



Interwar Romania and the Greening of the Iron Cage: The Biopolitics of Dimitrie Gusti, Virgil Madgearu, Mihail Manoilescu, and Ștefan Zeletin

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Abstract

This study examines the reconfiguration of the colonial matrix of power along biopolitical lines in interwar Romania. I reconstruct a shifting field of human sciences and governmentality whose cognitive interest resided in identifying the proper template for national subject-making and social modernization. This undertaking was predicated on diagnosing economic, political, and cultural blockages hindering the transformation of Romanian peasants into active political subjects. Building human capacity in the full, renewable, and open-ended sense implied by the term “bios” was seen as essential to overcoming what world-systems scholars would later characterize as conditions of dependency. But the empowerment/knowledge inherent in the biopoliticization of national development was simultaneously circumscribed and enabled by its transformation into power/knowledge mechanisms. I thus show the strong linkages between economics, sociology, and biopolitical theorizing during that era. Drawing on Weberian notions of the iron cage, Foucauldian approaches, decolonial thought, and the concept of alternative modernities, I examine several important projects of national development. These are exemplified by Dimitrie Gusti, Virgil Madgearu, Mihail Manoilescu, and Ștefan Zeletin. Said projects were based on analyses that reveal how Romania’s domestic status quo, peripheral characteristics, and role in the international political economy were conceptualized at the time. Furthermore, the biopolitical visions and alternative modernity programs advanced by these thinkers were imagined as upgraded variations of the Weberian iron cage. These variants were geared towards creating subjects capable of reproducing their distinctive internal economic, social, and political logics. In this way, these competing modernity projects, which were connected with well-defined organizational actors, helped crystallize the broader interwar colonial matrix within Romania.

Keywords: interwar Romania, coloniality, biopolitics, nation-building, modernization.



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The premise of the present study is that the post-World War I crises of the capitalist world system opened up spaces for the proliferation of discourses and projects of alternative modernity, each with its own set of diagnoses and prescriptions for the crises at hand.¹ Prior to the First World War the dominant, putatively normative conceptions of modernity revolved around politically liberal understandings (Wallerstein, 2011) and what one might retroactively refer to as Weberian notions of rationalization and bureaucratization. Although Weber's most relevant writings on these two subjects came after 1918, the earlier Weberian notion of the "iron cage" of modernity is more crucial to the present argument. This metaphor of the iron cage refers to the self-perpetuating structure of modern society, the very modernity of which can be unpacked as follows: scientific progress, instrumental rationality as a model of socio-economic action, and individual and collective disenchantment with the increasing impersonality of bureaucratic logic and modern social life (Kalberg 2001:178-182).

So powerful were the blows wrought by the mechanized horrors of the First World War and its revolutionary aftermaths to both the structure of the capitalist world system and its legitimizing myths, that the post-war political, social, and economic reconstruction of said world-system necessitated the invention of alternative models of the iron cage that would nevertheless preserve its functional benefits, structural logics, and mythical justifications. For the new multiethnic Greater Romanian state, this need was acute. The incorporation of Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina into the Old Kingdom of Wallachia and Moldova under the Paris Peace Settlement (1919-1920) engendered the possibility of irredentist conflicts with neighboring states and increased the non-Romanian population that needed to be integrated into the existing institutions of the national state from roughly 8 percent to approximately 30 percent. The most sizeable minority groups were Hungarians, Jews, Ukrainians, and Germans in that order—most of whom were better educated, tended to concentrate in urban areas, and were economically better-off than the demographically majoritarian Romanian peasants (Hitchins 1994: 290; Livezeanu 1995: 10-11). Thus, the modernization of Romania's predominantly agrarian economy, whose structural problems were exacerbated by war damage, was seen as imperative for the survival, advance, and prosperity of the Romanian people and state.

This is what gave renewed urgency to the quest for overcoming Romania's condition of what would later be called "dependency" vis-à-vis the West. Since dependency relations are always enacted in economic, political, and cultural dimensions, the question of which of these three planes was dominant in the mechanisms holding the Romanian state dependent need not, for the moment, concern us. This question continues to be debated by contemporary scholars, for whom the

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interwar debates on national development are essential to framing their own analyses (Love 1996; Chirot, 1976; Chirot 1989; Janos, 1978; Janos, 2000; Jowitt, 1978; Boatcă 2003; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007; Ban, 2014; Schmitter 1978). What presently matters is how interwar social theorists themselves characterized what world-systems historians subsequently defined as Romania's semi-peripheral situation and, more importantly, how these thinkers imagined and constructed new, "upgraded" iron cages capable of overcoming mechanisms of dependency and (re)producing their own mythical justifications.

I propose that these new mythical justifications are best understood as a "greening" of the iron cage. What do I mean by greening? This is a term that carries its own implied methodology and does not refer in this analysis to environmental or ecological issues. At the most general level, I use "green" to refer to the need for a re-enchantment of the world in the wake of the Great War; a new type of secular magic that would restore a sense of "psychic wholeness" and of belonging in the world. If scientific rationalism had once seemed emancipatory, the widespread sense of alienation inherent in the modern condition of mass administration and instrumental state violence could no longer be denied (Berman 1989:16-17). The therapeutic—and in the broader Marxist sense of the term, ideological—mission of overcoming the alienation between subject and object, between self and collectivity, now fell to the social and human sciences. At a functional level, however, "green" can stand for both renewal and the biopolitical. That is to say, these new, alternative iron cages were geared towards creating political subjects capable of reproducing their distinctive political, social and economic logics. And, I stress and will subsequently show, this biopolitical turn was now rendered both reflexive and prescriptive in sociological theorizing.

The key theme of this biopolitical turn was building human capacity in the full, open-ended, and renewable sense implied by the term 'bios' (Righi 2011: 5-6). Thus, it is no accident that all thinkers examined here either explicitly or implicitly engaged with the Marxian notion of labor power, not least its immaterial aspects. As we shall see, this was a well-nigh unavoidable concept if their quest to change their country's peripheral characteristics, which they themselves had identified and theorized, was to be successful. Consequently, one of the questions I investigate is the extent to which interwar biopolitical thought regarded human intelligence and creativity as productive forces that could be mobilized and set in motion for purposes of national construction. Yet, with the exception of Zeletin's, the projects discussed here did not aim for a type of social transformation subordinated to the needs of capitalist development. Hence, these interwar initiatives are also germane to contemporary arguments that in modernity work constitute its own form of power. In this view, work is a mode of organizing society in a way that cultivates and regulates life's productive potential so as to "extract a surplus of power from living beings" (Lazaratto 2002: 102-103; Just 2016).

The greening of the iron cage is most clearly exemplified in the alternative modernity project of the Bucharest Sociological School, of which Dimitrie Gusti (1880–1955) was the principal founder. Its vision of a quintessentially “Romanian,” rural modernity was predicated on the literal construction of rational citizen-peasants capable of transforming themselves and being transformed from passive repositories of social tradition into active agents of socio-economic modernization and bearers of nationhood. Crucial to this undertaking was diagnosing the economic, political, and cultural blockages hindering their transformation into active political subjects. In this way, strong linkages between economics, sociology, and biopolitical theorizing were articulated during that era. In the process of forging such connections, the Gustian School helped define a shifting biopolitical field of human sciences and governmentality whose cognitive interests resided precisely in defining the proper template for national subject-making (Costinescu 2014:15).

I will reconstruct the main features of this field by focusing on the explicit sociological groundings of the principal interwar national development projects, each with its peculiar biopolitical vision of an alternative Romanian modernity. The creation of a “new man” was a motif that permeated the entire interwar Romanian ideological spectrum, and this tropology typically denoted a “he.” However, the gender dimension of the problem is not part of the present inquiry. Rather, I attempt to bring forth, compare, and confront the biopolitical premises underlying the sociological systems of Dimitrie Gusti, Virgil Madgearu (1887–1940), Mihail Manoilescu (1891–1950), and Ștefan Zeletin (1882–1934). All four thinkers were intellectual and ideological rivals-collaborators, while their visions of modernity were connected to well-defined organizational actors and/or social movements. My analysis foregrounds the biopolitical and internal colonial aspects of their modernizing ideologies, provides a historical contextualization of the institutional positions they spoke from, and outlines the socio-economic problems they sought to address.

Their case is of particular interest from our perspective. They have been previously analyzed from several viewpoints: as strategists of modernization, as forerunners of world-systems theory, as examples of contested national identity formation, and in terms of interwar agrarian vision of collective regeneration in East-Central Europe (Chirot 1978; Schmitter 1978; Love 1996, Verdery 1995, Trencsényi 2001; Trencsényi 2014). More pertinent to the matter at hand, Manoilescu and Madgearu have been held up as examples of how subalternized sociological knowledge can produce thinking that exists at the very borders of the colonial matrix, potentially challenging Western global designs (Boatcă 2003: 248-249). The present article does not focus on this issue of epistemic disobedience in the context of “de-linking” from the logic of coloniality (cf. Mignolo 2007). Rather, I show how the empowerment/knowledge inherent in the biopoliticization of interwar national development projects became epistemically circumscribed yet at the same time enabled by its transformation into power/knowledge. As such, I undertake a case-study of

coloniality in action within the nation-state. My inquiry speaks directly to the dictum that the hidden, constitutive side of modernity is coloniality (Mignolo 2011: 2-3). Although a complete account of coloniality within interwar Romania would require a larger study that would take up the question of peasants' reaction to these national development projects, the modalities in which social scientists intellectually reconfigured and sought to institutionalize coloniality via biopolitics are key to understanding how the transformation of the power/knowledge structure actually happened. In this overall context, it is striking that Gusti has not received any extended treatment in the English-language literature as a strategist of modernization from the perspective of world-systems analysis and/or in the context of coloniality. As we shall see, he was one of the key architects behind the biopoliticization of the interwar Romanian power/knowledge structure, expending considerable efforts to guide its institutionalization.

