise to solve, whether they are sensationalistic or overgeneralizing. For Simonds (1992), self-help books promote the perception of the self as a correctable and transformable entity. They belong to the technologies of the self that help transform it into an object to be controlled and rebuilt according to a prescribed ideal (Simonds, 1992).

In a research akin to the one by Simonds (1992), sociologist Paul Lichterman (1992) examined the ambivalence of self-help readers. He argued that readers develop an ambiguous relationship with self-help books because they both trust and distrust them. Even if readers believe such books provide new psychological ideas that validate and label their problems, the author suggests readers share a *common understanding* about the books. Hence, the pieces of advice in such books can be applied “loosely, tentatively, sometimes interchangeably, without enduring conviction”, thus providing a temporary framework of understanding of their issues. Therefore, self-help books are purchased in the absence of legitimate and affordable aid (Lichterman, 1992: 441).

Another important analysis from a sociological point of view is Micki McGee’s (2005) description of self-help in the United States. The author introduces the concept of *belaboured self*, describing the process undergone by the practitioners’ selves. The process of self-help has no end; therefore, those who enter this process will work continuously to improve their selves. McGee’s (2005) analysis is centred on the categorization of individualism performed by Bellah et al (1998) that differentiates between utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism.

Besides the aforementioned study by Giddens (1991), few studies in sociology had a less critical approach toward self-help. One of them is *Worked up selves* by Elaine Swan (2010). The author drew from her personal experience as a personal development trainer, and conducted interviews with practitioners to provide response to criticism of current personal development. The book has an interdisciplinary perspective, combining organizational studies and sociology. Its main conclusion is that personal development is located at the

intersection of traditional therapies and management training. Furthermore, showing that personal development should not be perceived as uniform and context-free as it has been suggested, Swan makes a plea in favour of the importance of research for addressing the diversity of these accounts and practices (2010).

One of the most recent sociological works looking at personal development is *Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry* (Nehring et al, 2016). It describes the hybridization of self-help in China, Trinidad and Mexico and the newest trends of the genre in Britain and the USA, making an argument about the pervasiveness of this type of practices.

Numerous analyses of the self-help phenomenon start from a Foucauldian conceptual framework. Sam Binkley (2011, 2014), Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volčič (2009), Rebecca Hazleden (2003), Heidi Marie Rimke (2000), Warwick Tie (2004) argue that the techniques of self-help build self-governing individuals, in the context of the reconfigurations of the relation between state and society. Methodologically, most research is based on content analysis of self-help books. Heidi Marie Rimke (2000) argues that these practices are a tool by means of which citizens are governed and paradoxically their selves gain less autonomy. From the perspective of governmentality, Sam Binkley (2011) examines the importance of positive psychology in imposing the neoliberal project. Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volčič (2009) explore the self-help discourse as part of the managerial discourse in the context of post-socialist neoliberal economy. By using a self-development radio show as a case study, Tomas Matza (2012) investigates the practice and the policy of self-help in Russia, interrogating the status of neoliberalism in the country. Lisa Blackman (2005) analyses the concept of the dialogical self from psychology, tracing the construction of the concept within the discipline, discussing how it shapes mental pathology and normality, and at the same time linking it with the social and cultural context of flexible capitalism. Rebecca Hazleden (2003) highlights the difference between you and self. The latter is an entity with emotions, feelings, opinions, and ego that you as an objective observer have to guide and control (Hazleden, 2003).

Nickola Pazderic (2013) argues that *Heqi*<sup>4</sup> quasi-religious practice “that reflects and reinforces the mandates of individual success as it generates a new collective ethos within an electro-spiritual field (*cichang*) of universal love” (197), reveals a complex relationship between the neoliberal requirement for success, the perception about power and love, audio technology and the production of the modern self. According to Pazderic (2013), *Heqi* produces

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<sup>4</sup> A spiritual practices developed by Michael Chou, drawing from Chinese medicine, which involves breathing exercises, acupuncture centered on *qi* (energy field) (Pazderic 2013).

modern subjects in relation to the requirements of global capitalism. In a similar vein, drawing on Foucault's concept of techniques of pastoral power, George Sanders (2012) explains how the construction of self-governed individuals is framed in capitalism. On the same note, Warwick Tie (2004) explores the concept of psychic life of governmentality, using the example of self-help as mean of liberal government. Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson (2011) conducted a case study of Dr. Phil's self-help franchise, arguing that it is a way to build neoliberal citizens aimed at women. Elizabeth Puttick (2000) conducted a similar analysis, connecting New Age with current practices. She discussed the secularization of the 1970s movements, which morphed into the contemporary personal development trend, thus passing from a niche to a popular trend with implications in business, environment, the military, and politics. One paper that addresses the same topic as the present article, yet without using data collected through interviews and ethnographic work, is the book *Self Optimizing: Social Representations of Self-Help* by Ole Jacob Madsen (2015). The author analyses the increased interest in Norway for psy-techniques through the lens of critical psychology and argues that such techniques turn into means of management in the neoliberal system (Madsen, 2015).

Another research strand considers the analyses of the consequences of personal development ethos. Lynne Friedli and Robert Stearn (2015) show how the advanced capitalist economies construct the need for unemployed persons to improve their personal skills. The analysis, based on interviews with recipients of unemployment benefits, explores how the new requirements impact psychologically vulnerable people. Similarly, Kendall et al (2011) discuss the self-management strategies that people with chronic illnesses are advised to apply. The authors critically observe how this approach can produce inequalities. Congruently, addressing the question of inequality, Richard Hackman (2009) writes about the negative consequences of applying ideas from positive psychology in organizations. In addition, another study by Megan Brown (2003), looking at books on business success, analyses how their narratives are (re)constructing a new social Darwinism based on adaptability and flexibility. Brown (2003) argues that such narratives enable a situation to unfold in which the individual finds himself/herself in an endless process of adaptation, naturalizing the idea that anyone can succeed via his/her own willpower.

A third category of studies about self-help, using mainly content analysis of books, employs a Weberian lens to describe how the spirit of capitalism evolved over time. The most important such study is Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2016). Drawing on the analysis of management literature from different periods, they show how the spirit of capitalism has transformed over time. Their argument is that the 1968 movements in France,

criticizing the inequalities and the lack of creativity associated with capitalism, led to a change in the spirit of capitalism by incorporating only the latter part of the criticism. Kobe De Keere (2014) makes a similar argument. He challenges the arguments proposed by Bellah et al (1985), who explains social transformations through the shift from an economic utilitarianism towards an expressive utilitarianism, favouring the explanation of Boltanski and Chiapello (2016) about changes in the ethos of capitalism. Caitlin Forsey (2015) analyses from a Weberian perspective the relationship between self-help, its representatives, whom she called gurus, and their followers. It prolongs Boltanski and Chiapello's (2016) discussion examining

how the calling of the entrepreneur has been supplemented by and transformed into the dharma of the advice guru through a thematic analysis of the manifest and latent content of two self-help texts that display the economic ethics of New Age spiritualism (Forsey 2015:ii).

Barbara Ehrenreich (2009) describes the relationship of American culture with positive thinking from a cultural studies perspective. She looks at how different areas were infused with positive thinking, from medicine, psychology, business and religion, drawing attention to the consequences of this situation. For example, she links the 2007 economic crisis with positive thinking – the latter provided the basis for decisions on decreasing the number of employees or, in general, for decisions taken in the absence of any concrete analysis. In addition, she shows how this type of thinking eliminates critical attitudes toward the system.

Studies that argue that personal development practices are tools through which individuals build self-governance in a neoliberal context (Binkley 2011, Erjavec and Volčič 2009, Hazleden 2003, Matza 2012, Rimke 2000, Rose 1998, Tie 2004 etc.) do not make use of ethnographic examples, as most of them focus on content analyses of books or speeches.

Unlike the strategies adopted in the aforementioned studies, I will describe in this article how undergoing personal development reconfigures the daily activities and interactions, restructuring the way groups and society are perceived. In this description, I will consider Lichterman's (1992) observations that self-help readers engage critically with said books. Similarly, I have observed through interviews and participating in workshops, that informants do not take without consideration the information received. Drawing from the interpretation given by Giddens (1991), who sees personal development techniques as instruments of adapting to postmodernity, I will describe how these solutions are applied and what the consequences of their implementation are. Based on interviews with individuals passionate about personal development, I will explore how social relations are reconfigured through the initiation of the personal development process.



The paper contributes to the extended field of researches looking at the way the neoliberal project is applied and interpreted. Therefore, it follows the relationship between neoliberalism and the self mediated by personal development, analysing how they influence each other, what the relationship between neoliberalism and personal development is, and what the relationship between the self and personal development is.

### **You are the most important person in your life**

Underlying the entire diversity of personal development practices, there is a common denominator that is the requirement for self-centeredness. In each course or workshop that I attended, I heard phrases and expressions repeatedly emphasizing the importance of the relationship every individual must have with himself/herself. This exhortation is most often expressed through the phrase “You’re the most important person in your life.” The speaker constructs the moment of directing the attention toward the selves of the listeners with the question: “When was the last time you thought about you?” Such a question relies on the assumption that the participants are distracted by everyday routines and are not aware of how they feel and of what their needs are. Therefore, it imagines a separation between the outer life, including a person’s social actions, and the inner life, consisting of emotions and experiences according to Tie’s (2004) observation about the difference between a person and their inner self. This separation then continues with the idea that the person is the only one who can make a difference regarding how their outer life is shaped. The inner self and the attention granted to the inner life are the main mechanisms by which a person can influence the outer life because the attention directed to the inner life and the outer life means attention towards things that cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction. By identifying and understanding the social situations or circumstances in life, one can act on them. For example, if a relationship with someone is considered inappropriate, it should be discontinued. In the following pages, I describe how people passionate about personal development relate with others and with outer life.

### ***The Management of Social Relations***

The management of relationships is a very popular topic among personal development courses. The Institute for Happiness, where I conducted most of my research, organized events addressing the relationships with others, such

as Workshop *Happy U - Harmonious Relations: with me and with those around me* or *Happy U - Positive relationships. With ourselves and with others*. Both events were part of a four-meeting workshop about managing relationships, using the PERMA model, borrowed from positive psychology and developed by Martin Seligman (2012), one of the pioneers of positive psychology. PERMA is an acronym that stands for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. In Seligman's view (2011), these features are fundamental for individual happiness and psychological welfare. The workshops aimed towards the "conscious and careful cultivation" of love relationships, friendships, or organizational relations. However, in almost every workshop there are discussions about the management of relationships, regardless of theme or purpose. A very common advice found in workshops and courses concerned the examination of the relationship and the possibility of giving up on certain relationships, thought to have a negative impact upon a person and upon her or his personal development process. Giving up on these relationships is based on certain criteria. Maria, for example, describes her experience:

I had very good friends whom I tried to drag along with me. I said, «Come on, I am the locomotive, follow me!» They had such powerful brakes that they would not do anything... They realized that something happened with me, that I was different. Well, they've always considered me different, I was different when I said "yes" to quitting the job at the bank although I was not directly targeted by the layoffs, but I took advantage of the restructuring and I said: «Put me on the list of people fired, don't count on me!». They were shocked: «You have money; you have a position, how come you are leaving just like that? Nobody told you to leave!» That's it. From that moment on, they saw me as very odd, because I did this and because I tried to tell them to take action, to progress, not to settle for anything. However, nothing stuck with them.

(...)

I tried once; I tried twice, until I realized that, in fact, this was starting to get to me. All my zest was drowning and I said «Sorry, I can only do what Andy [author's note: a trainer] explained to me to do when we encounter such a situation». When I realized that I had gotten to this point, it had been a painful decision, it was a sad evening when I got home after the meeting with them. I realized that I actually did not find myself anymore in the group. There is a downside, you grow, but if you are in not in the same environment where you can have some exchanges, the same language, there is nothing to be done because for you the process is irreversible. You can't go back to the state before, once you have seen the beauty on this side, why would you go back to something worse. (Maria, 53 years old, F, economist, coffee shop, 01.03.2016)

When she started the process, Maria felt that she had nothing in common with her old friends. They were preoccupied with holidays and shopping, they did not invest in improving their selves – a friend of hers wanted to become a magistrate, but never acted upon it. Therefore, for her friends, personal and professional development was not the priority it was for

Maria. Consequently, she considered that this situation could interfere with her own process and decided to break ties with these persons. Their lack of interest was influencing Maria's process of development because their different interests could derail her by tempting her; instead of focusing on the process, she could get distracted. Therefore, how the acquaintances relate with the individual's process of personal development can impact the development of their relationship. If friends do not understand the person involved in the process of personal development, the advice of the practitioners is to end the relation.

Denisa shared a similar experience after she started the process, while experiencing a depressive episode during college. She decided to break up with her boyfriend because she considered that he did not understand what she was going through: "I was fighting and I was on the verge of breaking up with my boyfriend because I as a human was changing". She expressed the same desire as Maria, to cut off the relation with people who considered her different after her process began.

Another reason for ending relations after the beginning of the process of personal development has to do with the evaluation of such relations according to the influence they have on someone. The coaches with whom I spoke during the fieldwork I conducted in 2011 gave me examples of clients coming in with an initial problem that had nothing to do with the relation they were in, but who nonetheless renounced the relationship after a period of coaching. In the language of personal development courses, the relations which affect in a negative way the participant are called toxic relations. They can be found in many spheres: love, family, work or friends. Toxic relations are "devouring" the other person; they are consuming their time and energy and they create negative feelings (like sadness or guilt). If translated in conformity with the recommendation from the title of this chapter, a toxic relation is preventing a person from becoming the most important in their lives.

The solution for dealing with a toxic relation is constructed in an individualistic note. Since it does not question the possible cases of abuse, discrimination or exploitation that individuals seeking improvement could be experiencing, the solution provided places the entire responsibility in the hands of the individual. In the following pages, I will provide some examples from the workshops that I attended, describing how the empowerment of the individual who finds himself/herself in an "unhealthy" relationship is constructed.

During a workshop about emotional development called *The Journey*, organized by the Institute for Happiness, after the trainer remarked that everything that happens in our lives is our responsibility, someone in the group asked how it could be our responsibility if we have a manager that is treating us unfairly.

The trainer said it is the employee's responsibility because it is possible that she sends negative energy that is then reflected in the superior's behaviour towards him/her. The person insisted, wondering how it could still be her responsibility if the manager is "very, very unfair" and behaves the same no matter what she does. Then the trainer said that the responsibility is still hers and that she could get out of the situation by quitting her job.

The example above captures the negotiation and the establishment of the principles of personal development. The trainer had been initiated for a long time with these practices, while the person in the audience was attending one of her first workshops of this kind, and was hearing for the first time this kind of discourse, which explains why she was intrigued by the level of responsibility that was placed upon her.

Even if the relations are not considered toxic for the individual, being concerned for others or constantly taking the others into account are considered unhealthy attitudes. Denisa describes what one of her trainers told her:

He was like, "Hey, choose! I mean, you are burning the candle at both ends, I mean it's OK, you're wonderful, what you are doing is great, but let's make some choices" and somehow he was the man who told me "You, you are the master of your life. You're the only one who can make decisions for your own life, stop worrying about others, like your mom, dad, oh my god what is happening, stop worrying about your boyfriend, your friends, your work." This is how I was like; I was neglecting myself pretty much, for others. One way or another, I was neglecting myself, my own self, who I am as a whole and complete person for the way I was perceived. And it was a thing that no one has ever taught me, back when I was 16 years old and I started to build this thing, no one taught me, that I am going to a dead-end. (Denisa, 24 years old, F, student, coffee shop, 23.01.2016)

Just like in the case of toxic relations, caring too much for others is a hindrance for taking care of the self. However, worrying about others is a consequence of the individual's behaviour; it has to do with the way the person understands and acts with respect to others, and at same time, it has to do with the self. Starting the process of personal development leads to a reconsideration of the relationships in the lives of individuals and the way they are imagined.

Healthy relationships, from the point of view of the workshops I attended, are built around two major themes: listening and communicating.

I attended an active listening workshop at the Institute for Happiness. The importance of active listening in human relations from the perspective of personal development is suggested by noticing its absence. "We never listen!", "We talk, but nobody listens" are the catchphrases that start the argumentation for the importance of active listening. These examples are considered the main

problems that arise in any kind of relationships. The workshop had three parts: an overview of the topic, an exercise and a discussion. During the exercise, the participants were divided in groups of four, and each of the members had to play all of the following roles: speaker, listener and observer. The speaker had to narrate how his or her day was; the listener had only to listen and look at the person speaking, without asking questions or making other gestures. The observers had to analyse the interaction and then comment on it. In the last part, the participants had to explain what they thought about the exercise and how they felt in the different roles. Active listening is a concept borrowed from psychology and promoted in professional training sessions, which recommends that the listener has to understand what the speaker conveys, and to provide a response to what was said.

Similarly, assertiveness is presented in workshops by describing the opposite behaviour that also seems to be prevalent in everyday interactions, summed up by the phrase “we do not know how to say no”. Thus, many workshops about assertive communication are aiming to help participants how to “say no”. It is considered important to say “no”, because when accepting something for other people, we are actually refusing something for ourselves. Assertive communication reiterates the importance of the self in relation with others and is a technique for the practical implementation of this requirement.

Active listening and assertive communication are only two interpretations of the main components of building healthy relationships: listening and communication. For the participants, they become objectives. They are becoming objectives because they are considered processes. Hence, being difficult to achieve, individuals need to exercise them for a while. Ecaterina describes how she felt when she realized that she has objectives:

Now my objective is to listen, you know (laughs). I arrived at this conclusion, though it feels weird for me to get an idea that I have an objective because I wasn't very organized around objectives, like now I want to do this, you know? Now I want to listen more (laughs). (Ecaterina, 30 years old, masseur, coffee shop, 24.01.2016)

Another consequence of starting the process, after eliminating unhealthy relationships, is replacing them with relationships with people concerned with the personal development process. The volunteers and the employees of the Happiness Institute emphasized this; the Institute was developed because Mălina, the founder, wanted a community of people who share the same thoughts. Sorina joined for the same reason – she wanted to be part of a community, in a “positive” space, surrounded by people with similar concerns. Ecaterina also describes her desire to join in:

(...) because I needed to be surrounded by people who have a good state of mind, vitality, who are smiling, you know, compared to what you see on the street. I had a chronic need to communicate with positive people, you know. Perhaps then somehow I changed myself, since I was surrounded by positive people, you know how you change, like a mirror, depending on who you are with. (Ecaterina, 30 years old, masseur, coffee shop, 24.01.2016)

Denisa recollected how when she started attending the Alternative University her life moved there – friends, colleagues, boyfriend, and work. Besides interrupting some relations and beginning new ones, there is an alternative solution for the management of relations, namely introducing old friends to personal development practices in the hope that they will become equally interested. Sharing becomes an imperative of the process. Those who attend the courses also bring friends, in order to make them familiar with the process of personal development. Ecaterina says that if she does not share the information she feels like a “puddle”, thus emphasizing the importance of the flow of information, especially because she was herself acquainted with personal development thanks to a friend. Roxana has a similar story: while working for a multinational company, a colleague told her about a course on Neurolinguistics Programing. Consequently, she constructed a technique of personal development that she now practices as a trainer. Adina told me during the interview that recently her boyfriend confessed how he had changed his attitude because of the courses he attended together with her.

Eliminating relationships and choosing new ones are clear manifestations of following the imperative “you are the master of your own life” – the self-governance of social life. Moreover, according to some personal development practices, the organization of relations where the individual responsibility prevails applies to any interaction. While working for a company promoting fast learning services, Denisa was having some difficulties in working with children, and she received similar pieces of advice: children are not to blame, but her attitude toward them was. She also received this piece of advice in relation to inanimate objects – her mentor told her that her stress causes the malfunctioning of the printer. Such interpretations are justified by another important idea present in all techniques of personal development: thoughts influence the external life – an idea popularized by the New Thought, a spiritual movement from the beginning of the last century called positive thinking (Starker 1989). Alongside the growing popularity of positive psychology in the context of Mihály Csikszentmihalyi's election as president of the American Psychological Association in 2000, the importance of positive thinking has also become an object of interest for scientific research.

### *Self and Society*

The practitioners' sole responsibility is to educate individuals on how to identify relationships that can be detrimental. This kind of solution seems to be tailor-made for any problem in any society whatsoever. During the research conducted for my BA thesis, an author of personal development books told me that if he would open schools in Africa, the problems there would disappear. Sorina from the Institute for Happiness explained that its purpose is to educate people on positive psychology and achieving happiness. On one of the office walls there is a poster with a famous quote by Mahatma Gandhi - "Be the change you want to see in the world".

I have also observed the online behaviour of some of my informants, taking a stand on certain social issues like supporting the technocratic government or making leaflets about how to behave on public transportation. Similar to supporting a government that has no apparent political orientation, personal development as a solution to social problems is also not seen as an ideological solution. According to neoliberal ideology, the state must move away from handling social protection mechanisms and transfer the responsibility towards the citizens (Harvey, 2005). At a workshop called *The Art of Living Happily* organized during the fair titled Body Mind & Spirit, I came across the negotiation of the implementation of these discourses. The trainer held a rather vague speech, without offering too many practical examples about how meditation can be the key to a happy life, and people from the audience started to ask questions. The assumption from which the debate began was that the only way to happiness is meditation:

Participant: Do you think people who live on the street, homeless people, are happy?

Trainer: Have you asked them if they are happy?

Participant: No, I ask you. Do you think they are happy? Because you seem to know all the answers. If people meditate, will they have more, more bread for a day? Do you think they can be happy, even if they meditate? Let me give you a concrete example. Last night [it was winter, the author's note], in a rich district in Bucharest, there was a woman in front of a building, on the stairs, outside of course. Can she be happy if she asked me to call an ambulance because she could not stand the cold?

Trainer: There are consequences of her actions that have brought her into this situation.

Participant: Maybe she was born on the streets; maybe her parents were also abandoned. [*Uproar in the hall*]

Another participant: There are people born on the streets who became successful.

Such an approach can be found in Smiles's *Self-help* published in UK in 1883 that includes examples of people who achieved upward social mobility through hard work and dedication (1934[1883]). What makes the difference

between them and those who remained poor is that they have worked hard to meet their goals, as in the trainer's example. According to this view, if you work hard and do the right thing, in the end you will be successful. Moreover, at an event organized by the Institute for Happiness in order to celebrate the International Day of Happiness, one of the speakers was a person abandoned by his parents. He used to live in an orphanage, but nevertheless eventually became a successful young man.

This extreme form of personal accountability means that you are the most important asset you have. You are the solution for every problem you encounter. Thus, according to the ideology of personal development you are the panacea, not the practices as such. You can solve all your problems. You need to focus more on yourself. You need to operationalize, to know what your skills, abilities, beliefs are. You have to know yourself first; hence, you can use yourself to fix yourself. Unlike in the case of ancient philosophy, where self-knowledge was reserved solely for the elites (Foucault 1995), personal development in the modern society is the responsibility of each person. Everyone becomes a conglomeration of attributes that can be refined and improved to make life better.

Furthermore, practices from the spiritual sphere urge participants to assume full individual accountability. I attended a workshop called *Angels Therapy*, based on the following principles, according to the description provided by the trainer:

Decisions should be made with our soul, using intuition, not through schemes and analyses. The answer comes from your heart. Everything we see around us is signs. Whether you receive a SMS, an e-mail, or read an advertisement - these are all signs those beings of light use to communicate with us. We can find answers in coincidences, and even from a beggar on the street. We must observe what is happening around us and in our souls! Angels communicate with us through intuition, not through the mind. We can be friends with the mind, but the decisions we make with the heart. The first thought we have is the decision we must take. We can communicate directly with archangels, for example use this phrase: «Rafael, please let your green light pass through me». Then, put your hand where it hurts. If you have an emotional blockage, talk with Uriel, the Archangel psychologist, to let him work for you. With Michael, pray for the courage to make changes. Michael deals with cleaning and purification, and Gabriel with communication. (Adina, 37 years old, personal development trainer)

What can be drawn from the trainer's explanations is that we are not alone, we can ask for help from the higher beings, creatures from the Bible, to help us in the outer and inner life. However, they work as props for our decisions because they are made on first impulse. The trainer notes that decision-making schemes should be avoided, as they are tools built by others, which can deter the decision from us. The discussion in the workshop led to an explanation of the necessity of personal responsibility:



We are the most important people in our lives. If we are not OK with ourselves, how can we have good relations? We have to consider what is good for ourselves. It is important to be attentive and present in our lives, and angels can teach us how to love ourselves. For love, we can work with Jesus and the Virgin Mary. (Adina, 37 years old, personal development trainer)

Then she clearly pointed out what the implications of this might be:

People pick on me because I am too happy, they say, «How can you be so happy when there is war and famine and poverty in the world? » I did not know that it was wrong to be happy. I choose to be happy. I do not care about wars! I am focused on the good things! With each of us, the planet can change. It is not the fault of the system! We cannot blame the neighbour. We can change the world if everyone turns its thoughts toward the planet. How many of you take time for yourselves? (Adina, 37 years old, personal development trainer)

Even if only some practices are based on the idea that the planet can change with good thoughts alone, all have in common the idea that if you live a good life and take care of yourself, things can change. This thinking eliminates any social determination. If you make the right decision, either by using the angels or by having confidence in you, what lies ahead is happiness and success. This type of thinking does not recognize any form of discrimination, unequal access to resources, or the reproduction of classes. In other cases – like in the example of the happiness of the homeless person – this type of discourse removes any responsibility towards others, which in the modern state can be regarded as paying taxes that are redistributed towards others in the form of social services. Personal development is closely related to the neoliberal ideology and it works as an instrument for the ideological education of individuals through which they learn neoliberal values. Education is an important subject mentioned in the discussions, for personal development practitioners it is seen as a solution for poverty and the lack of access to resources of individuals. Many personal development courses include plans on how to develop a business, or how to be an entrepreneur. In addition, in order to increase the employees' performance companies use many of the personal development techniques. Companies/corporations support the industry by paying for the products in order to enable the individuals to continue to support the system that allows them to accumulate more capital.

In the United Kingdom, the unemployed looking for jobs are offered personal development courses (Friedli and Stearn, 2015). This shows how the state's withdrawal from the management of social security is unfolding and how the neoliberal project is protected. In this perspective, the latter does not build inequalities, but provides opportunities for individuals, who can use it to their advantage or not (ibid.).

The personal development discourse uses words that can have different meanings and interpretation for different individuals; a conservative's good thoughts for the planet are not similar with a socialist's good thoughts. Not addressing these differences and leaving the practitioners to discover for themselves what kindness and love mean, the solution can have different outcomes, in terms of *saving the planet*.

## **Education**

Practitioners see personal development as a form of education. Many practices explain how to manage everyday situations, drawing from studies in psychology and/or neurosciences, using concepts such as emotional intelligence, assertiveness, active listening, resilience, neural waves etc. They provide guidance on how to control different aspects of living, such as employment or personal relations, adapting them to different situations: how you can convince people to do what you want, how you can have relationships. Therefore, the daily life is split and explained in detail in order to be managed for the achievement of success and fulfilment. This management refers to the fulfilment of expectations that participants have about the conduct of life, which most often refers to work and to a certain extent also to love life, touching on other aspects of the social life by focusing on what I have called inner life.

Firstly, the concern for others implies a lack of concern for their own self, suggesting that the self can be separated from the others or, at least, that it can be built and separated from it. This interpretation is contrary to the sociological theories defining the self as a socially constructed and negotiated concept. According to the theory of personal development, the self can be developed separately from the social context. By proposing to eliminate the concern for others and society in general, what is suggested is the abolishment of the social construction and reconstruction of the self.

Personal development practices highlight the importance of focusing on the self and emotions. Because you are the most important person in your life, what you feel is the most important thing and the only certainty. As you move forward in the process, you receive a form of legitimization of the decisions: a transfer of knowledge from trainer/coach/therapist toward the client takes place. The latter will eventually start another transfer, towards those around her/him.

Starting the process of personal development also involves a process of reconfiguration of everyday life. By applying the principles, tips, and indications received through courses and workshops, enthusiasts can act directly on their daily lives. Observing and examining the relationships they have can lead to

their termination or to seeing certain people less often. Enthusiasts share and disseminate to all of their discussion partners that they started their “personal development”. They participate in personal development events together with their spouses, friends or family members, and some of them start to share their passion about it. By participating in these kinds of events and meetings, some social relations are replaced with others, namely with people with similar interests. Regarding the relation with society in general, practicing personal development implies on the one hand carelessness (Ehrenreich, 2009) and on the other hand a form of involvement by promoting personal development as a solution to social problems of the world. Personal development is seen by practitioners as a mean of educating individuals to overcome some of these inequalities. Therefore, individuals involved with it regard it as a mean of adapting to changes in society.

