LEARNING FROM THE CITY?
THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROMANIAN ELITES

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: Learning From The City? The Construction of Romanian Elites.

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This thesis will focus on the changes that modernization, especially during the transition period from communism to capitalism, brought to the use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) in Romania. The main question of the research will be whether these terms are still used and if they are used with the same meaning as they were before: in short, what does it mean to be “lady” or “sir” in modern Romania? The thesis will try to examine the way modern life lessened the differences between country side/rural life and town/urban life and between people with different educational levels. In Romania little research has been done examining how modernization affects everyday life and how individuals view and understand the world. Modernization is a key word in almost every field in Romania today, but the human dimension especially that of everyday life has not received much attention. The thesis will try to give a perspective on how the recent social transformations have changed the way people view themselves and the opportunities that developed as a result.
Romania is an East European country in transition. This means that among other things that for Romanians things seem to change rapidly and sometimes abruptly in very short time, often without much sense or logic. The result is that Romanians have had to learn how to adapt very quickly and to learn new social and material skills almost every day. Romania and her passage from socialism to capitalism can be a laboratory for anthropological research on some of the disciplines central and emerging themes. Among these is how the elite is self constructed and self selected over time. Another is the role that shifts in elites can play in a country’s and a culture’s economic and cultural transitions. This research will also add to the literature on Romania because while elite’s effects, both positive and negative have received much media attention, the scholarly literature is almost silent in how elites are defined and emerged since 1989. The study of the elites will also bring a better understanding of the way people in Romania behave, understand and accept each other. It will also help us to understand their goals and how these got defined in this transition period in Romania’s history. Looking at how Romanians think about (categorize) each other will also help the rest of the world understand Romanian culture and society. This is important - especially for those inside and outside the country who have a stake in Romania’s future.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements...................................................................................................................................... iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS................................................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT .................................................................................. 1

   Methods..................................................................................................................................................... 9

   Review of the Literature .......................................................................................................................... 11

CHAPTER 2: ROMANIA, PAST AND PRESENT – A HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL
BACKGOUND OF STATUS IN ROMANIA................................................................................................. 19

   Historical and social background............................................................................................................ 19

   The Monarchy.......................................................................................................................................... 20

   The Communism period .......................................................................................................................... 28

   The post-communism period (present day) .............................................................................................. 38

   Linguistic background of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) ................................................. 41

CHAPTER 3: STATUS IN ROMANIA 2011: FIELDWORK RESULTS.................................................... 45

CHAPTER 4: IDEAS OVER HOW STATUS IS PERCEIVED IN PRESENT ROMANIA...... 55
CHAPTER 5: FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS. NEED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

REFERENCES

FIGURES

Figure 1: Peasants vs People in towns in interwar era ................................................. 3
Figure 2: Rumanien, eine Darstellung des Landes und Leute ........................................ 21
Figure 3: Greater Romania, a study in national lands ..................................................... 26
Figure 4: Eastern Europe 1989-1991 ........................................................................ 29
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

“A child’s appetite for new toys appeal to the desire for ownership and appropriation: the appeal of toys comes to lie not in their use but in their status as possessions” - Christopher Lasch

In today’s Romanian language, the terms “domn” (mister) and “doamna” (misses) are used, mainly in cities or more urban areas, as polite forms to address another person that either one has just met, is older than you or has a more important position than the sender. Used in front of the family names, these terms also recognize the marital status of the addressee. Using them to address another person is the ultimate form of respect and recognition of the other person as an equal, who deserves to be treated with the same respect the other one expects of you. This might be considered an artifact of today’s society, when (imposed) elites and aristocracy do not seemingly have as much social importance and there is no longer much reason to aspire to belong to the ruling class anymore; these two terms are not used as much as titles as they are used as polite forms of address. This is a difference between the past historical times in Romania. Under the monarchy or in the communist period different kinds of elites had titles for its “members” and as well strict rules of status and rank difference. At the present time, a time of free market and capitalism, everyone appears free to construct their own status and to rise “in society” either through education or through material status markers.
The creation of status in present day Romania, especially rural Romania, it is very different than it was not even a hundred years ago. However, because Romania is still a country in transition, it is still difficult to determine if the social equality has actually increased or whether the limits between elites and masses are just more blurred today than ever in the past.

For a long time though – and even today in the rural areas of Romania, the terms “doamna” and “domn” were associated only with people from towns or with educated people. In the past, these terms where more than just a polite form of address. Instead they tended to be used more as titles for an “unofficially recognized” elite. Making a life in town or pursuing education were considered the first steps upward on the social scale and these became models for rural peasants who lived most of their lives dependent either on an aristocracy or on the land itself to dream about and try to follow. The comfort of a life in town or of the educated people’s lives in comparison with the harsh life of the peasants with their manual labor and hours spent in the fields, became a dream to be pursued. People in the countryside started to wish that someday they will have a life like that of the “domni de la oras” (the gentlemen/sirs in the city). These terms denoted more than a simple “mister” and “misses”. In the past, these terms tended to be used more with the meaning of “sir” and “lady”, to address to this informal class – ones not linked to the aristocracy or created by the state but in part by the popular imagination and a desire for a better life.
Figure 1: Peasants (top photo) vs People (bottom photo) in towns in interwar era (www.ziaristionline.ro; www.adevarul.ro)
Historically these two titles were linked to the urban “more modern” space or to an educated elite and created, for a long time, a division between “simple” people in the country villages/rural areas, and those in the town/urban areas. Both the urban and the educated were linked in popular imagination with status and were seen as markers indicating either the way up on the social scale or arrival there.

We are not talking here about the traditional aristocracy title and rank transmitted from parents to children for generations and who demanded a certain level of respect because of their inherited position. There were already different terms used in addressing the aristocrate elite. Here the terms “doamna” and “domn” were an “elite” created by the popular imagination of rural people. For people in the countryside these were their own terms and titles which they used to show respect and were based in part on what rural people image of the virtues and upper class acts and behavior of the elite. The two terms started be used by rural people as titles for those considered superior and worth of respect in popular imagination but who did not belong to any of the traditional categories of elites.

This respect increased over quite different historical and political time periods. This image was created mainly about the people in the towns or educated people but was also influenced by the few who broke the social boundaries of the times and were able to move to the other side, the side of the “blessed”. In the past when the aristocracy was also the ruling elite, the boundaries between classes were strictly regulated and peasants were limited to working the land in strict obedience to the ruling and owning families. (This is not to say that Romania did not have a series of peasant revolts: Nor was hand of the aristocracy always passively accepted). Once born in this class, it was almost impossible to make the change to the upper classes.
At least one factor in this increased contact was the linkage between urban life and education. For a long time, those in the country saw being educated as meaning the same thing as belonging to an urban area. This was especially true when there was a monarchy, i.e., before 1948 when most of the educated people were indeed coming from and/or living in towns and cities. During this time, the only educated people in the village were the priest, the doctor and the teacher. All of them came from towns, or left the village to seek education in the urban schools, returning with a new position and status in the eyes of the villagers.

Starting with the industrial revolution and especially with the European Revolution in 1848, the rural poor started to become exposed to urban life. More and more members of every class had access to education and hence to the opportunity to change their own social status. Higher education all most always meant moving to an urban center. Some of the educated would come back to the villages to teach or help in village’s administration. So the number of the educated people in village increased to more than one, usually just the village priest. This is the period of time when rural people began to respect educated people as a different class. Now the aristocracy was not the only class rural people looked up to. At this point rural people increasingly began to respect the educated. The differences between the educated people coming from the towns and the rural peasantry was still overwhelmingly visible in education and lifestyle, and so the new titles of “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) start to be used at this time for the new category of educated elite.

The respect the people living in rural areas had for educated people was almost tangible. It exceeded the formal politeness that usually exists between different age groups where old individuals are given more consideration by the younger ones. This kind of respect was generally shown to the more educated especially in forms of address (Mihailescu 2010). As time went on
even the individuals from rural communities, who left the village for the town, were treated with
the same respect as educated people, when they returned to the countryside.

Urban life was seen as a step upward on the social scale (“s-a ajuns domn” meaning “he
became sir”). This was supported by the policies conducted by the communist party. From 1948
through 1989, the declared purpose of the communist party was creating equality between all
people. To do this the party pursued its politics of the reduction aiming at the elimination of the
aristocracy and of all religious and intellectual elites. The declared purpose of the communist
politics was to create an industrialized country where there will be no classes and everyone will
have free access to commodities and education.

One of the prices that had to be paid in order to achieve this communist ideal was the
destruction of the rural villages and the creation of a new lifestyle, an industrial town lifestyle.
The disappearance of all the rural villages did not happen but a large amount of the population
moved, more or less willingly, to urban areas where, at least in theory, they had access to
commodities and a more urban lifestyle, creating in the minds of the ones left in the villages, the
image of urban success and status. This was a status many wished to achieve too someday.