Theoretical, Historiographical, and Methodological Considerations

If, as some scholars have argued, the strength of semi-peripheries to challenge the geopolitical imaginary of the world-system has typically resided at the epistemological and cultural level (Boatcă 2006: 325-327; Boatcă 2007), it is no less true that these challenges often came in the form of developmentalisms which reproduced the logic of coloniality in the management and control of the very subjects they purported to emancipate. (Mignolo 2000: 55; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2009: 136-137). The concept “coloniality of power” denotes a power/knowledge matrix that operates through control over authority, labor, sexuality, and subjectivity (Quijano 2000; Quijano 2007).

The reconfiguration of the colonial matrix in interwar Romania required that the more traditional sciences of the nation—history/historiography, philosophy, economics, and sociology—be recast and cross-fertilized into more explicit sciences of governmentality. In Foucauldian thought, biopolitics is linked to the concept of governmentality: the specific means—including but not limited to the social sciences—whereby governments render populations into objects of knowledge and targets of intervention. Governmentality links government actions to the modes and categories of thought that make them possible. The key point here is that governmentalization presupposes the internalization of specific types of political rationality by the governed, enabling them to govern themselves individually and collectively in ways that are politically prescribed (Foucault 1991: 99-101; Foucault 2008: 3-7, 19-22). The Gustian School was a case in point. Gusti's student, the noted sociologist and geopolitical thinker Anton Golopenția, consistently argued that the social sciences needed to become part of a “new

administrative technique” for governing the country (A. Golopenția 1938: 246-248; A. Golopenția 2002:68-78).²

Several qualifying assumptions are needed before proceeding further. The first is that the historically bounded nature of “rationality” in a Weberian sense is what allows a fairly seamless joining with the Foucauldian and (de)colonial themes outlined above. Second, that in light of this, these “subjects” should not be confused with the 19th century liberal, autonomous and reasoning ideal-type political subject. As the same Anton Golopenția put it 1937, the 19th century was “the age of Pax Britannica, liberal individualism, and the parliamentary recruitment of state leadership. [...] The emphasis fell on the individual actions of businessmen, rather than on those of the state.” Said parliamentary recruitment prevented the surfeit of state authority in such a way as to protect individual “liberties”; for Golopenția, this was now decidedly a thing of the past (A. Golopenția 2002:69).

Thus, the third assumption is that the Gustian biopolitical conception dovetails with the contemporary theory of alternative modernities, which regards the history of modernity as the “the story of the constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs.” These multiple “institutional and ideological patterns” are carried forward by social actors “pursuing different programs of modernity and holding different visions of what makes a society modern” (Eisenstadt 2000:2; Eisenstadt 2010). In this definition, competing alternative modernities qua national development projects can exist within a particular society. In the case of interwar Romanian, these projects were driven by colonial-type logics and/or practices and thus helped crystalize the broader colonial matrix. Inevitably, the social reform activities of the Gustian School also intersected with those of the powerful interwar eugenics movement, which also aspired to bring about a social modernization of the Romanian state. But, in as much as the notion of biopolitics is etymologically rooted in the ancient Greek definition of life, there emerged a morphological distinction between two types of biopolitical practice.

The first approach toward practicing biopolitics is related to the concept of “zoe,” denoting the animate processes common to all living beings (Agamben 1998:1). In the 20th century, and especially during the interwar period, this approach engendered a eugenicizing concept; a biopolitical practice based on the presumed biological aspects of nation-building. This phenomenon was not limited to territories inhabited by Romanians; it occurred throughout Central and Southeastern Europe. By and large, the extant historiography on interwar Romanian nation-building and social modernization has centered on the eugenicized dimension of biopolitics (Bucur 2002; Turda 2007a: 413-441; Turda and Weindling 2007; Turda 2010; Georgescu 2016). For example, under the Dual Monarchy “The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and

² All translations from Romanian are mine.

the Culture of the Romanian People” (ASTRA) emerged as the principal cultural organization of the Romanian national movement. During the interwar years, ASTRA recast itself as an important non-governmental instrument of state consolidation. ASTRA guided the biological, which evolved into the racial mapping of the Transylvanian peasantry. As importantly, it popularized eugenic ideas, becoming a vocal advocate for legislation and public health programs based on eugenic principles (Bucur 2002; Solonari 2015: 76-80). According to ASTRA’s President Iuliu Moldovan (1882-1966), politics had to be fundamentally recast as biopolitics, which he defined as “the science of government based first and foremost on the “biological capacity of citizens and directed towards their biological prosperity.” In his view, biopolitics was “the fundamental politics, the regulative consciousness of individualistic and social tendencies” (Moldovan 1927: 56, original emphasis).

This second type of biopolitical practice is more properly related to the term “bios,” indicating the “the form or way of living proper to an individual or group” (Agamben 1998:1). The biopolitical projects examined here belong primarily to this second category. They are more properly linked to the concept of governmentality, because they aimed to propel the Romanian “people” qua “bio-social entity” into a more advanced “social and spiritual” state of nationhood. Gusti himself argued on numerous occasions that intellectuals had a critical role in mobilizing and recasting popular culture (*cultura poporului*) in such a way as to transform “the people (*poporul*), a biosocial unit, into a nation, a superior spiritual and social unit” (Gusti 1970: 195). Clearly, then, Gusti, Manoilescu, Madgearu and Zeletin understood themselves to be engaged in a form of biopolitics, or at the very least as operating within a broader biopolitical field that could be shaped and contested. More to the point, Gusti, who never identified himself as a supporter of eugenics, was undoubtedly aware of Moldovan’s definition of biopolitics, having attended ASTRA’s conferences on this topic. On his part, Manoilescu was open to eugenic ideas. Yet his biopolitics focused on eminently socio-economic processes and, as will be shown, the transformation of consciousness. Moreover, like Gusti, Zeletin, and Madgearu, Manoilescu framed his questions concerning the role of the state in promoting modernization in terms different than Moldovan’s (Bucur 2002: 41-42; 80-81, 105-106). Because he believed that class struggle had become transposed from inside individual societies to “the level of nations within the world system,” he argued that the role of the state was to mitigate the exploitation inherent in the international division of labor (Boatcă 2003: 253-254). In turn, this raises the issue of how the modernizing outlook of our protagonists connected to questions of politics and ideology.

The Question of Politics and Ideology: Gusti, Madgearu, Manoilescu, and Zeletin

From a political and ideological standpoint, Gusti was an important member of the National Peasant Party (henceforth PNT), having served between 1932 and 1933 as Minister of Public Instruction in the government led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod (1872–1950). As such, he most certainly sympathized with the Poporanist and later Peasantist ideological and cultural currents that sustained the party. In a very concrete sense, Gusti may be described as a technocratic Poporanist. Accordingly, PNT was his natural political home (Rostás 2014). In the interwar period, the party was political abode to many “third way” advocates associated with the Peasantist current of thought and its various agrarian-based doctrines of socio-economic development. The chief Peasantist doctrinaire was the left-leaning economist and cooperativist theoretician Virgil Madgearu (1887–1940). Madgearu served as Minister for Industry and Trade between 1928 and 1929, twice as Finance Minister of Finance between 1929–1930 and 1932–1933 respectively, as well as the Minister for Agriculture and Royal Domains in 1931. His principal works included *Peasantism and Peasantist Doctrine*, published in 1921 and 1923 respectively. Gusti, in particular, believed that turning peasants into economically productive citizens of the nation-state was ultimately more important than the political actor(s) or the type of political regime that undertook to do so. In this way Gusti became a close and trusted collaborator of King Carol II as the interwar period advanced, and he continued to serve in official capacities even after the advent of the royal dictatorship in 1938.

On the other hand, the vision of the National-Liberal Party (henceforth PNL) concerning Romanian modernity was predicated upon rapid industrialization. It found its most forceful advocate in Ștefan Zeletin, although Zeletin himself opted to enroll in Marshall Alexandru Averescu’s (1859–1938) People’s Party because he saw in the charismatic figure of the war hero a better chance of creating a great national movement that would push forward his vision of socio-economic modernization. As far as Zeletin was concerned, the PNL apparatus had become hidebound, out of touch with the “national soul,” and staffed by intellectual mediocrities lacking the “theoretical knowledge” to lead a “neoliberal renaissance” that would materialize the “national aspirations of capitalism” (Zeletin 1927: 97, 109-110).” In practice, however, throughout 1920s the People’s Party and PNL often lent each other parliamentary support.