## **Conclusions**

This analysis contributes to the debate around the claim that personal development acts as a training tool for citizens in the spirit of the neoliberal project. It takes into consideration the studies that analyse the political discourse related to personal development practices and the link with the neoliberal project that needs self-governing individuals, and adherents to the credo of individual responsibility. Personal development came increasingly to the attention of social science studies, which are especially interested in its implications on social development. Nevertheless, there is no consensus regarding the meaning of these practices. A scholar like Giddens (1991) states that these practices help the individual to adapt to the changes produced in post-modernity. Yet other scholars are critical about the meaning of such practices. Studies argue that such practices work as means of governance for the citizens (Foucault et al, 1988), be it in the interest of the state (Nolan, 1998), or in the interest of the neoliberal system (Rose, 1998). This paper contributes to the debate by showing how personal development influences the everyday lives of the individuals taking part in personal development, and also how such practices are negotiated within the neoliberal technology of subject-making. The changes of the self have consequences upon the social configurations through the addition or removal of relationships. Personal and professional life is governed by individual choices. Although most of the practices and practitioners rely on the idea of an authentic self to be liberated from the constraints of others and of society, it comes to be built by applying the principles of personal development and limiting the influence of the social and of the people who also practice such

activities. The process involves assessing the social environment that a person inhabits. This evaluation may cause the breakdown of certain relationships, the transformation of others and/or the creation of another, especially with persons also going through a process of personal development. An individual discontinues a relation when it is considered *toxic* and it diverts the person from the process of development. There is a separation between those who practice and those who refuse to. The bettering of existing relations is part of the same process because it involves the improvement of the practitioners' relationships skills; in the analysis I have presented *assertive communication* skills and *active listening* skills. Personal development provides a model for the self-government of social life, which on the one hand empowers the individual, but on the other does not provide any kind of protection from abusive relationships and exploitation. The project is in line with the neoliberal reconfiguration of social security systems that tend to no longer be under state's responsibility, becoming an individual choice; in an individualistic world each person is responsible for his/her own life. Personal development assumes that "you're the most important person in your life", that "you are the only one who can influence your life", therefore when confronted with an injustice you are the only one responsible for finding a solution. A person treated unfairly at the workplace, or a person discriminated against, or a poor person are all responsible for the situation in which they are and are the only ones responsible for their (lack of) social mobility as long as they are exposed to personal development. However, access to personal development practices is restricted by the cost of products and the awareness regarding these practices, making it impossible for disadvantaged individuals to acquire the information provided, about their own responsibility.

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## THE AMBIVALENT AUTONOMY OF MOBILE “POCĂIȚI” BETWEEN VICOVU DE SUS, ROMANIA AND TURIN, ITALY AFTER 1989

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**ABSTRACT.** Intra-EU labour migration literature is fairly limited within migration studies and it has seldom considered migrants' embodied experiences and processes of subjectivation as a constitutive element of translocal economic transformations. The present paper focuses on the popular economies enacted by a segment of the migrant working class moving from Vicovu de Sus in Suceava district, Romania to Turin, Italy after 1989 as entangled in the production of “neoliberalism from below” (Gago, 2015). Mobilizing oral histories collected during an ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between 2012 and 2013, I will present some aspects related to the fields of *production* and *reproduction* within the movements of migrants belonging to a pentecostal community affiliated to the *Cultul Pentecostal – Biserica lui Dumnezeu Apostolică*. Pentecostalism is here understood as a performative regime of truth and practices (Foucault, 1987; Marshall, 2009), through which migrant bodies perform processes of subjectivation to actively “inhabit” the borders of the State and Capital. Bukovinean pentecostal discourse, through an entrepreneurial drive, a cultural shift towards material prosperity and a strict gendered division of labour, seems to have fostered the creation of a self-organized translocal community whose economic practices obey/re-enact rather than escape/re-signify the dynamics of exploitation and dispossession proper of Romania's peripheral incorporation into contemporary global regimes of production, accumulation and division of labour.

**Keywords:** intra-EU labour migration, post-communism, subjectivation, pentecostalism, neoliberalism from below

### Introduction

Contemporary literature concerned with Central-Eastern European intra-EU labour migration<sup>2</sup> is fairly limited if compared with research undertaken about incoming flows of labour from extra-European countries. It is possible to distinguish

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Favell and Nebe, 2009; Meardi, 2012; Stan and Erne, 2013; Woolfson, 2007.



a “‘social dumping’ perspective, which sees intra-EU labour migration as unsettling of existing industrial compromises in Western Europe” from an “‘integrationist’ perspective, which sees migration as beneficial to economic growth prospects” (Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2016: 1). Both hold the limitation of often neglecting migrants’ embodied experiences<sup>3</sup> (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) as “a constitutive and antagonistic element of the capital relation” (Mezzadra, 2010). Partially in resonance with the perspective proposed by the theory of the autonomy of migration (Moulier Boutang, 1998; Mezzadra, 2010; Mitropoulos, 2007; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008), I would on the contrary stress the epistemological and political importance of accounting for migrant subjectivities not merely as products of the functioning of State and Capital, but as co-constitutive of the current intra-European border regime pivoted on a logics of differential inclusion of migrant labour (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Rigo, 2007).

In her analysis of “popular economies”<sup>4</sup> in Argentina as a new frontier for strategies of capital accumulation and processes of financialization after the 2001 crisis, Verónica Gago introduced the concept of “neoliberalism from below”.

By neoliberalism from below, I am referring to a set of conditions that are materialized beyond the will of a government, whether legitimate or not, but that turn into conditions upon which a network of practices and knowledges operates, assuming calculation as its primordial subjective frame and functioning as the motor of a powerful popular economy that combines self-managed community knowledges and intimate know-how in the crisis as a technology of a mass self-entrepreneurship [...]. [S]peaking of *neoliberalism from below* is a way of accounting for the dynamic that *resists exploitation and dispossession and at the same time assumes and unfolds in this anthropological space of calculation, which is in turn the basis for an intensification of that exploitation and dispossession.* (Gago, 2015: 14)

It seems fruitful to mobilize such a concept, which stems from a foucauldian analytics of power (Foucault, 1976:121-123), in the understanding of certain intra-EU migration movements as an “everyday ‘realization’ and transformation” (Bayart, 2008:17) of a neoliberal politics of transnational labour mobility (De Genova, 2016). Firstly because it focuses on its everyday embodiment by popular subjectivities, rather than simply on macro-rationalities, calling for broader conceptions of the political and the economic; secondly, because it insists on the

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Stan and Erne’s noteworthy contribution focuses “on the role played by post-socialist transformations of production regimes, and the particular modes of development that resulted from them, in the specific shape taken by east–west migration at different points of time” (Stan and Erne, 2013: 3). On the other hand, qualitative and ethnographic research, for instance Anghel (2013); Bleahu (2004); Elrick and Ciobanu (2009); Horvath (2008); Potot (2000); Radu (2001); Vlase, (2004), is rich in accounting for migrants’ everyday life, but is often limited in the analysis of its entanglement with capitalist forms of valorisation.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to self-managed subsistence labour forms practiced by poor sectors of the urban economy.

radical ambivalence of popular economic practices, characterized by a complex coexistence of flight and capture with respect to mechanisms of capitalist subsumption. I will discuss the autonomous<sup>5</sup> labour practices enacted by a peculiar segment of the migrant population who moved from Vicovu de Sus, Suceava district, Romania to Turin, Italy after 1989, as a strategic site where to inquire into the dynamics of "neoliberalism from below". Specifically, I will look at labour migrants belonging to a pentecostal translocal community affiliated to the *Cultul Pentecostal – Biserica lui Dumnezeu Apostolică*<sup>6</sup>. On a theoretical level pentecostalism, understood as a religious and intrinsically political discourse, can be defined as a performative regime of truth and of practices (Foucault, 1987 and Marshall, 2009) which constantly participates in the reshaping of imaginaries and subjectivities in relation to the borders of the State and of the Capital. Within the pentecostal discourse what is at stake is precisely the constant negotiation of the relationship between the self and the surrounding order through "processes of moral subjectivation whereby 'individuals or communities constitute themselves as subjects at the margins of constituted knowledges and established powers, even if this means giving rise to new knowledge and inspiring new powers' (Deleuze, 1990)" (Marshall, 2009:34). Much has been written about the relationship between pentecostalism, migration and the economic, from divergent perspectives and within different socio-political contexts<sup>7</sup>, for instance insisting that pentecostal churches pushes migrants towards "a modern engagement with the market on its own terms; social catapulting as a motivational force that results from this particular ethic and that puts into motion particular group dynamics" (Van Dijk, 2009: 111). However, contemporary social research seldom focused on mobilities and markets crossing the post-communist Eastern European spaces (Wanner, 2007)<sup>8</sup>.

Mass-emigration from Romania (6-7% of the total population) started during the second half of the 1990s, a phase of devastating social consequences derived from a political economy defined as disembedded "shock therapy" neoliberalism<sup>9</sup> (Ban, 2011), and the main destinations were Italy and Spain. The two countries came to account for 60% of total number of emigrants after 2002, in concomitance with the possibility of visa-free entry to the Schengen

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<sup>5</sup> In the sense of self-organized.

<sup>6</sup> The only pentecostal movement to have received formal recognition from the State as a Cult. However, it is possible to speak of an effervescence and an informalization of Pentecostal/evangelical movements in the post-communist context. The 1992 census registered 219.151 pentecostals, while the 2011 one 367.938, that is 1,92% of the total population. Since 1989 pentecostalism has known the highest growth rate among all religious movements in Romania.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Aubrée, 2003; Van Dijk, 2002; Huwelmeier and Krause, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> On different aspects of the pentecostal movements in Romania, but not focused on migration, particularly interesting are Foszto, 2009; Foszto and Kiss, 2013; Gog, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> At the end of the 1990s wage levels had halved with respect to 1989 (in Euro equivalent), while poverty had grown from 20% in 1996 to 36% in 2000, since the average monthly net wage had decreased from 187 euros in 1989 to 107 euros in 2000 (see Stan and Erne, 2014:12).

area for Romanian citizens (Ban, 2009)<sup>10</sup>. Labour migration as a subsistence strategy within a context of rising unemployment and poverty can rightly be interpreted as a productive component of Romania's post-communist neoliberal trajectory of economic integration within transnational capitalist circuits (Stan and Erne, 2014). Within such historical context, Romanian pentecostalism as embodied by post-communist migrants moving between Vicovu-de-Sus and Turin, fostered the foundation of a “whiter” (Țichindeleanu, 2011; De Genova, 2016) entrepreneurship along with a conservative gendered division of labour as the motor of holy translocal economies. It would be mistaken to interpret such economic practices simply as “autonomous” acts of resistance or survival within a neoliberal regime generated from above. Instead their ambivalence lies precisely in that they are generated *within* and *through* neoliberal practices and knowledges, hence it becomes important to pay attention to everyday material migrants' subjectivation processes (Lüdtke, 1995).

### **Vicovu de Sus, the establishment of a pentecostal migratory chain**

Vicovu de Sus is since 2004<sup>11</sup> one of the 11 “orașe”<sup>12</sup> of the Suceava province and it is situated in the historical region of Bukovina<sup>13</sup>, a borderland which has historically been subjected to several processes of conquest and colonization since the Austro-Hungarian rule (Beaumont, 2005). Vicovu de Sus administrative unit also comprises the ex village of Bivolărie. It is situated 6 km away from the Romanian-Ukrainian border. According to the 2011 INSE census it counts 13.308 inhabitants, mainly Romanians (12.347), with a small Roma community (268), among which 2.872<sup>14</sup> declare themselves pentecostals (insse.ro). Under the Communist regime, Suceava's district was the last one to be officially collectivized in 1962 (Iordachi and Dobrinu, 2009). In Vicovu de Sus, whose local society was composed mainly by peasants and structured along ethnic lines, the first CAP “Unirea”<sup>15</sup> was created in March 1962 to employ a great segment of the popula-

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Anghel, 2013; Ban, 2009; Diminescu, 2003; Horvath, 2012; Ricci, 2005; Sandu, 2006; Serban, 2011; Sigona, 2011; Toma, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Law 83/2004.

<sup>12</sup> “Oraș” is the equivalent of “town”. On an administrative level the Romanian State is composed of municipalities (*comune*), towns (*orașe*), cities (*municipii*) and counties (*judete*).

<sup>13</sup> Today Romanian Bukovina, to distinguish it from Ukrainian Bukovina from which it was separated through the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947.

<sup>14</sup> 21,6% of the total population.

<sup>15</sup> C.A.P. stands for “Colective agricole de producție” and it refers to the collective farms established through a program of agrarian reform promoted by the communist regime between 1949 and 1962.

tion. Another segment was employed in the construction sector, in wood processing, in the extractive industry and in metal processing<sup>16</sup>. During the last decade of Ceaușescu's regime, parallel to the official economy, there was a spread of consumption-driven informal economic activities (Chelcea, 2002), which in Vicovu de Sus developed mainly through self-entrepreneurial activities in the realm of tailoring, tanning and shoemaking. After the "peripheral incorporation of the post-communist region after 1989 into contemporary global regimes of production, accumulation and division of labour" (Poenaru, 2013), with the shift towards a capitalist market economy, Romania was the theatre of a political economy of land de-collectivization. The controversially conceived and implemented Law nr. 18/1991, called *Legea Fondului Funciar*<sup>17</sup> (Verdery, 1996), also had a strong impact on the local economy in Vicovu de Sus.

In order to make a living and subsist, the inhabitants of the town were forced to follow one of the two alternatives or both. Taking advantage of freedom of movement across borders and the possibility of obtaining employment contracts in other countries, some of the inhabitants of the town have dedicated themselves to business activities elsewhere or have become occasional traders dedicated to the sale of certain products. Another part of the residents opened trading businesses, or went into production and services in the municipality. (Unsigned monography on the history of Vicovu de Sus, unknown year of publication)

Together with the process of de-collectivization, the post-communist condition was marked by a time of privatizations and wild neoliberalization, which in North-Eastern Romania caused the steadiest increase in unemployment (in 1999, 14,9% of the population against a national average of 11,6%). Self-entrepreneurship and translocal migration where the main economic tactics undertaken by the local population, both with a great impulse from the local pentecostal community.

The pentecostal community in Vicovu de Sus is organized in four churches, belonging to the Pentecostal Cult<sup>18</sup>:

- *Biserica penticostală Numărul 1* in Vicovu de Sus, founded in 1918. In 2013<sup>19</sup> it counted 1.000 registered members and 250-300 people in the diaspora;
- *Biserica penticostală* in Laura, founded in 1986, with 300 registered members;

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<sup>16</sup> Data published in the only existing monography about the history of Vicovu de Sus (unsigned manuscript unknown year of publication, received by the author via e-mail from the Vicovu de Sus local government (*Primaria*) on 29/10/12).

<sup>17</sup> Law on Agricultural Land Resources.

<sup>18</sup> There is also a community of "dissidents".

<sup>19</sup> Fieldwork data.

- *Biserica pentecostală Betleem* in Bivolărie, founded in 2000, with 600 registered members;
- *Biserica pentecostală* in Plai, a Roma “mono-ethnic” church founded in 1999, lead by Romanian members belonging to the Biserica nr. 1, with 50-80 adults attending church events<sup>20</sup>.

The history of the community begins at the end of World War I, by initiative of Nișu Constantin, who was returning from the Russian front and founded a pentecostal congregation with Russian influences (Andreiescu, 2012). The genealogy of the pentecostal discourse in Bukovina, which is considered the most conservative in the whole country, is linked to the history of Molokans, a mystic movement born during the second half of 16th century (Wanner, 2007), but also the Amish, the Mennonites and the Baptists, as it was explained to me by Simion Buzduga, one of the most respected pentecostal theologians in the Suceava district:

The origins of pentecostalism in Bukovina have to be retraced to Germany. In Bukovina, Rădăuți was the most germanised place, there were not many Anabaptists, but many Amish and Mennonites. They didn't accept modernism. So this was the first influence. The second influence was baptism. But overall we can say that the pentecostal movement saw a great influence from Saxons, who came back after WWI. There is no relationship here in Bukovina with pentecostalism in the USA. In fact, pentecostalism existed in Russia before the USA. In the second half of the 1800, in Armenia there were believers. In Russia the experience of the Pentecost goes back to the second half of the 19th century. (Simion Buzduga, october 2012)

The social and economic conditions of the first converts in Vicovu de Sus where those common to poor peasantry and conversions occurred by family units. The pentecostal community historically suffered great institutional repression. First, during the interwar period in the context of a growing nationalism (Livezeanu, 1995), when a specific State-Church relationship was prefigured, so that the Orthodox and the Greco-Catholic Church obtained the status of “national churches” (Lavinia Stan and Turcescu, 2007; Foszto and Kiss, 2013). Under the Antonescu regime pentecostalism and other religious minorities were also harshly persecuted as enemies sects. The communist regime, on the other hand, recognized a Pentecostal denomination in 1950 to centralize neo-protestant activities and better control the movements<sup>21</sup>. Such repression didn't stop the

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<sup>20</sup> Based on an interview with Vasile Ionesi, responsible for the church, member of *Biserica pentecostală Numărul 1*.

<sup>21</sup> Although it was a religion recognized by the State, the Pentecostals were considered by the staff from the Department of Religious Affairs as «an infection», «sickly mysticism», « fanatics», «bigoted» and against culture. See Neagoe-Pleșa and Pleșa 2005.

growth of the movement and it is precisely in such a context that the local community nourished a strong culture of economic self-organization and entrepreneurship beyond state control, which was then mobilized with the integration of the local economy within socialist structures. During the 1990s the main economic activities in Vicovu de Sus were shoemaking, tanning, tailoring, construction, retail trade, wood processing, transport, automobiles, with the leading sector being shoemaking and linked industries (especially tanning). After 1989 more than a hundred shoemaking enterprises appeared, most of them really small or medium size. In time, most of the production concentrated in the hands of a few factories, among which the most successful were the ones owned by members of pentecostal churches, namely Marelbo, Nicolis, Lidoro Prod Com and Incar Prod Com. According to the mayor, in 2013 the shoemaking industry employed 2,000 people.

In Vicovu de Sus labour migration flourished during the Ceaușescu regime, both on an inter-regional level, with seasonal mobilities towards western Romanian regions to work in CAPs and in mines, and on a transnational level, mainly towards the United States. Migration from Romania to Italy became consistent after 1989; however, there are no reliable statistics about it, since the majority of the movements were not regulated<sup>22</sup>. It is nevertheless widely recognized that migration from Romania to Italy, and to Turin specifically, became more relevant since the mid-1990s (Sacchetto, 2011), as a common class experience (Kalb and Halmai, 2011) of the ex-communist working class, dispossessed along different gender and colour lines during post-communism (Kideckel, 2008). As it has been argued,

[i]n 1989 in Romania, 28% of the population was employed in agriculture; during the two following years the percentage rose to 40%. The land saves a segment of the population through subsistence economy, but it can no longer be a permanent resource to which to entrust oneself on the medium and long term. The major route towards emancipation from living in the moment thus becomes emigration. (Sacchetto, 2011: 25)

In 1989 in Italy there were 8,000 regular migrants, in 1999 - 50,000, and over 100,000 in 2002 (Carfagna and Pittau, 2003). Given the fact that the main instrument through which migratory movements were managed in Italy at the

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<sup>22</sup> "The major problem encountered here is that (similarly to other sending countries) Romanian authorities have few tools to induce the (de)registration of emigrants. If we compare the Romanian emigration statistics with the immigration statistics of the main receiving countries, the results will be shocking. According to the World Bank statistics, in 2010, 2,8 million Romanian citizens resided abroad. In the time period between 2001 and 2011, the number of emigrants registered by the Romanian authorities was just about 128,000 persons. If we look at the flow statistics of the main host countries, we will realize that the Romanian emigration statistics captures less than 10 percent of the legal outflows from Romania" (Kiss 2013:6).

time were the so called “sanatorie”<sup>23</sup> in the absence of any coherent migration policy, the crossing of national borders occurred *illegally*, and was followed by an *irregular* insertion in the labour market (Reyneri, 1998). Most of the immigrants were integrated into the local labour markets through low-skilled jobs in the agriculture and service industry, a fact that was typical for migrant labour in Italy, which was “characterized by employment in heavy, low-qualified, unhealthy and underpaid jobs” (Ferrero and Perocco, 2011: 16-17).

According to the testimonies I collected, the first migrant from Vicovu de Sus to Turin, I. B., left in 1993. He was followed by his brother and a few others, for a total of around ten people in the first half of the 1990s. The phenomenon took off between 1995-2000, with a significant feminization of the migratory movement starting from the end of the decade, when many women left their families in order to integrate into the service and care economy in Italy. Turin was chosen as a destination because back in the 1980s and 1990s it was known as the “city of FIAT”. It was represented as a flourishing industrial city with good economic opportunities, an imaginary which soon collapsed in front of the migrants' eyes.

The Romanians who were the first to go out of the country were the *poacăîți*. In fact we were all over the world, we went everywhere. We went to the USA and to move around we used the power of the Faith, our love. We all knew each other. (G., august 2013)

Pentecostal migration, which was driven by economic reasons, was also charged with *prophetic meaning*, linked to the will of God and the Holy Spirit, “who showed us the way”, and a *missionary* one, linked to the moralizing role that the members of the church felt they held in Turin, a context represented as corrupt by ultra-worldly values.

In Vicovu we are closer to the Spirit, and we bring it to you, we bring Salvation. (L, january 2013)

I asked God: “Lord, I am missing a job”. First I wanted to go to the USA, with documents, everything legal... If I am not legal some nasty things can happen to me. In the USA I didn't go because the Lord told me not to. Then a brother had a prophecy, a spiritual gift: “Look, you have to go to Turin”. Because he saw a vision with the map of Italy and Turin, he saw it. He saw a map with an I, like Israel and Italy, but I thought of Italy and Turin and so I started to do all of those things, to arrive there as a tourist. (N., January 2013)

Pentecostals were pioneers in moving outside the region during communism to seek for job opportunities. As far as the movements towards Turin are concerned, other than fuelling such entrepreneurial spirit, the church represented a central infrastructure for the migratory projects.

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<sup>23</sup> “Sanatorie” are large scale amnesties, through which, from mid-1980s, irregular migrants were cyclically legalized in Italy. (Colombo and Sciortino, 2004)

How could you put together 1,500 German marks? How could you? There were maybe ten of us in the family... my father worked and we worked too. So what happened is that the church collected the money for my brother to leave. We do it now regularly as they did it for him and for others. (L, January 2013)

Another aspect was linked to the relationship with the pentecostal communities in the destination countries, for example in Turin a contact was established with the *Assemblee di Dio*. It was a guarantee that the migrant would have some support and orientation once arrived. Finally, through the pentecostal network it became possible to organize a very flexible structure of migration, both enabling the establishment of strong links with the community of origins and the possibility of return migration, both encouraging temporary labour mobility all over Europe, according to the conditions of local labour markets.

### **An army of autonomous workers in Turin**

It is important to underline that the "governmentality of migration" is in fact "primarily a government over lives" (Tazzioli, 2013: 86), which functions through the production of differences (in juridical conditions and beyond) which are put to value in contemporary capitalism, creating different regimes of life related to the position that is assigned to such differences within a given political order. The government of lives moving between Vicovu de Sus and Turin can be interpreted as being built upon the intersection between two governmentalities.

The first governmentality is related to the re-defined concept of post-communist "transition" (Gunder Frank, 1991) which crosses "oriental" territories and bodies since 1989 and which can be synthesized with the words of decolonial philosopher O. Țichindeleanu, who argued that "[t]he political meaning of transition/integration/accession is therefore the top-to-bottom alignment of East European governmentality in the order of Western governmentality, and of local economies into the world system of capitalism" (Țichindeleanu, 2010: 26). Such governmentality is related to the economic process of "Third-Worldization" of the so-called "Second World" about which A. Gunder Frank already spoke as early as 1992 and it deploys itself since the end of "State capitalism"<sup>24</sup> in 1989 (Tamás, 2009: 11-28) through a series of technologies meant to pathologize/ infantilize/allochroonize/feminize "backward" post-communist oriental bodies and territories with respect to the "civilized" western capitalist democracies.

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<sup>24</sup> See also Polgár (2012).



Transition in this context is translated into a “new” mode of production and accumulation, a “socially-disembedded” (Ban, 2011: 348) form of capitalism, that is neoliberalism. The second governmentality is related to the contemporary European regime of migration control, inextricably linked to the changes occurring in the management of internal and external borders both in the EU and in the Schengen Area (Rigo, 2007). Such a regime doesn't work along the dichotomous lines of inclusion/exclusion upon which the modern discourse of citizenship was built, but instead it deploys itself through multiple and violent temporal and spatial processes of differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013) which produce the conditions of segmentation of the migrant labour force to exploit its power within highly hierarchic labour markets (Ferrero and Perocco, 2011).

Within the pentecostal community in Turin, migrant bodies gendered as males coming from Vicovu were mainly employed into four different economic sectors: construction, small business, transportation and handicraft. More precisely, the vast majority was self-employed, holding a “partita IVA”<sup>25</sup> as bricklayer; a minority was salaried with different duties within the “Tarsin” transportation enterprise; two people were employed as electricians and one as a plumber.

Males work mostly in construction and factories. Either they hold a VAT or they are salaried. [...] The second generation changed a little. Some males are working as mechanics and others are also in factories. Then we must say that there are different situations, because now the parents support their children through school to study, while the first generation has other difficulties. [...] From Vicovu, men work primarily in construction, holding a VAT, then there are craftsmen, two or three, always with the VAT, and people working in transportation, two or three. There are also two electricians. But the main thing is the construction sector. Almost all males in the church work in construction. Some now went back to Romania and opened there a company with the skills they have learnt here in Turin. Because here with the crisis the sector shrunk... Now the biggest enterprise in the building sector within the church is [...], which has 12 employees. 70% of men of the church work in construction [...]. There are about thirty people owning companies who take others in the church to work. (A., March 2012)

The structural economic context in which migrants from Vicovu de Sus found themselves was characterized by long-term effects of the profound crisis affecting the binomial “FIAT-Turin” since the early 1970s. Turin in the 1990s was no longer a “company-town”. On the one hand FIAT's productive model had been profoundly reorganized through a growing financialization, a policy of saving on labour costs, a transformation in the relationship between the enterprise and the linked industries and the delocalization of the production both in Southern Italy and abroad. On the other hand, in terms of employment this resulted in

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<sup>25</sup> The Italian name for VAT number which is the registration code to work as self-employed.

the primacy of the service sector over the secondary one which however couldn't compensate for the overall unemployment of about 65,000 former employees<sup>26</sup> (Castagnoli, 1998). The high level of unemployment affected mostly the less educated segments of the workforce. In fact, during the 1990s and at the turn of the century, Turin's urban economy was profoundly reconfigured in terms of an expansion of service industries, also called the "industrial metamorphosis" (Berta, 2007): "Turin shares with other North-Western metropolises a trend that, during the thirty years comprised between 1971 and 2001, saw its industrial workforce halved" (Cominu and Musso, 2009: 45). The migrant workforce in the 1990s thus entered a post-fordist productive system where, on a regional level, there was a high demand for

unskilled industrial workers and construction workers, but also of manual workers in the service sector and domestic workers [...]. For males, the construction sector and the small enterprises have represented many opportunities for employment, especially in the initial phase of insertion. (IRES Piemonte and Fieri, 2011: 113-115)

In a seminal research published in 2000, concerning the employment of male immigrant workers, Allasino argued: "Work in the construction sector and in small and medium manufacturing enterprises dominates among males" (Allasino, 2000: 22). At the time of arrival of the first pioneers from Vicovu, the construction sector in Turin was organized in a similar way to other Italian urban contexts, with the proliferation of small enterprises and the use of sub-contract mechanisms.

As mentioned, the pioneer pentecostal migrants coming from Vicovu de Sus entered the labour market in Turin primarily within the construction sector, already before 1995. It was mainly a "job on call", illegal, for local small enterprises. If the crossing of the Italian State borders often occurred illegally or via tourist visas, through the intermediation of "passeurs" from Marginea, the insertion within the local labour market occurred through the intermediation of Italian "brothers" who directly employed them in their enterprises or offered contacts with owners of construction enterprises. The Romanian church didn't exist yet, so attending the Italian church was a way of building a network of relationship useful to seek employment: the church acted as a sort of recruitment agency.

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<sup>26</sup> "In the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism Turin found itself at the heart of the crisis. In 1981, while at the national level employment was increasing, in Turin there was a decrease of 17 thousands employees. [...] Between 1981 and 1989, while there were signals of concern regarding the progressive aging of the population, the Piedmontese productive sector lost about 200.000 employees. The manufacturing sector, the most penalized by the economic crisis and restructuring, expelled 150.000 workers" (Castagnoli 1998: 140-166).

When I arrived it was 1992, I was a boy, in Romania I worked in the factory for a short time, but I didn't have experience, because I was really young. I arrived in Turin and I had relatives from my family who were already here and gave me a place to sleep. My father was a pastor in Romania and he spoke to me about Italian pentecostals... I knew more or less that there were different groups, the Assemblies of God and so on... they are more libertine than we are. When I arrived in Turin I went to their church, but I didn't like it. Then I found independent churches where I felt more comfortable. They helped us build our community (...). Concerning the job, I was fine with everything, when I arrived I didn't have documents and I stayed like this until the first *sanatoria*. At the beginning I found contacts for jobs through the Italian brothers of the Church, in Porta Palazzo. (M., August 2013)

Even if pentecostal migrants seemed to dispose of a higher social capital compared to the rest of Romanian migrants, by virtue of the faith network already existing in Turin at the time of their arrival, which they could easily access, this doesn't imply that they were exempt from exploitation, as underpaid undocumented workers.