Romania used to be a rural country and even today more than 45 percent of the
population still lives in the countryside (The census of Romanian population, 2002). Before the
1950s, during the monarchy, the social differences between the peasantry and the educated
and/or ruling elite, were quite striking overwhelming (Benedict 1943; Djuvara 1999; Roman
2007). During the monarchy, mass education was promoted and more children were encouraged
to get an education. However, there was still a part of the population that still remained rural and
less well educated. Under the monarchy, the ruling elite still came mainly from historic rich
aristocratic families, which at that point in time, guaranteed both education and social
recognition. Even when there were intellectuals rising from the lower classes, moving to towns and studying at elite schools, a large part of the population remained in the countryside, working the land and having little or no real contact with city life or with different elites. The old elites, either of blood or intellectual or religious ones, remained unquestioned and accepted for what they were by the lower urban strata or the people in the countryside.

The communist system did attempt to reduce the differences between rural and urban communities with the ultimate intention of transforming rural life completely (Djuvara 1999; Ionescu 1958; Stefanescu 2010). Though the communist party was preaching social equality, the truth was that social differentiation continued especially between the people in towns and the people in the countryside. Also, the communist system created its own elites (and eliminated the old ones) while trying to convince the population that by adhering to the party rules, everyone would be treated equally and previous social inequalities would disappear. However inequalities did persist. The lack of freedoms and information under communism helped ensure that the newly created communist elites remain unchallenged, especially in the eyes of the rural population.

The post communism period can be characterized as a search for modernity for both people in urban and rural areas (Mihailescu 2010; Roman 2007). The post communist period is one in which individuals had lived at least through two of the historical periods (i.e., the monarchy and communism). But it was a period of rapid and complex change. Things seemed to change overnight. With access to travel, a free market, immigration and tourism, new opportunities were created. This is especially the case for the people in the countryside who wished to achieve the position of “domn” (sir) and “doamnă” (lady). While new opportunities
opened up it is also, as the World Bank attest (Roman 2007), a transition period often
characterized by poverty and even underdevelopment especially for rural people.

Although traditional aristocratic families are not an issue anymore and the country
continues to develop as a democracy, the image of the towns as elite continued. The elitist image
projected by the people in the towns to those in rural areas is still powerful and the wish to
become “domni de la oras” (meaning “sirs from the city”) influences rural actions more than
ever. This image together with the images given by the global media began to transform the way
people in the countryside see themselves. It also helped to create the belief that upward changes
in personal status is potentially achievable by everyone. Since the traditional ways of changing
someone’s social status, like belonging to an aristocratic family or receiving higher education
(mainly because of the higher costs of higher education for a rural family), are not available to
the people in the countryside, their most direct route to move upward on the social scale is
through material status markers. Globalization has decreased rural/urban differences during this
transition period leaving the people in the countryside fighting if not for the emancipation of
their lives (and status), at least for those outward markers (commodities) that indicate class and
higher status.

This thesis will focus on the changes that modernization, especially during the transition
period from communism to capitalism, brought to the use of the terms “domn” (sir) and
“doamna” (lady) in rural Romania. The main question of the research will be: are these terms
still used in rural areas and if so do they have the same meaning as before? In short, this thesis
will look at what does it mean to be ‘lady” or “sir” in modern rural Romania? It will also look at
the way modern life decreased the differences between country side/rural life and town/urban life
and between people with different educational levels. In Romania little research has been done
on how modernization affects everyday life and how individuals view and understand the world. Modernization has become a key term word in Romania today, but the human dimension like shifts in status has not yet received much attention. The thesis will discuss how the recent social transformations have changed the way people view themselves and the opportunities available to them today.

Methods

The thesis proposes to research how status changed in Romania and what are the main factors that contributed in the past 80 years to this change in the definition of status. These changes will be traced through three different historical-political eras (pre-communism, communism and post-communism) and across three generations. The main purpose here is to find out how rural people areas recognized/created elites and how did they use these categories to understand themselves especially today. An additional, but related, question is how do these differences of status (elite/non-elite) work out in the social exchange that occurs between rural-urban areas today? In order to obtain results several steps will be followed.

First, research about the origin of the words “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) in the Romanian language was carried out as well into how these honorifics emerged and were used during different historical periods. However because this is not a linguistic thesis, this research will provide only information about the context these honorifics appeared in and, about the status they denoted and created for the persons involved. This thesis will also track the importance these terms have had in three different historical-political eras: pre-communism, communism and post-communism. The thesis will also look at how these terms were used in rural or urban areas and the difference between rural and urban usage.
The next step is to sketch out the historical, political and social background of the population in both rural and urban areas in the pre-communism, communism and post-communism times. These three periods of time are very different not only politically but also socially and in each of them numerous changes occurred in both rural and urban lives. During the second one especially there was much rural to urban migration (sometimes involuntary) and this led often to a struggle for new identities and new roots. These sudden changes also created differences in status and redefined who represented the elite and who do not.

This study of the historical and social background will create a context that will help us understand the differences between rural and urban societies and status in both contexts. It will also help us understand how status was seen and played out in all these three different periods of time. The intention here is to study how people see themselves and others in reference to status. This preliminary research will inform the ethnographic study – by among other things proposing interview questions.

This ethnographic research was done in the summer of 2011 in Romania. Information and other data was collected in a rural area of Bucovina, in northeast Romania, and the urban Brasov area, central Romania, through interviews and discussions with members of a rural community. The two areas were selected as being representative given the changes there between rural and urban over the past 80 years. Bucovina still remains a mainly rural area today while Brasov area, though an important urban center since the middle of the 1200s, transformed during the communist period into one of the most important industrial centers of the country, attracting workers from Bucovina’s and Moldova’s rural population. The informants were selected from different age groups, of all ranks and status, and from them data was collected about the idea of status during these three historical periods of time: pre-communism, communism and post-
communism. One concern throughout was that it may not be possible to collect much data on the pre-communism period because of the age of the informants and by their ability/ willingness to answer interview questions.

The interviews used a semi-structured interview form that also allows for open ended discussion with informants. However the same issue or themes were covered in every interview.

- Did there used to be any perceived status differences between the people in the villages and the ones in towns? What about today?
- Were there many people with education in the village? What kind of education? Did they get more respect because of that?
- Were there certain term/ names used to refer to the educated ones or people who lived in towns?
- Did it make a difference in the village if you were related to an educated person or to one that lived in a larger town? How?

Also, as will be clear, participant- observation and document analysis was used to collect data.

**Review of the Literature**

There is little literature about how Romanian’s views and behaviors about/towards themselves and their elite have changed over time – especially in the context of rural-urban divisions in their country. But there is some research from the pre-communism times, communism times, the transition period after communism and Romania today. There is enough in fact to create a perspective on how the country was before 1989 and how it has changed over the last 20 years. Most of this literature touches on more general topics about Romanian culture
(Benedict 1943; Constantin 2010; Djuvara 1999; Ionescu 1958; Kideckel 2008; Livezeanu 1995; Mihailescu 1996; Mihailescu 1997; Mihailescu 2002; Roman 2007; Sarbu 2010; Stefanescu 2010; Verdery 2003) and Romanian values or customs (Benedict 1943; Dumitrascu 2009; Klingman 1988; Majuru 2010; Mihailescu 1996; Mihailescu 2002). This literature covers different periods of time starting with the monarchy, through communism years and to the present day. The problem of elite in rural and urban communities, lifestyle change and modernization has also been examined by a number of authors in Romania and elsewhere (Aronsson 2009; Birzea 1996; Chirot 1978; Frykman and Lofgren 1987; Hoffman and Glodeanu 2008; Hoivik 1974; Kolaja 1957; Kurzman and Owens 2002; Mihailescu 2002; Petre 2008; Samoila 2008; Stefanescu 2010; Verdery 2008). This literature creates the theoretical background for the field research done in Romania in 2011.

The Merriam-Webster 2012 online dictionary defines status as “a position or rank in relation to others” but also as a “relative rank in a hierarchy of prestige”. Of Latin origin, status is defined by The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language published by the Linguistic Institute of the Romanian Academy as “the place occupied by an individual within a given social system at a given moment in time”. When I talk about status I am not talking about a social class per se, one well defined and historically recognized and accepted, but more about a continually constructed position, a personal view the people have about themselves and others. The group of people who shares the same economic and/or social status forms a class according to The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2012. The same dictionary defines elites as “the best of a class’, “the group of persons who by virtue of position or education exercise much power or influence” (The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2012).
Social differentiation has existed in every society whether we talk about age, sex or other social categorizations like prestige, class or access to resources (Haines 2005). For many years now, researchers from all over the world showed their interest in the continuous need of people in creating new types of recognition. Prestige and recognition seems to be a human need, manifested in many forms during different periods of history. But what are the criteria used when categorizing others and for positioning themselves on the social hierarchy? Are markers here the ancestors, the family lineage, the common experiences, and/or wealth? The terms defined above speak eloquently about the need people have to define a social order that will show how the others should be treated and how they should see themselves too.