For Zeletin, Romania’s historical imperative was to proceed more rapidly through stages of development analogous to those traversed by the West. His project of national construction was therefore predicated on the extraction of peasant labor power in the interests of capital accumulation and the development of native industries. On his part, Mihail Manoilescu, who held a number of important functions throughout his career such as Minister for Industry and Commerce in 1931 and Foreign Minister in 1940, agreed with Zeletin on the need for industrialization. Unlike Zeletin, he believed that the root cause of Romania’s economic backwardness was its dependency

on the international market. This made him one of the most effective advocates for a Romanian “third way” in the field of economics and the country’s foremost corporatist theoretician. After the advent of the world economic crisis in 1929, these diagnoses led Manoilescu on a rightward political journey from Peasantist ally and sympathetic critic towards Carlism and ultimately Fascism in the form of Legionarism.

In terms of his biopolitical approach, Manoilescu was a thinker in many ways more similar to Dimitrie Gusti than Zeletin was. Believing as he did that only a corporatist mode of socio-political organization can mobilize the Romanian “nation” in order to achieve its full economic and human potential, Manoilescu logically came to be attracted by Fascism. And, as I shall explain, Manoilescu’s corporatism was a form of biopolitical national palingenesis, though not necessarily explicitly Fascist.³ Be that as it may, Gusti’s rightward political journey only went so far as to adopt corporatist principles towards the end of the interwar period. Some of his protégées such as Traian Herseni, who became a eugenicist, and Dumitru Amzăr did embrace the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Institutionally speaking, however, throughout the 1930s the Gustian School remained in serious competition with the Legion for influence among university students and the peasantry (Rostás 2009: 16-18; Momoc 2012; Sdrobiş 2015).

The Gustian Iron Cage: The Nation as Biopolitical Factory

The Bucharest Sociological School’s construction of modernity entailed social engineering on a vast scale, but it was undoubtedly motivated by genuine patriotism and a desire to improve the life of Romania’s rural population. Its aim was to maximize and direct the peasantry’s vast energies toward grassroots socio-economic development and civic engagement, energies unleashed by the sweeping land distribution mandated by the 1921 Agrarian Reform Law and the enshrining of universal manhood suffrage in the 1923 Constitution. Although A. I. Cuza’s (r. 1859–1866) 1863-1864 reforms had distributed more land and legally emancipated the serfs from the corvée in Moldova and Wallachia, they fell short in satisfying peasant land hunger and in reducing the importance of large estates in the overall agrarian economy (Murgescu 2010:228-229). The emergent nation-state was thus saddled with the structural “agrarian problem[s]” of rural poverty, economic inefficiency, and limited organizational capacity, while the extractive drives of landlords and the state remained unfettered. Unsurprisingly, peasant rebellions punctuated the 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably in the Great Revolt of 1907. Such outbreaks of discontent, however, did not immediately translate into the effective policies or the development of technocratic expertise needed to reverse Romania’s internal path dependence. This lack of technocratic know-how is understandable given that 19th century agrarian reform projects were bound by a historical

³ Roger Griffin conceptualizes generic Fascism as a form of “palingenetic ultranationalism,” which he defines as a utopian myth of social rebirth and national regeneration (Griffin 1991: 32).

and conceptual horizon indebted to mid-nineteenth century political economy. Indeed, reformers such as the agronomist and statistician Ion Ionescu de la Brad (1818–1891) and the historian Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852) had framed their arguments in primarily historical and legalistic terms (Tabără et al. 2014: 18-19; Trencsényi 2011:8-10; Turda 2007b:463-457). To be sure, by the late nineteenth century there had already appeared a number of “productive but ultimately failed” projects of social modernization premised on the creation of a national, “sanitary social body” and the nationalization of the medical profession (Cotoi 2016).

The Gustians articulated their project of nation-building and social reform in sociologically savvy, 20th century biopolitical language. Determined to do away with the proverbial millstones hanging around the neck of the economic and social life of the Romanian nation and state, the Bucharest Sociological School first sought to identify the country’s most pressing socio-economic problems. In 1921, Gusti founded the Romanian Social Institute. The institute was intended to function as an umbrella organization and an information clearinghouse that would research all areas of social and economic life in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the “nation” as a site of social and political intervention.⁴ The actual sociological research was initially conducted by interdisciplinary teams, many of whom had been trained in the Sociology Seminar established by Gusti at the University of Bucharest. Starting in 1934, under the aegis of the Royal Cultural Foundations, abbreviated forms of research in the rural world were combined with interventionist social actions carried out by larger teams of student activists and specialists in domains ranging from medicine to theology and from agronomy to demography. The Royal Student Teams, as they were called, carried out quick sociological investigations to identify the most critical problems in the communities to which they were assigned. These problems were addressed during their summer campaigns. Although the Royal Student Teams had modest beginnings, by the time rural social work was rendered compulsory under the 1938 Social Service Law, thousands of university-age youths were enrolled in Gustian-inspired programs (Sdrobiș 2015: 217, 229). Importantly, whereas in Transylvania such social-cartographic and interventionist activities were, with a few exceptions, carried out by ASTRA, the rest of the country came under the epistemic tutelage of the Gustians and their corresponding style of biopolitics. This was due to the consistent support which they received from King Carol II throughout the 1930s and which culminated with

⁴ An outgrowth of the Gusti-led Association for Science and Social Reform, the Romanian Social Institute adopted the same organizational structure. It was organized into seven “sections” as follows: agrarian, commercial and industrial, financial, juridical, political and administrative, social policy and hygiene, cultural. Additional sections were added at later dates, such as the “Demographic, Anthropological and Eugenics Section” in 1935 (APSR 1919:28).

ASTRA's incorporation into the Social Service. However, ASTRA continued to function autonomously within this larger organizational framework (Bucur 2002:35).

Sociologically and biopolitically speaking, the Gustians imagined the "nation" in engineer-like fashion: a large, spatially configured intellectual field of social knowledge production. This vast field was itself divided into subfields of knowledge and social intervention, held together by lines of force that extended into the institutions that enabled the power/knowledge formations and practices necessary for (re)producing the "nation" as a collectivity. More specifically, these practices constructed peasants into national subjects. As Gusti enthusiastically described it, the key to all this was "the will to create in the bosom of the nation social and cultural values, regardless of whether they are large or small, [all of] them being equally necessary for creating the Nation." For this reason, the "creative activity" of peasant householders, administrators, as well as that of artists and scientists was, "from the principal constructive viewpoint, of equal significance for the life of the Nation" and the emergence of the "the new man" (Gusti 1942: 363).

This sweeping vision was in itself derived from a broader sociological conception concerning the historical evolution of societies and their transformation into "nations." According to Gusti's "law of sociological parallelism," social evolution unfolded within, and was in turn determined by four basic frames: cosmic, biological, psychic, and historic. Within these frames and objectively conditioned by them in relations of interdependence, there concomitantly unfolded individual—yet above all "synthetic," that is collective and "social"—manifestations of human will. These manifestations took economic, spiritual (i.e., cultural and religious), political-administrative, and ethical-juridical forms. Therefore, societies developed holistically, the social "totality" being the expression of the mutually constitutive relationship between frames, manifestations, and social will (Gusti 1937a:380).⁵ In this conception, a folk or a people (popor) was but a "natural" ethnic community bound by together by geography, ties of blood, and tradition. By contrast, nations were the result of a people's willful historical passage towards consciousness of themselves as a unique collectivity and, just as importantly, the achievement of mastery over the community's means of action and self-realization. Though the historical development of a particular nation necessarily occurred in a relationship of "reciprocal influence" with that of other nations, Gusti believed that the maturation of national self-consciousness brought with it the capacity to pick and choose the foreign influences that were most "suitable or easily assimilable" (Gusti 1937b:53). Hence, developed nations, which Romania still aspired to become, were self-contained social units of a "total" and ultimately sovereign character (Gusti: 1937b:54-55). As we shall subsequently see,

⁵ Let us note that Gusti's description of society as a "totality" or "of a totalitarian character" was most assuredly not a nod to either Gyorgy Lukács or Mussolini.

Gusti was not alone in upholding a conception of the nation as a totality. Mihail Manoilescu developed his own version in an organicist-corporatist variant.

Two interrelated postulates logically followed from the Gustian conception of the nation as a “totality.” First, that knowledge of the nation as a fundamental social unit demanded a most rigorous science that could account for its historic development and explicate its manifold frames and manifestations. Second, that a detailed knowledge of the nation’s constitutive elements was only a prerequisite for a genuine “Science of the Nation.” Such a science could never be neutral or value-free, since it was constitutionally subordinated to the imperatives of nation-building. From these premises, Gusti derived the “ethical imperative” and “program” of fostering “everyone’s participation in the concrete life of the nation,” so that the most “critical social process” of “nationalizing the State, the administration, the schooling, and the education through culture” may be brought to fruition (Gusti 1942:362). Consequently, the preeminence of sociology as the ultimate science of the Romanian nation—a science that would subsume but not negate all other sciences of the nation, such as ethnology and folklore—derived not only from its epistemic efficacy, but also from its practical mission.