I arrived in Turin in 1995, I was one of the first. But I suffered, you know, a lot. I broke concrete, they paid me 30.000 liras at the time. All day I broke concrete. It was heavy, too heavy. (M., November 2012)

"Ok, come tomorrow, I'll pay you 20 euros a day. Are you happy?" "Yes, thank you" "Ok, from tomorrow you come to work". I stayed with 20 euros, for more or less two years. It rained, snowed, it didn't matter. My first wage was 100 euros... after one month... because he told me "Listen, I want to regularize you, I need money to make the documents for you, if you want to pay, otherwise I don't want to pay for you, if you want the documents you pay for them". The law said something else... but he... we talked with closed doors, nobody listened. (G, June 2013)

With time, once the Romanian pentecostal church was established, some of the members were already salaried workers in small enterprises, other were themselves small entrepreneurs and so the recruitment started being organized within the community itself, through word of mouth, or through the intermediation of the pastor or other institutional figures, or via a showcase with job offers and demands placed at the entrance of the church.

When I arrived my brother already had a job, he worked in the construction sector. I also started, but not immediately. Some months passed, and I was desperate, I was sorry to have come. The church has been very useful in finding a job. To find a job, the pentecostal community was important. It's normal, because when you are alone you pray, but you are missing the union, when there are a lot of people you pray and you know that tomorrow then... The other people give you strength. You know, you wait that God helps you, and in fact so it was. Little by little, we all found a job, we went to church, we worked. The Italian brothers gave us jobs, but also our own brothers! Directly or through their contacts. Let's say, my brother worked with calabresi, other brother worked with piemontesi, you understand? "You need someone? I have a good boy. Good, yes". And so we found places through word of mouth, because you know, in Italy it functions like this... and God worked for us. (D., August 2013)

Initially, migrants from Vicovu de Sus entered the construction labour market without previous experience, so the first insertion was characterized by training "on the job", "realized through coaching by more trained workers, which also involved an initial period of confinement to the most simple tasks, but also the toughest and most disqualified" (Cominelli 2005: 36). Towards the end of the 1990s, a phenomenon of self-entrepreneurship started to grow in the construction sector: it was often a kind of irregular labour, because it was linked to mechanisms of subcontracting operated by big enterprises in order to hide the presence of effective subordinate employment so as to gain profits by eroding labour costs (Allasino 2000). Migrants from Vicovu entered such a system similarly to the rest of the Romanian male migrant population in Turin, which tended to self-entrepreneurship towards the end of the 1990s. They soon became the migrant nationality that owned the largest number of construction enterprises, a position previously held by the Moroccan segment of the labour force. "[T]he percentage of Romanian construction entrepreneurs in Turin shifted from 2,3% in 2000 to 21,1% in 2006" (Villosio, 2008:65).

To integrate within the mechanism of such a labour market, pentecostal migrants from Vicovu de Sus built first on the *church as a recruitment agency*, very effective to meet demand and supply, but also on several other dispositives. First of all, there was an *entrepreneurial spirit* and a *work ethic* based on a willingness to take risks, cultivated since the communist time, which found a favourable condition for expression within the capitalist system.

In our religion women can not be pastors, however they can study at University level to become theology teachers and I tell you: women learn the best! This is because they have a complex of inferiority. This is the same thing that happened with pentecostals. The first reason why we are having a lot of success now is that we were humiliated. We couldn't work in many sectors: army, education, medicine, police were not accessible to us. So after 1989 our reaction has been: «now I will show you where I can go». In Bukovina, Jewish people had the economic monopoly of the economy until communism. But God helps neo-protestantism and this is where we are now. The second reason why we are having success is that within the community we help each other. There is a lot of collaboration between business men. Another aspect is that we have better morals. In Vicovu de Sus from the economic point of view it is much better now than it was under communism. There has been a great exodus and this has brought change in the mentality. Pentecostals are the only ones who made good business in Bukovina. We created the economic basis mainly with the shoe industry. It is linked with the small entrepreneurial activities that we did during the late years of communism. (Simion Buzduga, october 2012)

Such a spirit in the context of Turin reified a discourse on entrepreneurship built upon a hierarchy of whiteness which tends to naturalize the economic – other than social and political – marginalization of certain segments of the population

(Ferrero and Perocco, 2011). In fact the contemporary Italian space is traversed by racialization processes which also affect “Romanian” bodies, even after the integration within EU structures. As Grappi and Sacchetto argued “even white skin and freedom of mobility” do not guarantee the immunity from processes of racialization of semi-oriental difference, so that “‘new’ European citizens from countries of ex-realized socialism, after going through long phases of regulation and concession of the right to mobility, remain the object of stigmatization processes which show different lines of separation of whiteness” (Grappi and Sacchetto, 2013: 5). Along with juridical dispositives, institutional and mass media dispositives serve to keep “oriental” bodies in a condition of inferiority and deportability within the Italian national space<sup>27</sup>. Within the pentecostal discourse different technologies contributed to the construction of a pentecostal masculinity “whiter” than the dangerous and untrustworthy ordinary “Romanian man” and thus more apt for work and entrepreneurship. Among these, central is the rejection of alcohol.

You know, many Romanians work in construction. Because of our religion, we respect each other. We do not steal, do not kill, we do not do strange things around... Drinking, we do not drink. I In fact I have spent years in Italy where while working they said: "Will you have a drink?" "No, no." "Not even wine?" "No, no." But they did not believe it. "It's true?" "Yes, look at this. You do not believe us, but that's how it is." (G, May 2013)

First of all the Bible says that wine makes you lose your head. Then in Proverbs chapter 23, it says “Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty”. It can kill you not in the physical sense, well also physical, but spiritual, because you lose your head. And then there is a cultural meaning, because the Romanians are people who drink a lot, but we have decided to eliminate really the use of all alcohol. You cannot make of your body whatever you want, otherwise you ruin it, using cigarettes for example, drugs or alcohol or anything that can deteriorate it. (L., August 2012)

Along with bodily discipline comes the promotion of a strict lifestyle, disciplined-rational approach to work, savings, financial planning and discipline in handling family and personal finances. Second, the drive towards economic wealth is legitimized through an imaginary of *material prosperity* which colonized the local and national pentecostal imaginary after 1989.

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<sup>27</sup> “It is not by chance that in Italy the rhetoric of the ‘Romanian rapist’ becomes widespread right at the time of Romania joining the EU (in 2007), when it becomes necessary to find justifications to expel all of those citizens that the European legislation considers communitarian, but that in Italy are still disciplined by the media and institutions as foreigners” (Sabelli, 2012: 151).

Here in Vicovu de Sus there were many changes: for example the search for material comfort, a change in lifestyle determined by material conditions. There is a Romanian saying that we have here in the village people that did everything to reach a wealthy lifestyle: "they split the devil in four". There are those who, migrating or aspiring to material wealth, got indebted at the bank, using as a collateral their house or their old parents' house. You know, those who see the bank as a goldmine, as a safety valve to maintain the appearance of wealth. Many also go to usurers to get the money. (...) So in the end who made the New Man, communism or capitalism? Where have you seen a New Man on earth? I'll tell you an anecdote: when you see elderly people, be it women or men, going to church with traditional clothes, well for them it doesn't matter that it is communism or capitalism, they have time for their spirit, but this is not the case anymore for young generations. (I., May 2013)

The work of God is realized through money and through the Holy Spirit. In Scripture there is a lot of talk about money and the necessity to sustain the ministry and the Church itself. The entrepreneurial spirit went so much forward that no Christian institution can go on without money. We are becoming dependent on money. We interpret it as a gift from the Holy Spirit through God's work. (R., March 2013)

The desire to make money is well valued within the community, and money is necessary for the growth of the church itself, where the practice of the tenth is established.

My fortune came along because of God's help. In 1997 I had some money saved and I decided to give to the church, I didn't make any profit that year. In 1998 I had doubled my profit, because of God's help. I gave everything in 1997 for the church and then I got double, triple that in return. (A., October 2012)

It is possible to argue that the Romanian pentecostal discourse has been influenced by the prosperity doctrine, in a political-economic context marked by radical change in the meaning of work and wealth. Third, if the pentecostal movement in Vicovu had historically developed through social diffusion among peasantry, in a context of structural change in the economy, labour migration favoured the construction of complex social stratification within the church itself, with the emergence, at the extremes, of a new class of entrepreneurs active mainly in the construction sector and a class of unskilled labour functionally at the disposal of the enterprises for salaried and on call jobs. Such a phenomenon was legitimized through the de-politicisation of class conflict and the internalization of power structures. Economic inequality is never thematised within the community, due to a rhetoric of "brotherhood" and of the opportunity for anybody to become successful self-entrepreneurs by God's will and with the help of the community. Such rhetoric is also promoted, besides sermons and biblical studies, through formal activities, such as conferences on how to organize a business for it to be profitable and on professionalization.

We tried to make the people understand that we are all equal. That even if there are poor people, the church can help you start your business: we can buy the tools for you and then you will pay us back. During such activities, we also tried to culturally intervene for a mentality of savings and investments. To explain to everyone how to become investors on their own. (L., July 2013)

These dispositives are well exemplified by the biographical trajectory of Vicovu de Sus's main businessman, P.C., owner of Sorelmid, a shoe-making company which in 2012 had a turnover of 10 million euros, over 600 salaried workers and a distribution chain of 35 shops all over Romania. P.C.'s activity started during the 1980s, in the context of the proliferation of a secondary economy more recently interpreted in terms of a "refrigerator socialism" (Poenaru, 2008). Such activities were tolerated by the communist regime to attenuate the effects of a political economy and of a culture of scarcity. He was able to capitalize on his entrepreneurial *savoir-faire* within the ambivalent logics of an "unregulated" market, whose role was not only deepened after 1989, but also re-signified. As Mollona argued, informal economic activities could be "strategies of survival by marginal labourers", but also "a tool of economic policy used by the state for tuning the local labour market to the fluctuations" (Mollona, 2005: 544-545) of a given economic sector. It is precisely the case of informal economic activities in Romania, which under Communism were linked to the people's needs "to acquire the basic products and to satisfy basic needs" (Poenaru, 2007: 56), but after 1989 became functional within a neoliberal context with "increasing levels of unemployment" and "the relatively new and 'weak' existence of formal institutions, laws and economic activities" (Kanef and Pine, 2011: 10). In 1994 P.C. founded his company and the following year he bought some dismissed machinery from a factory which had been undersold to Italian entrepreneurs in the context of savage privatization which characterized the beginning of the 1990s. It was a logic of internal competition within the pentecostal community driven from a local redefinition of prosperity that enabled the growth of business. The pentecostal discourse promoted an imaginary in which it is God's will for believers to be rich and wealthy, thus inviting them to integrate themselves into a heavenly economy of abundance (Marshall, 1991; Ukah, 2005).

Nicolis, Lidoro, Sorelmid, Denis. The four companies started together, all at the same time. They are all from the pentecostal community. 100% only pentecostal people. Nicolis, Lidoro, Sorelmid are all from the same family basically. We help each other, but since [in capitalism] it is a different system, there is competition. We are all friends, we go to church together, we sing and pray together, but when it comes to business, it's business. (P.C., January 2013)

Moreover, P.C.'s business was based on the presence of a disposable labour pool. The local shoe-making sector profits were based on a general labour precarisation, also because several small companies became linked industries for Italian producers who eroded labour costs even beyond local standards. As Scroccaro (2012:283) explains, in the North-East the average wage was around 206 euros according to 2008 INSSE data. In Vicovu de Sus, if the production cost for a shoe is 5 euros, the Italian contractor pays 6 euros, forcing the subcontracting industry to seek its profits through the erosion of labour costs<sup>28</sup>. Within such a context, Sorelmid gained the workers' loyalty offering slightly higher salaries, which oscillated between 330 euros and 400 euros. The pentecostal discourse was then mobilized within the company to depoliticize economic inequalities through a rhetoric of communality, which was materially enacted through common prayers every morning for the company as a blessed community, singing activities during lunch breaks in which P.C. himself played the accordion, the organization of company parties at P.C.'s cottage, and especially the recruitment of labour within the church itself where an imaginary of "P.C.s is one of us" and "anybody can become P.C." was ordinarily performed.

### **Social factories: The pentecostal "virtuous woman" put at work**

L. is a 37 years old woman, who received her baptism in water as soon as she reached 18 years old. She has lived for over ten years in Turin, as a pioneer of migration inside her family. She was in fact the second to move, after her older brother, in the second half of the 1990s. During the years spent in Turin she worked first as a "badante"<sup>29</sup>, then as a domestic worker in different Italian families. Within the church in Turin, most bodies gendered as women who migrated from Vicovu de Sus were employed in unpaid domestic work within their own families, while four were also formally employed in paid domestic labour. The pioneers of migration were generally employed as "badanti", and in time a diversification in employment patterns occurred.

Women, if they have children, they stay at home, you know, they have work to do there. Otherwise women work as *badanti*, yes, especially the ones that arrived earlier. Others do cleaning, others work as domestic workers and others work as waitresses in restaurants. However, most of those who actually work are either domestic workers or caregivers. From Vicovu only four work, one in factory and three in cleaning. (N., November 2013)

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<sup>28</sup> "Pour faire face à cette précarité, le sous-traitant roumain ne peut que se focaliser sur les prix concurrentiels de sa main-d'œuvre et non pas sur un produit haut de gamme, car ses chaussures sont classiques, de balade, dont le processus de production est assez standardisé" (Scroccaro, 2012:284).

<sup>29</sup> The Italian word for caretaker.



A first aspect to be noticed is a trend of feminization of pentecostal migration (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Vianello, 2009), also visible in the case of Pentecostal migration from Vicovu de Sus, since many women were pioneers of their families in departing, as it is was the case for L. Such trend is in line with the mutations in the global regime of mobility which has also affected flows from Romania, and especially from Moldavia<sup>30</sup> (Piperno, 2007). In Italy – and more generally in advanced capitalist countries - migrant women are particularly on demand on the domestic and care labour markets given the interplay between several social and economic factors such as the dismantling of fordist welfare systems, the pattern of population ageing, the gendered segmentation of local labour markets and the increase in female participation in salaried labour. The first women migrating from Vicovu de Sus thus took part in what has been conceptualized as “global care chains”, intended as “personal links between people across the globe based on paid and unpaid work for caring” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003: 131). The pentecostal network was central in enabling the constitution of such chains, since the church functioned as a recruitment agency especially mobilizing its ties with autochthonous pentecostal communities in Turin.

Asking one or another, that was how we built knowledge and relationships, eh... Often they found a job for women. This happened in many churches. "Look, we found a job for a woman." "All women now have a job here, but I have a cousin, I have a relative in Romania". "Then bring her here." And they brought her here since she was a woman who could work, then after a while, in time, she also brought her husband. And the husband allowed the woman to go because he knew that she could find a job right away, he said "Yes, yes, go to work - go work as a caregiver - yes, you can stay there, live there, sleep, eat, everything with that lady. It's a good job." He would say: "We have the opportunity, so go there". There are so many cases like this, where the woman came first. (N., November 2013)

N.'s narrative exemplifies well the fact that domestic and care labour goes beyond a labour relation in that the worker is required to provide extra “emotional” and “intimate” labour, so that the boundaries between the worker and the job do not exist anymore. This is why care work has been defined as “job without boundaries” (Degiuli, 2007). The provision of such extra labour

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<sup>30</sup> “In Romania, according to the estimates of CURS (Centre for Urban and Rural Sociology) on a sample of 1,199 family units, the number of females appears to have doubled in just three years (between 2001 and 2004), going from 16.7% to 31% of total migration. The percentage of female migration in the Ukraine is similar, according to figures from the Ministry for Family. Strong female migration networks are even concentrated in specific areas. Ternopil in the Ukraine and Iași in Romania are cases in point. In these areas, according to local research, female migration flows currently account for 50% of total migration and, at least in the Ukraine, entirely account for the increased migration in recent years.” (Piperno 2007: 1)

requires certain burdening skills on the part of the worker, which the migrant women I encountered try to perform also by mobilizing pentecostal "technologies of gender" (de Lauretis, 1987). According to Degiuli, emotional labour "ranges from the simple yet demanding need to always display appropriate body and facial expressions to the more complicated need to devise strategies geared toward providing spiritual comfort" (Degiuli, 2007: 204), while intimate labour would involve "bodily and psychological intimacy: manipulating genitalia, wiping noses, lifting torsos, and feeding mouths, but also listening, talking, holding, and just being there" (Boris and Parrenas, 2010: 2).

The pentecostal discourse conveys a set of gender norms that contribute to the construction of a "virtuous woman", whose sexuality is restrained while her modesty and piety are celebrated. It is important to underline that within Romanian pentecostal theology there is a debate over Biblical interpretations of gender norms, as I had the chance to discuss at the Pentecostal Theological Institute in Bucharest. However, such theoretical discussions are certainly detached from the materiality of everyday life in the religious community of Vicovu which, as the rest of Bukovina, is historically characterized by a strong conservatism, whose influence is maintained also within the migrant community. This emerged clearly in a discussion about the influence of the Church of God's "practical commitments" on Bukovinean pentecostalism with Valeriu Andreiescu, one of the most prominent historians of Romanian Pentecostalism. The construction of a pentecostal "virtuous woman" - modest, hard-working, family and community-oriented (on a different cultural context see Eriksen, 2016) - which also emerged through specific technologies of the body concerning for instance the prohibition of consuming alcohol and tobacco, a conservative hair and clothing style - was mobilized in Turin within the domestic and care labour markets in opposition to a social imaginary of the "Romanian woman" associated with sexuality, seduction, fraud<sup>31</sup>. As Balcanu argued in her analysis of newspaper articles, especially after the murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian sex worker in 2007, "all of a sudden the Romanian women are all only criminals, demonic hookers that came in Italy only for killing or stealing Italian men from their wives and mothers" (Balcanu 2009: 11). Thus, if on one hand the participation in the labour market

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<sup>31</sup> The image of seductive and affectively manipulative Romanian *badante* has been a widespread sexist and racist representation in Italian media and popular discourse, especially around 2007 when Romanian accession to the EU was widely framed within the discourse of a "barbarian invasion" from the East. Of course, within such patriarchal imaginary, there are also a number of "positive" characteristics that with time have been ascribed to the "Romanian woman" body within the domestic and care labour markets, such as cultural proximity. As Degiuli argues: "Romanian women are highly valued because of their ability to learn the language due to similarities between Italian and Romanian and because they can legally work in the country" (Degiuli, 2016: 90).

abroad implied a challenge and a transformation of gender relations which governed the pentecostal community in Vicovu (see Stan 2005 for orthodox and catholic communities), since through salaried employment migrant women could access an economic power and an independence previously unknown, on the other hand this was a result of the reinforcement and not the subversion of existing gender norms (Butler, 1990). In the narratives of the migrant women from Vicovu the mobilization of the religious discourse, in its materiality, emerged as a central element in their employment tactics, as L.'s words exemplify.

You know, as a *badante* first and as a domestic worker later, I always worked for catholic families and they didn't know anything about Pentecostalism. I never really talked about *pocăință*, no, but for them it was clear that I was different from other Romanian women, that I was more serious, more loyal, I didn't go after men, I was silly, I was all family and church and they knew it from the way I dressed, my habits, they could perceive my devotion and my faith and they were admired. Truly, you know! They always told me how I was different, that I was respectful and a trustworthy person. I never told them in detail about the church, but I know that if I had invited them to come, they would have. For them it wasn't a matter of Pentecostalism and Catholicism, they didn't know, but for them I simply looked as a more profound Christian. (L., January 2013)

A second, interrelated, aspect to be underlined is the role of women within the community and the way in which their bodies were put at work in the construction of a translocal welfare system. A male member of the church once explained to me that “to understand the role of the woman in our community you have to bear in mind one simple fact: Eve comes from Adam's rib”. Within the pentecostal community the woman is conceived as hierarchically inferior to the man, who in turn is inferior to God. This conversation occurred while we were talking about domestic violence, a real issue within the community, and was meant to stress that exercising male authority should conform to God's norms, and those norms do not endorse violence and abuse. I would like to relate the re-enactment of a patriarchal economy<sup>32</sup> within pentecostal migration in its materialization within unpaid domestic labour, central for social reproduction both within the family and within the church. As Silvia Federici underlined:

Women's refusal to define themselves as housewives made it possible to conceive the unpaid domestic work done by women as a specifically capitalist form of labour-production and a terrain of exploitation: the social factory where the workforce is daily reproduced (Federici, 2012: 185).

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<sup>32</sup> Patriarchy is of course not specific for pentecostal discourse: “The patriarchal regime was deeply rooted in the Romanian peasant family pattern and it was maintained under socialism. Even if women acceded to education and to paid work their position within Romanian society remained subaltern in relation to men, especially in the private sphere. Women's gender identity continued being constructed around the role of mother, to which that of worker was added” (Vianello, 2013:112).

In a context where neoliberal reforms have progressively restructured the welfare State both in Italy (Bazzicalupo, 2008) and in Romania (Ban, 2011), labour migration came to play a central role both for daily reproduction of migrant workers in Turin and in sustaining social reproduction in Vicovu de Sus. As Bruno Meeus has brilliantly argued:

The Romanian work migration system evolved as a response to the increased individual welfare risks caused by a particular form of Romanian neoliberalism. The system acted as a transnational labour market and was built up from the grassroots. Secondly, through its maturing, this migration system acted as a 'safety valve' in Romania. Geographical proximity of informal work opportunities for over two million Romanians meant that neoliberal principles could be built into the Romanian welfare system, making migrant work a key structural aspect. (Meeus, 2013: 177)

The pentecostal women I encountered were charged with a triple burden in this respect, migrating to integrate within the Italian labour markets as a response to the problems of social reproduction back at home, while at the same time ensuring through unpaid labour the social reproduction of their families and their community both in Turin and in Vicovu de Sus. Such a system of translocal welfare was once again sustained through gender norms based upon biblical passages, ascribing certain roles to women with respect to domesticity within the family and within the church, "holding that the patriarchal family of male headship and female subordination is the 'order of creation', mandated by God" (Ruther, 2001). Such an order, even if partially challenged in the context of migration, was maintained daily by the practices enacted by pastors and by the so-called "Department of relations with diaspora churches" at the level of Church Council. Conflicts and tensions within the family around gender norms, often related to cases of abuse or to dynamics arising by female migration, were often pacified through counselling so that the "holy" unit was maintained. If the breaking of Romanian family units within the context of migration has been an issue, the pentecostal family remained firmly at the heart of the translocal economy, because the possibility of a divorce was extremely low.

## Conclusion

Mobilizing fragments of pentecostal migrant oral histories, this article narrowly focused on a few features related to *production* and *reproduction* within labour movements between Vicovu de Sus and Turin. The pentecostal discourse, through a self-sustained entrepreneurial drive and a strict gendered division of labour, seems to have fostered the creation of a self-organized translocal

community which obeys rather than escapes the dynamics of exploitation and dis-possession proper of Romania's peripheral incorporation "into contemporary global regimes of production, accumulation and division of labour" (Poenu, 2013). Far from any mechanistic explanation of the relationship between pentecostalism and capitalism, this paper mobilized some elements to argue that pentecostal economies actively participate in the constitution of "neoliberalism from below" (Gago, 2015) in a more complex way than a dichotomous analytics of power in terms of domination/resistance would imply. Further analysis, for example on the inner mechanism of social and ethnic stratification, on the conservatory political orientation within the movement, or on the role of pentecostal discourse as a healing technology to both contain and revolt against the social suffering produced within the neoliberal order, would be profitable. Following E. P. Thompson in his seminal history from below of the "Wesleyan" experience within "The Making of the English Working Class" (1963), analysed both in terms of a mechanism of "psychic terror" towards the working class, but also in terms of a potentially insurrectionary discourse, one must refuse any determinism in analysing the pentecostal discourse in its relation to the economic. This paper thus calls for further attention to the constitutive ambiguity of such a relationship at the level of everyday processes of subjectivation (Bayart, 2008) of migrant workers within the particular historicities of (trans)local societies they cross.

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## ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF A SELF-ENHANCING SUBJECTIVITY: FEATURES OF THE POST-SECULAR RELIGIOUS SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT.** My paper focuses on the shift in religious values in post-socialist Romania and explores the emergence of alternative spiritual beliefs and practices among the younger generations socialized during the post-communist period. It analyses some of the changes that occurred in the wider traditional religious field and looks at the various spiritualized technologies of the self that produce a distinctive type of religious subjectivity and an immanent ethics of authenticity. By departing from the idea of an integrated religious community and from the relational understanding of religious transformation, the field of alternative spiritualities operates a radical break with traditional religion and emphasizes the possibility of spiritual self-realization and self-discovery. It is this process of the individualizing sacralization of the self that constitutes the object of various workshops, blogs, personal and spiritual development literature, courses, spiritual retreats and counselling services. My research looks at how innovative technologies of the self are developed within these spaces that emphasize creativity, wellbeing and a new understanding of subjective interiority that learns how to find in itself the resources it needs to live in a spiritualized ontology of the present.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** religion, alternative spiritualities, spiritual subjectivity

The gradual emergence and institutionalization of alternative and complementary forms of spirituality represents one of the most significant changes of the Romanian religious landscape during the last decade. The early post-socialist period, when the religious field was dominated by Eastern Christianity that was trying to re-establish its inter-war national prominence and was finding ways to accommodate the growing Evangelical movements, the esoteric Yoga groups or the marginal bio-energetic therapies – all coded as

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'sectarian' activities by mainstream public opinion – are long gone. Two decades later we now have in Romania an extensive indigenization of alternative forms of spirituality ranging from various types of Yoga to Reiki, Bowen techniques, Theta-healing, Holotropic breathing, Familial constellations, Cranial-sacral therapy, etc. The wide diversification of these alternative spiritualities increasingly penetrates the popular urban Romanian culture: each year there are hundreds of new book titles on alternative religions, mindfulness, and spiritual wellbeing distributed by the mainstream publishing houses, which are widely read and referred to in blogs, podcasts, newspapers, TV programs, with wider and wider ramifications in everyday life. A new industry of personal and spiritual growth has emerged and a new sector of services aimed at commercializing spiritual development and wellbeing has taken shape in Romania during the past decade. Workshops, courses, counselling services and online stores that promote various forms of spirituality are just a few examples of this extraordinarily booming business in contemporary Romania.

These developments are indicative of much deeper transformations: not only are these alternative forms of spirituality becoming an important part of popular culture, but they are becoming gradually incorporated in various professional fields as well: there is a growing presence of various forms of spirituality in innovative management proposals that aim at supplying the sector of human resources with programs of personal and spiritual development; in psychology there are openings toward various forms of trans-personal and integrative psycho-therapies that make use of spiritual techniques; and in medicine we can see the incorporation of holistic and alternative healing therapies. The incorporation of these alternative spiritualities in the various professional fields happens along the grain of a socio-demographic pattern and signals a shift in the structure of the religious field. First of all, the vast majority of the people that are articulating an ethics of authenticity based on these alternative spiritualities are from the urban and educated strata of Romania. This can be seen not only from the profile of the people present in these workshops, seminars and spiritual retreats, but also from the scientification of religion and the way these spiritualities are grounded on an strong claim to scientific validity. Belief plays an important part in these spiritualities, but it is the scientific predicament of these practices that marks their mode of functioning, especially in the way they are employed in the above-mentioned professional fields. The complex philosophical language games in which these spiritualities are embedded, the scientification of spiritual techniques and practices and the resort to a language of self-discovery and self-mastery that makes use of psychological concepts and ideas all hint to a very specific urban and educated socio-demographic segment that has become spiritual. In this respect certain segments of spaces that were thought to be secular are emerging as deeply spiritual and genuinely interested in spiritual growth.

This structural change within the religious field also makes visible a deep and radical transformation of the language and religious ontology employed by the networks and agents of spiritual transformations. The young, educated and urban strata of contemporary Romania are becoming more religious/spiritual and in this process the nature of the religious field has been altered dramatically. Their religiosity is very different from the one of their parents and grandparents and by this I don't mean that it is different morphologically, in terms of the content of their beliefs. The new spiritual field has mediated a new sense of the subject, a new structure of temporality, new modes of religious socialization, and a new relationship to worldliness – all of these constituting radical transformations of how traditional and modern religious fields have been operating in Romania in the last decades.

