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***The Masks of Collectivization.
Dramatization of Income Distribution***¹

Keywords: cultural history, media, propaganda, land collectivization, dramatization, performance, wealth, happiness.

Abstract: The collectivization of Romanian agriculture during the 1950s was supported by a Government propagandistic strategy that permanently transmitted the same message: only collectivization could ensure prosperity and progress for the peasants. While presenting aspects of agricultural activities, media texts also carefully constructed a perfect image of the new rural and agricultural paradigm in order to persuade the readers. Propaganda employed, to this purpose, traditional representations of wealth and happiness by metamorphosing and dramatizing fundamental agricultural activities and exhibited the wealth ensured by the communist ideology.

The collectivization of Romanian agriculture, ideologically defined as a process of agricultural modernization and rural socialist becoming, parallel and tightly connected to the socialist development of industries in the urban environment, represented a complex process that went on for a period of 13 years and directly affected 12,000,000 of the 16,000,000 citizens, that is, the great majority of the Romanian population². Officially, the 21st century historiography views collectivization as a “true war against the peasantry”³ based on the class struggle principle and aiming to break the presumed peasantry solidarity, “a war against the Romanian people, meant to destroy private property and turn free peasants into lumpen proletarians engaged in the accomplishment of the social utopia of the regime.”⁴ But a war cannot be won without propaganda, which played an important part in conveying the same message through all channels: collectivization is the only way that ensures prosperity and progress for the peasantry.

The collectivization campaign was formally launched on March 3rd -5th, 1949 at the RWP Plenary, when Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej presented the party policy of enhancing the alliance between the working class and the working peasantry and also the socialist transformation of agriculture. The conclusion of the meeting, published in “Scântea”, the RWP official publication, offered clear solutions to the

¹ This paper is the result of a research financially supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [POSDRU grant/88/1.5/S/61104].

² Dan Cătănuș and Octavian Roske, eds., *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România. Dimensiunea politică*, vol. I, 1949-1953, (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studii Totalitarismului, 2000), 14.

³ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 239.

⁴ Tismăneanu, *Comisia*, 239.

peasants' problems: completely remove exploitation and establish socialism in the rural environment, thus solving the contradiction caused by the individual farm. According to the Leninist theory, the individual farm "generates capitalism and bourgeoisie permanently, day by day, hour by hour, spontaneously and in mass proportions."¹ The only way to improve living standards was to follow the Soviet model, to establish CAFs. In Gh. Gheorghiu Dej's view, the key to agricultural collectivization success was the middle-income peasantry, 34% of the households. If the agricultural proletarians (roughly 250,000 families that did not own land) and the poor peasantry (57% of the total number of households, owning maximum 3 hectares of land, most of the times divided in plots, not enough to make a living, which forced them to work for the rich peasants) had no reason to embrace the new politics that promised to put them out of the presumed misery, the middle-income peasantry, owning a maximum of 10 hectares, half of the production means and making 3/5 of the Romanian grains, had no reason to change their situation. They were "hesitating" (a word extensively used at the time), drawn by the rich peasants' status on the one hand (one more reason for the propaganda to demonize this status and make it appear unattractive and stigmatizing) and on the other hand exploited by the rich peasantry. Therefore, the middle-income peasants had to be convinced of the socialist agriculture supremacy, had to understand that it was in their best interest to adhere to the new structures.² First, the party was going to approve the constitution of a restricted number of CAFs, based exclusively on free will, which would then be strongly supported to become model farms.

The key role in the persuasion process belonged to the propaganda and party mass agitation actions, especially the party press³, which had to "demonstrate, for every poor and middle-income peasant to understand, that the only way to escape exploitation, misery and primitivism is to take the path of agricultural socialist reconstruction"⁴. The tasks of the propaganda were to carry on a systematic campaign of alleviating fear of the new CAFs, show the "enormous" advantages of the USSR kolkhoz and Soviet work and organizing methods. The only viable model was that of the Soviet agriculture, officially considered "the most productive in the world"⁵. From the very start, the party laid emphasis on persuasion, not constraint; the fundamental principle in the socialist agricultural organizing policy

¹ *Scântea*, March 15th, 1949.