The epistemic apparatus of Gustian sociology was inspired and creatively adapted from several sources. During his doctoral studies in antebellum Germany, Gusti had acquired a thorough grounding in the German *Kulturwissenschaften* (sciences of culture), including *Volksheorie* (folk-theory), *Volkskunde* (folk-characterology), and *Volkssoziologie* (folk-sociology). Gusti’s mentors were pioneers in folk or ethno-psychology (Wilhelm Wundt, 1832–1920), cultural history (Karl Lamprecht, 1856–1915), non-market economics Karl Bücher (1847–1930), and anthropogeography by Friedrich Ratzel (1847–1904) (Gusti 1942: 361-363). These scholars sought to build “nomothetic foundation” for the social sciences, namely to fashion the principles of a single discourse applicable to every field of knowledge (Smith 1991: 3). The empirical dimension of Gusti’s sociology, on the other hand, came in the form of the monographic method of sociological research. Partially derived from the French sociologist and engineer Frederic Play (1806–1882), who had studied the impact of industrial work on rural families, the Gustian monographic method took as its practical starting point all the “social subunits” of the village. Considering that Romania was still a predominantly agrarian nation, this was indeed the logical place to start. The method was meant to be expanded so as to include cities, regional administrative units, ethnic regions, and the nation as a whole; however, this expansion was only partially accomplished (Gusti 1937b: 56; Văețiși 2014). Be that as it may, the sociological monographs examined all conceivable aspects of rural life: geographic conditions, demographic data, the rural economy, popular beliefs and practices, and the character of social groups and relations. By the 1940s, around 600 villages, towns and regions had been surveyed at least in part (Bădescu 2009: 56).

To be sure, considerable methodological differences concerning the monographic method, to say nothing about ideological and interpretive divisions concerning the precise status of the peasantry in Romania's historical development, had begun to emerge among Gusti's students and various collaborators as early as 1932. Yet the fact that scholarly debates took public form through the cultural press and the more specialized publications of the Gustian School such as *Archive for Science and Social Reform* and *Romanian Sociology* contributed to the conceptual hardening of the "nation" as an object of intellectual inquiry and a field for political intervention (Rostás 2013; Văcărescu 2012; Verdery 1995).

In this context, the monographic method was not just a mode of social-scientific inquiry. It was also a formidable and finely tuned panoptical instrument suited for transforming peasants into national subjects through regulatory control over patterns of social behavior, loyalty, and interaction (Costinescu 2013: 71-72). Monographic sociology became a form of research-action that gathered the kinds of data necessary for creating practical, culturally specific programs to spur on the socio-economic modernization of rural life. Yet the challenges to this program of "nationalization" were enormous. Gusti was by no means the only one to accurately remark that the rural world was the stage for a "lamentable spectacle" of illiteracy, disease, coercion, exploitation, and a retrograde mentality that hindered economic efficiency. Since the village economy was embedded in the larger social subunit of the village, it logically followed that creating a strong state required building a "strong peasant" (Gusti 1942: 365, 361; Vrânceanu 1939).

In short, the "peasant" was the "nation" writ small. Just as the nation could be apprehended and advanced through its "manifestations," so too could the "peasant" be known in a social scientific sense and empowered by transforming his culture(s) of health, work, mind, and soul. In turn, these cultural spheres mapped to corresponding areas of active social intervention: healthy nutrition and proper hygiene, rationalizing agriculture and animal husbandry, improving literacy by organizing Peasant Schools and libraries, as well as strengthening the ties between village communities and the Orthodox Church. The latter also included "resolving" situations of cohabitation according to religious precepts (Rostás 2009: 19; Mușat 2013a: 360)

It needs to be reiterated, however, that the obstacles facing the implementation of this vision were formidable. As a state, Greater Romania occupied a subordinate position in the international political economy of the time, and its resources were limited. Even so, institutional resources for the social research and nation-building projects of the Bucharest Sociological School always seemed to be found, not least because of Gusti's savvy academic and institutional diplomacy. This enabled him to attract support from influential political and intellectual figures across the ideological spectrum, most notably King Carol II himself. Certain highlights are worth describing, but need not be analyzed in detail since they have been discussed in other works (S. Golopenția

2014:11-12; Rostás 2009; Muşat 2013b; Sdrobiş 2014). To begin with, the Romanian Social Institute, established by Gusti in 1921, was expanded in 1939 into an Institute for Social Research, intended to function as the clearinghouse for a vast federation of social research-action institutions. Similarly, once Gusti was appointed to lead the Royal Cultural Foundations (1934–1939), the monographic sociological surveys of village life undertaken during the 1920s evolved into rural social work. The social activists functioned alongside a program of intensifying the establishment of Cultural Homes (cămin cultural) in as many rural communities as possible. By the early 1940s, the number of Cultural Homes had reached 5,000 (Bădescu 2009: 56). The Cultural Homes were expressly intended to systematize and direct the socio-economic modernization of the countryside by active interventionist policies regarding rural peoples' health, work, mind, and soul—accomplished through encouraging peasants to assume a proactive role in their own well-being. This went hand in hand with promoting a sense of national belonging and active citizenship. Critical to this undertaking was the nurturing of peasant leaders who would work in conjunction with and under the direction of the village intelligentsia, namely teachers, priests, and officials. This agenda for developing and “nationalizing” the rural world was taken to a whole new level of systematization and state planning during the short-lived and ill-fated experiment with corporatism enacted during the royal dictatorship (1938–1940) of Carol II. Under the 1938 Social Service Law, all university graduates were required to perform social work in the countryside as a condition of receiving a diploma. No doubt, this requirement was intended to create a technocratic elite imbued with the pedagogical mission and sense of social solidarity necessary for transforming peasants into agents of socio-economic modernization.

Cooperativism and the Biopolitical Foundations of the Peasant State

The Social Service Law (1938) addressed the growing apprehension toward the slow pace at which the agrarian reform was coming into its own; at the time, Romanian agriculture's extant structural problems were compounded by the world economic crisis. The major issues were low productivity, unimpressive infrastructure, and a relative dearth of both agricultural credit and advanced technology. Additionally, most producers lacked direct access to the national and international markets. These problems had been identified by virtually all major economists and social theorists of the interwar period, regardless of their ideological inclination. For all the differences between them, the historical impact of capitalism on Romanian-inhabited lands figured prominently in their analyses. Gusti himself had not hesitated to blame capitalism for causing a “rupture” in the “wholesome” development of the Romanian people on their ancestral soil; he looked forward to the “new Romanian world” resuming “with determination” its interrupted path of development, particularly in regards to its “State life” (Gusti 1937b:52). Accordingly, although theoretical

solutions varied based on ideological preferences, all solutions were in the end biopolitical, notwithstanding their political and economic prescriptions.

Since Gusti's own research was focused on the contemporary rural world, he left the historical development of Romania's political economy and the historical sociology of the Romanian village to his collaborators. Within the Peasantist current of thought, particularly as popularized in the forms of economic analysis and political doctrine by Virgil Madgearu, the structural problem of Romanian agriculture resided in the problematic articulation of residual, quasi-feudal structures with capitalist relations of production. During the 1920's, in the Cooperative Studies Section of the Romanian Social Institute, Madgearu had collaborated not only with Gusti, but also with the Marxist historian and Gustian sociologist Henri H. Stahl (1901-1991) (Juravle 2014: 47). Although ideologically closer in spirit to the peasant-oriented populism of Constantin Stere (1865–1936), the principal founder of the Poporanist cultural and political movement, Madgearu turned to Marxist methods of analysis in his quest to identify the historical causes of Romania's economic underdevelopment. In his seminal 1936 collection of studies *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism* and in his thorough 1940 survey concerning *The Evolution of the Romanian Economy after the World War*, Madgearu identified the persistence of "neo-serfdom" as a long-term, structural constraint on Romanian agriculture.

This was a concept originally expounded in 1910 by the sociologist Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855–1920) in order to diagnose the root cause of the Old Kingdom's continuing economic underdevelopment. A hybrid formation and structural byproduct of late 19th and early 20th century political economy, neo-serfdom denoted the effective vassalage under which peasant smallholders remained beholden to large landowners and their tenant agents (*arendăși*). Draped in a liberal constitutional order, this neo-feudal labor regime was nested within a system of capitalist private property and markets that forced peasants to share the product of their labor with landlords in the form of rents and corveés. Problematically, peasants also had to pay their taxes to the state in cash, which was rendered nearly impossible by the omnipresence of relations of production that were feudal in practical terms. Neoserfdom resulted in low agricultural productivity, a problem that persisted even after the postwar agrarian reform. Although the general framework for economic development became more favorable after World War I, not least because of land reform, demographic growth continued to cause the fragmentation of peasant smallholdings via inheritance. Given that small plots were unsuitable for the adoption of modern farming methods that included machinery, they were a source of "technical regression." In such circumstances, it remained difficult for domestic industry to develop. Not only did it lack a developed internal market for its products, but international capital was more than capable of circumventing protectionist barriers by exporting technicians and setting up factories on Romanian soil, or by

rendering the development of native industries dependent on foreign financing (Madgearu 1936: 95-99; Madgearu 1940: 21-24).