Because of the overlay between a distinctive type of subjectivity employed by these new forms of spirituality and a socio-demographical pattern that is active in the new creative sectors of the post-communist capitalist economy an important question needs to be addressed: are these new spiritualities constitutive of an emerging mode of ordo-liberal governmentality and a new work ethic that is relevant within the new corporate and creative work environment? Do these new spiritualities contribute to a neo-liberal subjectivity that is instrumental for how economic enterprises are run and are the new spiritualized forms of authenticity in any way connected to the cosmologies of capitalism and entrepreneurial practices of the self that are required by the dynamic transformation of the Romanian economy in past 25 years? By asking the question of what economic and political vectors these spiritualities mediate we have to be careful in avoiding a simple, reductionist answer. When Adorno (1994) analyses the column on astrology from the Los Angeles Times and concludes that the wide consumption of horoscopes that project the 'the stars down to earth' is a symptom of how the irrationality of capitalist economy is rationalized by the dream industry which instils a blind and optimistic faith in a higher authority that will make sure each individual destiny will be providentially cared for, he remains within an analytical framework that equates religious beliefs with false consciousness. This avenue of research has two main shortcomings. First of all it fails to take into account the complex ways in which such beliefs account for features of personal identity and practices of the self that make contemporary economic transformations relevant and plausible to the individual subject. The idea of social actors brainwashed and doped by ideological formations to accept an exploitative economic system remains a reductionist idea if this is not backed up by an ethnography of how people make sense of the world around them and the social context in which they are embedded, precisely through strange and counter-intuitive ideas such as horoscopes and astrology. Secondly, only a thorough ethnography of those spaces where these religious practices are

articulated and where the mediation between people's everyday lives and socio-economic systems takes place can the question of the connection between certain religious practices and the new cosmologies of capitalism be settled.

A rigorous ethnographic investigation must proceed from the assumption that behind apparently obscure and 'retrograde' ideas there are complex perspectives on the world that are integrated in subjectively meaningful ethics of authenticity. In the case of this booming field of alternative spiritualities, the beliefs and practices are indicative of a new creative transformation of subjectivity and a new understanding of one's self in relationship to contemporary societal and cultural transformations. The deployment of innovative techniques of self-realization and self-motivation to instantiate an interiority that emphasizes spiritual authenticity, autonomy, recursivity, a temporality structure anchored in the present and producing intense living and wellbeing are some of the hallmarks of these landmark transformations. It is this cultural emphasis on the self-production of a new subjectivity and its ramifications into the emergent economic governmentalization that ethnography has to document and to analyse: this way what seems like 'false consciousness' can appear as a new sense of authenticity and an audacious ethics of perseverance in an context of global competitiveness and demand for intense personal expressivity and spectacular consumption. But simultaneously, the field of alternative spiritualities can emerge as a counter-culture that connects these inner transformations to a radical critique of capitalism, inequality and consumer society, which attempts to give meaning to an increasingly fragmented, dislocated and meaningless world.

The ethnography I have carried out led me to both conclusions. The findings presented in this paper are grounded in an extensive research carried out as part of a research team that focused on the emergence of alternative spiritualities in contemporary Romania. The research involved extensive interviews with people experimenting with alternative spiritualities, but also with spiritual teachers that have extensive experience in this field and have initiated many other people in these practices. We tried to cover the most prominent forms of alternative spirituality and explored the way they are embedded in everyday life and biographical trajectories. Most of these alternative spiritualities are being taught in workshops and seminars and this meant that we had to attend these meetings in order to understand and become familiar with the specific practices and techniques of self-development and spiritual transformations. In present-day Romania there is a variety of spectrum of workshops offered: from spiritual retreats in nature, intensive courses, feature presentations, or festivals to week long courses and workshops where complex training and exercises take place. We tried to cover as much as possible these various forms of spiritual/religious transmission and analyse the way the new ideas and practices are appropriated. An important part of the research dealt with investigating some of the most important Romanian blogs and other

virtual spaces where these new spiritual ideas are circulated, promoted, and commented upon. This enabled us to map out a wider field of positions related to what these new spiritualities are and are not and to explore the arguments mobilized by popular authors in order to delimit these ideas and practices from what are perceived as heterodox innovations and esoteric deviations. Blogs, online lectures, portals of information, online magazines and publishing houses specialized in personal and spiritual development writings were an important source for us in order to identify the books and authors that are most read and quoted in this field. A rigorous content analysis was helpful for identifying the most important features of this emergent field and this allowed us to outline the innovative religious technologies of the self that break away with traditional religious spaces of socialization. The data collected within this research project is vast and complex, hence in this paper I make direct use only of a few of the sources and materials gathered.

In order to contextualize these ethnographic findings I have analyzed two existing statistical databases on religious attitudes and practices in Romania ('European Value Survey' and 'Religion and religious behaviour in Romania'). Although this data is useful for having a broad picture regarding the generational shifts in terms of religious beliefs and practices, it conveys only a limited perspective on the diverse and complex forms of alternative spirituality emerging in Romania.

Because of the prominence given within the field of alternative spirituality to practices that aim at capacitating the self to draw on its inner resources and transform its subjectivity through specific techniques and procedures into an autonomous, pro-active and creative being I found in Foucault's (2005, 2007, 2008) and Asad's (2003, 2009) work a conceptual framework through which I could analytically demarcate the ground-research and elaborate an operative focal point that made visible the common transformative technologies of this vast and diverse field of alternative spiritualities.

Although Foucault has written little on religion, he exerted a major influence on the field of religious studies; his work on pastoral power, bio-politics, ordo-liberal governmentality, and care of the self generated a paradigmatic shift in terms of how religious practices are analysed and it produced a new epistemological framework for understanding subjectivities as constituted through various technologies of religious power. Talal Asad's genealogy of religion and his studies on the formation of the secular (Asad, 2003, 2009) represent an insightful instance of how Foucault's complex and elaborate work has been appropriated in the anthropology of religion. The epistemological strategy that establishes the precedence of governmentalizing technologies over meaning formations and of authoritative power structures over culturally constructed life-worlds has allowed for a new analytical angle that has led to a rupture with a sociology and an anthropology of religion marked by phenomenological

and interpretative approaches. This was particularly important for the study of alternative spiritualities that since Luckmann's (1967) work on 'invisible religion' has been captured in a culturalist time-space continuum and was blocked in a research program that emphasized private religiosities, popular practices, de-institutionalized beliefs and religious ideas, virtual hyper-religiosities, post-modern assemblages of fragmented religions and engaged its findings in a never-ending debate that had as an explicit agenda to demonstrate that traces of religion (now transformed into ubiquitous spiritualities) survive in modern society in spite of the alleged secularization theories. It is this phenomenological program of research that produced oblivion to the political configurations of secular and religious subjectivities and to the impact that late capitalism and its governmentalizing strategies had on the religious field. It got stuck in monotonously emphasizing the diffuse minor transcendences of the everyday life-worlds, the constitutive meaning formation involved in patchwork-spiritualities and the post-modern revival of neo-pagan exotic identities alongside sci-fi and movie-inspired religions. In doing so it ignored power structures, economic assemblages, ethical rationalities, and state governmentalities of secular and religious practices of the self.

In terms of how spiritualities are researched, Carrette and King's (2005) work has proven very valuable for breaking with the interpretivist tradition. Drawing on Foucault's work, their studies (Carrette 2002, 2007) have contributed not only to revealing how spiritualities are commodified, but also how they are connected to rebranding identities along the lines of inner authenticity and exotic consumption. Moreover, they showed the role Western psychology has played in producing the framework for enabling a new spiritual understanding of subjectivity as a locus of intervention and therapeutic adjustments.

Nikolas Rose's (1990, 1996, 1998) work on psychology and power has emphasized the important role the psy-disciplines have played in the implementation of technologies of intervention and social-scientific devices of production of the self which promoted the mass consumption of psychological expertise (through therapies, clinical mediation, self-help literature) and the tremendous influence this had in shaping a self-regulating and self-enhancing subjectivity. The neo-liberal governmentality and bio-political control of liberal societies could not be achieved without psychology and the therapeutic expertise on subjectivity that has spread in educational establishments, working environments, governmental agencies, healthcare, and social assistance programs. The popularization of specific technologies of the self that encouraged subjects to self-govern themselves through becoming more autonomous, creative, entrepreneurial, and fulfilled has played an important role in contemporary capitalist societies and this analytical focus enables us to understand how neo-liberalism is reproduced through what appears as a transformative ethics of self-realization.

What is problematic with Rose's argument is that he suspects the existence of "indirect alliances" between governing structures of advanced liberal democracies and the networks of expertise that promote these ethics of self-transformation through responsibility, autonomy, and self-regulation. Even if he insists to de-link this from the institution of the State and emphasizes the variety of procedures and strategies through which these expertises are deployed, he makes clear that the new therapeutic culture fulfils the function of a transmission belt between political and economic government agencies and the socialization of citizens as self-regulating subjectivities. For instance, it is the right-wing Tory government that has advanced these policies (Rose 1998:165) and have contributed to the general acceptance of how democratic governments should function through forging 'enterprising' individuals committed to shaping themselves in accordance with economic rationalities.

My argument is that the postulate of this allegiance between the experts of subjectivity transformation and policy/decision making does not have to be put forward because these technologies of the self can be anchored, as I will show, in forms of spirituality that escape both state structures and institutionalized religious establishments. The economic environment, especially those sectors that experiment with innovative forms of management and creative policies for developing human resources, can indeed capture these spiritualized technologies of the self and employ them for re-enchanting capitalist cycles of production. But the globalizing culture of alternative spiritualities into which capitalist enterprises tap is much larger than the economic spaces and the environment of work it seeks to regulate. It does overlap with a work ethic and with the (self-)fine-tuning of a subjectivity that can connect to the contemporary demand for creative and competitive labour, but in itself the field of alternative spiritualities constitutes a component of a wider cultural ontology in which religion, myth, and ritual still play an important role, in spite the fact that it has undergone a complex transformation due to scientification and psychologization of spirituality. I argue that only an analytical approach that connects both the exploration of this new cultural ontology and the economic neo-liberal governmentality into a helix that re-forces itself and produces a compelling mode of subjectivity which exerts an increasing powerful fascination over the minds and souls of the contemporary citizens of the world will allow us to capture the complexities of the field of alternative spiritualities. This requires a substantial connection of two different projects that in recent time have opened great avenues of research: first, Charles Taylor's (1992, 2009) genealogy of the *secular age* and analysis of the transformative processes that have led us to an *immanent frame* and a self-understanding embedded in an ethics of authenticity marked by self-realization that has set the structural condition of existence for both secular and religious modes of being; and second, Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007) account of the *new spirit of capitalism* and the way the management of work incorporates



previous social criticism and the demand for a more just environment and adjustment of justification claims in gaining social legitimacy for its mode of functioning. Such an approach also makes possible to reveal that these two registers do not always overlap: sometimes this vast cultural ontology employed by the field of alternative spiritualities goes against the current economic transformations and constitutes a critique of present-day consumerist society. It puts forth the idea of alternative community that is critical of class configuration and of power structures embedded in life-styles that revolve around materialism and profit accumulation. It is also very critical of the commodification of the wider field of alternative spiritualities and of the spiritual teachers that enrich themselves from selling services of spiritual development to people working in corporations.

In this paper I will look at the contemporary field of alternative spirituality simultaneously through these two lenses. I will not analyse all the specific features of this field, but just a single one centred on the development of a new spiritual self and I will contrast it with the traditional processes of religious socialization.

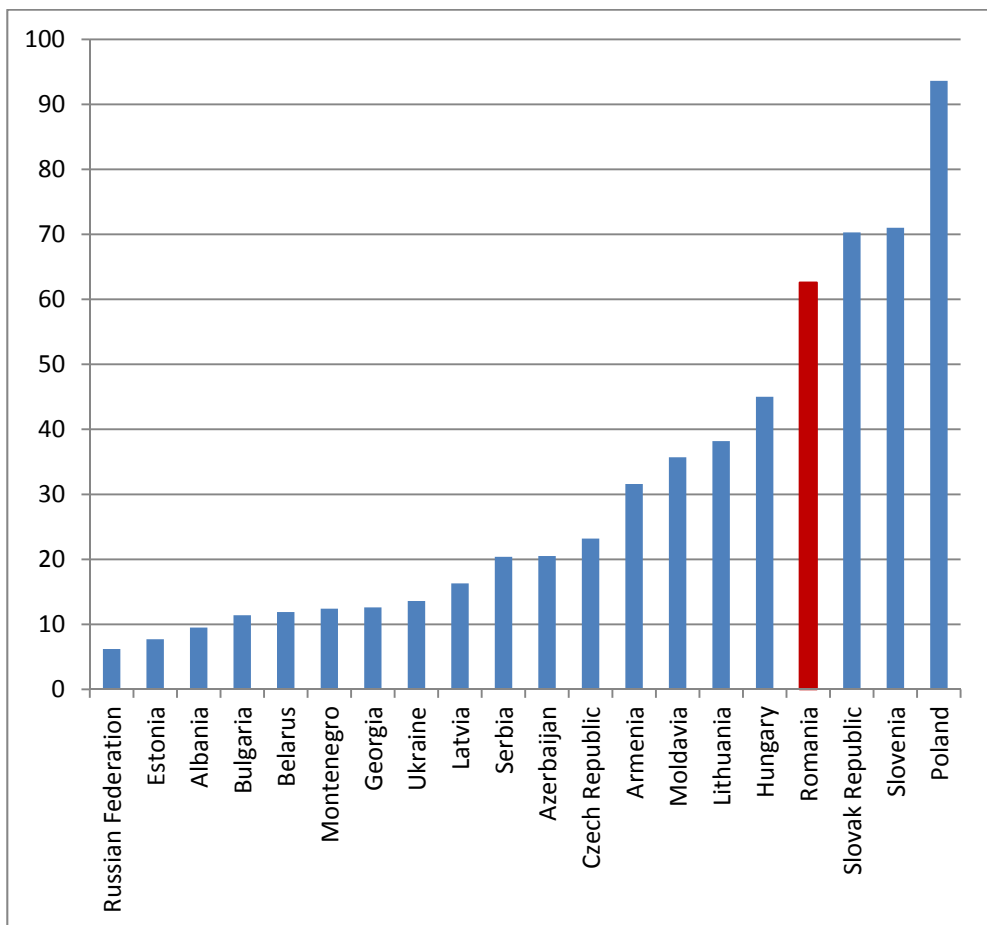
### **The erosion of institutionalized religion and openings toward spirituality among post-socialist generations from Romania**

In this section of the paper I will analyse some of the available statistical data in order to outline the growing interest in spirituality that exists among the generations socialized during the post-socialist period. The data that we have at our disposal is not well suited for this task: most of the cross-national surveys that gather information on religious values and practices focus on institutionalized religion only and have not been designed to reveal the growing interest in a variety of forms of alternative spirituality that are becoming increasingly popular in Romania. In spite of this shortcoming, the analysis of the existing surveys enable us to emphasize the decline of institutionalized religion, point out some of the important transformations of the wider religious space, and outline some proximities to openings to the field of spiritualities.

In the Romanian society religious socialization has played an important role: attending church together with one's family was for a long time an important feature of family life and this has been passed on along generations. If we compare Romania with other former socialist countries we can notice that in terms of attending church together with parents at age of twelve (institutionalized religious socialization), this country ranks among the first: 63% of the population claim that they have attended church at least one time a month when they were children and only 6.2% of the population state they have not usually attended church during childhood. This indicator is the best comparative proxy available for

the importance of religion within the family life and my argument is that analysing the importance of religious socialization within families across generations is a good indicator of the way religious practice changes its social form from one generation to another. This allows us to see not only the degree to which people were exposed to various practices of religious transmission but also the specific way in which religion was practiced: together with the family and attending as a family the religious services offered by the institution of the church.

**Figure 1. Religious socialization in post-communist countries**



**Source:** European Value Survey, 2008

As we can see from the following table, the importance of familial religious socialization decreases significantly from one generation to another with the important difference that the youngest generation born after 1981 has experienced a general increase in religious socialization as compared to the previous generation (born after 1965). It is important to notice that religious socialization constitutes a decision of the parents and not of the respondents and this means that the generations that were socialized towards the end of the socialist period had attended church with their parent less than the generations socialized during the post-socialist period. It is hard to tell if this difference in religious socialization is the outcome of a gradual individual secularization (religion ceases to be meaningful in everyday life at the personal level) or it is an effect of the specific Romanian communist policies that aimed to implement an atheistic world-view and advanced this secular perspective through the state and party structures.

**Table 1.**

**Religious socialization and religious attendance across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Religious socialization</b>	61.3%	56.2%	60.7%	70.3%
<b>Present-day religious attendance</b>	38.5%	41%	54.8%	58.4%

**Source:** European Value Survey, 2008

Nevertheless, this difference in religious socialization within the family does not translate into present-day church attendance. There is no direct link between attending church with one's family as a child and attending church by oneself as an adult. The younger generation (born 1981-1990), in spite the fact that it has been more religiously socialized, does not attend religious services more than the previous generations: it can be easily seen how institutionalized religion is eroding from one generation to the other by the fact that the youngest generation has the lowest attendance rate. The discrepancy between religious socialization (in terms of attending church during childhood with one's parents) and religious practice (in terms of attending religious services as an adult) does not tell in itself much – it could

be just an indicator of an ineffective process of religious socialization. But this is not the case, as we will see, since the younger generations retain an interest in religion, but this interest takes a different social form than the previous generations. My argument is that this change marks a wider transformation of the religious field.

The belief in God is shared by the vast majority of the population, there are only small differences between the different generations in terms of believing in God (between 96.5 % and 97.3% for the four analyzed cohorts): the overwhelming majority of Romanians do not share an atheistic world-view in spite the fact that for almost four decades that was the official state policy.

But what differentiates them to a great extent is the object of this belief. The traditional Christian representation of a personal God that engages into a personal relationship with the human being is eroding from one generation to the next and this is replaced by a more abstract, spiritualized representation of God as Spirit or Life Force. Among the younger generation that has been socialized during the post-communist period this religious representation is shared by more than half (54.3 %) of the respondents while the traditional representation is in their case most eroded (28.3 %). Comparing the younger generation with all three other generations we can notice important structural changes in terms of the object of their belief and so we can point to a significant shift in the way religion is appropriated by the people socialized during the post-socialist period: there is a growing trend of moving away from the traditional religious interpretation and practices that were specific to the previous generations.

**Table 2.**

**Objects of belief across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Personal God</b>	28.3%	34.3%	38.2%	44.9%
<b>Spiritual or Life Force</b>	54.3%	46.2%	47.4%	39.6%

**Source:** European Value Survey, 2008

This is also consistent with the way these generations perceive themselves: we can notice a strong tendency among the younger generations (born 1981-1990) to think of themselves as being less religious and thinking of religion as something that does not offer strengths and comfort anymore, but at the same time we can see that they manifest an increased interest in 'spirituality'. When

asked the question “Do you think of yourself as a religious person, how spiritual would you say you are, that is how strongly are you interested in the sacred and the supernatural?” the proportion of people that manifest interest towards spirituality is the highest among the young generations: 61.17%, as compared to 55.07% in the 1965-1981 generation, 57.17% of the 1950-1964 generation and 52.68% of the 1925-1949 generation. This contrasts with the perception of being a religious person, in the case of which we can point out a reversed trend among the post-socialist generation: only 71.5 % of those born in 1981-1990 think of themselves as being religious in comparison with 76.4 % of those born in 1965-1981, 83.6 % of those born in 1950-1964, and 84.9 % of those born in 1925-1949. There are also significant changes regarding how the four generations relate to institutionalized religion: while 87.5% of the older generation claims that religion is a source of strength and comfort, only 76.4 % of the younger generation think the same. This, again, signals an important shift in the way religion is experienced among the younger generation and hints to the decrease of traditional forms of religion and the popularity of spiritualities in present day Romania among the people that were socialized during the post-socialist period.

**Table 3.****Religion and spirituality across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Are you a religious person?</b>	71.5%	76.4%	83.6%	84.9%
<b>Do you receive strength and comfort from religion?</b>	76.4%	83%	86.6%	87.5%
<b>Are you interested in spirituality?</b>	61.17%	55.1%	57.1%	52.7%

**Source:** European Value Survey, 2008

For the argument of this paper it is important to show that this interest in spiritualities over religion among the younger generation from Romania is associated with a significant decrease of the role of the church in their lives and that this produces de-institutionalized and individualized forms of spirituality that are departing from the way the previous generations experienced religion, which was to a great degree centred on the institution of the church and religious socialization within the families. The next table draws a representational map

of how respondents perceive how adequate the activity of the church is to spiritual, moral, familial and social issues. If we start from the assumption that the church has a relatively homogeneous liturgical and ecclesial activity across the country and that its pastoral functions are structurally similar, then the way its activities are perceived by the different generations constitute a good indicator of the role the church plays in their own life. As we can see from the next table there is a minor gradual trend among the younger generations to limit the role of the church to spiritual and moral issues and see it as inadequate in terms of the answers the church gives to familial and social issues. Within each generation there is a tendency to restrict the activity of the church to spiritual and moral matters, but this position is more prominent within the younger generation where the gap between spiritual/moral and familial/social functions of the church is the widest. Also when we analyse these functions across generations we can notice that each one of them (spiritual, moral, familial, social) is lowest among those born in 1981-1990.

Table 4.

**Role of the church across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Church / spiritual</b>	83.3%	87.9%	90.8%	88.7%
<b>Church / moral</b>	62.6%	65.5%	72%	75.9%
<b>Church / familial</b>	55.2%	59.9%	63.9%	65.8%
<b>Church / social</b>	30.6%	34.1%	38.3%	41.6%

Source: European Value Survey, 2008

This data is consistent with research from other surveys regarding religious representations and practices in Romania<sup>3</sup>: the younger generation thinks the church not only offers inadequate answers to the above-mentioned issues, but also to matters regarding their own personal faith in God. A bit more than half (58.8%) of the younger generation states that the institution of the Church is not relevant for their religious quests and matters of faith. We can again notice

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<sup>3</sup> The statistical analysis in this section relies on the survey *Religion and religious behavior in Romania* from 2011 which used representative statistical samples for all major religions from Romania. The data presented in this section focuses only on the Christian Orthodox religion (who make up approximately 85% of the entire Romanian population) because some of the religious indicators are not applicable to Protestant and Evangelical religious groups, such as for example confessing to a priest.

how big the generational differences are in terms of their positions towards their Church (58.8% for 1981-1990 cohort, 65.2% for the 1965-1980 cohort, 70.7% for the 1950-1964 cohort and 81% for the 1919-1949 cohort). This has an important impact on the frequency with which they ask representatives of the church to bless objects of current use (house, cars, etc.). This is significantly lower among the younger generation than the older generation and shows the different modes of appropriating the sacred in their lives.

It is interesting to notice that the attitudes towards priests too have changed dramatically between the different generations. It was customary in the Orthodox Church to have a religious advisor/director to whom one confesses and from whom they receive spiritual guidance. This is no longer the case for the generations socialized during the post-socialist period: only 38.9% of them still have a religious advisor from the church in comparison with 61.4% of the 1919-1949 generation. The same erosion of the social function of the priest can be seen by looking at how many people turn to priests for advice in time of sorrow. Overall less than half of the population still consults with priests in such periods, but this is not evenly distributed among the four generation: the younger ones do this significantly less than the older generations.

**Table 5.**

**The erosion of the role of the priest across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Have a religious advisor</b>	38.9%	41.6%	58.3%	61.4%
<b>Talk to priests in time of sorrow</b>	28.2%	30.8%	34.5%	47.1%

**Source:** Survey - Religion and religious behaviour in Romania, 2011

On an individual level religion still plays an important role, but in the public sphere religion has a limited impact. This is arguably in spite of the fact that the Church plays an important symbolic role for the construction of Romanian national identity. One way to look at this issue is to see how people perceive and legitimize the relationship between the state and religion. Currently the state financially subsidizes those religious denominations that are legally recognized by the state; but only 56.7% of the population agree to this and, again, this is unevenly distributed among the four generations analysed. Only 50% of the younger generation think that this arrangement should continue. It

is also revealing to look at the stance towards the idea that only people that have religious faith should occupy public functions within the local and national state structure. In this case there is a more homogeneous position across the generations in opposing the overlap between state and religious function, but a difference between the younger and older generations still remains.

**Table 6.****Separation of state and church across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>State should finance churches</b>	50%	54%	55.6%	65.2%
<b>Public functions should be occupied by people that have religious faith</b>	48.2%	54%	58.5%	56.2%

**Source:** Survey - Religion and religious behaviour in Romania, 2011

The younger generations, in spite the fact that they were more religiously socialized, overwhelmingly believe in God, and think of themselves as spiritual, tend to depart more from institutionalized forms of religion than the previous generations: they attend church less, think that the church is strictly relevant for spiritual and moral issues and not for familial, social, and political issues, and tend to operate a slightly stronger separation between church and state. The traditional relationship with the priest has changed as well: the younger generations cease to have a spiritual director and reach out less for his advice when they are experiencing personal sorrows. The expression of this gradual dissolution of the institution of the church and its traditional functions is given by the growing perception of the younger generation that religion needs to modernize to fulfil the needs of the people: 50% of those born between 1981-1990 think that this should happen in comparison with 34% of the 1919-1949 generation.

In spite of the fact that the younger generations show a greater degree of secularization when it comes to institutionalized forms of religion there is a significant growing acceptance among them of specific religious beliefs. Whether we look at traditional Christian forms of belief (such as the belief in heaven, hell, and final judgment) or general religious beliefs (such as belief in miracles, belief in soul) or beliefs in alternative forms of religious ideas (such as astrology, charms, and reincarnation) we can notice that there is a general trend of decline of these beliefs from one generation to the other, but that the youngest generation



socialized during the post-socialist period is again an exception, in the sense that among them we see a general growth. The fact that there is gradual erosion of these beliefs among the other generations does not imply a progressive decline of religion as assumed by an historicist secularization process, it only hints to the different social contexts in which the religious life has been embedded and shaped: what differentiates the post-socialist period from the previous periods is an increase of social and religious pluralization and a growing contact with multiple religious traditions and practices due to cultural and social globalization.

Table 7.

**Religious beliefs across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>God</b>	91.7%	91.2%	96%	97.9%
<b>Devil</b>	73.1%	64.8%	68.7%	76.8%
<b>Sin</b>	86.6%	80.4%	90.9%	92.3%
<b>Soul</b>	89.8%	84.8%	87.7%	94.4%
<b>Heaven</b>	79.2%	77.6%	82.1%	84.9%
<b>Hell</b>	76.4%	72.8%	78.6%	81.4%
<b>Final Judgment</b>	64.4%	60.4%	62.3%	73.3%
<b>Life after death</b>	56.9%	50%	50.4%	59.6%
<b>Miracles</b>	73.6%	64%	61.9%	61.4%
<b>Reincarnation</b>	22%	22%	16.7%	15.1%
<b>Bad charms</b>	64.4%	60%	59.9%	70.9%
<b>Astrology</b>	34.7%	31.2%	23.8%	20%
<b>People with special powers (healing, clairvoyance)</b>	48.6%	47.6%	48.4%	46%

**Source:** Survey - Religion and religious behaviour in Romania, 2011

It is interesting to notice that when it comes to the question of how different religious traditions are perceived by the four generations none has a more open attitude towards other religions than the generation socialized during the post-socialist period. This means that this generation has a more de-centred religious experience and regards other forms of religious experience as having value in themselves, which is an important precondition for practicing alternative forms of spirituality.

**Table 8.**

**Position towards other religions across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>There is only one true religion</b>	29.6%	34.4%	40.5%	40.7%
<b>There is only one true religion, but other contain fundamental truths as well</b>	46.8%	40.8%	33.3%	34.4%

Source: Survey - Religion and religious behaviour in Romania, 2011

This can also be seen from the way they regard the idea of a single religion as being the true one: the post-socialist generation is the one least in accordance with this idea. Only 29.6% affirm that there is only one true religion in comparison with 34.4% of the 1965-1981 generation, 40.5% of the 1950-1964 generation and 40.7% of the 1925-1949 generation.

Finally, the position of this generation towards religious education in school is also edifying for the argument of this paper. The Romanian society recently underwent a big debate regarding the teaching of religious education and whether this should be mandatory in schools or elective (depending on the decision of the parents). Again it is important to notice that the younger generation is slightly more favourable to teaching religion in schools as a mandatory class in comparison with the 1965-1981 generation, but still not more than the previous generations. But also it is the one generation most in favour of teaching classes in which religions other than their own are taught as well (in opposition with studying only about the religion to which they belonged) and are the ones most in favour of the idea that this class should be taught by professors that have a degree in history of religion (as opposed to having it taught by pastors and priests - as a form of religious catechism).

**Table 9.**

**Religious education across intergenerational cohorts**

	<b>Born 1981-1990</b>	<b>Born 1965-1980</b>	<b>Born 1950-1964</b>	<b>Born 1919-1949</b>
<b>Religion should be a mandatory class</b>	49.5%	46.8%	54%	60.4%
<b>Students should attend classes where more religions are taught</b>	41.7%	30.4%	28.2%	26.3%
<b>Teacher should be expert in history of religions</b>	55.1%	47.2%	44.8%	36.1%

Source: Survey - Religion and religious behaviour in Romania, 2011

Among the younger generations there is a gradual decline of institutionalized religion, an increased perception that the church does not offer adequate answers to their religious quests, and a tendency to separate the church from social and political matters and to reduce its legitimacy to spiritual and moral matters, yet this does not lead to secularization but to a growing interest in spirituality. We can see among them a growing interest in different types of beliefs (that are syncretically accepted) and a more open attitude towards different types of religious traditions and spiritualities. This is also consistent with the way they perceive themselves as less religious, but more spiritual than the previous generations. Although the dataset is very broad in terms of the religious ideas and practices it surveys and insufficient for capturing more complex trends related to the emergence of a culture of spiritual and personal development of the self, this nevertheless allows us to position our ethnographic research into a wider social context regarding the transformation of the main religious structures in contemporary Romania.