² The party policy was based on converting the middle-income peasant: "Middle-income peasants stop hesitating and oscillating when they are convinced from personal experience that the alliance with the working class and poor peasantry protect them from the avaricious chiaburi, that collective farms bring wealth and happiness", in *Scântea*, April 12th, 1952.

³ A proof of the role attributed to the party press, but also of the confidence in its propagandistic capacity, is the co-optation of Sorin Toma, editor-in-chief of *Scântea*, into the C.C. of RWP. The proposition was made by Iosif Chișinevschi and voted unanimously at the Plenary meeting on March 3rd-5th, 1949. Cf. "949 martie 3-5. Procesul verbal și stenograma Plenarei C.C. al P.M.R. din 3-5 martie 1949, în urma căreia se va declanșa oficial procesul de transformare socialistă a agriculturii (fragmente)", in Cătănuș, *Colectivizarea*, 96.

⁴ *Scântea*, March 15th, 1949.

⁵ *Scântea*, March 15th, 1949.

was the peasants' free consent, a principle absorbed from the Stalinist policy. In 1929, "Pravda" published "Reply to Collective Farm Comrades", Stalin's personal analysis regarding the kolkhoz creation policy, where he relentlessly criticized the use of force against the peasants, calling such practices "inadmissible and sinister when used against the middle-income peasant, our ally"¹. In his opinion, the only acceptable possibility was Lenin's principle of free adhesion to the collective farm: "any attempt to force collective farms, any attempt to create kolkhozes forcibly can have negative effects, such as drawing the peasant further apart from the kolkhoznic movement"². Apparently, Stalin was convinced that the peasants would adhere freely to the collective farms when "they are shown and understand through personal experience that the kolkhoz is better than the individual household, that the kolkhoz opens for the poor and middle-income peasant the path towards a life without needs and misery"³. At the RWPC Plenary on March 3rd-5th, 1949, the free will principle is discussed again and Ana Pauker, chief of The Agrarian Committee, a body of the party assigned with the supervision of collective farms foundation, denounced any abuse: "only the irresponsible might think that people can be forced into collective farms"⁴. At first, propaganda used as information, documentary and statistic support the image of the Soviet model⁵, "the most developed agriculture in the world", thus imprinting in the collective imaginary illustrations of Soviet wealth and happiness; "the happiest peasants in the world" became characters familiar to Romanian peasants who listened to accounts of the party press every morning, noon and evening.

The first five Romanian CAFs were founded on July 24th, 1949, but their number increased rapidly so that, by the end of 1950, there were approximately 900⁶ of them. Rich crops were harvested soon enough and the press flooded with "documentary" texts written by local correspondents or visiting journalists – professionals pretending to presents reality as such – illustrating the "holiday" of distributing the first collective farms crops. These accounts that describe realistically "the overflow of wealth in the homes of collective farms members"⁷ abound in numbers and other units of measurement⁸ (suggesting rather a reception report) and are accompanied by photographs which document "the truth" of what is

¹ *Scânteia*, April 1st, 1950.

² *Scânteia*, April 1st, 1950.

³ *Scânteia*, April 1st, 1950.

⁴ D. Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România. Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948-1965*, (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 108.

⁵ Claudiu Degeratu and Octavian Roske, "Colectivizarea agriculturii. Modelul sovietic: Ridicarea neconținută a nivelului de trai", in *Arhivele totalitarismului*, II, no. 1-2, (1994), 80.

⁶ R. Levy, "Primul val al colectivizării: politici centrale și implementare regională: 1949-1953" in D. Dobrinicu and C. Iordachi, eds., *Țărănimea și puterea. Procesul de colectivizare a agriculturii în România (1949-1962)*, (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 76.