Within the Peasantist milieu, there was a general consensus among rural sociologists and economists that the peasant household and its afferent smallholdings constituted both the main obstacle to, and the key to unleashing the dormant productive forces of Romanian agriculture. For Madgearu, peasant households were the basis of a traditional, quintessentially non-capitalist village economy. But this way of life and the social capitals that were an essential part of it were in the process of dissolution. One of the ways this occurred was through the disbanding of self-governing institutions and common landownership, as documented by the by Henri Stahl in the Vrancea region. Another way was the result of state-driven modernization. None of these processes precluded the influence of urban centers and capitalist economy on the traditional Romanian village, but in any case the result was a reduced capacity and “willingness for collective action” in large swaths of Romanian society (Butoi 2011).

Madgearu believed that the peasantry’s weak capacity for collective action was aggravated by the “traditionalism and resistance to new procedures that characterized peasant psychology.” This mindset rendered the “process of rationalizing and intensifying” Romanian agriculture cumbersome and slow, since the inherent difficulties in effecting structural change were compounded by resistance towards adopting new work methods, the latter especially due to “the high percentage of illiterates (Madgearu 1940: 89-90). On this point, we may note that the Gustian program for social reform emphasized literacy in both the functional and cultural sense.

There was, however, a potential solution. To the extent that economic cooperatives were a non-capitalist form of economic organization, they were well-suited for countries with economies based on peasant households. While in Romania many cooperatives still functioned as an instrument of capitalist exploitation, the experience of countries such as Denmark was inspiring. There, underlying socio-economic conditions were more favorable to the establishment of cooperatives. Such organizations thus became the “technical instrument” whereby all the “means and ways that lead to capital and commodity markets were brought under the control of peasant economies; in this way, through the cooperative system these [peasant economies] were able to take the entire apparatus of commerce and credit that facilitated their economic interests under their control (Madgearu 1940: 358). Be that as it may, Romanian agriculture was in such a backward state that economic cooperatives could not function as mere “technical instruments.”

For the cooperative movement’s theorists and advocates, the entire agrarian (and urban) economy needed to be reorganized according to cooperatist principles. On the one hand, this reorganization implied a vast state-sponsored program establishing a broad array of cooperative institutions, from land-leasing associations to consumer and credit cooperatives, and from government-funded Popular Banks designed to stimulate capital investments to local producers’

co-ops. The program was originally overseen by the Central Savings Bank of Cooperatives and Redistribution of Land for Villagers. This institution was tasked following World War I to oversee the implementation of the agrarian reform. Subsequently, the 1929 law on the organization of cooperatives established a National Office of Cooperation, where Gusti was titular head Dimitrie Gusti until 1934. Finally, the 1935 law on the status of cooperatives had two main objectives. The first was to solidify and render more predictable from an institutional standpoint the “administrative tutelage” of the state over numerous cooperative organizations. The second was to remedy the problems caused by the hitherto excessive state interference in the direction, organization, and financing of the cooperativist movement (Larionescu 2013:116-117). Maintaining a proper balance between these two objectives was a challenging process that required fine-tuning by means of additional legislation, such as in 1938 and 1939.

On the other hand, given the Romanian peasants’ putatively retrograde mentality, economic cooperatives were intended to function as virtual nation-building laboratories. Their biopolitical function was to instill a sense of social responsibility and cohesion in the peasantry, as well as the pride in national belonging necessary to transform them into active citizens. This work required a vast program of cooperativist propaganda and education. As Gusti so eloquently put it in 1936, there was a great need for “cooperative social camaraderie, cooperativist social love, and cooperativist social service” (Gusti apud Larionescu 2013: 131). The idealism of this initiative went hand in hand with its practical aspects, since there was already a legislative and organizational framework in place to promote it.

By 1937, the total number of cooperatives in Greater Romania had risen to over 5,000. Slightly more than half were minority organizations, although Romanian cooperatives boasted almost five times more individual members. The cooperative structures of the Hungarian, Saxon, and Jewish communities were economic frameworks for the self-assertion of minority interests within the newly formed Greater Romanian state. They provided successful models of national-self organization that protected ethnic minority autonomy and equality vis-à-vis the other nationalities in Greater Romania (Hunyadi 2012). These cooperative networks thus proved their ability to function as effective transmission belts for nationalist ideologies and practices. There was no reason, then, why they could not be used to promote “Romanian” social values and models of civic action. In fact, just such a method for promoting the “Romanian element” in the state and regulating the relationship between Romanians and ethnic minorities was articulated in corporatist form by Mihail Manoilescu. As I will subsequently show, the corporatist mode of social organization was in many ways a hierarchical rendering of cooperativist principles. Its purpose was to foster the vertical integration and participation of internally autonomous groups, each presumed to fulfill its own specialized function in the quintessentially “national” organization of the state (Manoilescu 1934: 24).

Despite widespread agreement regarding the salutary biopolitical aspects of the cooperative spirit, considerable disagreement remained between proponents of cooperativism. Suffice it to say that for social democrats such as Henri Stahl, cooperatives were a necessary means to protect peasants from the worst consequences of capitalism, which remained an unavoidable historical stage on the road to socialism (Juravle 2014: 47). By contrast, for Peasantist doctrinaires such as Madgearu, cooperatives were a way to circumvent and perhaps eliminate capitalism altogether. In this view, they functioned as the economic foundation and basis for interclass cooperation and national solidarity in a state that would embody the democratic power of the peasantry as the most numerous social class (Madgearu 1924: 68-71; 81-83).

Neoliberalism as a Biopolitical Project

The Peasantist vision of a democratic, “national,” and therefore “peasantized” state based on some form of non-capitalist, cooperatist socio-economic organization was challenged early on in the interwar period by the economic and political doctrine of Neoliberalism. In its most elementary form, Neoliberalism was a “nationalized” form of economic liberalism, adapted to foster the consolidation of state independence by promoting the development of a capitalist, industrialized national economy. It was based on the interests of the Romanian bourgeoisie as the presumed historical agents of economic and political modernization, although its active embrace of protectionist measures was distinctly at odds with the freedom of economic action that had been at the core of classical liberalism. In this sense, interwar Neoliberalism fit well into the tradition of Romanian Liberalism, whose openness to protectionist ideas and practices has contributed to a historical awareness of its relative exoticism by conventional standards (Chirot 1978: 31-52; Michelson 2005: 3-19; Hitchins 1994: 390, Boatcă 2006: 332-334).

This is why its advocates insisted that Neoliberalism was but the “regenerated liberalism of our times,” a doctrine “in perfect concordance” with Romanians’ “long historical evolution” and their “national character” (Manoilescu 1924: 154-156). A peasant-based state might well empower the toiling classes, argued Neoliberal theorists, but it was more important that their social and economic potential be disciplined and efficiently harnessed in order to evolve a form of political organization that “potentiates to the maximum the individual powers and energy of the entire people” (Manoilescu 1924: 161).

Consequently, the development of Neoliberalism as a biopolitical project took shape in two distinct formulas. The first was articulated as a type of national palingenesis, to be achieved through a corporatist type of socio-political organization. Its principal advocate was Mihail Manoilescu, who endowed Neoliberal doctrine with its richest and most fully developed biopolitical vision. Manoilescu’s project of national rebirth involved sophisticated methods of social engineering predicated upon the bio-politicization of economics, as both science and

disciplinary social practice, into a political economy of the nation's constituent corporate bodies. By contrast, the second variant, promoted by Ștefan Zeletin, legitimized an ongoing project of national construction. Zeletin's innovation, if one might call it such, was to turn on its head the emancipatory biopolitical thrust of Marxian class analysis. Its logic was thereby deployed in the service of capital accumulation, extraction of labor power, and the socio-economic organization of the state into a political regime of class-based oligarchic rule. Since the country was still struggling with the effects of delayed economic development, argued Zeletin, historical necessity relegated the advent of industrial socialism far into the future. He thus came to regard the bureaucratic oligarchy that wielded direct economic power through the National Liberal Party and its associated cartel of banking institution as being in the best position to lead the state-driven industrialization process (Rizescu 2013: 100-101).

Neoliberalism, especially in its corporatist iteration, became increasingly appealing during the 1930s world economic crisis. Like other Eastern European countries dependent on agricultural exports to pay for many of their industrial imports, the Romanian state was caught in the infamous "price scissors" of a global decline in agricultural prices. The imposition of trade barriers by major industrialized countries caused a sharp drop in agricultural prices, while industrial prices remained relatively stable. Across the region, agricultural prices dropped an estimated 34%. Romania (a major agricultural exporter) was particularly hard hit. Between 1929 and 1934, it experienced a steep (> 50%) decline in agricultural revenues. Peasants, already burdened by debt and high levels of taxation, saw their incomes devastated, despite putting considerable efforts into increasing agricultural output (Berend 1998: 255-256). Consequently, the search for solutions out of this impasse became increasingly urgent, and it is to these we now turn our attention.