### **Radical individualism and the self-development of the spiritual subject**

One of the most important features of the field of alternative spiritualities is the employment of a distinctive type of subjectivity that is self-referential and seeks to find in its own interiority the resources and means for self-development and self-amplification. It produces not only a spirituality of interiority which becomes the locus of religious experience (as the one operated by Sufism in Islam or by Pietism in Protestant Christianity), but also a distinctive type of a productive subjectivity that spiritualizes a circular looping of the self in order to enhance its well-being, immanent authenticity, and validation. The radical self-iteration of the subject that encloses itself and taps into its inner transformative resources represents an innovative projection and socialization of subjectivity that is often encountered within the new field of alternative spiritualities. In terms of religious experience this is translated through an immanentization of the object of faith: this ceases to be external to the subject, it becomes internal and indwelled; the spiritual gaze is not towards an alterity, but towards the newly discovered self that is an integral component of a wider Presence, Force, Energy, or Divinity.

Your mind tells you to validate your-self. Because this is what reiki is. Self-validation. A mantra of validation. And from this comes healing: from acceptance, from self-acceptance, from understanding the shortcomings that you have (A.Z., Reiki master, personal interview).

Within the Christian theological traditions in Romania (Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism and Evangelical) the religious experience is always conceptualized as a mediated (through church hierarchy) or unmediated (personal belief) encounter with a Greater Being, even when this is apophatically conceived as Non-Being or Nothingness. The traditional religious experience dwells on the postulation of an epistemological religious dualism that distinguishes between the subject that believes and the Subject that acts as the object of the belief. The progression of the self towards God involves in all of these Christian traditions the idea of communion with divine beings: even in the most modern forms of Christianity (American Evangelical movements), where there is a strong emphasis on the religious subject and personal religious experience, the ideas of encounter, relationship, and dialogue continues to be a substantial aspect of how the religious experience is defined. The religious work on one's self is very important, but this always takes place by projecting the transformation of the subject in relationship to another Subject. Let's take as an example a fragment from a sermon by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch regarding the relationship of the believer with God:

We enrich ourselves in God, first through faith and gratitude when we give Him thanks for the gift of life and health and for all the help received from Him. Through prayer, the connection of man to God, the love of God becomes the fortune of our soul. When man binds himself to Him, the grace of God enriches the soul, it makes it glow, makes it kind, uplifting, it humanizes it. We become even richer in God when through the gifts received from Him, as signs of His love, we also give to others. The purpose of today's gospel is to teach us that God's mercy prompts us to be merciful as well.<sup>4</sup>

The religious subject experiences enlightenment and spiritual progression in relation with a divine Being. In contrast with this, the new spiritual environment emphasizes the development of a spiritual self that turns to itself as the central axis of the religious experience. The main idea of this spiritual practice is self-referentiality and inwardness. This does not imply the production of a mystical inner space in which the spiritual experience of God takes place; it means that the subject looks within the self in order to discover in-itself the power and vitality to become an authentic presence. The generalization of this subjective recursiveness and the deployment of the Self as both the agent and the source of spiritual development represent a radical new idea within the Romanian religious space:

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<sup>4</sup> <http://basilica.ro/patriarhul-romaniei-prin-rugaciune-iubirea-lui-dumnezeu-devine-bogatia-sufletului-nostru>, [last accessed: 15.12.2016], my own translation, emphasis in original.

Did it happen in your life to achieve something from nothing, only because you wanted that certain something? Certainly, it happened to you. And now let me tell you why: because in that moment when you wished [this] you were in the present, you were connected to your own Self. When you thought about that certain something in this state of connection it was as if you showed your own Self what you wanted, and it, as a strong guardian of yours, said "So be it!" And the entire universe listened to the message from GOD THAT SAID "SO BE IT!" AND IT HAS BEEN DONE. Your Self is always with you, it is in your interiority, it is your guardian angel, it is also God, also the Holy Ghost, also Saint X, everything you look at on the outside is in fact inside you. Not long ago I read this story in which some deities that were coordinating humans on the fields where they were working, were discussing where to hide the power of man so that man doesn't realize how strong he is and refuses to be obedient to them in the future. Everyone [deities] found a place, namely: either in the Sun, in nature, in water, in air, but one of them said: "let's hide their power in their interiority because they will never look for it there". And from then on the power of Man lays in him, but our man always looks for it in the outside, in celestial bodies, among the initiated, in religious advisors, cults, nature, etc.<sup>5</sup>

This mode of subjectification that sacralizes the self is not an exotic example encountered within the field of alternative spiritualities, this is not an Oriental guru speaking about an out of ordinary experience, but a psychologist and motivational speaker that expresses in words a common assumption embedded in the subjects in the field. The creation of a self-referential spiritual self is one of the most important aspects of these new spiritualities that is reproduced in many different alternative forms of spirituality regardless of their morphological aspects, in workshops and seminars, in books and blogs. The recursiveness of the self is not a radical marginal idea, it is a new technology of self and a new type of subjectivity that is advanced by many transformative projects taking hold of highly educated people from Romania. In a more secular language the exact same idea occurs in various neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) workshops and popular techniques of reprogramming the self in order to become a happy, fulfilled, and proactive person. There is congruence between the (secular) personal development programs and the spiritual ones in terms of how the subject is deployed - as a resourceful interiority that can be mastered by each individual in order to enhance its own genuine subjectivity:

Trust in you means that you can start from anywhere, anytime, being conscious of what you have to offer and that you are an important stake for any country. Trust in yourself is not about what you knew and what you did until now, but about how you can learn and become anything. Trust in yourself is not what you feel when you are complimented,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.holisterapi.ro/cand-traiesti-in-prezent-esti-conectata-la-sinele-tau-divin>, [last accessed: 15.12.2016], my own translation.

but what stays when the things you hear are not pretty at all. Trust in yourself it is not the great title from your job, but that what makes you feel alive and full of life, even if you choose that way and know you can make a future for yourself out of this.<sup>6</sup>

The projection of a self that finds in it-self the required resources to live an authentic and spiritually abundant life constitutes an important structural change within the Romanian religious field. It is important to emphasize that this is not just an exotic phantasm, but the most important device that is employed by both alternative spiritualities and personal development programs that popularize various forms of NLP. It is encountered in most alternative spirituality programs even if these have different origins, employ different historic networks and address different groups of people. The idea that the subject becomes the object of the spiritual quest and that spiritual subjectification becomes a radical immanent project constitutes the basis of a new religious counter-culture that shapes more and more the imagination of believers from Romania.

An important consequence of this project of the self is that the religious community fades in importance, and it virtually disappears. Within the various Christian denominations from Romania the religious experience cannot be imagined without the religious community and the ecclesial gatherings which are a vital part of what it means to grow spiritually. Within Christian Orthodoxy and Catholicism the liturgical participation and the communion with the 'Body of Christ' represent vital requirements for all believers; within the Evangelical communities being part of a local church and getting actively involved in its religious activities is a consequence of acknowledging that each lay-believer has been called to become a priest and potentially assume a clerical position within the church; even in the Protestant churches (Lutheran and Calvinist) where church attendance is the lowest, the religious community is an important aspect of the spiritual practice; all the individualizing religious practices (reading the scriptures, praying, personal belief, etc.) enfold within a local religious community. Within the traditional field of religion there always was a communitarian vector embedded and the way the believer was religiously socialized always entailed the requirement of social belonging and religious fellowship. This does not mean that Christian ideas and practices don't thrive outside the institution of the Church, or that these religions don't develop individualistic tendencies that weaken the fabrics of the religious community. Nevertheless, the main tendency of the traditional religious field and one of its central technologies of religious socialization and mobilization is that of church attendance.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nicoletapopliceanu.com/increderea-in-sine/> [last accessed: 15.12.2016], my own translation.

This aspect radically changes in most of the alternative spiritualities projects. The spiritual awakening produces a distinctive type of subjectivity that does not need the others in order to grow spiritually. Relying on one's own self is the single resource needed in order to experience spiritual fulfilment, and this deems the religious community obsolete. Depending on others means a lack of autonomy and a lack of spiritual maturity: the whole idea of spiritual development is to become a pro-active person capable of finding the inner resilience to overcome the obstacles of life and if this does not happen, to become invulnerable to them and experience in yourself the needed Presence and Peace. The spiritualized subject learns to discover in him/her-self all the required answers and it is socialized to become as a subject with its own authoritative truth:

In what way does it help you to find out who you are, when you can decide any moment who you want to be? And if someone could give the answers you search for so much, how would like to be them [the answers]. Because... guess what?! You are your own Master/Teacher/Healer/Prophet, everything else is only 'signalling marks' that guide you to find your own Answers, Truth, Way...<sup>7</sup>

In comparison with the traditional religious field this represents a radical new innovation. Here, not the self-centring of the self was important, but the exact opposite: the social integration within a community of saved believers. A passage from the Epistle to Corinthians written by St. Paul that is often quoted in the sermons and religious text in Romanian churches states:

Just as a body, though one entity, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. [...] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues[d]? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-31, New International Version, The Bible)

Within the field of alternative spiritualities various gatherings and networks are created, but the idea behind them is not to form a religious community. Workshops, seminars, classes are important as a tool of spiritual transmission, but the result of this is not the formation of religious community

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<sup>7</sup> <http://copiicurbueu.ro/ce-conteaza-cu-adevarat/> [last accessed: 15.12.2016], my own translation.

in the Weberian sense.<sup>8</sup> These networks developed within the field of alternative spiritualities are occasional and temporal. Their only purpose is to help out the individuals to become aware of their inner spiritual capabilities and to mediate a transaction (sometimes monetized) between a person that has the spiritual know-how and the individual that wants to acquire techniques of self-development. These occasional networks aim at igniting a spiritual awakening in persons that most of the time are already open to this realm and equip them with the necessary teaching and instruments to become self-sufficient spiritual subjects. This does not produce a permanent religious community or a communitarian ideology in which becoming part of an ecclesial unit is valorised as an essential part of spiritual development. Nor does it produce a permanent master-disciple relationship. The new spiritual subject does not need a clerical hierarchy - even if this is referred to - this is secondary in relation to the individual subject who discovers that his/her spiritual interiority already contains the possibility of fulfilment. There are many spiritual teachers and many socializing units (workshops, tutorials, courses), but all of them aim to help the spiritual subject discover that its own subjectivity is an inexhaustible resource of joy and that mastering the spiritual techniques, truths, and practices will enable an autonomous connection to this source. This is why these spiritual teachers do not ask for restrictive membership and their teaching does not produce unique and exclusive spiritual ways to follow: they are compatible and the spiritual competences are inter-changeable precisely because they all mediate the access to the resourceful inner self.

I went to that [group] meditation just so, because I had to meet someone, to give a book to someone that was there. Somebody gave me a book to give to someone, this was the context. I am not going to group meditations with other reiki practitioners. [Interviewer: Why so?] Because this is not the essence of reiki. The essence of reiki is the dialogue with the self. The true reiki practitioner is that who understand that it is just a mirror for the you [addressing the interviewer] and everything that the you take from that process of healing and knowledge is your own merit and his merit [reiki practitioner] is that of reflection. In the moment when we start to credit ourselves, that I heal you, we are already in the area of ego-idolatry. The process is bilateral. In this moment [addressing the interviewer] you as well are a master to me (A.Z. Reiki master, personal interview).

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<sup>8</sup> "Such a transformation of a personal following into a *permanent congregation is the normal process* by which the doctrine of the prophets enters into everyday life, as the function of a permanent institution. The disciples or apostles of the prophets thereupon become mystagogues, teachers, priests or pastors (or a combination of them all), serving an association dedicated to exclusively religious purposes, namely the *congregation of laymen*." Weber, 1978: 454 [emphasis added].



What constitutes a radical novelty for the Romanian religious field is the imagination of a new dispositive and of new spiritual techniques that authenticate the self as its own resource of spiritual growth and at the same time entrust and capacitate the self with the power to creatively renew its interiority. A pro-active self, an autonomous self, a self that knows it is both the agent and the object of spiritual development, an individualized self that does not need a religious community and does not rely on an ethic of brotherliness (Weber, 1978) is at the centre of these spiritual innovations. Something truly remarkable has to have happened in order for the field to register a switch from the traditional religious logic of kenosis (an emptiness from the human decayed nature and acceptance of the sufferings of the Cross, that is still so prevalent in Romanian Christianity) to a perspective that emphasizes that power of the self to achieve everything and to become its own authoritative legitimating frame for an immanent plenitude:

You have the power to create everything you want in your life, and this process starts with the vision you have. How do you see the world in which we live? As a vast universe of infinite possibilities or you are not capable of imagining a new person, a fantastic collaborator?<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusive remarks**

The gradual erosion of institutionalized religion and the developing area of alternative spiritualities represent some of the most influential changes of the Romanian religious field in the past decade. Christianity in its various denominational forms continues to be the most popular religion, but among the urban and educated strata there is a clear opening towards alternative forms of spirituality. Yoga classes, meditation, complementary healing techniques, holotropic breathing, reiki, theta healing, shamanism, spiritual development workshops - to name just a few of the options available - have become an integral part of the contemporary Romanian religious environment. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider these changes just in terms of the multiplication of world-views or in terms of morphological differentiation of objects of belief. This is not a just a 'post-modernization of religions', the effects of globalization of local religious practices and the emergence of new form of religious eclecticism. Something much deeper has happened in the past decade in Romania, namely a profound and a radical structural change of the religious field. In spite of the

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nicoletapopliceanu.com/ganduri-pentru-o-dimineata-magica/> [last accessed: 15.12.2016], my own translation.

vast diversity of practices and the various religious ideas that are actualized in this new field of alternative forms of spirituality, there are several features that cut through most of these emergent practices and constitute a substantial alteration of the religious field.

By emphasizing these communalities I don't mean to say that the variety and diversity of these spiritualities are in fact indistinguishable, or that the differences that they engage are negligible. Quite the contrary: there is an ever increasing spectrum of ideas, practices, projects, and transformative requirements that one finds in this expanding field which are highly innovative and creative. But at the same time, in spite of this kaleidoscopic religious rhizomatic ramifications there are some important features that recurrently appear in most of these spiritualities and certain proximities in terms of how these are appropriated by believers. This constitutes, I argue, a substantial alteration of the wider Romanian religious field and produce several discontinuities with how the religious space has functioned so far. In this paper I have dealt mainly with how spiritualities are decoupled from traditional religious communities and with the individualized forms of believing that produce a new sense of subjectivity centred on the amplification and development of one's own self.

But there are other important structural changes of the religious field that need to be explored and that are important features of emergent spiritualities. The spiritual subjectification I have described here is embedded in a new ontology of presence and a temporality structure that produces a radical form of presentism. Salvation is not about a future spiritual kingdom anymore, nor about the restoration of past tradition, but the spiritual valorisation of this very present, the here-and-now in which the illuminated subject can find fulfilment and happiness. This also produces a new ethic of authenticity centred on self-realization that shifts from traditional moral concerns with the creation of an integrated and just community or with a righteous and ascetic way of life as opposed to the worldly, secular one. The field of spiritualities operates an opening to multiple religious traditions and to the idea that all of them contain spiritual truths from which the subject needs to learn: this generates a cosmopolitan syncretism that legitimizes the appropriation of divergent spiritual techniques, religious ideas, and ritualized practices as long as they mediate a process of self-discovery and spiritual self-emancipation. It also produces a strong reaction against any form of dogmatism and religious exclusiveness, which is considered to be the hallmark of traditional religions from which the field of alternative spiritualities have to distinguish themselves, and leads to the abandonment of all forms of radicalism based on religious dichotomies which institute a scission between a community of believers and the profane world. All these features of the

field of alternative spiritualities remain the topic of future research. An important focus of research has to be set as well on the ways these alternative spiritualities are embedded in various professional fields.

In management there is a growing awareness that the classic personal and professional development programs for workers are insufficient and that they have to be complemented with programs that are open towards spiritualities, which enable employees to reach their full potential as human beings within the organizations where they labour. Spiritual entrepreneurialism within the field of management of human resources means engaging one's whole being, body-mind-soul, in becoming a proactive, creative and resourceful person, but it also means acquiring various spiritual techniques (meditation, holistic perspective, spiritual NLP, the ontologization of the present) that mediate the production of such a subjectivity.

In the field of medicine and healthcare there is a wide tendency to use alongside allopathic medical treatment complementary medical remedies as well, that are imbued with various forms of spirituality. One can now find clinics in Romania where doctors that specialized in oncology for example, are also offering spiritual healing and meditation techniques. The guiding idea of these integrative clinics is that only a holistic treatment of the human being is capable to get to the root of the medical condition of patients. Treating the body means just treating the effects of the illnesses, not their causes. Alternative and complementary medicine is not anymore subterranean, esoteric and something that popular healers perform in their private practice, it is something that has been introduced in mainstream medical establishments.

A massive outburst of spirituality has taken place in the field of psychology as well. There is a growing number of psychologists that think that classical cognitive-behavioural forms of psychotherapy are not sufficient for helping patients and that these need to be either complemented or completely replaced by post-rational psychotherapies that integrate either light forms of mindfulness, meditation, or spiritual wellbeing, or stronger forms of spiritual practices such as yoga, familial constellations, shamanism, etc. Among psychologists this paradigmatic shift is often generated by their own existential crisis during which they discover that the classical psychotherapeutic tools that they acquired during their college education or in the various post-graduate professional trainings are not capable of addressing their own deep ontological questions and anxieties. The shift can also be the result of their professional practice which produces the conviction that for a lot of the patients that are estranged from institutional religion - but open to alternative forms of spiritualities - such spiritualized psychotherapies are helpful in establishing a common language and a meaningful environment in which patients can be counselled and treated. This

turn towards spirituality in psychology can be observed in many instances: either in the individual practices in their counselling offices and psychotherapeutic centres or in the wide spectrum of workshops and seminars that are organized by psychologists for people interested in exploring and healing their emotions, anxieties, depressions, relationships, or professional dysfunctionalities.

Future research needs to emphasize the role these spiritualities have in these professional fields, the function they fulfil and how the wider field reacts to these transformations and paradigmatic shifts. The increasing embedding of these spiritual ideas and practices within management, healthcare, and psychotherapy signals the growing interest for personal and spiritual development in contemporary Romania.

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## STEPS ON LIFE CHANGE AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION: THE PROJECT OF THE SELF

ANDRADA TOBIAS<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The aim of the present paper is to analyse how individuals in contemporary Romania come to adopt a new life-style centred on the self and how new forms of spirituality contribute to this project. In order to document how powerfully immersed alternative forms of spirituality (yoga practices, transcendental meditation, bioenergy, holistic medicine etc.) and subjectification techniques (personal development, motivational practices) look like for people in Romania, I have combined participant observations with semi-structured in-depth interviews. First of all I have reviewed the literature on spirituality and self-development and overviewed the specific techniques of subjectification. These techniques have the *power* to change the individual's view of life and have elements that serve the neoliberal *governmentality*. To continue, I have attended courses and workshops centred on spiritual development to uncover the communalities between literature and discourses on change. I was mainly interested in analysing the discourse of trainers, speakers and religious guiders and outlining the participants' experiences, while understanding how they utilise the knowledge and support given throughout these courses when trying to enhance their day-to-day lives and careers.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** spirituality, self-development, governmentality

The public space is invaded by more and more discourses on the need for continuous self-development, in order for people to be able to survive in today's highly demanding and competitive living and working conditions. According to these, the individuals who are interested in creating happiness, success, efficiency and balance in their personal and work life are expected to self-refer to activities that support personal development. This increasing interest has created a huge sector for personal development and various programs and

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materials have been elaborated (Binkley, 2007, 2011). In this context, different forms of spirituality have been developed as accessible programs to serve this need for self-development. Also, self-development programs and books have provided instructions for people by referring to their entire existence; they offer participants knowledge, techniques and successful models for realizing their individual potential. This message can come in different forms, for example experts on spiritual programs focus their discourses on the link between the universe and self; the subjects are encouraged to follow their individual paths in the universe on their own. My remark is that *one's own path* is usually understood according to what 'society' believes to be true. What I have found in my fieldwork is that many discourses have a common source of ideology on self-development. This transformation of the self implies ways of experiencing the reality rather than working on changing the reality (Miller and Rose, 2008). The practice of personal and spiritual development can offer new attitudes and strategies for practitioners to work continuously on themselves in the current economic conditions of neoliberal world. Making this argument, I found reliable Foucault's notions of *governmentality* and *technologies of the self*.

For Foucault, governmentality refers to the 'conduct of conduct' which ranges from governing of others in all aspects of life to governing of the self (Foucault, 1991). For hermeneutic purposes, Miller and Rose (2008) propose three different 'families' of governmentalities according to Foucault. The first one, named *classical liberalism* should be analysed as a mode of government, not merely a philosophy. In this case, the state limits itself from sectors of private life, market or civil society. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that the political apparatus is dependent on the activities of multiple external governing agents, like church, charitable organizations or trade unions. But the capacity of these comes under question when the political apparatus begins to extend its obligations into new spheres. In the 19th century the place of *classical liberalism* was replaced by *governing from the social point of view*. It was grounded in the argument that social government was necessary to combat the market individualism and the communist revolution. This was the original third or middle way to save private enterprise, to transform subjects into social citizens with social rights. [The governing from the social point of view] "depended heavily on the invention of new professionals of the social and new forms of inculcation of civility into citizens especially via home and domestication" (Miller and Rose, 2008: 17).

Foucault highlights the importance of the link between what he calls the *technologies of the self* (the creation of the individual subject) and the *technologies of domination* (the formation of the state) in the third 'family of governmentalities'. Named by Miller and Rose (2008) *advance liberalism*, usually

known as neoliberalism, “it took shape in the last three decades of the twentieth century, although it was prefigured by the neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek in the immediate post-war period” (Miller and Rose, 2008:18). Now, governing is more than simple top-down power relations. Governing bodies view clear norms, fear and violence as being much less effective than employing more subtle forms of control (Hefner, 2010). The emergence of new strategies of activation and responsabilization of individuals are visible; certain conceptions of subjectivity from psychology are now central and act in the name of the idea of freedom. In this context, self-control becomes an important tool linked to economic sector and political rules.

[Technologies of the self] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988:18).

These technologies are not invented by subjects themselves but rather are “proposed, suggested and imposed on them by one’s culture, society and social group” (Foucault, 1991:11). What appears to be individual choice is meant for the benefit of the state. In other words, neoliberalism implies structures of power by which governance is aligned with the personal capacities of the individuals. It is not just related with the idea of controlling, disciplining, normalizing or reforming subject; it is also related with the idea of making people more intelligent, happy, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled and empowered (Rose, 1998). Neoliberalism relies on the notion of responsible, rational individuals who are able to take responsibility for their lives and encourages them to see themselves as active subjects with entrepreneurial initiatives. As Rose (1998) argues, governing through the freedom and aspirations of the subjects makes it possible to govern in a liberal-democratic way, in the sense that self-governing capabilities are installed in free individuals in order to make them use their own ways of conducting and evaluating themselves. These techniques work “under the authority of experts who claim that the self can achieve a better and happier life through the application of scientific knowledge and professional skills” (Rose, 1998:157). Based on these arguments, I will analyze how a significant part of spiritual development programs and discourses reproduce certain types of subjectivity specific to neoliberal governmentality. I want to stress that my observation is based on the evidence that a significant number of subjects use techniques from spirituality practices to potentiate specific areas appreciated by neoliberalism, but we cannot reduce all the existent forms of spirituality to this alone. The existence of resilience groups of spiritual practitioners that are distant from the neoliberal agenda can not be denied, but the



comparison of both categories can make the object of another discussion. My focus is on the similarities between the neoliberal agenda and the specific techniques of subjectification from the spiritual field, on how different forms of practices have similar purposes with those from the neoliberal agenda.

I began fieldwork on spiritual transformation several months ago and once I became familiar with a part of the literature on personal and spiritual development, I have delved into the surprisingly diverse web of programs available in this field in Romania. To understand what spiritual transformation means for practitioners I began to frequent different courses and seminars addressing the vast topic of spirituality. Besides attending courses, a great part of fieldwork was centred on interactions with practitioners and providers of spiritual services. My presence at these programs represented a necessary introduction towards understanding how individuals come to adopt a new life-style centred on the self, while re-evaluating their priorities during their implication in spiritual activities. The fieldwork revealed how practitioners of different forms of spirituality develop a perspective centred on the self. This perspective allows individuals do clearly distinguish themselves from those around them and to find motivation and resources within themselves for everyday life. In the meantime, they learn to become responsible for all the aspects of their lives, especially their happiness and well-being. Having said these, I am interested in how practitioners relate the changes of the self during the process of spiritual transformation and I identify what community dynamics, interactions and individual behaviours contribute to this. What needs to be brought to the fore is that some principles of governing in neoliberalism are to be found in the project of spiritual transformation as well.

This project will focus on those forms of spirituality that occurred in Romania in the past two decades, since the process of cultural and economic globalization has made the spiritual experience a psychological and individual one. From a shared system of beliefs and customs that established clear norms in society to personalized and syncretic forms of spirituality that offer individualized comfort, these spiritualities could emphasize a specific way of imagining productive subjectivity, one that helps the subject to be more motivated, more efficient and competitive (Binkley, 2007). In addition to that, spirituality implies techniques to accomplish a new self, one that is capable of self-management, responsible for its own life and able to deal with the new neoliberal condition (Carette and King, 2005). As mentioned before, in this context, the accomplishment of a new self requires a massive change of life. My fieldwork shows how different discourses on change reveal similar aspects that need to be improved in the process of self-development. The aim of this paper is to analyse how different actors – practitioners and authors in the field –

discuss and understand the process of change and how they appropriate certain techniques from different fields of spirituality that have the capacity to improve certain elements distinct for neoliberal governmentality (Binkley, 2014; Heelas, 2008; Urban 2016). I will take into discussion the elements that need to be changed in the process of self-development; the list is not exhaustive, but points out the most noted aspects that were identified during my research as: the necessity of living in the present, the view on happiness, the increasing degree of self-confidence and the ability of being responsible for oneself. My empirical analysis shows that for subjects, working on these aspects contributes to their relationship to self and society. The transformation of the self implies a holistic approach, one that is aiming equally at the mind, body and soul, and is directly manageable by the individual; this change claims a re-evaluation of perspectives on self, happiness, present, responsibility, society and work.

I will argue in the empirical section that the *necessity of living in the present* or the spirit of *presentism* (Heelas in Rose, 2007) has become essential in the neoliberal society, a task eminently individual to find within oneself the ability to change the way of relating to past, present and future. According to this view the individual learns mental techniques through which one can be emancipated from the past and future and become a spectator of one's own mental processes, holistically in the here-and-now (Heelas, 2008). An aspect strongly connected to *presentism* is the improvement of happiness. The new discourse on happiness is remarkably prominent in the therapeutic culture of today. This notion of happiness requires repeated intervention in one's thinking, until the person gradually appropriates the new state of being. The personal development project requires one to *Don't worry. Be happy!*; another prerequisite is also that of being *Happy, Healthy and Wealthy*. These three attributes can be acquired through one's own strength; they do not appertain to the social context or the social origin of the individual. Today, almost all over the world, happiness and the degrees it can achieve are measured; happiness can be directly manageable and thus it becomes 'material', just as a muscle (Binkley, 2011) whose mass you can grow through physical exercise. In his book *Happiness as an Enterprise: An Essay on Neoliberal Life*, sociologist Sam Binkley brings together a conceptual problematic surrounding the practice of government in contemporary neoliberal societies with an extended empirical inquiry into the discourse of happiness, as constituted in popular texts especially on the topic of positive psychology. Based on the theoretical writings of researchers in the field of governmentality studies, Binkley views happiness as a technology but also as an enterprise of self-development. "It represents one of the chief instruments of neoliberal government, the very leitmotif of neoliberal life itself and [...] its most radical extension into the realm of private existence" (Binkley, 2014:4).

The project of the self also implies the change of attitude on the subject's self-confidence and responsibility. The individual can learn different techniques that help him/her to increase self-confidence and at the same time to re-evaluate his/her responsibilities with implication on personal and professional relationships. According to Nikolas Rose (2007), the principles of governing in liberalism and democracy have a significant role in the project of changing the self, especially on self-confidence and responsibility. One of the main ideas is that individuals are free and responsible for their freedom. Contemporary human subjects, at least when they are accorded the status of adults, are obliged to be free (Schwartz, 2000; Urban, 2016) in the psychological sense. Binkley (2007), Rose (2007) and Urban (2016) are sceptical about the promised 'freedom'. In their studies, the authors explain how this freedom implies a greater individual responsibility and a change of perspective on self-confidence. The subject needs to be confident in his/her ability to improve all the aspects of his/her life and is the only one responsible if these occur or not. Self-confidence can be used to improve other aspects like efficiency or communication, valuable in the contemporary society, in day-to-day and work-life. The foregoing aspects envisioned by the change of the self are interrelated and have the capacity to determine other changes in the relationship to work, to society as a whole and most important to self. These changes help the subject to remain – or to become – well anchored in the urban contemporary society.