Starting in ancient times there were often social differentiations between the members of the same group (Kottak 2005). As an old English song says: “When Adam delved and Eve span/ Who was then the gentleman?” Whether based on access to resources or to prestige, recognition by other people is itself a form of power, and hence, recognition itself became an object of desire for most people. The firm boundaries drawn between the ones who had the access to resources and the ones who depended on that class for those resources assure that the former class remained in power and its place unquestioned and undoubted for centuries. Of course we have the examples of tribes where prestige - recognition by the others, were related not just to “objective” resources but to different virtues or abilities (Kottak 2005). But once societies started to become more complex, the social aspect of an individual life started to get new dimensions, individuals with different virtues and abilities started to compete with the others to prove social worth (Haines 2005).

Many researchers believe that hierarchy emerged with the beginning of cities. Many believe that it was in cities that power started to be concentrated in individuals and groups and
thus a ruling elite was formed (Eisenstadt 1971, Frykman and Lofgren 1987, Kottak 2005, Wolf 1966). Concentrating power in the hands of a few, led to an even sharper social stratification where the leading group imposed their values on others and demanded respect of lower classes who depended on the resources and power of the ruling elite (Frykman and Lofgren 1987, Haviland 1999, Wolf 1966). “Social stratification amounts to institutional inequality” (Haviland 1999: 325). For centuries these elites did not allow access to their class to anybody outside it and continued to rule through the power of economic resources and/or by fear. Today there are many kinds of elites like ruling elites, political elites, intellectual elites or religious elites. They have existed before too but they all tend to be formed in the same way, they depend on the resources of the (elite) group of people who control those resources. This control over resources by one group resulted in the acceptance of their elite status by the masses.

All this started to change in the nineteenth century with the industrial revolution. With the appearance of newly formed social groups like the workers or bourgeoisie the roles of the ruling aristocratic elites and the peasants started to change. In Marx’s vision the nineteenth century world was transformed by industrial revolution and increasing capitalism and social stratification became a simple division between the bourgeoisie and the workers (Marx and Engels 1848). But the bourgeoisie was both, dependent on and in opposition to the old aristocratic elite; at the same time, the working class was formed in opposition to both aristocracy and bourgeoisie (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). If new classes emerged, the old classes of aristocracy and peasants did not disappear with the industrial revolution. They continued to exist, the former elite aristocracy retained its status and the peasants still were a dependent class.
Even with the appearance of the two new classes during the industrial revolution, the pre-existing social stratification did not disappear and the social mobility for the people in the lower classes did not improve dramatically. But the appearance of the bourgeoisie and workers blurred class differences and started to move slowly power from the formal center to informal ones. Every class started to define their own ways of life and transmit their own cultural messages. While the access of people to different economical benefits and even political power did not influence social stratification much, the modern social system was no longer simply divided between the dependent class and the ruling class. Further the middle class did offer the opportunity for some social mobility (Frykman and Lofgren 1987, Kottak 2005, Wolf 1966).

The twentieth century was characterized by the variety of ways in which different classes were formed, accepted or adhered to. These sudden changes created some status confusion both for the ones inside a particular social class and those outside it. The formation of new social classes meant new social relations. These changes created both confusion (how is one class defined vs. another class) and opportunity (new classes allowed people to claim status in different, higher classes. One’s ancestors, common membership, high education, etc, can and did create a criteria of association and the way to establish and change one’s status but what happens when these traditional markers of status are no longer the only ones that exist in a society? How then is someone’s status built? The industrial revolution, and later mass production, also resulted in a vast increase in the number of material possessions that could be purchased at lower prices. This allowed non-elites to buy materials items that had once been purchased only by the elites. The “things” that had once marked elite life now could be had by those in dependent classes. This created a new culture, a culture of consumption in which acquisitiveness and power to
consume it brought some new criteria in defining someone’s status: the power of material

In states with a large rural population, where this group of people is dependent on a
ruling aristocracy, materiality started to be seen as a way to “buy” steps on the social scale. Even
when we talk about two different social systems, rural and urban systems, they did not function
in total isolation one from the other and they tended to borrow from each other (Kottak 2005).
Even so, there is a clear differentiation between access to resources and prestige in the two
systems. For the people in the country, with little or no access to aristocratic descent or
education, materiality seemed to provide them with a new social status, one often connected in
the past with education or social background. Whether we think of the monarchy or the industrial
republics, we can say that throughout most of their history, peasants were kept in a dependence
state, either to a ruling aristocracy or to an industrial modern way of life – the later they could
not access as freely as the people in towns. Industrialization in Romania, as in most of the
countries, came late and it was taken straight from the plow (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). The
resulting access to different cultural or/and material resources, made the differentiation between
masses and elites, once very well delimited, seem not to be clear anymore. People want what
they see other people have. People think that once they get these material things they will also
get the status that comes with the possession of those things. Here, the cultivation of and desire
for certain lifestyle is coming from the class one wants to join and for the privileges one thinks
will come with that class. The reference is no longer the class one is born into, it is the class one
seeks to join.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Weber wrote about the social stratification: the
economic status – the wealth, power – the ability to impose one’s will and prestige – “the
“cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1984), meaning respect, esteem. Though related, these kind of social rewards were considered still different and the possession of one did not imply necessarily the possession of the other (Eisenstadt 1971, Kottak 2005). But today’s consumption culture seems to imply that having economic status, will allow one to change class and move up the class system. More, it seems like people in the rural areas try to make up for the ascribed status qualities (i.e., birth) with achieved ones (i.e., money). In order to obtain social visibility and status, they can purchase the same lifestyle or standards of living that are the “same” as those of people living in urban areas. Once chosen, they are not asked to demonstrate their capacity to adhere to those standards. The “culture of consumption” does not require its members to hold certain standards or values. The “culture of consumption” is a lifestyle and once chosen, its members have to show that they can live that lifestyle (Eisenstadt 1971, Kideckel 2010, Mihailescu 2010): “The taste classifies…the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984:6). People in the lower strata seem to copy the behavior and the lifestyle of the people in upper strata, in the hope that they can acquire the same prestige and hence, the same status as the latter (Frykman and Lofgren 1987, Tarde 1890). In the eyes of the lower strata or the people in the countryside, the elite is not formed anymore by a group of people with ascribed qualities as aristocratic descent, but by a group of external material qualities that give that group of people the impression of an aristocracy (Pareto 1994).

Industrialization and the modernization have created the need for educated people who would be able to manage the technical developments and social changes. Even if it was considered by many as an opportunity to step up the social ladder, only a small number of people from the lower strata actually received higher education. Further, even if this number is slowly increasing, the kind and way an education is selected has still a lot to do with one’s class
(Eisenstadt 1971). With no access to aristocratic descent and little access to higher education, the lower strata’s and the peasantry’s only way of advancing up the social ladder is through the acquisition of material power. In the next chapters we will see how this phenomenon happened in Romania and what the results were there for the rural population.
CHAPTER 2: ROMANIA, PAST AND PRESENT – A HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF STATUS IN ROMANIA

“We do not go to bed in single pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies/all the bits and pieces of our unique existences” – Angela Carter 1904-1942; English writer

Historical and social background

The twenty years since the Revolution and the fall of communism in December 1989, represents a period of extreme change in Romania, with sudden and often changes in the social as well as the political life of Romanians. The opening of the borders and the freedom to travel in and out of the country, the increasing exchange of goods and a free market, and the available and modern communication media, have created a very eclectic society formed now of at least three generations with their own political, historical and social background. Social changes from one generation to the next are recorded in every society, no matter what other political and historical background changes have been. In order to understand how people see themselves and others, it is important to know and understand the background everyone has more or less in common. In present day Romania social changes affect the entire population, from the youngest to the oldest. But while the youngest were born and raised in only one historical period – the post-
communism, the oldest have lived through three different ones – monarchy, communism and post-communism, all three of them different from the others from historical, political and social points of view. To understand status in Romania today, what it represents for the rural Romanians and how is created and achieved, it is important first to take a bird’s eye view of the last three historical and political periods, all of which made important contributions, positive or negative, to the development of present Romania and today’s Romanians. In the next pages we are going to outline the social transformations Romanian society has passed through in these three historical periods and how the rural population was affected by these: the monarchy – the middle of the 1800s until 1947; communism – 1947 until 1989; and post-communism and democratic republic – 1989 to the present (Djuvara 1999).

The Monarchy

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the adoption of the French culture by the Romanian aristocratic families, the education of the boyars' sons at Western universities, the opening of the country to Western markets, the European Revolution all had consequences for the Romanian provinces. Throughout this period rural life for the peasants continued unchanged following the same season patterns, and working the land that they did not own, with traditional methods and equipment. Young intellectuals within the country started to show an increasing

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1 The Explanatory Dictionary of Romanian Language defines Boyar as landlord beneficiary of privileges, person belonging to the feudal aristocracy; in the old social order representing the aristocracy (DEXonline 2014). Representants of the Romanian aristocracy before 20th century, boyars were extremely wealthy landlords with immense influence at court. Playing an important economic role and having a lot of privileges from the rulers of the country, boyars usually were the ones bringing the change in the social life of the country too (Djuvara 1999, Djuvara 2010, Eliade 1982).