The Biopolitics of Mihail Manoilescu: Corporatism as National Palingenesis

Among economists, sociologists, and historians, Manoilescu is recognized as a capable theorist of underdevelopment and one of the forerunners of dependency theory. During the interbellic period, however, he built an international reputation as a theoretician of corporatism (Love 1996; Boatcă 2003). Corporatism and its organic conception of society were certainly compatible with Durkheimian notions of solidarism and interclass harmony, but they became adopted across the entire spectrum of the European interwar political right. In a social sense, corporatism stood for a mode of organization in which the constituent units of society—families, local powers, and professional associations— "are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically-ordered and functionally differentiated categories." These entities were to be legally recognized or even created and would replace "the individual-centered electoral

model of representation and parliamentary legitimacy, becoming the primary and/or complementary legislative or advisory body of the ruler's executive" (Pinto 2014: 89).

Thus, at its core, corporatism was a path to activating the biopolitical potential of nations. This idea proved to be eminently adaptable, since it could be grafted upon and taken in tow by a variety of ideological and political projects. It was well suited for politically and socially conservative authoritarianisms, as well as for national revolutionism in bureaucratic-authoritarian or radical-fascist iterations. As Manoilescu described it, the ideal of corporatism as both political philosophy and practice was to "concretize" the idea of nationalism "in every field of national activity," thereby affirming the "nation's collective personality" (Manoilescu 1934: 11, 22). It is no surprise that corporatist ideologues often promote the virtues of the "unique" party and/or charismatic leadership as the highest expressions of national consciousness and will. Manoilescu himself first did so in 1936, the year he launched a series of writings intended as interventions in the public debate on the subject (Manoilescu 1936: 319-323; Manoilescu 1937a). Though he foreswore the attachment to political democracy he sometimes displayed in his earlier texts, Manoilescu's collaboration with the fascist Legionary movement and the royal dictatorship of Carol II as an important member of the National Renaissance Front cannot be described as mere political opportunism. As he saw it, the corporatist mode of socio-economic and political organization was a historical phenomenon arising from the postwar transformations in the structure of the world economy and the international division of labor (Manoilescu 1934: 5-6). Its political and economic doctrines, rendered imperative by the onset of the world economic crisis were, in his view, derived by means of inductive scientific methods: corporations "expressed and represented all the nation's manifestations" (Manoilescu 1937b: 32).

Hence, just as Gusti conceived of sociology as the preeminent prescriptive science of the nation, Manoilescu transformed economics into a political anatomy of the nation's corporate bodies. The nation's overall political economy could be logically subdivided into a series of smaller political economies, so as to better account for the various types of economic phenomena that unfolded within the nation's larger social framework. From a strictly analytical standpoint, Manoilescu contended, this approach was scientifically valid for all possible socio-economic frameworks, whether they were organized according to capitalist, corporatist, or even communist principles (Manoilescu 1938a: 37-38). Manoilescu remained faithful to this scientifically guided biopolitical vision throughout his entire career, despite his manifold political affiliations.

A more appreciative critic of Marx than he would have cared to admit, Manoilescu was keenly aware that human labor power is essentially creative and capable of producing cultural and spiritual values in addition to material goods. As far back as the early 1920s, he had shown himself distraught at the prospect that the Romanian people's potential would be squandered in class conflicts, political competition along party lines, and regional rivalries. Such divisions could

fatally undermine the monumental task that lay ahead. In their quest to build a truly “civilized State” for themselves, he asserted, Romanians could ill afford any “exclusion of energies, energy wastage”, or “shading of real values” (Manoilescu 1924: 160-161). Then and later, his solution was to advocate for the “scientific organization” of production on a “national basis,” so that the “dominant spirit” would be neither capitalist competition nor socialist class struggle. Although in the 1920s Manoilescu believed that this solution would mark the triumph of the “*cooperative form*,” the economic crisis of the 1930s would persuade him that national cooperation was best organized along more efficient hierarchical lines [original emphasis] (Manoilescu 1922: 50).

The scientific organization of the nation’s productive forces, Manoilescu believed, was the necessary remedy for the chaotic individualism wrought by classical liberalism. This doctrine, which had risen in “that western capitalist milieu where people slaughtered each other for the “satisfaction of egotistical economic goals,” had given birth to a science of economics that was nothing less than “a theory of the jungle” (Manoilescu 1934: 19; Manoilescu 1938a: 37-38). One pertinent example was the exploitation inherent in international trade. Rejecting David Ricardo’s notion of comparative advantage, which prescribed a global division of labor between industrial and agricultural nations, Manoilescu’s analyses of international exchange purported to show that industrialized countries had a much higher productivity than countries with a predominantly agrarian economy, because industrialized economies invested a much higher amount of capital per worker. In the *Theory of Protectionism and International Exchange* (1929), he argued that industrialized economies were favored in their commercial relations with agrarian economies because of their inherently greater productivity. This pattern of unequal exchange between industry and agriculture also replicated itself within a given country. Because labor productivity was so much greater in industry, it followed that underdeveloped countries were well advised to shelter their natural resources and emerging industries by means of subsidies, tariffs, and import quotas. This course of action made sense, he claimed, not merely in terms of nurturing infant industries in order to create domestic economies of scale. Protected industries with a higher labor productivity than the national average brought benefits in terms of economic development and increasing national income from their very beginnings. Given the proper set of indicators, it was therefore possible for state planners to develop a coherent national economic policy by measuring and ranking branches of production, including agriculture, according to their productivity (Manoilescu 1938a: 57; Love 1996: 81-83).

Yet the *Theory of Protectionism* was but a first plank in an epistemic scaffolding meant to sustain the transformation of economics qua discipline into the political economy of the “social body” and its interdependent elements (Manoilescu 1938a: 35). For Manoilescu, human existence was of a quintessentially social nature, which meant that the anthropological notions underpinning classical and neoclassical economics were fundamentally flawed. It was not necessary, he

maintained, to postulate the existence of a “homo oeconomicus” with personal needs and desires. In fact, the science of economics would be better off dispensing with this notion altogether, since it was not necessary to aggregate the needs and wants of many similarly driven individuals in order to explain the behavior of a collectivity (Manoilescu 1938a:31). Rather, he posited that the social existence of individuals unfolded across three predetermined dimensions. The first dimension was the “national function,” which was the primary element because it integrated and subordinated the other two functions. The second dimension was that of interest, collectively aggregated by means of syndicates. Finally, there was the individuals’ competence in various fields of activity such as medicine, engineering, etc. (Manoilescu 1934:19). These three dimensions appeared along “lines of force guided in the same direction” and were present at “every point in the social space.” In this framework, the social dynamism produced by “individual egoism” was contained, counteracted, and directed towards the “fulfillment of the national purpose.” Hence, any genuine economic science must study not only the “mechanical,” but also the “psychic” phenomena that comprise economic activity (Manoilescu 1938a: 39, 163). From this perspective, the science of economics would contribute to the better management of “human forces” (Manoilescu 1938b: 59).

Consequently, Manoilescu believed that it was a mistake to talk about corporatism in a strict economic sense; the need to organize the nation’s collective forces could not permit the economic sphere to dominate all other areas of human activity. The church, the army, schools, judicial institutions, and the public health system were also important corporations fulfilling specialized national functions. It was only in the “debauchery” characteristic of political democracies that economic motives were allowed to override in an “unhealthy,” “morbid” way (Manoilescu 1934: 18-19). In light of this conclusion, Manoilescu drew a distinction between two types of corporatism. The first type, with which he identified, was the “pure and integral” form: corporations were entirely autonomous and constituted the sole source of public power, the state itself being conceived as “an emanation” of its constituent corporations. This conception was but a hierarchical rendering of cooperatist principles. The second type of corporatism, best exemplified by Italian Fascism, was characterized as “subordinated corporatism,” because in this system all corporations were subordinated to a central power outside the corporations themselves, such as a political party. Fascism thus represented a lesser, “partial” form of corporatism, since it was the Fascist party and its leader determining the nation’s objectives and insuring that the corporations fulfilled their roles in achieving them (Manoilescu 1938b: 32).

In a manner analogous to Marx’s concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary stage in the emergence of a mature communist society, Manoilescu asserted that subordinated types of corporatism may be necessary in “transitional phases.” These phases were meant to organize the nation’s spiritual and political forces towards achieving full “corporative independence” (Manoilescu 1934:30). After all, when compared to the “previous liberal epoch,”

Fascism represented “immense social progress” for the toiling masses; workers of all types could now collaborate “on equal footing” with employers in directing and coordinating the various branches of economic production (Manoilescu 1938b:13). Especially in its integrative aspect, corporatism thus seemed a winning formula for bridging class interests, and a means of enrolling the forces of capital and labor in a common national mission. It appeared to be a much more effective instrument for tackling the problem of class exploitation and for achieving social justice than anything envisaged by Peasantist doctrinaires such as Madgearu.