To understand how powerfully immersed alternative forms of spirituality (yoga practices, transcendental meditation, bio-energy, holistic medicine, new-age movements etc.) and subjectification techniques (personal development, motivational practices) are among people in contemporary Romania, I have combined participant observations with semi-structured in-depth interviews. I have analysed 34 interviews, conducted between April and November 2016 with people preoccupied with spiritual development, both consumers and providers of spiritual services. The interviews were conducted in two major cities in Romania, where the number of consumers, programmes and specialists on spirituality are spectacularly popular. The phenomenon is visible in other major cities in Romania as well, but I chose to do my fieldwork in these two places due to the abundance and accessibility of the providers and consumers of such services. All the selected respondents have higher education and are living in one of the selected cities; 27 of them are practitioners and seven of them are working in one of the spiritual branches. In the same period I have attended four courses on spiritual development and self-development and for nine months I have done fieldwork on weekly workshops and spiritual sessions offered by a spiritual centre. I was mainly interested in analysing the discourse of spiritual guides and outlining the participants' experiences, while understanding

how they utilise the knowledge and support given throughout these courses when trying to enhance their day-by-day lives and careers. I have also done content analysis on a number of 20 books of spiritual development. The selection was made based on recommendations of practitioners and professionals in the field. All the selected titles are highly relevant for the subjects of my research, and some of them are alleged by these readers to have the power to change their life and spirituality. The list of selected titles comprises both international and Romanian authors. The notoriety of the author was however not the main criterion of selection. I was mainly interested to read what came highly recommended from within the field and to uncover similarities on the discourses about change. For example, in the books authored by Romanians, it is readily apparent central ideas are taken from the international field of spiritual development books.

In order to understand the ways in which meditation, yoga practices or other programs focused on spirituality can enhance the process of self-transformation, I participated in the activities of an organization I will refer to as 'The Spiritual Centre', in order to ensure its confidentiality. I was interested in understanding what drove individuals to take part in these activities and what are the perceived personal and professional benefits of pursuing these activities from their point of view. This organization has not emerged from a local initiative, but an international one. Almost half of the organization's staff is foreign and they have come to Romania precisely because they perceived here a huge interest for spirituality. Following the friendship between practitioners of various forms of holistic spirituality from Romania, Australia, USA, Hungary and Spain the desire has been born: 'to share with those around us the experience of awareness and personal transformation. We wanted to offer an alternative environment favorable for individual development' (A., 32 years old, yoga trainer). In just two years, the projects of "The Spiritual Centre" became attractive for non-practitioners by offering diverse services 'for mind, body and spirit'. Here, one can find specialists with international credentials and international experience in life-coaching in multinational companies. The members are comparing the organization 'to an incubator in which you'll live your transformative experience in a conscious, sustainable and authentic way, an ecosystem for personal development' (Y., 41, trainer on different forms of spirituality).

The programmes are successful in introducing, in a very accessible manner, elements of spirituality into the lives of individuals who have not had interest for these beforehand. Unlike many other programs in which participants have a projection or certain expectations about what will happen, many of those attending programmes here have come out of curiosity, accompanied by an acquaintance who has also attended the spiritual centre. Most of them had no

knowledge of spirituality and not necessarily an interest into this field before, but desired to improve or to change themselves. The manner in which all of these programs are conducted - be it yoga, mindfulness, holotropic breathwork - manages to capture the public in a colossal manner. The declared goal of "The Spiritual Centre" is not to attract large numbers of people, but rather to target some individuals that afterwards have the capacity to implement the holistic technology of self-fulfilment in other spaces, such as companies. For them, personal examples of revitalized life are the most important. The perception of a generalized state of well-being is common, maybe even at the very first meeting. The fascination of all of these programs is amplified by the fact that they highlight each and everyone's inner capacity for self-control over their own inner states and for knowledge of the 'authentic self'. The common ground is the considerable improvement of the inner state, a generalized sense of well-being, more concretely expressed through: excellent self-knowledge, confidence in one's own strength, concentration, efficiency, balance, better time management, new understandings and connotations for experiences and peace. Participants are always grateful towards these self-development programs, but each individual is convinced that improvement depends on each person's involvement and open-mindedness. The ultimate promise of all these programs is mastering certain individual techniques and practices through which the individual can easily fulfil his/her goals, while discovering one's potential and identifying the areas in which one can become fully performant.

As Heelas (2008) remarked and is consistent with what I have found in the interviewees' discourses is that each person has to be responsible for his/her own conscience. Spiritual development comes with the need to detach from what others want for you; only the 'self' is responsible to choose its own path. They state that the way to achieve the goal is also one's responsibility, regardless of the process being easy or not. Examples that I was given have often emphasized 'success', 'performance' and 'prosperity' and were direct references to the corporate environment: 'You cannot become a leader, more so a good leader, if you don't start from the bottom, if you don't know the needs of beginner employees and what motivates them' (Y., 41 years old, man, trainer on different forms of spirituality). Also, in many of the meetings that I have attended discussions were centred on workplace satisfaction, beyond material satisfaction, and this we were told does not necessarily belong to the workplace, but first to our own self. This perspective creates a much greater individual responsibility for one's own path in life and satisfaction (Gonzales, 2015). Equally, this perspective dilutes critical attitudes towards social inequalities. Individuals are trained to believe that what is not directly manageable by them, like life experiences, has to be treated as a lesson for someone, it has a purpose. If one has a look at the

aims of what spiritual changes suggests, it is hard to deny the link with principles of neoliberal governmentality exposed before. ‘Technologies of the self’ are activated from the beginning: apprentices have to learn how to manage their own conscience and thoughts. They have a non-imposed guidance on how to create their own well-being, on how to ‘be the best version of themselves’.

### **The state from which change begins: What exactly requires change?**

What I am is a given. [...] What I become is a process that, with a more awakened attention, I hope that I’ll be able to coordinate to such an extent so as to raise my life instead of lowering it or leaving it to chance to unfold without my intervention (Andreescu, 2015: 22).

The examples of situations that require change presented by authors, experts in the field or practitioners of spirituality, differ significantly. All these sources stress the uniqueness of the human being, and this means that these situations cannot be generalized. I found out later, from interviews and book analyses, that what triggers the desire to change the self is less relevant – it was in the past – what is truly important is that the intention, aspiration to change has occurred. Moreover, I was told explicitly that this moment is not quite relevant:

Change comes when you’re ready, never before (A., 35 years old, woman, Yoga practitioner).

Each person is different. For some maybe it’s about specific words and from there they get interested. For others it may be about events: some events may be simple, for others they have to be complex. So far from what I have seen, from what I have noticed, there is a range so great that it’s really hard to create a pattern or a mode, an algorithm to identify if a situation fits or not. To persuade a person to become active on that side, I at least still have not found that ‘common’ aspect (F., 29 years old, man, Reiki therapist and IT engineer).

Practitioners told me that there are no specific causes that bring the desire to change, just as there is no universal recipe for that change to occur. As Daniela Andreescu (2015) – one of the analysed authors – mentioned, the range of positive changes and conscious transformations is fairly diffuse. Sometimes changes in the day-to-day life are very subtle and happen on the level of details. But the fact is that change involves a general *upgrade* of life on all levels. One of the main commitments promised by these new forms of spirituality is changing the self, not through means that are exterior to the self but through the very discovery and employment of one’s own abilities: Be the change that you wish

to see in the world<sup>3</sup>. Personal development is an individual process and directly determined by our own outreach, streamline of anything, self-motivation and self-accountability (Salome, 2008; Szasz-Soares, 2014). This idea, specific to the new forms of spirituality, couldn't have occurred outside a neoliberal context, one that pushes the concept of freedom and encourages subjectivity. From the perspective of a significant part of specialists and practitioners "It's up to you to choose what you want and how your life will be" (Zărnescu, 2014:8); the external factors are almost missing or ambiguously mentioned. The only thing that is necessary is the change *per se*.

The individual search for meaning (Bown and Williams, 1993) becomes one of the main responsibilities of the person engaged in the process of change, necessary in identifying and developing the authentic self (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007; Osho, 2015; Urban, 2016, Gonzalez, 2015). All the books promoted a focus on a holistic approach of change, one that is aiming equally at the mind, body and soul, and directly manageable by the individual. The responsibility for one's own life and well-being becomes a personal one. So the responsibility at a social level is attenuated, but this never comes up explicitly:

The responsibility is yours entirely. If there is a failure, that is it. The responsibility for failure lies on you. If you succeed, you succeed. The responsibility for success lies on you as well (Osho, 2015: 75).

[Change] is about freedom and about assuming your own life beyond your wildest dreams. [...] The ability to achieve anything you put your mind to (Zărnescu, 2014:15).

Love yourself and live in harmony with your spirit. If you do so, your life will run smoothly and you will feel at peace. This is all it takes (Choquette, 2009, fourth cover).

With the exception of some materials, that are often discredited within the field – that propose through a number of steps and techniques a rapid improvement of mind, body and soul – the change is not necessarily seen as an easy process. More often than not, authors of the books claim that spiritual transformation is not easy (Andreescu, 2015; Demetrescu, 2013; Sandner, 2015) especially on one's own, just because it is not truly understood (Andreescu, 2015). Thus the guiding offered throughout personal development can be justified and finds meaning, alongside the multitude of resources and materials available. The change cannot be understood as a quick fix and it cannot be compared to *microwave recipes*<sup>4</sup>, it is a process. What is indeed a quick fix is the birth of the

<sup>3</sup> This extract from Mahatma Gandhi is widely used in the field of spirituality; I encountered this quotation in interviews, texts and blogs.

<sup>4</sup> Name given in a pejorative way to discredit a part of the industry that promotes quick methods of body-mind-soul improvements. These methods take for granted some directives, they are applied universally to anyone who wants to improve certain aspects of their self and they use introspection only to a very small extent.

desire for change; awareness of the need for change – as interviewees said – cannot be generalized and is not bound to a particular event in the life of an individual. We are unable to determine what triggers the change, but we can identify a pattern that concerns the issues that need to be changed and the techniques to follow.

Well, the soul always knows it, and guides us too! What we have to do is be aware of the presence of our soul inside. Believe me, you can listen to it. But to be able to listen to your inner self takes a lot of practice, and this practice is best known as meditation. So I believe including this very practice of listening to the soul in our daily life, acts as the first and very important step towards finding spirituality in our daily life. As they say, 'Keep calm and meditate' (P., 38 years old, man, 'modern shaman').

### **What does the project of changing the self actually mean?**

As I mentioned earlier, the moment in which change occurs, common in all the interviews, is *when it is supposed to come*: 'It comes when you're ready! Then you'll find the shaman, coach, book or course. It comes at the right time just because that is what is right for you!' (F., 29 years old, man, Reiki therapist and IT engineer). 'It doesn't come by chance!' (A., 35, woman, Yoga practitioner), but this moment cannot be premeditated, only understood after it has happened. The fact is that there must be a moment for that change to ensue, even if change is not 'instant' but a continuous process, "it needs a starting point, either chaos or paradox. [...] How I am is a given. How I become is a paradox." (Andreescu, 2015:22). As it becomes evident from the excerpts from books and interviews, the change does not come with pressures or constrains, it has to come naturally and suitably for the subject (Osho, 2007; Robbins, 2011; Tolle, 2009). As Foucault argued in his writings on neoliberalism, "nothing imposes an obligation, and everything, including one's own mind, body, and emotional state is a resource, a force to be excited, an opportunity to be developed, exploited, or leverage for advantage in a world of competitive actors" (Foucault in Binkley, 2014: 3).

The project of self-development implies first of all an evaluation of the relationship to the present. Understanding the importance of focusing on the present seems easy, but in practice it is a laborious process that requires a lot of work, theoretical and practical training. The exercises suggested by authors, trainers and practitioners include a great range of options and are classified according to the level of training of the practitioner (Hedges<sup>5</sup>; Ferrini, 2007;

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qeaE5tf2-s>.



Sandner, 2015; Tolle, 2009, 2012) from simple exercises that focus on posture, breathing, visual, tactile and olfactory to long meditation exercises. There are exercises that aim at achieving a state of *living in the now* instantly, but the effect felt by practitioners is ephemeral; total *living in the now* requires thorough mental preparation and a very intensive work with one's own self. I have frequently heard trainers say: "Living in the present means focusing on what is happening right now, enjoying it, and making the most of it" (C., 26 years old, man, motivational trainer). Thus, as practitioners argue, daily life becomes more enjoyable, less burdened by worries and less stressful.

Amy Cuddy's book can provide a good example for inexperienced readers; she discusses at length *presence*, giving it a widely accessible meaning as "a state of contact with our true thoughts, feelings, values and potential, and also the ability to express them freely. That is it" (Cuddy, 2016: 36). This state is present in moments when the subject feels confident about his own capabilities and allows himself/herself to focus intensively on his/her truest self. The presence that Cuddy is talking about is different from the state of presence that occurs in spiritual professionals' discourses. In this case, presence is achieved by gradual changes that do not imply a spiritual revelation and hard work on total inward transformation. It is accessible to everybody and happens in the everyday life. Augmenting the state of presence requires practice, a good coordination of the psyche (self-inducing the state) and body posture. At this level, the easiest one, presence helps to achieve success and enables a much better management of day-to-day stressful situations, working like a panacea; that's why, presence knows success through employees. Cuddy says:

The state of presence arises from the fact that we believe our own story. When our story is not credible for ourselves, we are not authentic – in a way, we deceive ourselves and others. It has even been proven that this self-deception can be observed from the outside, because we lose our self-confidence and start to manifest dissonant verbal and nonverbal behaviours (2016:54).

The present moment is the only thing where there is no time. It is the point between past and future. It is always there and it is the only point we can access in time. Everything that happens, happens in the present moment. Everything that has ever happened and will ever happen can only happen in the present moment. It is impossible for anything to exist outside of it (F., 29 years old, man, Reiki therapist and IT engineer).

In 2015, in the top five best-selling books of *Curtea Veche Publishing*, a well-known publishing house in Romania<sup>6</sup> there are three books from the field of personal development, and one of them is the much publicized *Power of Now*

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/topul-celor-mai-vandute-carti-in-2015-foto-14943347>.

by Eckhart Tolle. Although the ideas presented here are related to the ontology of the present and conscious living, this type of reading differs substantially from that of Amy Cuddy. Tolle explicitly proposes a type of reading that requires on the one hand much attention, and on the other thought or meditation. The stake underlying all of the book is to produce a radical transformation of the subject in terms of self-discovery as the most important resource for achieving enlightenment. Spirituality thus presented is not esoteric or paranormal, it does not imply endless theological and philosophical debates, but requires a radical transformation of the subject. Consciously living in the present requires detachment from projections about the future, fuelled by experiences related to the past, and a much better concentration on everything that is happening in the present moment. As shown in the international bestseller *The Monk who sold his Ferrari* (Sharma, 2013), the art of mind control and spiritual awakening is strictly related to the present, it cannot be obtained from the past or from projecting the future. Emotions are attached to experiences associated with past events or projections about the future. In addition to that, just by learning the ability to live in the present enables the possibility of absolute living. In the present all senses are exploited to their maximum capacity and all the other changes that I will discuss in what follows, are conditioned by acquiring the ability to live in the present.

Changing the self in a spiritual context means, besides living in the present, also changing the view on happiness. As it became apparent from my interviews, it is not enough to live. You must live happily. "The existence has no meaning and colour unless it becomes the place and time of happiness" (M., 34 years old, English teacher; practitioner). To support the therapeutic effects of happiness and to provide a guarantee for their practices, many experts have appealed to already acknowledged studies from positive psychology or medicine. For example, Lyubomirsky's (in Winfield, 2013) study on happiness demonstrates that spiritual people are generally happier, have superior mental health, cope better with stressors, have more satisfying marriages, use drugs and alcohol much less, are physically healthier and live longer than non-spiritual people (Lyubomirsky in Winfield, 2013). Especially from the perspective of those urban and high-skilled people that practice different forms of spirituality, no one is responsible for someone else's happiness or sadness, but each one is responsible only for their own feelings. In order to achieve happiness, new forms of spirituality offer a large range of options: from yoga classes to aromatherapy, Bowen techniques, meditation, holotropic breathing or music therapy suggested by positive psychology studies.

When I feel down, energetically, I stop everything. I'll do a simple breathing exercise, eight counts, and then I'll resume the exercise for five more times. It's important to break off anything, to concentrate only on yourself and your breathing. The results will soon appear. The body rebalances, I reach the state of tranquillity and all worries are cleared. In fact, what I'm saying is that happiness is stored inside us, we just have to find the right key to release it (A., 35 years old, yoga practitioner).

I don't think happiness is found in substances, only within your being, eager to connect to the Universe's energy, not someone else's energy (T., 28 years old, woman, TethaHealing practitioner).

Nutrition matters a lot, in the sense that we are influenced by the energy we ingest and if we have contact to food that is energetically imbalanced, this comes at the expense of our energy. Of course, we can rebalance energetically, but that is extra-work and a very hard one, so then we're better of paying attention to what we eat (R., 30, woman, after-school trainer).

At a seminar, we were recommended a very nice exercise. We were all together, and the first time it was a little awkward to laugh, even mechanically, but it became contagious. It really works! (F., 29 years old, man, Reiki therapist and IT engineer).

As consequences of living in the present, some of the prospects that spiritual development promises are: concentration, confidence in one's own abilities and detachment from problems. As almost all the interviewed subjects have revealed, they feel many of the day-to-day problems are made up by our own thinking, by comparing with others. To avoid such inconveniences, the project of personal subjectification introduces ways through which the individual gains the ability to increase the degree of self-confidence by the ability to detach oneself from problems and from the others. Thus, thinking itself becomes 'material' and directly manageable, as does happiness. In the project of self-development, the meaning of life must be derived from the interior and should not be sought outside of it. Each individual is responsible to identify and intensify 'one's own best version of themselves':

Americans have a saying 'Get Alive'. Meaning what?! Meaning that you have only one life, your own, so live this one because you don't have time for another! Or more bluntly: You watch out for YOURSELF!!!' (A., 35 years old, woman, Yoga practitioner).

On the other hand, you get legitimacy as your own authority. You no longer need someone from the outside to validate you and you have some inner certainties that guide you. More than just certainties, because that is pejorative. Ushering truths. It's just like a spot where all things in your life concentrate.

Compared to institutionalized religions, new forms of spirituality, as Osho says, create a *chaos* (Urban, 2016). Perhaps Osho's most pervasive influence has been on the loose and eclectic body of contemporary spirituality commonly

referred to as *New Age*: “various beliefs and practices that are by no means singular or monolithic but in fact widely diverse and heterogeneous” (Urban, 2016:30). In this chaos, like in neoliberalism, nothing is mandatory anymore, there are no more prerogatives. Everyone applies what works because everyone is responsible for his/her choices; only the self, connected to the Universe, can decide what's right for oneself. I would say that the diversity and abundance of widely eclectic forms of spirituality is possible due to this *chaos*. Individuals are looking for instruments that facilitate their (social) lives and adopt what they think is proper for them, in terms of efficiency and accessibility. These forms of spirituality, practiced by more and more people in urban areas, cannot be regarded merely as simple, passive echoes of globalization, but instead their active catalyst role in the contemporary society must be understood (Urban, 2016). They do not pull individuals out of the society, on the contrary, they enhance the self in order to increase one's capacity of adaptability in a given system. Essentially, the personal development project greatly serves ‘the interests of society’, in the sense that the new person manages to become more efficient, more creative, proactive, determined to succeed and prosper, to become responsible for their own wellbeing.

It is not necessarily obvious, but a significant part of fieldwork shows that some forms of spirituality benefit capitalism and consumerism. Prosperity must be a part of the personal development agenda; it does not only aim at economic capital, but it also refers to the physical, mental and spiritual development. To be prosperous one must remain anchored in society, develop positive thinking and understand the law of attraction. The universe – as described by spiritual facilitators or trainers – is a great meritocratic system, in which the law of attraction works well. This refers to the ability of each individual to attract in his/her life those factors that one is thinking about: if one's thoughts are good, the Universe will reward you with goodness. As Osho asserts: “Capitalism is a humanistic system which gives full freedom to all kinds of people, and in all directions of life, to grow and be themselves [...] The death knell of capitalism may turn out to be the death knell of man himself” (Osho in Urban, 2016:56). Besides the personal level, changing the self fits very well with the capitalist system and the new type of work enforced with the advent of corporations. Technological advances, new global politics, together with changes in the view of imagining work at an organizational level contribute to massive shifts regarding the perception of labour and the way employees position themselves regarding their working activities. In order to maintain its mobilizing powers, capitalism needs to call up resources from outside of its immediate economical reach, permeating all the other relevant ideologies from the larger cultural context in which it develops (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Starting from the

early 2000s and intensifying in the last years in Romania as well, positive psychology and all the emergent alternative religious forms seem to represent these ideologies.

Corporate spiritualities (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007) promote the idea of maximizing the employee's potential, encouraging a competitive and productive unique individual, but in order for these strategies to function on the long run, employees need to develop all these 'abilities'. The developmental triad following the personal, professional and spiritual evolution of the individual almost becomes a chore that needs to be fulfilled if one wants to embrace actual working standards. All of these processes represent individual actions, although they can be actualized in collective settings, because each and every person focuses on his or her own self, trying to make things better for his or her self-interest (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). Due to these new forms of spirituality, companies interact with people who find their own balance, are mentally stable, find motivational resources in their actions, know what they are aiming for, get involved in difficult tasks, aim to develop their careers and find resources to sustain this effort, are eager to compete and are extremely well-trained. At the same time, *the new employees* were socialized to believe that prosperity and success can be and should be achieved, but only if they manage to properly adapt and display self-discipline.

It is relevant to discuss one more aspect: the relation between individual – practitioner of spiritual development – and society. Most of the respondents are not interested on what others think about them, and this is one of the major changes in their lives. They learned how to live in harmony with social norms and at the same time to feel free. I would like to point out the fact that, for them, achieving a higher level of spirituality does not mean living in a specific alternative society. On the contrary, the great challenge for them is to be their best version within the contemporary urban society. As one respondent mentioned "the challenge is not to live in isolation, there you don't have temptations and you could be calm and meditative all day long; the challenge is here!" (M, 26, woman, therapist). Perhaps the most suggestive quote is: *Be the change you want to see in the world* repeated by some respondents when I asked them to think about their relationship with society. As Zinnbauer et al. have noted, to see "spirituality as a solely phenomenon is to overlook the cultural context in which this construct has emerged, and the fact that spirituality is not experienced or expressed in a social vacuum" (1999: 902). It is no coincidence that the popularity of spirituality has grown in a culture that values individualism and rejects conventional authority (Zinnbauer, 1999).

As your connection with the Universe becomes more and more intense – in fact increasingly conscious – you'll see that you'll start to lose some of your interest for others. Please, don't understand that in the sense that you no longer care, but you realize that there is no use in judging others, and just because you start to not look at others, you start to not care about what others say about you (T., 28 years old, woman, TethaHealing practitioner).

## **Conclusion**

Based on analysing interviews, discussions with trainers and the literature on spiritual development, I claim that the main aspects of self-development imply changes on the vision of self, time, happiness, work and society as a whole. As the fieldwork denotes, the project of the self has the following features: success orientation, an emphasis on healing and a desire to be modern. It combines eclecticism, syncretism, optimism, a tendency towards believing in life-long personal growth and an emphasis on psychic and mental power. It is this pursuit of special interest for persons with higher levels of education and with professions that need concentration, performance, adaptability and, why not, creativity. In almost all the situations analysed, the process of spiritual development has a clearly defined purpose and immediate results that concern only the practitioner and the relationships that he/she establishes. Emphasis is laid on unique experiences, the uniqueness of life that must be 'consumed' here-and-now. All these mentioned characteristics are in accordance with the current economic and social conditions of neoliberalism. The research shows that the process of self-development greatly serves as a technology of neoliberal governmentality.

Spiritual development becomes in fact an individual project – for the subjectifying self – and equally a transnational project that involves many more factors hinted at here without detailed analysis. The form of spirituality that the individual chooses is not that relevant, because the global forms emphasize personal spiritual experience and an ideal personal freedom. Throughout this process the individual develops all those abilities that one considers necessary for increasing self-esteem and to detach from problems that do not relate to oneself or to one's own well-being. The personal development project, in a spiritual framework, is much more complex than it might seem at first glance. It has the capacity to permeate all forms of daily life; it interests employers and, at the same time, it interests the entertaining industry that can thusly suggest new ways of spending leisure time, new forms of spiritual tourism and also new forms of consumerism. The same project also includes transnational networks, ideas and capital from many corners of the world. These spiritual movements coming in part

from Asia offer a powerful alternative to the usual narratives of globalization. “Cultural ideologies flow not only *from the West to the rest*” (Srinivas in Urban 2016:5) but also from India and other parts of Asia, revealing a far more dynamic and multidirectional global flow of religious forms (Urban, 2016).

As far as future studies on spiritual development are concerned, I propose a closer look at the differences between those subjects that are very close to the interests of neoliberalism and those who adopt alternative modes of living and manifest anti-consumerist attitudes. I think that is necessary to make this distinction when we are looking at spirituality and spiritual development. Due to the fact that my fieldwork is ongoing I will have a closer look at the similarities and distinctions between these two categories that have the same fundamentals. The analysis of both categories will offer a better understanding of how neoliberal governmentality works and how it adapts itself to satisfy the demands of the population.

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## THE QUEST FOR THE SPIRITUAL SELF: ANTI-CAPITALIST AND NEO-LIBERAL FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

CRISTINE PALAGA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** In line with socio-anthropological theories meant to deconstruct the secularization teleology (Berger, 1997; Luckmann, 1967; Shah, 2015), this paper aims to document recent transformations in the field of Spirituality and Religion. Inheriting the analytical dichotomy between neo-liberal and anti-capitalist forms of spirituality, introduced by Carette and King (2005), I aim to emphasize both the common points and the ruptures between the subjectification technologies used within transformative self-development and self-help programmes, on the one hand, and a form of alternative Neo-Pagan spirituality, which opposes the capitalist way of organizing social, economic, political and cultural life, on the other hand. The rupture between anti-capitalist and neo-liberal forms of spirituality rests on identifying the extent to which the spiritual domain is colonized by an economically mundane ideology, in which the subject is invited to look upon spirituality as an internal resource meant to satisfy all the tropes of the neo-liberal economic imagery: optimization, efficiency, amplified productivity, abundance and prosperity. In addition to the ethnographic justification of this theoretical construct that supports the existence of two opposed poles of constituting a spiritual self, I will adjoin the cultural relationship between spirituality and capitalism to the wider problem of secularization, by arguing that spirituality is a byproduct of late modernity and a leitmotif of the power technologies through which the neo-liberal subject is produced.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** modernity, secularization teleology, personal/spiritual development, Neo-Paganism, (anti)capitalist forms of spirituality

### Introduction

The societal secularization process (Dobbelaere, 2002) undermined the legitimizing authority of institutionalized religion, marking the failure of traditional theodicies, while generating new private and individualistic religious orientations.

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Contrary to the secularization teleology, according to which modernity will undeniably exhaust a religiously transcendent view of the world, the social actor of late-modernity can create or subscribe to a personal and intimate form of spirituality by embracing disparate religious motifs, values or practices and bestowing meaning, habit and ritual onto them. Some of these emerging spiritualities contest the manner in which our lifestyle is shaped by the consumerist society, while others are permeated by market forces, becoming ingenious instruments that maintain and reproduce the capitalist ideology. In this paper I aim to investigate two opposing responses to religious individualization and privatization produced by societal secularization in contemporary Romania: first, Neo-Paganism<sup>3</sup>, a communitarian spiritual orientation, highly escapist, reactive and antagonistic to the capitalist way of organizing social, economic, political and cultural life and second, the so-called consumer-oriented private spiritualities/neo-liberal spiritualities (Carrette and King, 2005) - individualistic, socially disengaged and de-traditionalized forms of spirituality promoted by the spiritual/personal development programs and used by the neo-liberal agenda to create convenient individuals, that will voluntarily and uncritically embrace the *status quo*. Of course, there are various forms of spirituality that radically distance themselves from the consumerist, competitive and individualistic ethos promoted by and through the neo-liberal agenda. I selected Neo-paganism as the case study for capitalist counter-spirituality for the following reasons: first, I had already collected rich ethnographic data for my Bachelor's thesis on three Neo-Pagan movements in Romania: Wicca, Asatru and Zalmoxianism<sup>4</sup>. Beyond this personal preference originating in my conceptual familiarity and practical knowledge of Neo-Pagan spiritual orientations, the comparison between Neo-Paganism and neo-liberal spiritualities is justified by the similar socio-demographic background of their audience: mostly young to middle age individuals, with university degrees, well-paid jobs, that see themselves as members of the middle class. Both Neo-Paganism and neo-liberal spiritualities are private forms of religiosity, that shape themselves in contrast to institutionalized canonical religion. Moreover, they are both patchwork spiritualities (Wuthnow, 1998), promoting religious sensibilities that rest upon personal reinterpretation of religious themes and motifs. Last, but not least, they imply a new set of values, accompanied by a transformative process and concrete techniques of elevating the human being.