⁷ *Scânteia*, November 1st, 1950 *Scânteia satelor*, November 3rd, 1950.

⁸ L. Boia noted that the statistics of the communist party were pure fabrications meant to illustrate in figures how correct the doctrine was. In L. Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005), 129.

presented; the images clearly show smiling and charismatic peasants who can be identified¹, sitting on piles of grain bags in an overload cart or walking alongside a cart so piled up that could not bear the owner. The reports show how the crops were distributed (according to the statute of the CAF and the number of working days: those who worked more receive more and those who worked less receive less). This was done in public meetings (nothing was kept secret), where even peasants outside the CAF were invited, during which the exact quantities of crops received by CAF members were communicated, quantities much larger than the crops individual peasants gathered after working just as much, but did not benefit from the party support and the latest technical-scientific discoveries in the USSR. Simply and clearly, the receiver gets the official message: only the CAF can ensure a happy fulfilled life for the peasants. The texts, as any propagandist discourse, are mobilizing, magnifying the achievements of the socialist revolution, meaning to mesmerize and “wise up”² the undecided. Moreover, the visible results of collectivization become irrefutable evidence for a new wealthy life and “cause more hatred on the part of the *chiaburi*”³ and former land-owners. They also turn into a weapon in the East-West ideological battle: “the results of the collective farms are a slap in the face of the English-American imperialists who draw the long bow against our collective farms.”⁴

However, these seductive narrations, so fit to illustrate the ideology and so suggestive and convincing in their evidence, are not innocent! Mass-media uses the same document-photographs⁵ in different combinations and present the happiness of the same collective farms members, amplifying the penetration power of communist wealth imagery by replacing explanation with repetition (advertising messages seem to explain, but in fact only repeat, in order to exclude any real analysis of the object presented⁶): a photograph that displayed the peasant I. Vlășceanu while receiving 1,400 kg of grains appeared in *Scânteia* on October 27th, 1950, in *Scânteia satelor* on October 29th, 1950 and also *Albina* on November 5th, 1950 where it also included the message “he worked enthusiastically for the collective farm”; another photograph, of the peasant I. Oltean leading a line of 25 carts of crops, all “private property” appeared in *Scânteia satelor* on November 3rd, 1950 and *Albina* on November 12th, 1950; the photograph of the peasant Șt. Niculăieș, proudly posing on top of a pile of bags in his cart appeared in *Scânteia satelor* on November 5th, 1950 and, in a lower format, in *Albina* on November 19th, the same year; the photograph of the peasant

¹ All the photographs showing the income distribution are accompanied by full name, location and CAF name!

² E. Negrici, „Rolul literaturii în campania de colectivizare”, in Dobrințu, *Țărănimea*, 160.

³ *Albina*, November 12th, 1950.

⁴ *Scânteia*, November 28th, 1951.

⁵ Any representation labelled as “documentary” was an irrefutable proof, documentary footage and photographs were incontestably true materials. – see L. Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), 47.

⁶ F. Brune, *Fericirea ca obligație. Psihologia și sociologia publicității*, (Bucharest: Trei, 2003), 117.

M. Ștefan, leaning possessively against a pile of bags higher than himself, was published in *Scânteia satelor* and *Albina* on November 19th, 1950. The accounts that accompany the pictures, as well as the texts lacking visual illustrations were either not signed or attributed to volunteer correspondents¹; true homodiegetic narrations, they extract their truthfulness and impose themselves as realities because the author has been “there”² and therefore can offer numerous details: precise locations, names of persons, exact quantities. The descriptions are hyperbolic, the overflow of wealth would be incredible if it were not for the photos and eye-witnesses to testify. What happens to the cooperative peasants is too good, what they receive is too much:

“Olteanu had never taken so much wealth at home (...) when all the 25 carts were loaded, Olteanu straightened his back and wiped his forehead”³;

“never in his life had Marin Ciopâca had so many provisions at the beginning of winter”⁴;