Manoilescu believed that corporatism was inherently more efficacious because a state based on the interests of a single class (e.g., the peasantry) could only lead to national disintegration. The very notion of class, he asserted, represented “a negation of nationalism,” not only in the realm of ideas but in a practical sense as well. To his mind, “the corporation was “functionally homogenous and socially heterogeneous.” By contrast, class was socially homogenous and functionally heterogeneous” [original emphasis] (Manoilescu 1934:19). From a functional standpoint, the superiority of the corporation was plain for all to see. Moreover, the corporation was better suited to the Romanian social structure, particularly as it existed in rural areas. As early as 1922, in a pamphlet titled *Peasantism and Democracy*, Manoilescu had taken Madgearu to task for being insufficiently attuned to the patterns of socio-economic differentiations within the peasantry. While not denying the class aspect of what was commonly known as the “agrarian problem,” Manoilescu cast serious doubt on the possibility of defining the peasantry as a class in a sociological sense. The main problem, as he perceived it, was that the peasantry was already undergoing a process of internal division along class lines, namely between peasant proprietors and the agrarian proletariat, and he believed this division was likely to intensify following the agrarian reform. In fact, it was precisely because the peasantry was not an internally coherent social entity that class-based politics were unsuitable for promoting the interests of the rural population as a whole (Manoilescu 1922:14-17). According to this logic, undoubtedly reinforced by the economic crisis of the 1930s, only corporations had the wherewithal to vertically integrate the socio-economic and ethnically heterogeneous elements of the peasantry in order to fulfill their national function and advance the national interest: “in the interior of a household establishment such as the corporation and in an atmosphere of positive work and sincerity most national differences could come to an end, in a manner just as natural and peaceful [sic!] as the disappearance of social differences in the bosom of the Italian corporations” (Manoilescu 1934: 24).

The above quote is significant. It not only illuminates Manoilescu’s political sympathies, but also and more importantly his biopolitical vision. Whereas the cooperative movement theorized the peasant household as the fundamental unit of national biopolitical and economic production, Manoilescu imagined the national corporative state as a large, scientifically organized, and

disciplined household (Manoilescu 1934: 37). Just as individual peasant households could be integrated into the nation by means of corporations, so too could corporations be used to “rationalize” and discipline peasant work habits.

Although its authoritarian premises are disturbing, particularly in hindsight, Manoilescu’s biopolitical project was neither callous nor brutal in its intentions. His program of national regeneration evinced great social depth and an unshakable faith in human potential, as well as a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the social sciences could be deployed as blueprints for national construction and harnessed as vectors of economic progress. His project was an appealing, dynamic, and socially progressive vision for its time and place. No wonder, then, that Manoilescu was but one of many who regarded Fascism as the cutting edge of historical progress. By contrast, Ștefan Zeletin’s defense of the political status quo, articulated as a different variant of Neoliberal socio-economic modernization, fell far short of matching the biopolitical capacity for governance and social transformation inherent in Manoilescu’s corporatist scheme.

Ștefan Zeletin and the Biopolitics of Primitive Accumulation:

Neoserfdom as Industrial Pedagogy

The key to understanding Ștefan Zeletin’s biopolitics resides in his analysis of the historical origins of the “agrarian question” in Romanian-inhabited lands and in his vision of capitalism, particularly industrial capitalism, as a motor of historical progress. Zeletin expounded his analysis of capitalist modernization and the origins and historic role of the Romanian bourgeoisie in two seminal works: *The Romanian Bourgeoisie* (1925) and *Neoliberalism* (1927). Though Zeletin’s career was cut short by his untimely death in 1934, his corpus of works was influential. As such, his writings are a classic illustration of the perils of reading Marx in too economic a fashion. Whereas Marx had bequeathed a vision of a biopolitically emancipated future, freed from the dual constraints of capitalism and state sovereignty, Zeletin’s notion of progress was brutish and bleak. At its core was a reductionist reading of the Marxian concepts of “labor power” and “alienation,” a reading which stripped Marx’s vision of a society in which the “free development of each is the precondition for the free development of all” of any meaningful programmatic content (Marx 1978:491). As a brief reminder, Marxian thought regards labor power as the fundamental attribute of humans as a distinct species, denoting the “aggregate of those mental and physical capacities existing in a human being” capable of producing use-value whenever exercised (Marx 1976:336).

As we shall see, Zeletin did not care about mobilizing the mental capacities of peasant labor power. What seems to have eluded him is the basic contradiction within the very nature of labor: labor as an aprioristically creative, unquantifiable value-producing activity on the one hand, and labor as a physical, quantifiable input in the production process on the other (Righi 2011: 5-6). In its first aspect, labor is very difficult (if not impossible) to commodify, which is why Zeletin

operationalized only the material, quantifiable aspect of labor as a sociological concept in his historical analyses of the Romanian political economy.

This emphasis on material labor is understandable. Despite Zeletin's belief that capitalism fulfilled a civilizing mission, only the commodifiable aspect of peasant labor could be instrumentated as part of his recipe for economic modernization. At the same time, one of the major weaknesses of Zeletin's thought was that he did not understand, even in vulgar Marxist terms, the objective needs for establishing a baseline of shared culture and functional education that would allow for national development and semi-skilled industrial flexibility. This is a point so basic that one does not even need to be a Marxist to seize upon it: Gusti, Madgearu, and Manolescu had all understood, each in their own way, that the construction of a modern Romanian nation and state required a mass educational enterprise. Instead, Zeletin sought to apply a simplified Marxist schema of historical development to chart a path toward an advanced industrial society. By his reckoning, this was the only kind of society capable of fostering and utilizing intellectually and scientifically grounded labor power on a large scale. In doing so, Zeletin perpetuated a classic reductionist fallacy: in identifying cultural modernity and the development of the national ideal with bourgeois values, he was convinced that there could be no widespread cultural modernization without an industrial breakthrough in the economic sphere (Zeletin 1922:64; Zeletin 2008:404-405).

Zeletin's belief in the centrality of industrial modernization to progress was therefore deliberately blind to the possibility that Romania's historically peripheral status in the capitalist world economy and its division of labor might have implied the development of a distinct path in and through modernity. What did not escape him, however, was the exponentially greater level of violence inherent in peripheral economic development. Acknowledging the "deep wounds burrowed by capitalism into the social body," he remained unfazed by these traumas, regarding them as historically and objectively necessary if the Romanians were to be firmly set on the path towards occidentalization (Zeletin 1922:35). Indeed, Marx himself had noted that the most brutal process of primitive accumulation occurred in the peripheries of the world economy, since under colonialism "the discovery of gold and silver in the Americas, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production" (Marx 1976:915). This was a lesson thoroughly assimilated by Zeletin, a moral which he sought to combine with Werner Sombart's (1863–1941) theses regarding the connection between the evolution of capitalism and the revolutionary transformation of agriculture. The fundamental conundrum of Romanian capitalism, Zeletin asserted, was that it appeared "too late to be capable of appropriating the gold of others or of selling slaves" (Zeletin 1927:153).

Instead, following Sombart's scheme of development, the growth of capitalism in the lands inhabited by the Romanians had followed the path taken by all economically backward societies. From this perspective, the evolution of capitalism determined changes in the agrarian structure, which functioned as a "simple annex" to this advancement (Zeletin 1924:203). Beginning with the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople, the invasion of commodities produced in economically advanced countries destroyed the feudal order that Zeletin believed had been similar to the one found in the medieval West. In this stage, which engendered a domestic, mercantile capitalism and the rise of a native bourgeoisie, the backward Romanian agricultural sector was forced to produce goods for exchange under the influence of foreign capital. The rise of commodity production, imposed by the encroachment of foreign capital, spelled the death of the old social order. This was because the commodity form demanded a new type of property, namely the "right to use and abuse a piece of land" as one saw fit (Zeletin 1922:39). In this context, serfdom, which came with the obligation of giving the workers certain rights to the land, became obsolete. Serfdom was now a hindrance, a constraint upon the owners' right to keep, buy, and sell land as they would any other commodity.

Just as significantly, the function of the domestic capitalism that arose under foreign capital's influence was to mediate the exchange between the latter and native agriculture. This stage, he maintained, corresponded with the mercantilist phase in the evolution of capitalism in the West. The newly forming urban middle class was composed primarily of rentiers, many of whom were absentee landlords, merchants, and financiers. However, this native bourgeoisie was not strong enough to resist the pressures of foreign capital without tutelary state power. This was precisely why Western mercantilism had had a quintessentially "national" character during the 16th through 18th centuries, and now also why the 19th century Romanian bourgeoisie sought to build a modern national state through "the same means" (Zeletin 2008:18-19). Hence, in its struggle to build modern institutions, the Romanian bourgeoisie had stoked popular anger, using the peasantry as a "hammer" to "smash" the boyar class and the great rural estates upon which it was based. In Zeletin's view, the peasantry was but "a blind and elementary force of nature" in its struggle against its former masters. This was because the destruction of the old agrarian order had been so "sudden and violent" that the peasantry was left with no time and no capacity "to understand what bourgeois liberty or property [actually] is" (Zeletin 1922:43).

Thus, the apparent demise of the feudal order—brought to fruition by Cuza's 1864 agrarian reforms—left serious problems in its wake, the most troublesome of which was that the "ungluing" of the peasantry from the land and its "ancestral hearths" had proven to be a singularly long and painstaking process. The ongoing "slow pulverization of rural plots," by dint of population growth and the division of inheritance, would achieve the proletarianization of the peasantry with the "certainty of a natural phenomenon" (Zeletin 2008:323). Therefore, the disaggregation of latifundiar estates and the redistribution of their holdings, finally accomplished by the 1921

agrarian reform, could at most postpone the inevitable: the complete proletarianization of the peasantry and its transformation into a geographically mobile force available for factory work (Zeletin 1922:53).