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<sup>3</sup> Neo-Paganism designates modern reconstructions of pre-Christian polytheistic religions (Strmiska, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Zalmoxianism is a contemporary replica of the religion of the Dacians, which are considered the ancestors of Romanians; they used to inhabit the areas around the Carpathians and the Lower Danube before the Roman conquest.

Regarding the methodological aspects, I have decided to use “triangulation within the qualitative method” (Denzin, 1978), combining participant observation with in-depth semi-structured interviews and qualitative data analysis of both personal/spiritual development international books and popular Romanian blogs. The private and individual character of these spiritual movements has pushed me into a plural ethnographic adventure. Five years ago, I took part in a series of open-air rituals or ceremonies held in private residences or natural settings (for example Wiccan fertility ritual, or lighting the sacred fire with Zalmoxians). Regarding my first direct fieldwork experience on the topic of personal and spiritual development, I took part in an intensive two-day workshop during the autumn of 2016. The workshop aimed at providing participants with the proper instruments to obtain a state of ‘inner congruence’. Being-in-congruence describes a state of inner tranquillity, in which individuals can realign their feelings and actions by changing their inner selves.

In order to protect the identity of all the participants, who became subjects in my research endeavour, I anonymized all the data obtained through participatory observation and opportunistic interviews<sup>5</sup>. Up until now I have conducted fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with both consumers and personal/spiritual development service providers. I spoke to persons that perform trainings or attend courses and workshops on the following forms of spiritual/personal development: Yoga, Neo-Paganism, Access Bars techniques, the Silva Method, Bowen Therapy, Mindfulness, Familial Constellations and others. The interview questions mainly targeted aspects of neo-liberal spirituality (Carrette and King, 2005), trying to see if all the subjectification techniques used in these personal and spiritual developmental programmes promote a sense of individuality, amplifying one’s spiritual self to the detriment of a collective/communitarian sort of spirituality. I also wanted to see if the interviewees were critical of the ways in which the mundane world is socially, politically, culturally and economically organized, or if they reinforced the mundane while pleading for small and relevant changes at a more personal/individual level. Other interview questions explored the motivations behind addressing these personal/spiritual development programmes (workshops, books, courses, retreat camps) and the exact techniques and forces one needs to mobilize in order to obtain personal growth. Qualitative content analysis of the personal/spiritual development discourse, as comprised in international book production and successful Romanian on-line service platforms, also had a central position in my methodological strategy. This third method allowed

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<sup>5</sup> An “opportunistic interview” (Costello, 2001) is an apparently informal discussion, with the subject of spiritual and personal development, without making explicit the research interest.

me to address both the amplitude and the mosaic character of the field. I mapped personal/spiritual development discourses from a vast array of fields, including: psychology, scientific medicine and alternative medicine, business and economical studies and, last but not least, from the field of alternative forms of spirituality.

The paper comprises two sections: in the first part of the article I will problematize the ways in which late modernity manifests itself in the field of religion, by tackling the ampler social processes that mark the transition from institutionalized dominant religions (dogmatic, cohesive and canonical) to private and individualized spiritualities, in which the social actor builds new symbolic universes according to his/her own worldview and his/her own expectations, and through which he/her is able to escape church-related religions. Another focal point of the investigation follows the ways in which the neo-liberal agenda finds breaches in these individualized spiritualities, breaches that can be easily colonized by market ideology. In the second section of the article I will be focusing on providing an ethnographic account of the emergence of Neo-Paganism and the neo-liberal spiritualities promoted by personal/spiritual development programmes in contemporary Romania. I will be discussing in a comparative manner the aesthetics, politics, systems of meaning and modes of belonging for these two different types of spirituality, that can be hijacked in order to sustain the neo-liberal order or seen as a way of constructing a new sacred cosmos, apart from modern exigencies.

### **From institutionalized religion to private religiosity and consumer-oriented spirituality**

Imagining and anticipating the numerous ways in which modernity will reconfigure each and every region of human existence has a long intellectual tradition, representing both a favourite subject matter and a sybillinic attempt of predicting the future image of society for numerous scholars - Schopenhauer, Kant, Nietzsche, Spengler, Heidegger, Tönnies, Weber, Durkheim and so on. Their views were polarized, some of them trusting the beneficial impact of the modernization process, characterized by progress through Enlightenment, while others feared the negative effects - estrangement, alienation, loss of purpose and existential angst. Social scientists, regardless of their view on the positive or negative effects of the modernization process upon society and humankind, convene on the fact that modernity dislocates society from its "traditional" order, under the circumstances of *industrialization, capitalization, rationalization and secularization* (Giddens, 1991, emphasis added).

Linked to the ontological region of religiosity, modernity is described as being secularized<sup>6</sup> and “disenchanted” (Gog, 2007; Weber in Michel, 1997), i.e. completely petrified, mechanic and devoid of meaning (Saler, 2006; Seidman, 1983). The vast majority of authoritative socio-anthropological sources in the field of religion and secularization (Berger, Martin, Fenn, Parsons, Bellah in Tschannen, 1991; Wilson, 1981) assume that all references towards the supernatural, the sacred and the divine will dissipate at the conscious level of the social actor (Dobbelaere, 1981), as the modernization process comes to an end and as society achieves an increasingly complex and differentiated state (Durkheim, 1965). I think that we should not deny the reality of the secularization process, but we should also severely scrutinize the secularization teleology as religious individualist signification systems are empirically identifiable. At a societal level, secular value frameworks replace religious ones, but the individual is not invariably affected by the societal secularization process, continuing to be “religious” or “spiritual”. The way in which religiosity and spirituality are conceptualized is deeply shaped by the secularization process, which produces a reactive antagonism with church-related-religions, privatization and individualization of the religious experience. We can therefore witness a transition of the sacred and transcendent from the public to the individual sphere, a byproduct of secularization and, at the same time, a source of de-secularization, away from institutionalization.

The “set in stone” authoritarian “meta-narratives” of institutionalized religions are replaced by ingenious individual forms of religiosity, in which the practitioner builds new symbolic universes according to his/her own worldview and his/her own expectations and through which he/she is able to escape church-related religions. The modern social actor can remain a religious subject while secularization permeates and expands on an organizational and societal level or, in other words, the same social world can be simultaneously secular and enchanted.

Modernity does not necessarily lead to a twilight of religion; on the contrary, it “simultaneously generates and destroys routine phenomena labelled as religious” (Gilsenan, 2000: 589). Therefore, it is time to question the taken-for-grantedness of this opposing relationship between religiosity as an exponent of the pre-modern and modern secularism. What I want to emphasize is that religiosity is not incompatible with the contemporary and, furthermore, religiosity, rebranded and commodified as “spirituality” becomes a subjectification tool, an ingenious instrument that can be used to maintain the neo-liberal *status quo* (Carrette

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<sup>6</sup> We cannot talk about one singular coherent and integrating theory of secularization (Bruce, 2002; Gorski, 2000), but of a series of secularization paradigms, founded on a set of common concepts and assumptions like “differentiation”, “rationalization” and “worldliness”, “privatization” or “individualization”.

and King, 2005). Endless implicit or explicit invitations towards initiating a quest for the private self can be identified in the personal and spiritual development industry, which holds the promise of a mundane beneficial transformation using spiritual techniques such as meditation, bodily gestures (yoga), or more occult practices meant to attract abundance, wealth and prosperity.

Along with facilitating the permeation of religious motifs and practices into the capitalist worldview, the individuation of religious experience caused by the secularization process also allowed countercultural spiritual movements to emerge. Neo-Paganism is one such countercultural spiritual movement, that completely refuses the present state of society, smothered by consumerism, injustice and lack of meaning, proposing a "sacred cosmos", a better (old) new world in return. In the following section I will describe the main traits of neo-liberal and anti-capitalist forms of spirituality while empirically exploring both the points of rupture and overlay areas between two different responses to the process of secularization, understood mainly as the process through which religion is no longer needed in order to legitimize the social life of the late-modernity actor, but a set of private and highly individualized spiritual beliefs and practices.

### **Neo-liberal versus anti-capitalist forms of spirituality in contemporary Romania**

Starting from the conceptual rupture between neo-liberal and anti-capitalist forms of spirituality, introduced by Carrette and King back in 2005, I contrast the subjectification techniques used in personal/spiritual development discourses on how the self should be governed and enhanced against those produced by Neo-Pagan forms of spirituality, which I consider as critical to the ways in which capitalism structures and organizes our social, political, economic and cultural life.

As a macroeconomic ideology, neo-liberalism promotes a market-based economy, which needs to satisfy three fundamental criteria in order to be fully functional: reducing state involvement to the minimum, promoting efficiency and, last but not least, stimulating competition. According to the doctrine, the fulfilment of these criteria would undoubtedly lead to freedom, welfare and prosperity for all involved. Any problem or systemic irregularity that may occur is believed to be caused by insufficient liberalization and never by the system itself. This brief description of the neo-liberal economic doctrine is a perfect snapshot of the official discourse on reorganizing all aspects of social, economic or political institutions in postsocialist Romania, such as the public healthcare system, social services or the public education system.

Capitalism was first adopted by institutions and afterwards infused into other sectors of social and cultural life. We are now witnessing the micro effects of the economic principles of neo-liberalism on the social actor who internalized the pillars of capitalist success: individuality, efficiency and competition. By identifying an ontological breach in the social actor's need for transcendental meaning, these three fundamental neo-liberal criteria and the promises of their fulfilment – wealth, progress, and social status – permeate into religiosity and produce changes in the self.

In the following section I will discuss neo-liberal and Neo-Pagan spiritualities in a comparative manner. The comparison is based on the following analytic categories: entry points; means of relating to the modern social world and the political attitude towards its systemic problems; religious imagery and promoted values. Last but not least, I will observe the transformative and ritual techniques that are specific to either of the two.

First I will elaborate on the *subjects' entry points* into personal or spiritual development literature and practical courses and into Neo-Paganism. All the persons interested in spiritual development entered the field in order to find answers to specific problems they were confronted with at a certain point in their lives. Some of them resorted to personal/spiritual development techniques to resolve health-related issues (those who appealed to Bowen therapy, for example). Others wanted to improve their social skills or professional capacities, while a smaller category hoped to find responses to deeper questions regarding the meaning of life or their purpose in the larger scheme of things. Acknowledging one's problems, doubled by the will to solve them marks the first step of the transformative process. Here is an intervention that I find highly illustrative of these facts:

(...) In my opinion, in life we all encounter the same problems – I mean... all adolescents have the same problems: they don't get along with their parents, they all rebel at some point. (...) It is hard to establish relationships with the persons around you, then you'll have a lover, then you'll go to college, then you'll have your first job, then you'll have your first marriage... and I think that personal development target these generalities precisely, the problems we all have in common and then personal development gives us a hundred solutions for the same problems. And you can choose a solution for that problem, that one you consider more useful for yourself. And, thank God, we are all excessively good at creating problems! (X., female, 28, event planner).

At the beginning of the personal development workshop I attended, the trainer introduced several self-knowledge procedures, meant to make us acknowledge the problems that were keeping us from evolving. The problems, fears and anxieties that came through were numerous and diverse, but the most frequently mentioned ones were: the phobia of public speaking (which



was considerably ameliorated until the end of this workshop), loneliness, the fear of not being loved and appreciated by the significant others in their lives, the inability to communicate freely with work colleagues, fear of loss, fear of stagnation. Some of the participants, who were familiar with the content and scenario of this kind of personal development workshops, said that they resolved their psychological blockages or social fears (partially or completely) and will continue to attend spiritual and personal development courses and workshops in order to get in touch with particular means and techniques through which they can enhance their qualities and capabilities. Some of the latter participants wanted specific know-hows on developing their sense of making profitable businesses, on influencing and manipulating others' decisions or on better addressing financial problems. Those subjects who "invested" a great amount of time, energy and financial resources into personal/spiritual development books, courses and workshops and came to view them with a critical lens, appreciate that the industry itself produces most of the problems it pretends to solve. Also, the industry of spiritual or personal development always addresses individual problems, never taking into account more general problems like access to health or education, environmental problems, or political crises. Mostly, the individual is the one blamed for the difficult situation he/she is dealing with.

All the interviews taken with Neo-Pagans showed that the disappointment caused by consumerism and the commodification of life itself, the downfall of the main pillars of the canonical cult and the interest shown to occultism, mythology and history paved the road towards the Neo-Pagan sacred cosmos:

Me, I've always loved history. I think that in order to know who we are, we should study and understand what happened before we came. Of course, my opinion is against what the world wants us to believe nowadays. Everybody's focused on the present, on being competitive and planning for the future with money they don't have and probably never will. (...) I like to believe in a more romanticized world, a world in which we can talk about ancestry, real gods and traditions without appearing like a bunch of fools. (...) I became a Neo-Pagan because I refused to swallow lies from the authorities and the media and I went looking for this nostalgic deeper meaning. That's how I became a Zalmoxianist follower (Z., male, 28 years old, IT specialist).

Going further, I will circumscribe the *religious imagery* of Neo-Paganism and capitalist spiritualities. Capitalist spirituality tends to be eclectic and de-traditionalized, although it takes the "aura of authenticity" of religious traditions for granted (Carrette and King, 2005:16). Both on a discursive and on a practical level, the spiritual attitude of the bloggers, trainers and book authors I have analysed proves to be sincretic, combining disparate religious themes and motifs. The individual who subscribes to these forms of spirituality chooses

what they want to believe in, most often bringing together ideas and practices originating from two, three or more religions into a wholesome personal belief system. For example, within the same blog entry or throughout the works of the same author, one can notice both references to the spiritual advice provided by the Holy Fathers of Orthodox Christianity and concrete advice on how we can alleviate our karma of past sins, under the goal of reuniting with our Cosmic Self. Orthodox Christianity, oriental religious practices, clinical psychology and scientific medicine are no longer part of a distinct and irreconcilable discursive order. Each belief, regardless of its specific operating precepts opens a flux of quantum potential by which everything falls into place according to one's own belief. Another relevant trait of neo-liberal forms of religiosity is the bestowing of spirituality upon any daily activity, regardless of how prosaic it may seem, in order to connect to the Divine Self.

Unlike capitalist forms of spirituality, anti-capitalist ones reclaim the authenticity given by millennial religious practices; the discourse on the authenticity and purity of their beliefs is of great relevance. I need to highlight that Neo-Paganism does not constitute a monolith spirituality. Instead, it is a conglomerate of numerous fractions, that encompass various ways to conceptualize religion starting from the animist doctrine, which claims that spirit is actively present in all objects, living beings and natural phenomena: "I believe that God is in everything: in that tree, within rocks, in you and in me. (...) He is everywhere, he doesn't sit on his cloud in the sky" (A., 26, male, chemist).

Some of the Neo-Pagan fractions - wiccans, for example - are both anti-totalitarian and non-dogmatic (Gallagher, 1994), while others show a quasi-tolerant attitude towards other pagan denominations and no tolerance at all towards mainstream religion or other cults - as in the case of Zalmoxianism. While neo-liberal spiritualities advocate for the fusion of any religious elements, this is not the case for Neo-Paganism, in which the only allowed form of sincretism is the blending of pagan motifs, originating in polytheistic Celtic, Egyptian, Greek, Norse, Thracian, Roman or Slavs pre-Christian religions.

Pantheism is another common denominator between the two. In the case of neo-liberal spiritualities, although the Christian God is referenced directly on occasion, divinity is most frequently portrayed in a pantheistic manner. Despite the numerous variations of cosmologies and pantheons that characterize "new Paganism", a common feature is the belief in the existence of a "realm of gods, spirits and other beings perceived as part of a co-existing reality" (Greenwood, 2000:1). The Neo-Pagan gods are anthropomorphized, have names and specific features (Strmiska, 2005). When humanized, deities take both masculine and feminine forms and are seen as complementary halves of the same whole. The Neo-Pagan gods engage in extra-marital sexual relations, they develop pleasures and passions, sympathies and dislikes, they make mistakes and learn from them, just as the people they govern:

(...) the limitations and imperfections of the gods they worship reflect the dynamics of life on Earth in a much more convincing manner than the absolute perfection of the supreme god worshipped by monotheistic religions (Strmiska, 2005:36).

To pagans, the divine has a double nature: both immanent (inside the human being – the individual becomes imbued by the divine in the case of rituals that lead to possession or inspiration) and external, transcendental: “Frigg [the Norse goddess of destiny and marriage] is the beauty of my mother’s face and Odin guides me whatever I do, so I’m not afraid of anything anymore” (R, 26, female, assistant manager).

For both neo-liberal and Neo-Pagan spiritualities, the means through which new universes of significations are built is of rational, conscious nature as opposed to pre-modern religious realities which were not questioned, but instead internalized as they were. Within the frame of late modernity, the individual coerces himself or herself to an “act of faith” (Berger, 1967) in order to imagine a picture of the sacred. The deliberate is however transgressed along with the internalization of beliefs and practices; these are not invariably standardized. Instead, they are fluid and permissive, always open to renegotiation and redefinition.

As far as the promoted *set of values* is concerned, the Neo-Pagan moral edifice is built on the belief in the existence of an essential principle, much like karma – a principle of cosmic order and complementarity, a sublimed form of *lex talionis*, in which the universe balances and regulates the sum of relations between organisms and things. Love, simplicity, joy, happiness, pleasure, respect for nature and for one another lie at the foundation of the prescriptive infrastructure of modern pagan ethic (Bonewits, 2005). There are no such things as absolute good or evil: these principles are juxtaposed in a dialectic schema that generates cosmic unity. In the case of neo-liberal spiritualities, the virtues of the individual and, implicitly, the values one should work on acquiring are as follows: mastering different kinds of social and professional skills, being pragmatic and self-centred, above the influence of others, being strong, focused and determined, achieving economic success and prosperity by internalizing efficient and productive techniques of organizing one’s life. The ultimate promise of pursuing these values is individual happiness itself. The problem is that the manners in which “happiness” is operationalized allows the exploitation of various schemes of social desirability regarding the individual’s physical aspect, his or her health status, education, profession, income, intimate relations or social ties.

The following section will treat the *different approaches towards modernity and contemporary social and political problems*. Within the context of a radicalized and reflexive modernity, Neo-Pagans develop answers and strategies in a post-

modern manner - “mistrust in meta-narratives”, the decline of legitimizing narratives, syncretism and eclecticism, with “post” signifying “a restless and contesting relationship with the modern” (Michel, 1997:345), unlike those who embrace a neo-liberal spirituality, who take everything as it is, without questioning the fundamentals or subtleties of their spiritual orientation.

From a Neo-Pagan perspective, modernity is the foulest and most destructive of all epochs:

Modernity has stripped us of our most precious things: humanity, love. Today, everything is mercantile, reduced to making money and obtaining advantages (L., 27, salesman).

Modern life has uprooted us from our sacred traditions and sacred lands. (...) You see the same products everywhere, coming out of mass production facilities: milk tastes the same everywhere. Farmers are forced to sell out and submit to corporations. There is nothing sacred in this world anymore. Me, I can't willingly live in this world where nothing is holy. So, I went back to our ancient traditions, to the ways of our ancestors and I found something that this modern world can't take from me anymore: pride and purpose! (Z., male, 28 years old, IT specialist and Zalmoxianist adept).

Another attitude often found among Neo-Pagans is that of rebuke, disapproval and downright hatred towards the implications of technological advancement in our everyday lives:

My grandparents, may they rest in peace, used to lead a simpler life and they were happier like that. They understood how things worked. (...) They communed with nature and had a certain simplicity in their lives (G., 24, female, waitress).

In Neo-Pagan circles, pantheism leads to the adoration of the metaphysical entity of nature, followed by a profoundly ecologist individual policy:

Man must understand, once and for all, that he is a part of nature and not its ruler. So long as we don't understand this thing, we'll witness more calamities and misfortunes, for nature cannot be suppressed. It is not like a horse you can tame. It has its own rule set and it's powerful, much more powerful than this cutting edge technology that humanity is developing (M., 19, male, student).

Neo-Pagans challenge the *status quo*, but only at a discursive level. Although they are sensible to all systemic problems, they don't want to programmatically face them or change the current state of things at a social level. All they want is to escape this reality and recreate a life based on simplicity, while being close to the gods and natural elements. Escapism also creates social insularities, in which Neo-Pagans recreate their life according to what they call “the natural way”, away from technology, consumerism, workaholism and urban clusters. The Neo-

Pagan replica to the modern way of life is an autonomous existence, in cohesion with nature, while gradually pulling away from the dominant socio-economic system. The first step in this quest of becoming in tune with the land is to establish a household away from urban centres, in areas that can provide the basic resources and raw materials needed to survive. The goal for most Neo-Pagans is to ultimately withdraw from the system as much as possible.

Neo-liberal spiritualities acknowledge the existence of social issues, but never point towards their societal roots. They propose a complete transfer of responsibility from society to the individual. Collective accountability is just an excuse for those who are unwilling “to be the change they want to see in the world”. With no exception, all the books and blogs I have analysed promote this idea of “self-governance”, by which only the individual is responsible for his/her wellbeing or his/her failure. Nothing in his/her social environment or anything related to the larger political or economic context can be blamed for the fragility or uncertainties one will encounter throughout their lifetime. This discourse is meant to de-focus the individuals from all the problems they cannot immediately control, such as hunger, poverty, gender inequality, or corruption. Another relevant trait of capitalist forms of spirituality is *quietism*, “a tacit acceptance of the inevitability of social injustice rather than a wish to overcome it” (Carrette and King, 2005:34). Unlike the personal and more immediate issues, the aforementioned larger problems are not within the individuals’ reach and should not be the subject of his or her concern. It is assumed that only after resolving your intimate issues and anxieties can you hope to resolve systemic issues. The individual answerability trope is supported by an internal psychological and spiritual inalienable and ceaseless strength that we all invariably possess. The Self is an unlimited reservoir of strength and stamina, able to fix any kind of problem or anxiety. The Self should not be understood as brute force that just needs to be channeled into the direction of problem solving, but as a evergrowing potential one can be taught to use.

This last comparative section follows the *transformative processes and ritual frames* proposed by both Neo-Pagan and neo-liberal types of spirituality.

Neo-liberal spiritualities claim that the transformative action of personal growth entails a long-term process: “The process of change must proceed throughout the course of the subject’s entire life!” (F., 32, male, personal development trainer), although one needs to see small improvements in order to validate the usefulness of the personal/spiritual techniques. If the expected result is not achieved, no one other than the individual can be blamed. The sole person who applies the transformative techniques is responsible for the success or failure of the personal/spiritual development plan. There are many specialists in the field, but their knowledge cannot get one far if they will not

consistently apply the principles they are advocating again and again. The coach, mentor, author or spiritual advisor is a simple mediator or coordinator in this quest of discovering and harvesting one's inner resources.

During the two-day intensive personal development training I have attended, we were constantly being told by the trainer that "There is no such thing as "I can't!". The trainer equated "I can't!" to the "I won't!" trope. If one can identify some weaknesses or some critical aspects in their life and they still do not spring into action to change them, lamenting that "it is impossible for them to change them", it means that they don't want to make the change because they are benefitting from their problems: "One has many advantages from being depressed or jobless, have you ever thought about that?", the trainer kept on provoking us. We were told we needed to stop lamenting and start disciplining our minds. Here the trainer made the first explicit connection to a religious tradition: "We need Buddhism in our lives. We don't need therapy, but a setup, a mental discipline, 'cause this is what Buddhism is really about". As far as I can tell, the trainer also used the concepts of "pain" and "suffering" in a Buddhist sense. We are the only ones responsible for all the pain and dissatisfaction we are experiencing, because pain becomes part of our lives when our world-model and our life expectancies are not congruent with the expectations we ourselves also create. Suffering intervenes when we feel powerless in changing that state of mind. The training concentrated on making us believe that we should stop controlling all the external aspects of our personal, professional and social lives and start concentrating on reprogramming our minds into creating a new, more balanced mindset. One should not blame the external context for all the unjust or unpleasant situations encountered throughout one's lifetime. This complete responsabilization of the individual is strongly associated with neo-liberal political discourses, in the context of which it takes on the implication that the subject being now responsabilized has avoided his/her duties or taking responsibility for their acts, always blaming other persons, forces or the larger context for their failings or problems.

Each trainer, each personal or spiritual development programme proposes some instruments, some specific techniques one should use in order to access his or her own subjectivity. The use of "psycho-physical techniques that seek to pacify feelings of anxiety and disquiet at the individual level rather than seeking to challenge the social, political and economic inequalities that cause such distress" are labelled as *thought-control mechanisms* (Carrette and King, 2005:34, emphasis added). Here are some techniques, practices and mental adjustments the individual can instrument in order to access his or her own subjectivity, as proposed by the persons I have interviewed: different forms of inner energy, which can be harvested and channelled through bodily gestures

or postured (Yoga, Access bard, Emotional Freedom Technique); taming one's (conscious) mind through neuro-linguistic programming; learning how to elaborate specific objectives and identifying the most useful way to reach them; meditation as a way to connect with one's "true", "authentic" self.

I now want to insist on the extent of the conceptualization of one's inner strength and capabilities, as presented in the blogs I have analysed. In this scheme, the individual is literally the creator of their own destiny and reality. Using his/her cognitive force, the individual is able to channel some energetic fluxes that become manifest in the external world as well: "The material world and the unseen one are the result of the intersection of worlds created by the minds of all the beings in that space".<sup>7</sup> This is the reason why it becomes very important to not concentrate on the thoughts that betray negativity, fear or uncertainty, because all these feelings will be projected into our external lives. By controlling our minds and the great turmoil of thoughts, we can consciously create a reality in which we can know happiness. In order to control the flux of negative thoughts we can resort to mantras, constantly repeating phrases such as: "I am important, I am of great value, I can do anything I tell myself to do, I am intelligent, I expect only great things from myself; there is no obstacle I can't overcome (...)" or "I am the eternal manifestation of Self-respect; I am the eternal manifestation of Self-acceptance; I am the eternal manifestation of Self-appreciation"<sup>8</sup>.

During the workshop we were also constantly being told by the trainer that we are our own biggest enemies and the only way one can obtain the state of 'congruence' (a state of inner tranquillity, in which individuals can realign their feelings and actions by changing their inner selves) is by mastering his or her mind. One should start taming the mind by bringing himself or herself into the present. Only by acknowledging the present mental, emotional, physical state can we identify the most efficient strategy to be used in order to obtain the desired state. The mind is a complex apparatus, but it doesn't differentiate between reality and fiction; the mind does exactly what we program it to do. The good part is that we can learn how to program our minds in order to do anything: from instant healing to attracting wealth and prosperity and the right people in our lives. The lesser part is that we are continuously sabotaged by our subconscious self, a part of us that is not currently in focal awareness. We can silence the effect of our subconscious through some specific techniques.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.holisterapi.ro/holistic/sfaturi-utile/#sthash.zfUlkzzB.dpuf>  
[last accessed: 15.08.2016]

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.holisterapi.ro/holistic/terapie-holistica/regasirea-puterii-interioare-holistic/page/2/>  
[last accessed: 15.08.2016]

The first and most effective measurement we can take against the 'enemy' is to create a healthy and stable mental map in the conscious by training a new voice that constantly gives short and clear orders to the mind. But first, one needs to identify the object of her or his desire, a certain objective, that needs to be 'SMART'- specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related. "We need to be more specific with ourselves, otherwise the mind will not be able to process our desires and needs", the trainer said repeatedly. Also, the way in which we address our mind is vital; we need to renounce negative terms and modal verbs. When we address the mind, we shouldn't say: "I would like to be paid one hundred euros more each and every month", but "I will be paid one hundred euros more each and every month, starting from...". Also, we need to stop comparing ourselves to others: the only validation we need comes from within. The process of obtaining what we want, even though we are talking about a psychological quality like patience or serenity or something more 'material', like money or a lover does not need a severe control of the conditions of possibility, because "everything is possible" once we really want it and tell our mind to go get it. We need to live as if we already possess the object of our desire or like we have already reached our objective: "We need to be there, in the moment of success. We need to be able to smell, to see, hear and to touch success" (F., 32, male, personal development trainer). Before giving a command to our minds, we need to be certain of the utility of what we are asking from it. So, we need to be attentive to the 'ecology' of our thoughts, to anticipate all the advantages and the disadvantages of reaching our objectives.

Similar to neo-liberal forms of spirituality, Neo-Pagans have the conviction that human minds are able to create and perform religious and magical rituals, given the proper training and discipline (Bonewits, 2005). As a ritual common denominator, Neo-Pagans bestow great importance onto the solemn celebration of solar and lunar cycles through so-called "intensification rites" (rituals performed upon solstices and equinoxes) and "rites of passage" (the ritual celebration of reaching certain milestones in life). The ritual array creates an ingenious buffer zone against rationalism and ceremonial practices converge towards a form of communication with the outer world of gods. For Neo-Pagans, "souls and supernatural beings and forces are real" (Wallace, 1966:52). Neo-Pagans organize their ritual calendar according to the "yearly wheel" – the solar seasonal cycle, and their ritual practices vary between individual rites and collective ceremonies (Jorgensen and Russel, 1999). These rituals often take place in open spaces (forests, groves, river banks) because "that's how we can get closer to the Gods" (A1, 21, female, student). Some Neo-Pagans own personal altars, at which they meditate, pray, perform ritual songs, incantations and provide offerings to their governing gods. Each Neo-Pagan tradition employs divination practices: tarot or runes. Prayers are also paramount in Neo-Paganism:



I pray to the Goddess, she always takes care of me and S. and our little girl and she caters to our every need. When I have a problem with my wife or at work, or if I'm simply feeling down, she always comes to my aid. (...) It's enough to light a candle, call her, while intensely focusing on my problem, and she enlightens me – then I know what to do to make things better (C., 32, male).