2 After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, major changes happened in the economy and social life of Europe. The development of industry marks a boom in England and France, creating a gap between the bourgeoisie and population in lower strata. In 1848 the revolution started in Paris and soon spread in different European countries. In Romanian Principalities the Revolution was brought by the Romanian students studying in Paris, asking for democratic reforms. The European revolution changed the face of the Romanian aristocracy, opening it to the western culture. It also started agrarian reforms and began the liberation of the Gypsy slaves (Djuvara 1999, Djuvara 2009).
openness towards democratic reforms, even if majority of them were from large landing owning aristocratic families. Their politics ended up with the unification of two of the Romanian provinces Moldova and Wallachia into one country, under the name of Romania in 1859. The third province of Romania, Transylvania, remained part of the Habsburg Empire and in 1867, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, until the end of the First World War.

Figure 2: Bergener, Rudolf – Rumanien, eine Darstellung des Landes und Leute [Romania - A presentation of the land and people]; Breslau 1887; www.commons.wikimedia.org

In 1881, the young state of Romania became a monarchy under King Carol I. One of the longest rules in the history of Romania, the reign of Carol I represented a kind of modernization

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3 After the Balkan war, at the Peace treaty signed in Paris in 1858, the Romanian Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia are allowed to unite with the condition of keeping two rulers. In 1859, during the elections, Colonel
and openness to the Western cultures Romanian society had not experienced before (Djuvara 1999). In general, the second part of the nineteenth century represented an immense turn in the politics, economic and cultural life of Romania, which supported the changes brought later during the monarchy period.

Romania, the two united provinces, became a monarchy under Prince Carol I, who was chosen by the government leaders of the time. He was seen as a viable alternative to a local prince who would only deepen the already existing conflict among the Romanian aristocratic families. In the period of time from the union of the Romanian provinces until the installation of the monarchy, a few reforms were started which lead to further reforms brought by the four kings that ruled Romania before communist party took over in 1947. Some of the most important of these reforms are the emancipation of the gypsy slaves, the adoption of the modern law codes and the secularization of the lands owned by the monasteries. Though the land taken from the monasteries was redistributed to the peasant families, all freed by now, the situation of the peasants did not improve since, due to the improvement in medicine and new hygienic conditions, their number increased very much in the nineteenth century (Djuvara 1999; Livezeanu 1995). Exporting goods from the newly formed state helped to create a Romanian bourgeoisie, consisting mainly of merchants and small boyars. This did not help the peasants’ situation, who became even more exploited by the aristocratic landowners whom needed more and more agricultural products to export.

Carol I, of German origin and with a strong military education, reigned over Romania from 1866 until his death in 1914. Carol I was followed by his nephew, King Ferdinand I. Carol I’s long reign (48 years), brought stability to the country that lead to positive changes in both

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Al. I. Cuza is elected ruler in both provinces, becoming the sole ruler of the newly formed state called Principatele Unite ale Valahiei si Moldovei [The United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova]. The country will take the name of Romania in 1862. (Djuvara 1999, Livezeanu 1995, Mackenzie 1983)
politics and society. During his reign, there are important economic changes like the building of roads, railroads, factories and the development of a modern banking system. During this time an important natural resource, oil, starts to be exploited, commercialized and exported.

Romania’s cultural life developed too as Western European trends in particular were adopted with a speed unseen before by the aristocratic families or the nouveau riche. The 1860s also represented a turning point in the country’s educational system, with two major universities opening in two of Romania’s largest cities, Iasi and Bucharest. Before these universities opened, the majority of the aristocrats’ sons went to study abroad. There were not many people with higher education before the beginning of the nineteenth century, and mainly because of the weak economy and the lack of professional jobs (Livezeanu 1995).

Nevertheless some people of culture existed and continued to exist within the Romanian Orthodox Church, which for a long time created the bridge between the peasantry and the aristocratic families. Traditionally under the rule of the Patriarchy in Constantinople, at least on paper, Romanian Orthodox Church had privileges that allowed it to function almost autonomous in the principalities. Under the protection and financial help of the principalities’ rulers and boyars, the church became a wealthy institution early after its formation in Romanian principalities. For a long time, monasteries and churches were the ones that held libraries, printing machines, art (Djuvara 1999, Djuvara 2009). Besides that, an old Romanian custom believed that when a ruler, aristocrat or any wealthy person died, sins could be forgiven if land was donated to churches or monasteries (Djuvara 2009). As such, these donations along with rulers’ foundations of churches and monasteries, transformed these into extremely wealthy institutions that own by 19th century more than a quarter of the arable land of the country. Even after the secularization of the monasteries’ lands in 1863, the role of the church as a bearer of
education was not much diminished, especially in the countryside where the priest was still the one educating the children of the peasantry (Djuvara 2009). The reforms brought by the monarchy meant that by 1940 the priests were paid and hired by the State including, in some cases, offering scholarships to theological schools (Benedict 1943). Though not as highly educated or regarded as the metropolitan or the city priests, the priests in the countryside, often coming from the peasant class themselves, were offering an elementary education to the peasants’ children. Offering theological scholarships to further their theological education meant that they could return to the village with a higher position than the one of a peasant (Benedict 1943, Djuvara 2009). Besides that, during the monarchy more and more students attended the Romanian universities or studied abroad. With almost 80 percent of the population being peasants, “universities were particularly significant in the creation of elites” (Livezeanu 1995:211) that the new country so much needed.

With all advances of the time, the Romanian population continued to be largely rural (Benedict 1943, Djuvara 1999). The students studying abroad brought changes, culturally and architecturally, especially to the towns. However, this only deepened the social differences and distance between towns and villages. The country continued to have a strong class system, where wealth, family and education confer power without the support of the large peasant class (Benedict 1943; Djuvara 1999). “With a legal system based on French civil law and a language belonging to the family of Romance languages, Romania was home to pre-communist elites who were predominantly educated in French high culture, while the country at large remained peasant” (Roman 2007:17).

The beginning of the monarchy was a period characterized by rapid changes but these changes largely meant that aristocratic families embraced town life more and more and adopted
the new Western cultural trends brought home by the students and diplomats. Although this was the beginning of modern industry in Romania, labor was still largely confined to agriculture and aristocratic families were still mainly land owning. This situation is probably exemplified the best by the two parties in power at the beginning of the monarchy: The Liberal Party – a party formed from bourgeoisie but also some boyars, who wanted to get rich by modernizing the country and establishing new industry, and the Conservative Party - supported by the big land owners. The elections were open to everyone who paid taxes but they were not as accessible to the majority of the population living in the countryside. Not only was the wealth concentrated in the hands of a few but also the illiteracy was more than 85 percent in the rural areas (Livezeanu 1995:30). Hence, while modernity was brought to the towns and to the wealthy families belonging to aristocracy or nouveau riche, little changed in the countryside. There, due to the increasing birthrate and the slow pace of agrarian reform, the life continued to be hard for the rural population. While the monarchy brought positive changes and opened the country to modern era, these changes affected mainly the upper strata of the population. The differences between village and town continued to increase and so the feeling among the peasantry that have affiliations with or moving to an urban area proved one had moved up the social hierarchy.

The First World War and the interwar period brought more changes to Romania. At the end of the war, in 1918, the peace treaty almost doubled the country’s territory. With the majority of population still in the countryside, the country’s elite had to expand, given Romania’s new territory. This included urban areas once dominated by ethnic minorities like Germans or Hungarians. As such, new educational reforms were adopted and peasants began to upgrade their social status becoming members of the middle class. They moved to the towns and took industrial or bureaucratic jobs, enthusiastically embracing education as the way to create
new elites and move upward on the social scale. The Romanian peasants were always the “country’s common denominator” (Livezeanu 1995:11) and they played an important role in the country’s economy and politics for a long time. But it wasn’t until now that they were given the opportunity to make a conscious change in their status.

Even if educational reform had existed since the middle of the 1800s when education became compulsory and free, these reforms remained mainly on paper because of lack of teachers, school buildings and the peasants’ indifference (Livezeanu 1995). After the First World War, however, an “educational explosion occurred in Romania” (Livezeanu 1995:18). Education was embraced by the country’s politicians as a means to integrate the country’s ethnic populations and to advance the social status of the peasants. Advised by the rural intellectuals,
the country priests and village teachers and supported by the state, more and more schools were built in rural areas that peasant children could easily use. Many times wealthy peasants gave money or land while poorer ones donated labor and time to this project. This optimism about education and what it can bring to the countryside was part of a general after war enthusiasm. At the same time, this was one of the most important period for the peasants since their emancipation, bringing them the right to vote and the long promised land reform which left only 20 percent of the land in the hands of upper class.

All these reforms were intended to help modernize the nation and to help peasants overcome the problems they faced. At this point in time, the Romanian industrial base was even more underdeveloped than urban life. Immediately after the war the answer to the problem posed by the need of (urban) industrial workers and bureaucratic workers seem to be answered by educational reforms that targeted the rural population. With little urban experience, little education or even connections, the peasants who made it to the town were creating a new “artificial bourgeoisie” (Livezeanu 1995: 40). To the rural population that remained in the countryside those who left the villages and moved to the towns looked like the perfect image of success.