“when he entered his yard in his cart, the beam of the entrance gate squeaked and cracked. The old man did not feel sorry for the loss. He had no idea, when he had built that entrance, that it would ever have to support so much abundance and indeed, so many crops had never come into old Mikloș' poor household”⁵;

“Marti Ștefan's house, made up of a room and a kitchen, turned into a barn. One could hardly turn around inside. (...) together with the money received and those we got for potatoes and grains we will build a bigger house and buy clothing.”⁶

Such laudatory articles do not “copy” reality. Primarily textual, they are fictions (despite the fact that they belong to eye-witnesses, to individuals who have been there and testify⁷) which interpret reality, a body of images with meaning for the receivers, peasants in the situation of making decisions about their future. Propaganda productions, these texts are constructed with the purpose of conveying

¹ Volunteer correspondents constitute the spine of the party press. They are common people – curious, lucid observant amateur journalists – encouraged by the party to report accomplishments but also troubles in the country, praise the devotion of the party members and collective farm members and identify class enemies, spy them and report them to the Militia.

² In *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), the anthropologist C. Geertz stated that the credibility of the ethnologist comes from his capacity to convince that what he says and writes is the result of penetrating another life form, that he has been There and understood the Other. Moreover, a gifted writer, the ethnologist convinces everyone that if they went there they would feel the same and draw the same conclusions!

³ *Scânteia satelor*, November 3rd, 1950.

⁴ *Scânteia satelor*, November 3rd, 1950.

⁵ *Scânteia satelor*, November 3rd, 1950.

⁶ *Scânteia satelor*, November 19th, 1950.

⁷ C. Geertz states that anthropological writings – therefore scientific – are secondary interpretations, fictions in the sense they are “constructed” or “perfected”. Which does not mean they are false or do not refer to facts, but only that they are interpretations of the one who has been in the field. In C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 15.

a certain ideological message and of creating and making visible – for dozens of poor and middle-income peasants to whom agitators read the daily party press – the event reported. The communist propaganda of collectivization does not invent and does not lie, it attributes significance; it organizes reality and crops a certain configuration, exhibiting a new living system. Therefore, not only is text more important than events, but it also creates and popularizes them by means of interpretation. The articles translate a desired reality, they project hope coming true following political change and access to the long-promised happiness that now can materialize onto the imaginarieness¹ of those who read the communist press. After all, as L. Boia² observed, it is impossible to put a border between “reality” and “imaginarieness” and no representation is ever identical to the object because it “adapts”³ and imaginarieness manipulates something similar to the substance of reality but “melted and poured in another mold.”⁴ Such reports on the abundant distribution of products are representations⁵ imposed by the communist power, representations meant to:

- 1) build a certain reality – the “new”, desirable, socialist one;
- 2) recognize a social identity and a new rank – the successful collective farm member, a role model for the undecided;
- 3) visibly mark the new force in the rural environment – the communist group of the former poor peasants, now on the path of no return of prosperity.

Part of the strategy of mesmerizing poor and middle-income peasants into freely adhering to the collective farms – when they are convinced by facts that this is the way – the display and popularization of results is of utmost importance: in fact, only the display matters. The procedure of income distribution – and its representation in the press – is dominated by exhibition, by acting; nothing is secret, nothing is known by collective farm members only, everything is done in the eyes of the entire village: the entire community is invited by agitators to the numbers reading ceremony, to watch how crops are loaded into carts and to accompany (often with envy and discontent) the happy collective farm members home. All (participants, spectators, readers) must see, because they must all know and “catch on”⁶. Propaganda is obsessed with “seeing”, for it is based on an elemental reflex: seeing is believing; like in advertising, trusting an image causes reflex adhesion to the image⁷, especially when it seems so real! The communist

¹ Text and historic discourse are more or less autonomous elaborations relating to the event they refer to and depend on the structures of imaginarieness and action of ideologies. In Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, 5.

² Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, 12-13.

³ Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, 15.

⁴ Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*, 25.

⁵ “Representation” as in R. Chartier’s view, « Le monde comme représentation », in *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 44, no. 6, (1989), vol. 44, 1513.

⁶ “Catching on” is the denouement of a battle between the middle-income peasant and his own thinking or the chiaburi’s influence. In Negrici, *Rolul literaturii în campania de colectivizare*, 160.

⁷ Brune, *Fericirea ca obligație*, 125-127.

party (which, in fact, advertises the CAFs aggressively) employs the principle of tautology used in advertisements: what is shown is indisputable (and real) because that which “exists” is not debated:

“Niculae St. Petre, the hard-working peasant from Șandra, could not stop writing things down on a piece of paper. He wanted to bring this wonderful news to his village and show people what the collective farm members in Lenaueim had accomplished”¹;

“the distribution of profits proved the members of the collective farms and the other peasants that only enthusiastic work for the CAF can ensure a truly wealthy carefree life”²;

“Comrade Matee Amalia from Sanatăul Mic stood behind superintendent Albert to see his calculations. She had written down in her own notebook the names of all those called by the president during the meeting [...]. When asked why she wrote down everything she saw, she replied quickly: ‘Women at the other end of the village are expecting me to tell them what I saw at Biharia. I want to give them as much as I can so everyone will see the lies the *chiaburi* spread; we should start a collective farm in our village as soon as possible.’”³

“Poor and middle-income peasants from over 40 villages in the Stalin region came to see the results of the ‘Gheorghe Doja’ collective farm members’ one-year work. Also, 30 delegates of the collective farms in the Stalin region arrived”⁴;

“when collective farm products and grain were distributed, peasants from Conțești and other villages could see for themselves the happy fulfilled life work in the collective farm can bring”⁵;

“The working peasants from Jelna, county of Bistrița, had long wished to see how the Jeica-Bistrița ‘Victoria Socialismului’ CAF members were doing. They had learned all sorts of spiteful rumour from the *chiaburi*. So when they heard products were distributed, many [...] went there. When they returned, they did not know what to tell first. Notes in their hands, they reported to those who could not see.”⁶

The purpose of “showing” is always the same: eye-witnesses are convinced of the “socialist truth”, sometimes after a tearful melodramatic process⁷, so they can oppose the negative images, “the *chiaburi*’s venomous rumours.”⁸ After being shown, there is no reason to doubt the glorious future of the socialist agriculture and those who saw turn into “new people”⁹: “(...) there, my eyes see the truth. From

¹ *Scânteia satelor*, November 5th, 1950.

² *Scânteia satelor*, November 5th, 1950.

³ *Scânteia satelor*, November 5th, 1950.

⁴ *Scânteia satelor*, November 19th, 1950.

⁵ *Scânteia satelor*, December 2nd, 1950.

⁶ *Scânteia satelor*, December 10th, 1950.

⁷ He who goes from “disbelief” to “belief” exhibits tears as sign of his transformation. The suspicious Saveta, wife of collective farm member, waits an entire year – until she sees her family’s income – to declare herself convinced and satisfied. In front of the seven overload carts, Saveta cries because “I am ashamed. My shame is as great as my happiness. There was not enough light in my soul.” In *Albina*, November 5th, 1950.

⁸ *Scânteia satelor*, November 5th, 1950.

⁹ Like in a true passing rite, the neophyte is initiated – by showing the wealth and revealing its

now on, mind you, I am a woman with a new mind, you hear? New and whole, as I should be, as any collective farm member should be. The party is true to say that this and no other is the right way, the way to happiness.”¹ What is really shown, beyond numbers, exact quantities, heavy bags and happy peasants, is the victory of a political system, of a new structure that marches triumphant along the red horn of plenty, always conquering other partisans.