I'd rather dedicate lyrics to female goddesses. Without them, life would be bland; they are the beauty of the world, the blue sky and life's great mystery (V, 22, female, "poet and composer").

The Neo-Pagan religious imaginary attests to the recurrence of spirituality in the modern world, as new forms of transcendence become increasingly more visible within the social life, away from the logic of personal enhancement for success and profit. The emergence of Neo-Pagan counterculture illustrates a process of rejuvenating the sacred through reinventing the value of ancient spiritual mysteries and religious rituals.

## Conclusions

There is a tight relationship between the decline of institutional religion and the emergence of such forms as private spiritualities. Religious pluralism, as well as the privatization and individualization of religious sensibilities allowed the ascent of consumerist and capitalist forms of spirituality, which entail the use of religious motifs in order to cope with the rigors and pressures generated by the modern quest for personal and professional identity (De Lange, 2011). In this scheme, spirituality becomes both "a cure for the isolation created by a materialistic, competitive and individualized social system" (Carrette and King, 2005:40) and a mechanism that pleads for "self-governance", promoting the idea that the individual is an infinite reservoir of potential and agency, having the capacity to change any context in order to better suit his or her interest. The subordination and exploitation of religious themes to promote the individualist and corporate-oriented pursuit of profit (Carrette and King, 2005) constitutes the main trait of capitalist spiritualities. The same secularization process can also create bubbles of meaning through which one can (partially or completely) evade the neo-liberal techniques of subjectification, imagining a new enchanted world.

A common trait found in the principles of most neo-liberal spiritualities is the concept of pure individual development, with little to no reference ever being made to the inequities of the world and the socio-political context of the present. The individual is moulded towards becoming a self-sufficient agent, the sole bearer of responsibility for the outcomes of his or her actions. The

over-arching neo-liberal system, with its social, political and economic dimensions, is portrayed as the only possible canvas on which the social actor can plot a route towards either success or failure. Whether the end result is the former or the latter, that is purely up to each single one of us. The outside world is but a mirror image of our mentality and our interior universe. However, the responsibility for failure is further emphasized by the fact that we are all supposedly given the necessary tools to succeed. This being said, it is important to note that all self-development programmes and neo-liberal spiritualities promote individual resilience and a “never give up” attitude, repeatedly stating that failure is one of the most important steps towards reaching one’s goals. Individuals are taught to learn from failure and be driven by it because the capitalist system requires relentlessly active social actors to keep it running. A person who experiences ultimate failure is no longer a productive member of society. Their potential productivity is not only lost, but they become a burden on the entire community.

On the other hand, by returning to old belief systems, Neo-Pagans seek to craft an alternative to modernity, which they view as one of the two main causes that lead to a “corrupted world”, the other being Christianity. Neo-Pagans reject the frameworks of modernity, capitalism and organized religion, leading their life based on the common core pillars of ancient beliefs: communion with nature and the spiritual realm, observing behavioural standards such as honour, honesty and integrity. The ultimate goal for many Neo-Pagan followers is to withdraw from the neo-liberal system and achieve a state of self-sufficiency outside the constraints of modern society and politics. Even though Neo-Pagans can be found working in corporate environments alongside individuals who regularly attend self-development courses, their goals lie in direct opposition. While the latter category seeks success within the system, the former sees the corporate lifestyle as a necessary evil that will eventually allow them to amass the capital for self-funded methods of escapism. To conclude, the self-sufficiency sought by Neo-Pagans lies outside the boundaries of the system. A self-funded life, with little or no interaction with the mainstream is their overall goal, whereas neo-liberal self-sufficiency is aimed towards creating an individual who sees no faults within the system, but rather looks ever inwards for the solutions to his or her problems.

The modern individual uses spirituality in order to create new symbolic instances and interpretations that are able to provide legitimacy to the order of everyday mundane life or to denounce it as being foul, proposing a new sacred cosmos instead. Within the spirit of post-modern reactive antagonism with church-related-religions, the emergence of new forms of spirituality and new religious movements attests a phenomenon of “re-enchantment of the world”,

constituting a new vein for the critical investigation regarding a unique and irreversible secularization process, while also giving us the chance to critically investigate the ways in which spirituality is used by the neo-liberal agenda in order to create 'convenient' subjects. The need for sense and significance, doubled by the pressure of constantly inventing ourselves (De Lange, 2011) and the necessity of coping with all the anxieties created by the modern way of life constitute breaches that can be easily overturned by the corporate environment, which uses spirituality to create and celebrate forms of autonomy and self-realization. Spirituality has a key role in constructing "governable subjects" (Rose, 1999), our personal subjectivity becoming a very useful instrument of control and domination. The focus now lays on the individual self, holder of unlimited potential and, in itself, owner of every mechanism through which personal or professional life can be organized in a desirable manner. The pressure of the gruelling project of building a resource-self, that holds the energy, vigour and internal capacities which can be orchestrated towards excelling in everyday life, cannot be removed from the frame given by the capitalist ethos. Self-governance is a very ingenious method of disciplining and controlling the subject, who grows to internalize and implicitly naturalize the key principles of neo-liberal government. The abundance of self-development programmes, personal, spiritual and entrepreneurial growth is an expression of the means through which the individual attempts to solve the issue of an identity that is in a constant state of crisis.

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## ***Commentary***

### ***Editorial Note:***

***This section provides alternative perspectives,  
discusses ideas, controversies, and raises or  
generates new questions  
for future research.***



## COMMENTARY

***On Studiu despre valorile și comportamentul românesc din  
perspectiva dimensiunilor culturale după metoda lui Geert Hofstede  
(Study about Romanian values and behaviour from the perspective  
of cultural dimensions according to Geert Hofstede's method),  
by Adina Luca, INTERACT, 2005***

VERONICA MATEESCU<sup>1</sup>

The study, published in 2005<sup>2</sup>, continues to be a landmark in the Romanian management literature addressing the influence of culture on management practices and work behaviours. This is due both to the celebrity of Hofstede's management model<sup>3</sup>, and to the fact that its authors consider it the first representative study in the analysis of this model in Romania, using exclusively Geert Hofstede's methodology and the research instrument developed by him – Value Survey Module, 1994 – on a representative sample of the Romanian population: the study is conducted in collaboration with Gallup Romania (Interact, 2005).

Although the study was published in 2005, it has not lost its relevance, as it is used as a reference in more recent studies of Romanian authors addressing various management topics: cultural dimensions in management (Rusu, Isac, Cureteanu, 2015); organizational culture (Hudrea, 2015); leadership styles (Leoveanu, 2015); the impact of cultural values in consumer behaviour (Negrușă, Toader, Vidican-Manci, 2015), or topics of social psychology: cultural change (Boacă, 2016); social representations of power (Neculau, Iacob, 2013). The study

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<sup>2</sup> The study can be accessed at <http://customer.kinecto.ro/2005/Interact/Overview%20Cross-%20Cultural.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> According to a study by Søndergaard (1994) on reviews, citations and replications of Hofstede's first book in which he presented the results of his study - *Culture's Consequences. International Differences in Work-Related Values*, 1036 SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index) quotations from the book, 36 reviews, 61 replications of the study, and 274 applications of the model of national culture dimensions were found between 1986 and 1994.



is however problematic, for it lacks critical appraisal. We will discuss below the main issues that we believe are problematic in the study, in the wider context of the debates in the field of cross-cultural management.

The purpose of the study is to develop a “theory based on sociological research to analyse which management and human resource practices work and which ones do not work in Romania and why” (Interact, 2005:2). The study is part of a broader discussion in the field of management (cross-cultural management in particular) on the transfer of know-how and management practices from one cultural and social context to another. In the case of post-socialist countries, this debate also includes the import of Western management theories and practices, which have become major landmarks or even models to follow and apply, in the context of broader discussions on the transition to a market economy and the existence of a difference between the so-called “socialist/communist” work values and behaviours (most often considered negative, as they hinder economic progress) and the “capitalist” work values and behaviours (considered positive, as they are associated with economic success).

There is a wider theoretical context to this, namely cross-cultural management theory is dominated by the approach to cultural diversity in the workplace in terms of national cultural differences, which are explained using national culture models/dimensions; Geert Hofstede’s model is the best known and the most widely used model. Hofstede is considered to be the first author who scientifically legitimized cultural relativism in management (Chevrier, 2003). However, one of the main limitations of Hofstede’s study is the very universality of the national culture dimensions model which he proposes and the deterministic concept underlying it. The national culture dimensions proposed by Hofstede are: power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation - Confucian dynamism (Hofstede, 1996).

The main criticisms of Hofstede’s model are: 1) the way in which he uses the concept of “national culture”; 2) the concept of culture is seen as implicit, essentialist, causal; 3) the number of respondents is not representative – the samples are not national, the respondents are from one company, predominantly from one department; (4) Hofstede believes that the variation in the answers of the IBM employees derives from the national culture, and does not take into account the organizational and professional culture that accounts for the multiple and contradictory cultures within the same organization (McSweeney, 2003). Other criticisms generally made of the approach by models focused on national culture are: use of national culture as a unit of analysis, a “positivist” approach to culture, universalism, reductionism, focus on very general elements and neglect of cultural interactions and other (organizational, economic, individual, contextual, etc.) factors that may influence work behaviour (Yeganeh, Su, 2006).

Therefore, the study starts from a model which has its own theoretical and methodological limitations, in addition to the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study itself, which prevent it from providing solutions/approaches that are appropriate for the reality of the management of organizations, namely a reality of differences in work behaviours and values in addition to the transfer of management practices from one cultural and social environment to another. The interpretations are thus based mainly on common sense and generalizations that are not acceptable in a scientific study - i.e.: "However, if we observe the behaviour of most people, we may conclude that" (Interact, 2005: 6); "No Romanian entrepreneur I know has financial projections for one year ahead" (Interact, 2005: 9).

In addition, there are psychologizing interpretations and a conspicuous subjectivism - i.e. the existence of an emotional relationship between the population and authority, which is characterized either by "worshipping and dependence" or by "hatred and counter-dependence" (Interact, 2005: 6); authority complex (Interact, 2005: 6); the society's inability to make long-term plans is due to the triggering of defence mechanisms (Interact, 2005: 8). A number of interpretations are based on general knowledge (history, religion, etc.); this type of arguments is also taken from the initial model proposed by Hofstede - i.e. "the forced mix with other nationalities through migration and the struggle to maintain a national identity under many foreign rulers" (Interact, 2005: 8) (as explanation for the "anxiety level" in Romania); "Therefore, the religious tradition is the main cause of the short-term orientation of all the European countries and the USA" (Interact, 2005: 9). Then there are the value judgments recurrently expressed by the wording "the good/bad news is" - i.e. "Another piece of good news is that the population's individualism is increasing" (as it is correlated with the finances that the country receives) (Interact, 2005: 7); "the collectivist mind" is associated with "agricultural thinking" (Interact, 2005: 7).

The text is also marred by a number of methodological problems, such as changing some of the dimensions of Hofstede's model, although the research is based on the model's measuring instrument, without operationalizing and theoretically supporting the new concepts (the Power Complex instead of Power Distance, the Anxiety Level instead of Uncertainty Avoidance), and repeating part of the research on the grounds that there is a discrepancy between the results and the initial estimates. For example, Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) becomes the Power Complex understood in its psychological meaning (Interact, 2005: 4), considered to be obvious due to the low score for this dimension (Interact, 2005: 4) and to different "assumptions" regarding the answers to a series of questions on the relationship with one's superior (Interact, 2005: 6). PDI is the dimension for which the research was repeated because the score

was “surprisingly low” compared to Hofstede’s initial estimates for Romania (Interact, 2005: 5); the new score, which is similar to the one in the first research, is justified by the population’s lack of habit to be asked the opinion on authority or the reluctance to give straightforward answers to strangers (Interact, 2005: 5), the conclusion being that “in reality, the PDI level is very high” (Interact, 2005: 5).

The findings of the study are formulated as recommendations for organizational and managerial practices appropriate for the Romanian economic environment. The recommendations are abundant in stereotypes on work values and behaviours of Romanian employees and entrepreneurs, which, correlated with the interpretation given to different behaviours and values associated with national cultural dimensions, suggest an implicitly superior/inferior, desirable/undesirable position. For example: “Innovation may not be the best strategy. (...)” (Interact, 2005: 9); “many Romanian employees may go into a state of paralysis and inaction as a result of delegation of authority” (Interact, 2005: 12); “We believe that, if you want to send your managers to management schools, the German and British schools are most appropriate. There, your managers will learn a form of business discipline and ethics that may influence their actions in the future and thus they will be more appreciated by their subordinates” (Interact, 2005: 13).

Moreover, the recommendations are made in terms of management models: “French/German structure”, “French managerial behaviour”, “American management” (Interact, 2005: 10), an approach which was prevalent at a given time in cross-cultural management (understood as compared management between national management systems and models) and which has the same limitations as those mentioned for the models of national culture dimensions/orientations.

In conclusion, although the study tries to provide answers to a real need to understand the impact of cultural diversity on organizations, it ends up producing and reproducing several stereotypes and problematic approaches in cross-cultural management.

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## ***Critical Reviews***

### ***Editorial Note:***

***This section provides reviews and critical reflections upon recent evolutions in social research, with focus on changing societies and current dilemmas.***



## BOOK REVIEW

***The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015, 331 pages incl. Notes and Index**

IRINA CULIC<sup>1</sup>

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing recounts in this book the history of the matsutake, an edible mycorrhizal mushroom with high commercial value in Japan. It commonly grows on the floor of pine forests in the Northern Hemisphere. Together with her fellow researchers from the Matsutake Worlds Research Group, the author sought the matsutake around the world visiting, speaking, learning, observing, picking, smelling, getting lost on beds of mycelium in the forests of Oregon (USA), Tamba (Japan), Yunnan (China), and Lapland (Finland).<sup>2</sup> In these exploits, she pieced together the supply chain of the matsutake mushroom which would end up in Japan, served in restaurants or offered as gifts; marvelled at the fitful explosion of mushroom colonies, and the structure of the groups of people living off them; collated the histories of forests in various places, emphasizing their multiple trajectory lines and conjectures; and pondered on the tensions, ambiguities, and forces of lives in common – of humans, and other entities.

Tsing's account of her trails across the world, following the strong aroma mushroom, is scripted in a very particular way. Her writing evokes, represents, and reconstructs the kind of history she advocates: multiple, irregular, uneven, spasmodic, conjectural. It comprises a sequence of vignettes that, just like the black and white photographs and the little drawings that illustrate them, capture fragments of life around the matsutake. Such is that of South-Asian refugee pickers living in camps at the border of heavily logged pine tree forests in Oregon, who devised an existence that resembles their former homeland village life (Chapter 5). Earning them a ghost-ridden freedom, haunted by panic-inducing crowds, suffocating apartment dwellings, and tedious industrial labour, it is performed as independent business, carried on in national parks used like

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<sup>2</sup> See Matsutake Worlds Research Group's website at <http://matsutakeworlds.org/>



extensive commons. One longer section of the book narrates trajectories of forests in Finland, Japan, and China as temporal nodes of transformations generated by the global commercial circuits of wood, and the radically different administration of their destruction, reconstruction, and conservation by human “disturbances” (Chapters 12 and 13).

Tsing records both intra- and inter-species collective living, that transgresses hierarchies of moral worth. Her ontological position follows closely Bruno Latour (1987) and Michel Callon’s (1986) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as all ecologies evoked in the bits of stories and histories presented are rendered as companionships of vegetal, animal, human, and inanimate things, scaled or disordered, at times so intricately linked that attempting to identify a definitional border between them seems impossible. In the narrative of her pursuit, Tsing rehearses much of the relational, post-structuralist, and post-humanist tropes that have been in use by the critical and left leaning scholars in the past thirty years: objects are relational and processual; humans and things are bounded in entanglements which erupt in diverse patches of life; global capitalism is functioning through assemblages formed through acts of translation across diverse social and political ecologies, that do not require rationalized labour, raw materials, and scalable operations.

The matsutake in its ensemble - pine roots, nematodes, chemical secretions – is synecdochic to life in capitalism. Tsing summarizes her creeds about this life, which are as many dimensions of present day global capitalism, right at the beginning of the book, using italics. “[T]he concentration of wealth is possible because value produced in unplanned patches is appropriated for capital.” (p. 5). Thus, she looks for “disturbance-based ecologies in which many species sometimes live together without either harmony or conquest.” (p. 5). She investigates these unplanned patches, these ecologies. They are places of ruin, abandoned sites of capitalism led by progress. They are what is left after commodifiable resources have been found, produced, and extracted, in a process of asset accumulation by simplified alienation.

Tsing seems to find no hope for other order than capitalism, and goes to minute detail to show how even in abandoned ruins value is produced unexpectedly out of what capital deems to be waste and weed. To emphasize this, she introduced the term “salvage” accumulation. “In this ‘salvage’ capitalism, supply chains organize the translation process in which wildly diverse forms of work and nature are made commensurate - for capital.” (p. 43) “Salvage” refers to “pericapitalist” forms of activity, that escape organized capitalist commodity production, yet end up filling capitalist firms’ commodity inventories nonetheless. It comprises both the yield grown unplanned in places of industrial devastation, and the work

involved to find, make, move, or transform it, outside capitalist organized labour (see pp. 63-70). Salvage accumulation is primitive accumulation or “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003) in capitalist ruins.

What characterizes “salvage” in these processes is “freedom,” to which the author dedicates a three-chapter section. This is a worrying, bitter part to read. The stories of freedom are stories of devastation themselves, of ruined lives. They are the stories of war survivors and economic refugees, stories of trauma and displacement. The lives for whom freedom at the margins is the choice opted for or forced into are precarious lives. Precarity is as implacable in capitalist ruins as is the thrust of global capital. Tsing urges us to acknowledge the variety of forms surging in these holes of the capitalist blanket, and value them. Here is a longer fragment:

Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others. We can't rely on the status quo; everything is in flux, including our ability to survive. Thinking through precarity changes social analysis. A precarious world is a world without teleology. Indeterminacy, the unplanned nature of time, is frightening, but thinking through precarity makes it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible. (p. 20)

To this, Tsing adds: “The only reason all this sounds odd is that most of us were raised on dreams of modernization and progress.” (p. 20) And the oppositions are drawn here in sharp lines: progress, and the positive categories of order it entails, are disdained as illusory and pernicious for thinking and making the world; precarity instead teaches us to “look around rather than ahead.” (p. 22) By so doing we can learn to notice other practical activities of making lives and the world-making projects they bring about.

Indeed, it does sound odd. But not because of the entreaty to think theoretically through the notion of precarity, which Tsing finds compelling by its double link to the natural world: as a state into which humans have brought nature; and as a metaphor for how to continue complex life-making in such a state. Not the metaphor is worrying and bitter here, but the naturalness of assuming the fate of precarity, of ultimate devastation, when theoretically and objectively one knows that other ways of sharing the world are still possible. So the reader finds herself here with a double lack. A lack of hope, despite the cheerfulness of the ethnography that brings matsutake mushroom and its worlds so skilfully into our rooms. And a lack of a proper critique of capitalism, despite meticulous description of its present workings. The aesthetics of this project is not matched with a politics of the main concepts it proposes. Disturbance, precarity, freedom at

## IRINA CULIC

margins are seductive, they are not enraging. The proposition of consubstantiality of man and nature fails exactly at this point: while nature disturbs, thins, and erupts in one way, men do so in many. Disturbance, precarity, and freedom are overly domesticated in Tsing's work, and seem to fall on the same side of today's global capital, thriving upon the mass of over-flexible, diffused, crowdsourced, indeed precarious and seemingly free, labour.

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## BOOK REVIEW

***Fundamentele metodologice ale științelor sociale***  
***(The Methodological Foundations of the Social Sciences)***,  
by Traian Rotariu. Iași: Polirom, 2016, 235 pages

NORBERT PETROVICI<sup>1</sup>

Traian Rotariu's "The Methodological Foundations of the Social Sciences" is a contribution to the epistemological foundation of sociology. It is the work of a scholar who ponders on his four decades of research work and evaluates the transformation of the sociological field since the 1970s. The six chapters approach major epistemological issues, covering the central dichotomies which have organized from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the debates in the field around the scientific nature of sociology as a discipline: idiographic and nomothetic, qualitative and quantitative data, individualism and holism, realism and constructivism, methodological monism and dualism. The book is construed as a polemical engagement with the postmodernist attacks on science and, especially, with the various trends of postmodernism in sociology. The old dichotomies are repurposed to put in perspective the criticism on the rationality of science and give a firmer foundation to the contemporary sociological endeavours as a coherent collective scientific project.

The reader is invited in the first chapter to recapitulate the debates surrounding the scientific character of sociology. It unpacks both the classical arguments against positioning sociology in the scientific disciplinary pantheon and the postmodern take on science as a modernist lore. The chapter makes a methodical inventory of the conceptual oppositions to create a complex classification of the research practices. It then places sociology in the matrix practices delineated by the various possible ways to do science. The result is a strong defence of sociology as part of the Illuminist hope for a rational, logical, and systematic way of investigating the social world.

The pretensions for an autonomous "qualitative sociology" is dismantled in the second chapter and exposed as an unwitting repurpose of the *Geisteswissenschaft* concept. In recent decades, many researchers have increasingly preferred qualitative

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methods, in reaction to the sophistication of the statistical apparatus which has evolved in a dizzying manner. Traian Rotariu re-examines the distinctions, on the one hand between the ordinal and cardinal character of numbers, and on the other hand between counting and measuring. The purpose is to make clear the differences between qualitative and quantitative scales. While measuring in sociology is sometimes problematic, counting is easier. Even nominal and ordinal traits can be counted. Classifying a trait on a qualitative scale does not discard automatically the possibility of counting. This insight is used to show that qualitative research cannot be opposed to quantitative research, and moreover these two purportedly distinct branches do not constitute different realms in sociology.

The third chapter discusses the opposition between individualism and holism by recapitulating the debates started in 1970s. In a complex manner, the literature is reviewed to carve a place for the author himself in the debates. He makes a careful distinction between the political, ethical, and ontological issues at stake to permit a detailed analysis of the ontological presuppositions of various strands of sociology. Rotariu unambiguously positions himself in the field of methodological individualism, or, more precisely in his own terms, *explanatory individualism*. Explanations in sociology should proceed until an understanding of the actions of those who were part of facts, process, or phenomena under scrutiny is achieved. Bounded rationality and the structural, functional, cultural contexts of the actions are major concepts mobilized to further specify the major assumptions of an explanation that appeals to understanding the individual's choices. Using Raymond Boudon work, the link between rational choice theories and explanatory individualism is investigated to show their intersections and, also, where these two paradigms depart. Through a detour to Pierre Bourdieu's action theory, Traian Rotariu further specifies the link between the explanation based on individuals and the aggregate effects of their actions with their unexpected consequences.

The fourth chapter dwells into the debate of whether society is real or constructed. The line of investigation on the ontology of the social world is deepened. Three forms of constructivism are posited: a strong program (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), a mild version (Hacking, 1999) and a cognitive one (Latour, 1993). These strands of constructivism are refuted by engaging critically authors like Peter Berger, Paul Boghossian, Michel Foucault, Ian Hacking, Thomas Kuhn, Bruno Latour, Thomas Luckmann, Paul Ricoeur, John Searle. The reality is affirmed as autonomous and knowledge is posited as an always partial representation. The knowing subject may organize the production of representations through collective scientific practices. That is, in a manner that is increasingly more precise in terms of predictions, applications, and consequence, based on Popper's falsification imperative.

The issue of causality is filtered through the debate on the methodological monism or dualism. The neo-Kantian insight on the nature of the historical facts as singular is used in chapter five to ponder on the issue of repeatability of the phenomena and facts in sociology. If explanatory individualism imposed the requirement to formulate explanations based on understanding the actions of the agents in contextual manner, the precise formulation of what is 'understanding' becomes crucial. If 'understanding' refers to singularity of the person's motives then the problem of the idiographic crawls back into the very heart of the explanatory individualism. Causality becomes questionable and the very purpose of the science as an exercise generality is jeopardized. Traian Rotariu relaxes the idiographic character of the understanding and shows that regularity can be found at the heart both of the scientist's empathy and of the subject's motives. Causal explanations are possible.

The last chapter takes the hard toil of making a comprehensive classification of methods in sociology. Yet, this is not just an intellectual game. The classification of methods, techniques and procedures is closely linked to the epistemological options and ontological assumptions. Rotariu argues that there are two major classes of methods: observation and experimentation. Observation can be done in sociology in four ways: directly, or as document analysis, survey, and interview. Experiment is rather complicated in social sciences, except for the social experiment done with rather small number of people or with a sort of a simulacra, the 'comparative method'. The comparative method is not a simple method of collecting information, but a way to order the observations to mimic an experiment. This taxonomy avoids any qualification of a method as qualitative or quantitative; subjective or objective; subjective or intersubjective; monographical/case study, sample based, or census. Any such alternative reiteration may sin through attempting to reinstitute the old dichotomies that place sociology in a realm of investigation that is not scientific or scientific enough. On the contrary, this organisation of the methods has the virtue to make similar or comparable the everyday research practices of the sociologist with that of a chemist or physicist.

This is a beautifully crafted book, with a very dense and structured analysis. Nonetheless, at least two aspects could have received more attention. First, the reader would have benefited if more attention would have been given to what exactly constitutes reality. A strong stance of the book consists in positioning a realist ontology. However, this ontology is predicated on a critical posture against constructivism, holism, and methodological dualism. Less time is dedicated to elaborate and affirm of what exactly a realist ontology consists of. Reality is posited as existing independently of the knowing subject which represents it through models. Some part of the reality is readily available and is manifest. Nonetheless, some part of this reality has a latent character. That is, the knowing subject

only infers the latent dimension's existence. This is the backbone of the current debates in realism. Yet, the author does not position himself in relation to critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998; Collier, 2005) or to any other major contemporary paradigm on debating realism (Archer et al., 2013).

Another theme that probably would have captured the attention of the reader is that of the *context of enunciation*. Using John Searle (1995) language, Rotariu is interested in the truth value of a sentence, not in the social origin of a sentence. In this way Foucault's genealogical analysis is discarded, becoming irrelevant for the truth content. Even if the Foucauldian analysis is recognized as important in terms of modelling the context of a sentence, the Popperian attitude is affirmed repeatedly, i.e. science is a collective endeavour of a community in search for the truth through logic, by modelling reality by means of representations prone to falsifications. However, no systematic scrutiny is given precisely to the collective game of recognizing the truth of a sentence, or to the possible distortions given by the context of enunciation. Power, capital or coloniality are somehow eluded and the truth is left to speak through its own intrinsic logic. No extra-scientific resources hinder the truth.

For the reader acquainted with the Eastern European and Romanian sociological debates, many of the arguments raised by Traian Rotariu are fully emerged in this particular context of enunciation. To take some examples, in the first chapter Rotariu upholds strongly that sociology is a fundamental science, not an applied science. This position echoes his strong opposition to the technical understanding of sociology as a tool for the bettering of the socialist society (Cernea et al., 1970; Constantinescu, 1974). In the third chapter, Rotariu's interpretation of the Weberian axiological neutrality is in dialog with the debate that unfolded during socialism, in the 1970s and 1980s, about axiology, ethics and sociology (Kallos and Roth, 1968; Roth, 1986). In chapter six, in a short note, there are other positions mentioned on the classification of the methods in the Romanian field formulated in the 1970s. However, the stakes are barely fleshed out. Yet, the Bucharest school was strongly rooted in the monographical tradition with a clear interest in having the case study as a distinct method, while thematising the issue of generality in terms of regional studies (Stahl, 1975). Rotariu's classification is mounted also against this context. His positions are in conversation with some of these themes and many of his criticisms are at least partly related to these unreferenced debates.

Much of this book has circulated for years now in various ways. It has circulated as coherent syllabuses for the epistemology and methodology classes and ideas that were formulated or discussed in professor Rotariu's classes. These ideas were also sketched out in other texts, while drafts of these chapters circulated as lecture notes. They influenced other researchers as in the shape

of the methodological choices made in various research teams where Traian Rotariu was either principal investigator or a team member. They are part of the epistemic assumptions in his research papers and books. In fact, Traian Rotariu moulded many generations of sociologists at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj. The book is a coherent approach that summarizes four decades of thought on the logic of social inquiry. I was one of professor Rotariu's students, and I, alongside many, found in his teaching a secure base from which to explore new epistemological venues and ideas. We all built on these ideas and further explored the nature of the scientific character of sociology and of the political and ideological uses of the scientific ideals. This book invites the reader to develop an acute sense of the epistemological stake in a research and to ponder on the implicit or explicit decisions in all of the sociological researches.

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