Even with all the educational reforms that targeted the peasants and the 1920’s land expropriation, little changed for the majority of peasants (Djuvara 1999). Unlike the earlier period when power was in the hands of the landowners, the peasants, mostly now new small property holders, were able to elect their own mayors and community leaders. The local priest and/or the village’s teacher now came from the middle strata of the peasantry and these professions were now seen as one way to achieve some social mobility (Benedict 1943).
However, the economic crisis in the middle of the 1920s and the arrival of the Second World War stopped the progress made in all these domains. The educational reforms in this time of economical crisis oversaturated the labor market with poorly educated people. The peasants, especially after the land reform, resisted proletarization. There was also a certain, “resistance to modernization in agriculture and industry, the scarcity of the native capital and the reluctance of Romania to venture into industrial /business professions” (Livezeanu 1995:243). The economic crisis and the approach of the war were not the only limiting factors; so were the increasing number of children and the raised problems of land inheritance. This together with the refusal to adopt modern technology, meant that peasants, though owning the land they lived on, were unable to produce anything beside what they needed for their own households. Still the peasants kept buying more land and increasing their debt while the wealthier (and more prosperous) of them “advanced socially by sending their sons to the city to receive a university education and become “gentlemen’”’ (Livezeanu 1995:243)

The Communism period

For Eastern Europe the end of the Second World War did not represent the beginning of reconstruction period but the beginning of a fifty year’s dark era of political, economical and cultural tyranny, controlled by a Russian Stalinist system. Only two years after the end of the Second World War, the communist party headed the Romanian government with the support of the communist leaders in Moscow. This was not a smooth transition from one political system to another but the enforcement of a new political regime by pure force. In December 1947, after more than eighty years of monarchy, the fourth king of Romania, Michael I, was forced to abdicate by the communist leaders for “the benefit of the country”. Romania became, almost overnight, a communist republic. This was the result of a decision made by communist leaders
in Moscow. The roots of this decision can be traced to Yalta Conference and the Armistice signed between Russia and Romania. In Romania, this regime varied over time but overall it was characterized by violence, control and suppression of all freedoms. As a consequence of this, the regime ruled with little opposition for almost fifty years (Chirot 1978, Djuvara 1999, Leustean 2007, Rusan 2007, Stefanescu 2010).

From the beginning, the communist regime used class struggle as a main argument for a new constitution, new laws and the state’s strong enforcement of them. As later events prove, invoking class struggle was only rhetoric used by the regime to attract new members to a party that gained control of Romania without popular support. The regime almost overnight stopped the progress in modernization and education that had been started by the monarchy. The communist regime not only stopped the country’s progress, it set the country back for almost fifty years economically, socially and culturally.

Figure 4: Eastern Europe 1989-1991 [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)
The communist regime gained power in Romania at the end of the Second World War, when Moscow, under the cover of the Romanian-Russian Armistice, pretended to de-Germanize the country. The communists, previously a marginal, illegal party in Romania won the first post war national election in 1945 through fraud and violence with the help of Moscow (Djuvara 1999, Stefanescu 2010). Within two years, the Romanian communist party with Moscow’s support took the control of the country, forcing the king to abdicate, transforming the country into a “People’s Republic” and bringing major changes in the politics and economy of Romania.

The following ten years can be characterized as the most oppressive political and economical regime in the history of Romania (Stefanescu 2010). The intent of the regime was to destroy any possible opponents or resistance to the party and to rebuild Romania according to the Soviet model of communism on every political, economical and cultural level. This is second phase of the communist regime in Romania, the establishment of a Stalinist model and the elimination of the indigenous political, religious, military and intellectual elite. Between 1948 and 1958, industry and private property were nationalized, agriculture collectivized and all other political parties eradicated. All these changes were intended to create the new man, “the Romanian Homo Sovieticus” (Stefanescu 2010: 4).

In the first years after the overthrow of the monarchy the communist party attempted to fully implement a Stalinist model. Some of the most drastic changes involved in this model were the accelerated nationalization of the industry, starting with the factories and mines, banks, health companies and insurance companies and continuing with the nationalization of the privately owned houses. Because of the small number of people who worked in industry and private sector at that time and also due to the small percent of the population who then lived in
the urban areas these changes took place quickly. As the 1957 census shows, at the beginning of
the communism period, more than 68 percent of the people were in the countryside and worked
in agriculture (Ionescu 1958, Romanian Census 1956-1957, Stefanescu 2010). This highly rural
population was a problem for a political regime whose ideology and propaganda assumed an
urban working class occupied with industry. At the time of the communist regime, the wealthiest
and the dominant group of people in the urban areas were the bourgeoisie, not an industrial
working class, the class the regime wished to co-opt. Instead of a dominant working class the
majority of the Romanian population remained located in the countryside and was occupied in
agriculture (Ionescu 1958). As such, the utopian dream of the communist regime based on a
working class that will rule the country found itself threatened by the lack of such a working
class.

One of the first measures taken by the regime was the removal of, the Romanian political,
religious, military and intellectual elite. This group of elites was composed mainly from
members of the aristocracy or bourgeoisie. These elites were imprisoned, sent to work camps,
leaving the country without an opposition to the communist regime. Most of these individuals
died in prisons or immediately after release, leaving their families in poverty.

The imprisonment and the elimination of the former members of the elite brought radical
changes to the social hierarchy in urban areas. Now the former bourgeoisie and aristocracy were
placed on the bottom of the social scale, while the working class, though a minority in
comparison with the rest of the population of the country, was considered the leading class. It
was from this class that future members of government and party would arise. Although the
working class, living in towns and working in factories, was regarded as the principal class in the
communist system, this was not how it actually worked. Actually, the most “well-to-do” people
were members of the communist party, the government bureaucrats and members of the (communist) intelligentsia (Ionescu 1958:54).

Despite the fact that the regime unceasingly pursued the elimination of all former elites, there was one Romanian institution that had a different fate. Even after the installation of the communist regime the overwhelmingly part of the Romanian population remained Orthodox (Chirot 1978). Instead of eliminating a religious elite that had potentially the power to raise opposition to the new order, the regime supported the existence of the Orthodox church, trying to manipulate the Romanian population through the church (Chirot 1978, Leustean 2007). The Orthodox Church found itself in an apparently advantageous position with salaries paid by the state and a certain freedom to publish religious work. This was unlike the old Greek-Catholic Church which was banned and all their properties and parishes given to the Orthodox Church. In return for this treatment, the Orthodox Church was assigned the important role of “diminishing/eliminating any opposition to the regime; preserving the religious sentiments of the population” and “supporting the governmental peace propaganda and political triumph of Communism” (Leustean 2007: 491).

Although the elimination of the Romanian bourgeoisie and elites had been possible in a very short period of time, the process through which the peasantry would be transformed into a “socialist class” (Ionescu 1958:55) proved to be much longer and much more complicated. The collectivization of the Romanian agriculture, started in 1949 and took almost thirteen difficult years, much longer than the communist party ever anticipated. This was an extremely harsh period for the peasantry who resisted collectivization and when they did so they were imprisoned or eliminated. More than 80,000 peasants were imprisoned because of their refusal to give up their properties, and many of the rural elite were deported to different remote parts of Romania,
(Rusan 2007, Stefanescu 2010). At the same time “the peasant class, in spite of persecution, compulsory quotas, exorbitant taxes and exaggerated prices for the services of the tractor station, has been able – because of its ineluctably central position in the national economy – to save enough to acquire more land” (Ionescu 1958:57).

Despite of the communist party policy that supported the transformation of the Romania from an agriculture to an industrial economy where the workers will be the leading class, the majority of the population remained in the countryside. Not only did the peasants reject the communist regime, they strengthened their position by keeping their small or medium holdings and even acquiring new land for ten years after the communist regime was established (Ionescu 1958). Though they were not accepted as a socialist class, peasants were recognized unofficially as a class by the communist party due to their number and the role that they played in the Romanian economy. The recognition of peasants as an (unofficial) class was rationalized because the peasants were not part of the bourgeoisie.

The period from 1958 to 1971 was a period of political, economical and cultural relaxation, due mainly to the death of Stalin and its aftermath. Known as the “Enlightened Absolutism” (Stefanescu 2010:4), this period occurred during the last years of presidency of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and the first years of Nicolae Ceausescu’s presidency, the last Romanian communist leader. The years between 1959 and 1971 represent the alienation of the Romanian communist party from the party in Moscow and a focus on the national rural values and traditions. It is during this period when Romania becomes more open to the western influences like media, music, cinema, and this helped further the nation’s modernization. On the political scene, Romania joined the UN in 1965, at the beginning of Ceausescu’s presidency, leaving the western countries to believe that Romania had taken its first steps to a more
democratic regime. This impression is reinforced in 1968 when Ceausescu refuses to take part of the Soviet response to Prague Spring, attracting the anger of Moscow but gaining further support from the West.

But this period it was not to last. In 1971, the Romanian communist leader, Ceausescu, took a tour of China, North Korea, Mongolia and Northern Vietnam, returning home with ideas about an incipient personality cult that would increase dramatically over the next eighteen years, dictating his future politics and the future of Romania. While still officially condemning the Soviet Union’s politics, Ceausescu returned soon after his visit to the Asian communist countries, to a violent and tough dictatorial regime. He started by implementing a new form of socialism -“the dynastic socialism” (Stefanescu 2010:4). In this period, his family members were elected to leadership positions. He also began a continual rotation of all the other leadership positions still held by senior party members to make sure no one else would be able to challenge him or his family.