The actions described are not ordinary, everyday operations; in fact, most of the times they are considered holidays, therefore part of a transcendent time frame. Those present at the CAF or the Culture House – the new power centers in the rural environment – are dressed “differently, in holiday clothing,”² listen carefully and respectfully to the report of the CAF president, applaud enthusiastically, speak up to thank the Party, observe the weighting of products, congratulate the receiver, scold the undecided or those who worked less, emphasize the differences between the scarce supply of food a poor peasant would enter winter with before 1950 and that of a collective farm member after 1950. All the articles on income distribution in the fall of 1950, after the first year of socialist agriculture, follow the same pattern, implying that the actions themselves follow that pattern. This consistency plus the emphasis on the emotions of both actors and spectators and the obsession for showing the abundance point to a cultural construction; more precisely, a tendentious *mise-en-scène* with propagandist stakes. The rural everyday life, dominated by work and concern for the future, is disrupted by a “dramatic time” which includes performance in the sense indicated by V. Turner.³ Any cultural performance – representation before an audience – is a motivation and explanation for life because performance exposes what is usually hidden or implied. In the fall of 1950, the CAF peasants do not just receive products, they perform – in the etymological sense of the word: to complete, to end a process, to accomplish – the socialist variant of agriculture; they show and demonstrate on an invisible stage they reach following their adhesion to the CAF: wealth, safety, happiness. This setting is captured by photographs sent on the field and described by local correspondents who unknowingly become theatrical chroniclers. The look becomes legitimizing instance. Witnesses are the foundation of legitimacy; mass media presents events caused in order to be related. Relating means “imprinting in memory”⁴, a recognition of a fact being true even if it was not checked by readers themselves. It “must” be true, since it is in the paper! Photographs showing happy peasants and eloquent descriptions become the official image of collectivization

political sources – into the “mysteries” of the CAF, where abundance and happiness are a certainty easy to attain; it only takes a signature on the adhesion form. Signed with “free will”!

¹ *Albina*, November 5th, 1950.

² *Scânteia satelor*, November 5th, 1950.

³ V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publication, 1982) and *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York: PAJ Publication, 1987).

⁴ P. Lardellier, *Teoria legăturii ritualice. Antropologie și comunicare*, (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2009), 143.

forever in the collective memory, and also an archive for posterity (the perfect communist world is the final stage of history, its peak), “monumentalizing”¹ the righteousness of the collectivist demarche. Moreover, maximum visibility (the number of readers or those who listen to press articles being read by agitators is practically unlimited) constitutes means for the power, the communist party, to show itself in order to be seen, to represent and demonstrate. The eyes of the spectators are drawn by the large quantities of products collective farm members receive and, via the cornucopia, that is, the CAF, by the power that made it all possible: the RWP.

Like in a true *potlach*, the CAF distributes products earning prestige not by accumulation of wealth, but by generously giving them up, therefore maintaining its leadership²; those who receive become dependent or exchange partners. Peasants can really see, in substantial images and actions, the power of the party and they have the “freedom” to choose whether to join the party and the consequent wealth:

“These actions show how mischievous the lies of the enemy have been, they prove that those who worked honestly in the collective farm receive more than they could ever make on their own land. These facts clearly demonstrate the words of the Party came true and the collective farm members have started a new, abundant, bright life. There, facts speak louder than words.”³

“Now, that collective farm products are being distributed, the working peasants of Conțești and those in other villages came to see for themselves the happy plenty life work in the collective farm can bring about.”⁴

“For days, people would still tell each others about the income distribution and how much the CAF members had received. It was then that they started to understand how abundant the life of collective farm members was.”⁵

“Let us pace around the village, comrades, so everyone can see what I am taking home for my work. The *chiaburi* will go mad because they were wrong and the Party was right.”⁶

The frequent mentions of the *chiaburi* – an exploiting class in the eyes of the RWP, who conspire, instigate and lie but now cannot contradict what is “seen”, who now watch their former hind marching before them with loaded carts and shiny faces⁷ – are part of the new communist society paradigm. The former “key to

¹ Lardellier, *Teoria*, 152.

² Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual în Tribal Society*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 58-60.

³ *Scânteia satelor*, November 19th, 1950.

⁴ *Scânteia satelor*, December 2nd, 1950.

⁵ *Scânteia satelor*, December 10th, 1950.

⁶ *Scânteia satelor*, December 17th, 1950.

⁷ The presentation of the proud and superior “shiny faces” of the collectivist peasants is not random. It is part of what E. Goffman called “sociology of circumstances”, *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, (New York: Pantheon, 1967). In his social environment, the individual externalizes a “face” – a behaviour type – to express his view point on a situation and his appreciation on other participants and himself. Collectivist peasants “keep their faces” in front of the *chiaburi* and even more!

the village”, who used to produce most of the grain and products and were political parties allies, become “village leeches”, forced to realize the superiority of the new agricultural structure; transparently, the power relationship in the rural environment changes and the image of the formerly exploiting presently enraged to see the happy formerly exploited proves it.

The entire behaviour of the peasants during income distribution – their happiness and pride for the quantities they receive, the emphasis on the opposition between the poverty of the former regime and the abundance of the new, the parade of the loaded carts around the village, the hatred of the *chiaburi*, the discontent and envy of those outside the CAF, the repetition of the same pictures and scenario in most press articles – suggests ritualization, in the sense discussed by C. Bell¹⁸: ritualization includes actions performed under special circumstances which generate differences by privileging some over others; certain social actions distinguish strategically from others. Therefore, with the ritualization of income distribution, this activity is separated qualitatively not only from everyday agricultural activities, but especially from the same actions in the years before collectivization. The substantial qualitative difference (from the spectators and readers’ viewpoint) between two time structures and two types of behaviour means to set a privilege contrast between two agricultural structures; the strategies employed by the propaganda include formalism, fixation, and repetition. The most frequently used strategy constructs binary oppositions between the past (lost of work, little production, poverty, humiliation, exploitation, uncertainty) and the present (lots of work, massive production, wealth, pride, equality, security) in order to construct a clear hierarchy, without any doubt, by “showing” and establishing power relations. All the peasants, including the poor and middle-income or the undecided, all the *chiaburi*, who still hope the inter-war power structures return, see the force of the communist party to change the rural lifestyle. The party power does not manifest violently (with accidental exceptions), but, according to the Stalinist slogan, by proving that all peasants have common interests, by showing the way and “forcing” peasants to follow this way to happiness.

The performance of CAF members – as presentation of personal happiness and success of collectivization – is intended to contribute in shifting peasants’ perception on collectivization, an active agent of change in itself. The distribution ritual is not only performative, not just a show, but “performative with a purpose and a target-audience.”² The performance shows and does at the same time, because spectators and readers are drawn and involved emotionally: they become “spect-actors”³, as P. Lardellier puts it: nobody is just actor or just spectator-reader, everybody can see their reflection in the other, everybody “seems” something to others. Income distribution dramatization takes place at the moment of a possible crisis, in the first year of agricultural collectivization, when few peasants had yet

¹ C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1992).

² David Parkin, “Ritual as Spatial Direction and Bodily Division”, in Daniel de Coppet, ed., *Understanding Rituals*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 11-25

³ Lardellier, *Teoria*, 216-217.

adhered and the situation was uncertain, many peasants were watching and waiting for a sign: “What do I know?!... Who knows?!... These are new times, who knows what’s best? Everybody wishes for the better. I, for one, cannot believe until I see with my own eyes and feel with my own hands.”¹ The uncertainty of the peasants, fed by catastrophic rumours spread by the *chiaburi*, is counteracted by the communist party with an entire arsenal of mesmerizing representations of the change. The fear of the peasants is therefore compensated by substantial wealth imagery and an idealized representation of collectivist experience. Media texts present, by initiating and repeating, the story of achieving communist happiness.

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