In this context, the slow pace of peasant proletarianization appeared to be one of the principal stumbling blocks to Romanian capitalism's maturation. The demise of the old agrarian order had transformed the rural population, save a small class of independent farmers, into an agrarian Lumpenproletariat. Barely able to sustain themselves, these immiserated peasants were an idle, non-productive workforce. Not only were they deprived of land to work; their "primitive" medieval mentality contented itself with working only to fulfill meet the minimal demands of subsistence (Zeletin 2008:323-324; Zeletin 1927:184). As Zeletin saw it, the salutary antidote to the Romanian peasant's self-perpetuating idleness had been outright coercion in the form of neoserfdom:

But since the peasant, newly released from the burdens of serfdom, is incapable of willingly performing this type of labor, he had to be forced to it. [Due to] his incapacity for uniform work, the bourgeoisie of these times suffers an endemic shortage of manpower. From this follows the reestablishment of serfdom: neoserfdom; its role is the economic education of the rural strata, habituating it to the discipline of methodical work (Zeletin 1924:217, emphasis original).

Apart from the shocking amorality of this view, it is remarkable that Zeletin did not recognize the characteristics of neoserfdom as primitive accumulation par excellence. Let us bear in mind that, in its original form, Dobrogeanu-Gherea's theory of neoserfdom specifically argued that the misery it brought was more damaging than that inflicted by the western process of proletarianization (Gherea 1920: 101-105). Zeletin himself paid unwitting tribute to Gherea when he emphasized that other backward agrarian countries had "heroically" closed the development gap by dint of "much work and low consumption, reduced even below physical necessities" [original emphasis] (Zeletin 1927:188). But he had no justifiable reason to actually endorse such biopolitics of disruption, especially since he had a venerable domestic Marxist tradition to contend with starting with. Ever since Dobrogeanu-Gherea, with Madgearu and Stahl being cases in point, Romanian Marxists had evinced a more humane attitude towards the shattering of the traditional peasant world. Henri Stahl, in particular, sought whenever possible to mobilize local knowledges

and customary forms of self-organization in order to attenuate the violence inherent in capitalist modernization.⁶

Unequivocally, neoserfdom—even if a transient social formation—was sure to leave biopolitical devastation in its wake. It also fostered deep resentment in peasants who came in contact with state institutions, be it the bureaucracy with which they had to do constant battle or in the form of perennially unfulfilled promises of social mobility. In short, the brutifying effects of hard physical labor and the constant struggle against state and estate administrators squandered the creative human potential of the peasant masses. In Zeletin’s terms, however, this suffering made economic and pedagogical sense.

Despite his rhetorical commitment to Marxist orthodoxy, Zeletin’s understanding of primitive accumulation exhibited the classic signs of ideological false consciousness. Inverting the original Marxist principle that the base determines the superstructure, his conception of primitive accumulation was premised on the mystification and exaltation of finance capital as a separate sphere within the economy. In 1924, during a heated, wide-ranging polemic against Peasantist doctrine, Zeletin asserted that banking and industry, the specific province of the bourgeoisie, constituted a separate economic domain unrelated to agricultural production. He developed this viewpoint by proposing the bizarre notion that since the two classes did not take part in the same process of production, there could be no conflict of interest and no class struggle between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie. Although the proletariat and the bourgeoisie were fated to struggle over the ownership of the means of production, the peasantry could not be said to possess “specific interests” that demanded a social order based “on a new principle” (Zeletin 1924:202-203, emphasis original). Only three years later, however, Zeletin quietly conceded the absurdity of this stance, acknowledging that the bourgeoisie and the peasantry were bound in a common relation of production. In *Neoliberalism*, he devoted considerable space to the analysis of the newfangled Romanian plutocracy who had replaced the agrarian aristocracy as the new owners of latifundiar estates. In his view, the plutocracy had propagated the neoserf regime as a means of labor control in the transition towards mature industrial capitalism. Yet his basic argument, namely that compared to the rest of the nation the bourgeoisie’s mentality was “ahead by several centuries”, remained unchanged (Zeletin 1927:110,145-156,250-253).

Interpreting Marx through the lens of Rudolf Hilferding’s (1877–1941) *Finance Capital*, Zeletin argued that, save for the brief period between 1866 and 1903, the evolution of Romanian

⁶ For example, Stahl argued that one of keys to solving the economic problems of the interwar Vrancea region, which was unsuited for agriculture because of the climate and the terrain, was to return to locals’ customary occupation of cattle-raising. However, he believed this should not be done at a “traditional scale” but by employing “modern zootechnical scientific techniques” and by establishing “sheep and cattle-raising cooperatives” (Stahl 1981: 380).

capitalism had skipped the intermediate stage of laissez-faire economics and classic political liberalism. Having used the state and its commanding position in the bureaucratic apparatus to complete the process of capital accumulation by massively misappropriating and in effect privatizing public funds, particularly during the dirigiste economy of the war years, the Romanian bourgeoisie had now entered the advanced, “imperialist phase” of capitalism. This corresponded with the reign of monopolistic finance capital, rendering all economic activity, especially industrial production, dependent on banks. Consequently, given the radical disjuncture between the country’s agrarian base and the requirements of the dominant bourgeois class and its institutions, “the people” needed to be “dragged by means of brute force towards the path of capitalist aspirations for their own good” (Zeletin 1927:74-77,110). It was only through capitalist-driven industrialization, he argued, that the “calvary” of the peasantry would end. “Pumping” the surplus rural population into factories would allow those who stayed behind to earn a decent living. Most importantly, industrialization would “revolutionize” the existing mode of working the land through the introduction of wage labor, transforming “the peasant into a worker in the bourgeois sense: a free man” (Zeletin 1927:21). In short, Zeletin’s solution for modernizing of the country’s agrarian base was a state-driven bourgeois revolution from above.

Zeletin believed that that the wholesale looting of public financing and its transformation into private capital—a regrettable but necessary part of capitalist modernization—had reached a point beyond which loomed the danger of “social disaggregation.” He therefore saw the need for an “iron hand” to regulate the nation’s economic life, asserting mastery and imposing order upon on the “chaotic mass” of the peasantry (Zeletin 1927:167,174). Ingeniously arguing that the 1923 Constitution had already revealed the transformation of classical liberalism into Neoliberalism by consecrating the right of forceful state intervention into the economic and social life of the nation, Zeletin did not hesitate to call for the next logical step: the instauration of a “centralized dictatorial regime.” This Neoliberal dictatorship would take upon itself several vital tasks. The first task was “the nationalization of capital,” the creation of a “national Romanian capitalism” that would emancipate the country from the “tutelage of foreign finance.” Secondly, national production would be developed to meet internal needs and reduce Romania’s dependence on foreign markets. Finally, “national production” needed to be arranged according to a “unitary plan” in order to prevent the waste of energy and material resources caused by a “chaotically organized industry” (Zeletin 1927:15).

Conclusion

Although his reductionist, physical understanding of labor power translated into a wasteful approach toward the vast intellectual capital embodied by the peasantry, Zeletin was a compelling

and farsighted biopolitical theorist deeply engaged with the critical issues of his time. Possibly his most important insight was that Greater Romania's structural crisis of underdevelopment had become acute well before the onset of the Great Depression. Just as Manoilescu's corporatist solutions for rationalizing agricultural production in order to promote industrialization amounted to a type of collectivization *avant la lettre*, Zeletin's prescriptions regarding the role of the state in appropriating peasants' surplus production for the purposes of accumulating capital and directing industrial development bear an uncanny resemblance to the breakneck program of socio-economic modernization subsequently undertaken in Romania during communist rule. In this sense, Zeletin's work displays remarkable affinities with that of his Soviet contemporary, the economist E. A. Preobrazhensky. In the mid-1920s, Preobrazhensky had argued that the solution to the problem of building an industrial economy in a backward country lacking colonies was to create a specific, transitional form of state capitalism premised on domestic accumulation of investment capital. In the context of the New Economic Policy then being implemented by the Bolsheviks, this could be accomplished by transferring resources from capitalist agriculture into the state-owned industrial sector (Day 1982:165-168). Hence, the only difference between Zeletin's and Preobrazhensky's strategies was that under a Neoliberal dictatorship, the state would direct but not outright own the industrial means of production. That being said, it is important to note that Manoilescu's variant of Neoliberalism, though just as radical in its authoritarian implications as Zeletin's, was based on a much more profound understanding of the creative aspects of human labor.

For their part and in their own distinct ways, Gusti and Madgearu were equally attuned to the role of human intellect as the dominant productive force as opposed to unmediated material labor. Theirs and Manoilescu's recipes for national development were accordingly much more sophisticated than anything Zeletin and his generally unacknowledged "real socialist" legatees were ever able to elaborate. This is particularly true in regards to their use of the social sciences as instruments for nurturing specific types of self-reproducing rationalities capable of transforming peasants into agents of socio-economic modernization and national consolidation. All gave credence to the biopolitical potential of the peasantry, seeking to activate and mobilize it for the purposes of national construction.

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