New methods of control and manipulation of the population were implemented too. Since the “re-education through incarceration” or imprisonment – former Stalinist methods – were less an option now, that Romania was part of UN and Ceausescu’s politics being watched by the western leaders, new indoctrination and manipulation methods implemented: the relocation of the rural peasants to the towns where they would work in factories. Though this process was rationalized as modernization by developing industry, it was actually a method of social manipulation intended to change social demography of the country’s urban areas by bringing rural peasants to towns so as to help create the “new man”(Rusan 2007:36).

The intent of this policy was to create a working class that would become the principal class of the country. This utopist (communist) dream was impossible to materialize since the
majority of population still continued to be rural. In the later years of communism in Romania, with the aristocracy and bourgeoisie long gone, industrialization and urbanization became a priority for the communist leaders with the ultimate aim of having rural life disappear completely (Djuvara 1999; Stefanescu 2010). In turn, this policy led to the rapid creation of the large industrial centers all over the country resulting in massive “rural-urban contact” (Klingman 1988:53).

But it was not until the middle of the 1980s, with the “Systematization program”, that the urban population started to grow and the rural population to decrease (the demographic situation of the rural areas – Structural European Funds 2005). Under the “Systematization program” entire rural communities were to be leveled and their population moved to towns to work in industry. This together with the personality cult and the decision of Nicolae Ceausescu to pay the international debt of Romania brought economic disaster to the country. The new policy meant that virtually all domestic products exported, leaving little food or material products for internal consumption. This was an era of much suffering and it led to the overthrow of the communist government. In 1989, after a short but bloody, violent revolution, the communist regime collapsed and the country returned to a democratic government.

Overall, the communist regime was a fascist regime characterized by control and violent enforcement of the socialist ideology by any means. The communist party supporting the working class was simply propaganda. This was just a cover for the party’s general “class hate” that led to the elimination of all elites and “social genocide” (Rusan 2007:64).

With the old Romanian elites eliminated and most of the rural population living in poverty, the communist regime began the construction of a new kind of elite made from rural people brought to towns to work in industry. This kind of population or class became the new
model for the rest of the population, especially for the people still living in the countryside. As such “a domn” (meaning “to be a gentleman”) now included not just the educated people dressed in modern clothes but was extended to all the people who made it to town. This kind of social recognition and mobility made life in town represent the top end of the social scale.

However, life in the towns had many problems for the people living there. The communist party had a lot of control over the lives of those who lived there. Because the communist system tried to suppress private property, the limited access to different goods and the lack of freedom in making career and employment choice, the ownership of goods and property as visible symbols of one’s success became more important (Mihailescu2010). In this kind of system, “(...) along with this boundary-making, property is about appropriation, and thus about power. Power affects which actors and relations are recognized or privileged in a given understanding of property” (Verdery 2008:4). The accumulation of material possessions became a mark of power.

The lack of goods leaded people, especially those in towns, to see access to goods from the West as marks of high status. The ownership of such goods was taken to be undeniable symbol of class and success. Since a lot of people in the countryside were commuting to work in towns while still living in the countryside or they had relatives living in towns, this process was transferred to rural areas from the towns. Rural people, especially the young, were trying to borrow or imitate the modern Western customs they learned in urban areas and as such, to become themselves “domni” and “doamne” (meaning to “sirs” or “ladies”). This process was helped by the communist politics of destroying the village life, the removal of rural population, and transforming the country into an industrial state. The result is that rural people too started to become more conscious about the power of image and status.
During the communism period, the rapid destruction of Romania’s elites created a gap that needed to be filled. Both before and during communism “aesthetical legitimacy was located in the intellectuals’ high culture” (Roman 2007:69) and such, the elimination of the intellectual elite represented, in the new political system, a statement about the new model of man and society that needed to implement. But new Romanian Communist intellectuals did not arise. “The absence of new, or old, but genuine Communist intellectuals” was “exceptionally striking in the Romanian People’s Republic” (Ionescu 1958:62). The elimination of the old intellectual elite, the lack of genuine communist intellectuals and the party politics of creating a new working class to lead the nation, led to an overcrowding of the existing schools with “new hastily recruited pupils” (Ionescu 1958:60). At the beginning of the communism, the technical schools and universities were packed to create a new intellectual elite that met the party’s standards. One result was that in 1957a new education reform was implemented because that majority of the universities were still attended by an “unfavorable composition of students” (Ionescu 1958:61). This new reform required that at least forty percent students at university should be from worker’s families and seventy percent of the total number of students should be from worker’s or peasant’s families. Despite this reform, the number of graduates from peasant or working classes was lower than students coming from other “classes”. To deal with the resultant shortfall of competence, the communist leaders started bringing back –from prisons or camps, considering the time spent there as “re-education” (Ionescu 1958:60) – some of the old scholars and members of the old elite, in order to help train new the new elite (Ionescu 1958).

Despite all politics implemented in some fifty years of communism, the regime was not entirely able to rid itself of the country’s rural population. Indeed, the rural-urban contact grew under communism and rural society itself was transformed because of both urbanization and
industrialization – both forced and voluntary. But communist propaganda about urban life
coupled with the relative lack of goods and the freedom of movement in rural areas, made that
the life in town both more attractive and assigned a higher social status than one given by family
or education.

The post-communism period (present day)

In 1989, Romania “emerged from this [communist] regime with an impoverished
economy and an outdated industrial base, a residue of forced industrialization and
modernization” (Roman 2007: 17). In 1991 a new constitution was adopted and the country
started to rebuild and began “an effort for international acceptance” (Roman 2007:17). Today,
Romania is part of the European Union and NATO and, according to 2002 census, has a
population of 21.7 million, of which 53 percent is urban. But more than a political change, the
country is also passing through a cultural and social change like none before in its history.
Globalization, a developing free market and easy access to different consumer goods, the
freedom to travel and modern communications and media has brought more changes to the
country than fifty years of communism, even with the governments systematic attempt to
implement a socialist ideology throughout the country (Ghinea 2007).

These changes affect the entire population but due to differences in age, people have very
different views of the world. The youngest Romanians were born after the Revolution and grew
up in the era of globalization and freedom. However, the oldest Romanians were born before
communism. They have experienced two or three different political, social systems that
influence their behaviors and how they construct images about themselves and the others. Today
Romanian people are going through a very eclectic period with influences coming from ones’
background but also from globalization and the foreigners who visit the country and/or
Romanians who have left the country under or prior to communism (Ghinea 2007, Stefanescu 2010).

Politically Romania is today a democratic republic, geographically it still has almost the same borders it had since the end of the Second World War, but culturally and socially, the country and its people still struggle to define themselves, especially in relation to the nation states and populations near them. The bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in both urban and rural areas were for the most part eliminated during communist period but their legacy has survived (Roman 2007).

Despite all the changes brought by the communism, “the notion of culture in Romania” is still pretty much “conservative and elitist identified solely with humanist intellectual history” (Roman 2007:69). In the past, culture and the elites, who defined it (“a pre-communist bourgeoisie – richest in educational capital”), could exclude or ignore popular culture and Romania’s cultural diversity. However, today, the strong link between elite status and educational capital has weakened.

Today, because of globalization and the expansion of businesses and work opportunities, a new elite group has emerged in post-communism Romania. This elite group is less well educated but wealthy economically and are ready to create models and identities for others in Romania to follow: These are “the nouveaux riche” who choose to “express the taste of luxury in terms of taste of necessity” (Roman 2007:54).

Today Romanians have the mobility once not possible for those outside certain social classes. More than in the past, more than connecting various places, roads have became ways to transmit information and discover new trends and ideas, to discover what is modern and what is the easiest way to bring modernity in someone’s home. If this tendency seems to be less visible
in the urban areas, this is not the case in the rural areas. In the rural areas years of social and political domination have created the dream of town life, a life that today, with the right material things, can be achieved by everyone no matter where they live. As Kideckel noticed, in this era of global economy and free markets, with more opportunities for people to work in different professions, people seem to stop identifying themselves so much through family history, education and work. Instead they seem to identify themselves more through consumption (Kideckel 2010). Especially in the countryside, this often seems an alternative to an investment in education that is more expensive, potentially more difficult to achieve and simply can take too long.

Though in the last years of communism the urban population increased significantly because of the forced industrialization and systematization, the industrial centers that emerged under communism collapsed immediately after the Romanian Revolution. This left the urban population largely unemployed and without any future prospects in a new and unknown environment. The change in the economy of the country, the privatization and closing of the state factories - the main source of jobs under communism, not only stopped the rural-urban mobility but actually led to reverse migration and an increase of the number of people returning to the countryside and agriculture (Mihailescu 2010). That process was very common in the first years after the fall of communism.

But recently, as Romanians more easily travelled and obtained work permits within the European Union, a new phenomenon emerged in Romania: external work migration. Surveys show that almost 3,000,000 Romanians were working abroad in 2010. The main reason given for working outside the country was to increase their and their family’s wealth (Soros Foundation Survey, The National Institute of Statistic 2011). The external work migration, mainly from the
countryside, is not only changing the wealth levels of many of the rural people lives but also is bringing new mentalities and ideas to the countryside, creating new models for the rural population.

If in the past the social and cultural situation of the peasants little changed, the present day presents a different situation and opportunities for them, where the blood or the education that marked status before can be replaced by economic and material wealth (Ghinea 2007). Today, especially in the countryside, status reflects community opinion more than standards derived from other classes. The media plays an important role too in defining class and status today, especially in the countryside. New models of status are arriving from outside the country, either through the people who traveled outside, or through the media, shaping the way people see themselves and the way they will build their future lives.

Though a traditional bourgeoisie does not exist anymore, a new kind of “bourgeoisie” has emerged in the imagination of the rural people, from the people who still live in towns and succeed professionally and economically there. But if in the past the social differentiation between rural and urban was expressed in verbal forms of respect, expressed by rural people towards educated and urban people, the changes of the last two decades offer rural people an opportunity to redefine themselves and to pursue the dream of having a life like those who live in town. This has, diminished, at least for those in the countryside, the social differences between urban and rural areas.

**Linguistic background of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady)**

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language published by the Institute of Linguistic of the Romanian academy defines “domn” as:
“1. Polite form of addressing a man; Husband; (popular understanding) Man who lives in the city. 2. A person who has the authority, the possibility to achieve something, owner, lord. 3. Title bared [used] by the ruling princes of Wallachia and Moldova; ruler, prince, person who was baring [bore] this title. 4. God, Jesus Christ” (The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language 1998).

Coming from the Latin word “dominus”, meaning God, the word “domn” has had in Romania several meanings, all of them showing the superiority of the person who bore it. If we follow the historical progress of the word in the Romanian language, if at the beginning the word was used to refer to God and later extended to the rulers of the country, the word also started to designate more and more categories of people like lords, people living in towns wearing modern clothes and people with education (The Etymologic Romanian Dictionary 1958-1966, The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language 1998, The New Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language 2002, The Romanian Language Dictionary 1939, The Synonyms dictionary 2002).

Today, the terms “domn” and “doamna” are used, mainly in cities or more urban areas, with the meaning of Mister and Misses. These are polite forms used to address a person one was just introduced to, is older or has a more important position than oneself. Used in front of a family name, the two terms recognize the marital status of that person. The two honorifics are used today in business and self-identification. Using them in present Romania shows the respect for the other person, more a recognition of the equal position of all the members of the conversation than any statement about rank or status (Ion Giurgea – personal communication).

It is not very clear how far these terms go in Romania, but “the nature of the semantic content of the source terms, the entirely native phonology, and the verb agreement morphsyntax suggest that the terms are native coinages and not borrowed or “fabricated’” (Foster, Joe – personal communication). As honorifics once marking the social differentiation between the
noble’s class and the commoners, “domn’ and “doamna” have been recorded in the Romanian language since the sixteenth century, almost two centuries before they became polite form for non-nobles (Giurgea, Ion – personal communication).

The Romanian provinces had a very old aristocracy, older even that the formation of the provinces, and such, it was only natural for these honorifics, given their etymology to be applied to the heads of the country and to the nobility. But while these honorifics were first used only for monarchs and lords, they were also politeness terms for non-noble persons too as early the late eighteenth century (Giurgea, Ion – personal communication). The last prince titled “Domn” or “Domnitor” (meaning the Reigner/Ruler) was the Prince of the newly formed Romania, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (reigned 1859 to 1866), and Prince Carol I who followed him as King of the Romanians.

While the class distinction was still official, and a strong aristocracy still ruled the country, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the use of the honorifics “domn” and “doamna” began to change. They started to be used more as titles that applied to an unofficially recognized elite made of the distinguished persons who were not seen as commoners. This could include, teachers and professors, respectable persons (The Romanian Language Dictionary 1939), wealthy people or educated people and people from the cities (The Etymologic Romanian Dictionary 1958-1966).

Dictionaries of the Romanian language from different periods of time attest these new usages of the two honorifics. This change can also be found in Romanian literature: “we cannot all be lords, priests or teachers” (Petrovici P), “I am going to town to talk with the gentlemen” (Slavici, O.I.), “I always told Glenetas to sent Ion at the big school from Armadia, to make him gentleman” (Rebreanu, I), “having only one child…and wishing to make him a gentleman in the
city hall, or priest at the new church….he decided to sent him to gymnasium” (Vornic, O) (The Etymologic Romanian Dictionary 1958-1966) and in oral tradition.

During the twentieth century, the transformation of the two honorifics from designating social status to politeness forms accelerated, mainly by the economic and political changes in the country and the disappearance of aristocracy. Today they are used as politeness forms in the everyday conversation, to show respect among equals.

This transition from one use of such term to the other is not unique to the Romanian language. The same thing has been found in different European languages like Spanish, Polish, Italian or Russian. The shift in meaning in Romania is very similar with what has happened in Spanish with “tu/vos> vosotros (meaning “you”) becoming replaced in polite conversation with “usted” and “ustedes”, forms originally used only for the royal families, high dukes and maybe Grandes “Grandees” of Spain” (Foster, J – personal communication). There are also archaic forms of address in Russia, “sudar” and “sudarynya” which marked class” in Russian feudalism in Russia. These forms continue to be used well into the twentieth century, after the Revolution and long after the abolition of slavery and indentured servitude in rural Russia (Graves, W – personal communication). Linguist Elizabeth Riddle is aware of Polish terms “pan” and “pani” which are both the everyday terms for Mr. and Mrs. as well as the polite/distant forms for second person singular. She writes: “historically, these are lord and lady, but although those are still available meanings, the words are quite lexicalized in the non-aristocratic sense, (..) During the soviet era, we were told that the government had tried to get people to use [instead] the Polish equivalent of Comrade” (Riddle, E – personal communication).
CHAPTER 3: STATUS IN ROMANIA 2011: FIELDWORK RESULTS

“The value of the dollar is social, as is created by society” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

As we have seen previously, Romania is a country that passed through a lot of political, economical and social changes in the last eighty to one hundred years. These changes together with the transformation due to the modernization of society in general made that the way people construct their views about each other and themselves changed too. Modern life affected both the rural and urban population and what we find today seems to attest that the social differences between country-side and town have decreased. There has also been an increase of the material wealth of the people in the countryside. This thesis focuses on the changes the modernization has brought to rural life in present Romania, to the way people there construct their own statuses and especially how they choose to express their respect towards the others – a key element in social status in Romania. The historical and present use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) in rural Romania as honorifics for different social categories is attested to in oral tradition and also in written literature. How these terms are used today by the people in the country side and how rural people in present Romania recognize/create elites it is shown here through a combined survey of the literature on historic and social background of the rural population and, last but not least, through ethnographic work.
The ethnographic work was done in the summer of 2011 in two different areas of Romania: rural Bucovina, in the northeastern part of the country, and in Brasov, Romania’s seventh largest city, situated in the centre of the country. Information and data was collected over a span of seven weeks through ethnographic methods like interviews, informal discussions, documents analysis and participant observation. The informants were from different age groups of all ranks and statuses and data was collected about the status during three historical periods of time. The two areas were selected as being representative of the country’s political, economical and social changes over the last eighty years. While Bucovina remains a mainly rural area, with many villages still occupied in agriculture, Brasov area is a historical urban area dating way back to the 13th century but in the same time Brasov was profoundly transformed during communist times by accelerated, forced industrialization4.

Due to the different educational level of the people interviewed, perhaps the most effective approach to informants this summer proved to be the informal interviews. These interviews used a semi-structured interview form and led to open ended discussions with the informants. Though the questions were not asked in any set order and were not entirely the same for all the informants, the same issues or themes were covered during every interview:

- Did there used to be in the past any perceived status differences between the people in the villages and the ones in towns? What about today?
- Were there many people with education in the village? What kind of education? Did they get more respect because of this?
- Were there certain term/names used to refer to the educated ones or people who lived in towns?

4 During communism period in Romania, between 1948 and 1989, the government conducted an industrialization policy that moved a large number of people from rural areas to towns to work in the factories and create a new social category that would replace the removed elites (Ghinea 2007).
• Did it make a difference in the village if you were related to an educated person or to one that lived in a larger town? How?

Thirty seven informants, 20 males and 16 females with ages between 18 and 80 years, from both areas were interviewed in seven weeks. Their views and opinions, collected through ethnographic methods, will constitute part of the research data used here about how status is created and recognized in present rural Romania. With the informant’s approval, most of the interviews were recorded and notes were taken at all the interviews. Interviews were done in Romanian with transcripts translated into English as needed. The informants for the research were selected through various methods, chance meetings, taking part in local events and gatherings, and the recommendations of others at the field sites.

Besides the information from interviews and the document analysis, I also brought to this thesis my personal experience and knowledge of the history, traditions and life styles in Romania. I am a native Romanian, born in Brasov, with my mother coming from Bucovina. I grew up traveling around the country and visiting my grandparents in the countryside. Later as I became interested in the history and the traditions of Romania, my work as a tour leader and guide led me to travel and experience multiple times the life in the country side. This has made me aware of differences between the rural and urban areas I am working with here. Besides my own research and travels, I’ve been part of the Ball State University’s Department of Anthropology ethnographic field work in Romania for five field sessions.

The first three weeks of 2011 I was part of the Ball State University’s field work and methods course. During this period I with seven students and two professors did ethnographic research in Sucevita in Bucovina. For three weeks, interviews were conducted with a large number of village residents like the mayor, the priests, private business owners, the principal, the
teacher, local guesthouses owners, the blacksmith, nuns, the doctor, the pharmacist and many more others in the village area. The selection was done starting with key informants and then using a snowball technique, where more people were recommended to us by interviewed informants or mentioned in their interview material. We used translators from the local area that facilitated our understanding of the local traditions and scheduling interviews in the community. After the students left, I continued the research in the village for another week and then moved to Brasov for the three weeks.

The two areas selected for the ethnographic work are representative for the social changes that have happened in the last eighty years and the kind of the rural/urban contacts that have happened in Romania over the last three or four decades. Bucovina still remains a mainly rural area today while Brasov area, though an important urban center since the middle of the 1200s, transformed during the communist period into one of the most important industrial centers of the country, attracting workers from Bucovina’s and Moldova’s rural population.

Bucovina is an ethnographic area in the northern Moldova which itself is in the east Romania. In 1775, after a treaty between the Hapsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire is signed, the northern part of Moldova becomes part of the Hapsburg Empire and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This northern part is called Bucovina, from the German word “Buchenland” meaning the land of the beech tree. The province became part of Romania again only after the First World War, in 1918, when the peace treaty of Versailles returned Bucovina to Romania. The union was not to last very long. In 1940, as a result of Molotov – Ribbentrop treaty, the northern part of Bucovina is taken by Soviet Union. Today that northern part remains part of Ukraine (Djuvara 1999).
No matter what historic period we are talking about, Bucovina has been largely a rural province, with one large city and a few smaller towns spread around the region. Many of the villages are wealthy due mainly to the timber business and some have some of the old historic monasteries that were supported and sponsored by princes or noble families of Moldova. Today, however the majority of these villages in Bucovina survive on tourism, especially after the fall of communism in 1989, when this historic area opened to foreign tourists who come here to visit the painted monasteries and to enjoy the scenery.

The first part of the ethnographic research was carried out in the Sucevita village area. Sucevita is an old village in the foothills of the Eastern Carpathians. The village is first mentioned in late 16th century documents - the same time the painted monastery was built here by the noble Movila brothers. Since then, Sucevita has grown into a wealthy village due to the timber industry and the existence of the monastery. Sucevita today is a commune, a government unit, with two villages Sucevita and Voievodeasa. The Sucevita village has 1904 inhabitants (2011 census) while Voievodeasa has 943 inhabitants, so the commune has 2847 inhabitants mainly Romanians and Gypsy\(^5\). As for religion, the population is 70 percent Orthodox, 25 percent Pentecostal and 5 percent Catholic. The commune has two elementary schools, two kindergartens, a city hall, a local clinic and many businesses in tourism, timber or other small village venues. Because there is no high-school in the commune, children have to commute to the closest town, Radauti some 18 km away, or to move in a dorm in the biggest town of Bucovina, Suceava 57 kms away. Today, many adult villagers work abroad, and send money

\(^5\) “Roma constitute the largest minority population in Europe” (Engebrigtsen 2007:2). Gypsies/Roma arrived in Romanian principalities in the 14th century becoming almost immediately slaves to the ruler, boyars and monasteries. Today they constitute somewhere between 1,8 percent and 10 percent of the Romanian population (Djuvara 1999, Engebrigtsen 2007).
back home to be invested largely in property by the families left at home. We interviewed there twenty seven people, some more than once, from all the village’s social strata and occupations.

The second part of the ethnographic research took place in the Brasov area. Brasov is one of the oldest cities in Romania, referred to Transylvanian German documents from 1235. Since almost its beginning, the city was known for its German population and their commerce with other cities in Transylvania or the Old Kingdom\(^6\) of Romania. Part of the Transylvania province, Brasov became an important commercial, industrial center during the Austrian administration. After the unification with the other Romanian provinces in 1918, Brasov continued to develop as a city. But the city’s largest transformation happened during communism when the city was heavily industrialized and communist leaders tried to reduce the importance of the city’s German\(^7\) heritage by encouraging internal migration to Brasov. Due to the size of the factories built in the city, the number of workers increased. Also, as a result of the Systematization\(^8\) program, which intended under Ceauşescu to destroy all the country’s villages and rural life, a large number of peasants were brought to the Brasov to work the factories. Most of these people were from Moldova and Bucovina. Most of the times the workers contrived to leave families in their villages and built new lives in the cities they were moved to. After communism, the

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\(^6\) In 1866 Romania got a new ruler, Prince Carol of Hohenzollern. In 1881 he became Carol I of Romania and the country became a monarchy under his rule. At that time Romania was formed only of two of the historic provinces, Moldova and Wallachia, known as Regat [Kingdom]. The third province, Transylvania, united with Romania only after the First World War. Even after the unification of the three Romanian provinces, the first two were always referred to as Old Kingdom. (Djura 1999, Livezeanu 1995, MacKenzie 1983).

\(^7\) In 2013 the German population was 0,20 percent of the total population of Romania (www.insse.ro). German groups were colonized in southern and northeast Transylvania in 12\(^{th}\) century in order to advance the agriculture, to built fortified towns and spread guilds and crafts. The Transylvanian Germans known as Saxons, were given many privileges during their history, especially before the unification of the three Romanian provinces after the First World War. After the Second World War, because of the political situation, many of the Transylvanian Germans left Romania and returned to Germany or moved to America.(Djura 1999, Mackenzie 1983, The Romanian Institute for Statistic Website www.insse.ro).

\(^8\) The Systematization program elaborated by the communist regime consisted in the destruction of the rural settlements and the creation of an industrial urban environment, where people from rural areas were brought to work in factories and live conform with the socialist model (Ghinea 2007, Klingman 1988).
Systematization program collapsed and many of these people found themselves without jobs. Some of these continued to live in the city while others returned to their home villages.

During my ethnographic research in Brasov area I had ten interviews with people whose social and educational background was more diverse than those in the village where I interviewed. In Brasov, the people I interviewed included those who came from the countryside to work in the factories, people whose parents earlier came from countryside to Brasov, people from Brasov with a certain level of education who worked in a rural area and people born in the city and lived all their lives there.

In total, there were more than thirty hours of recorded interviews and some ten hours of informal interviews for which notes were taken either during or immediately after these interviews. All the interviews were open-ended but they all covered the same issues stated at the beginning of this chapter. Depending on the informant’s education and understanding of his or her own social environment, these issues were addressed more or less directly.

In the last Chapter I showed how the honorifics “domn’ and “doamna” are understood and defined in the scientific literature and in fiction and nonfiction. The use of these two terms as honorifics for the people with education and later for the people living in town is in both the lay and scientific literature considered to be a “well known” fact. But in the field, approaching the subject of honorifics, the elite and status, proved to be almost a taboo subject, since most people, especially in the countryside seemed reluctant to answer questions about rank or to admit that not everyone had the same social status and that that these honorifics indicated these kinds of social differences. The result was that I had to use two different approaches when talking to the people in the villages and the people in towns.
A more indirect approach was used for most of the rural interviews, using open-ended questions to let the persons interviewed to talk about the honorifics and status freely, without making it uncomfortable for them by using specific terms and providing definitions. The interviews in the countryside started with important figures in the village life, like the mayor, the priests, the principals and the doctor. Afterwards a large number of the villagers, of different age, status, occupation or education were interviewed. These interviews started with general questions about their life in the village, letting the informants become familiar with the interviewer/s and with talking while being recorded. Once introduced in their lives’ details, it was easier to find a way to the questions about rank and status without making the informants uncomfortable.

As a result of preliminary observations, past fieldwork and literature research I went into the field with certain expectations about what kind of information people will have to share with me. Once in the field though, I had to adapt my questions and my research methods depending on different characteristic of the informants like age, level of education or wealth. Sometimes the informants would answer questions directly but sometimes a question required some clarification.

As it is, there was no predefined model of questioning for one informant to another other than in all cases asking them general questions and making them comfortable when being interviewed. For example, when asked who are the people they would look up to in the village I got different answers from the elderly and the youth groups. The elderly, like the blacksmith, the weaving lady or the housewife recognized the priest and teachers as representative figures in the village, especially during their youth. One of the main reasons for this was the priest’s and teacher’s knowledge and education, that had been obtained mostly somewhere outside the village
boundaries. Most of the elderly interviewed went to school for only seven grades because of lack of money or a high-school in the village. When asked who they consider “domn” and “doamna” they seemed confused about what they were expected to say. However, in interviews they often spoke about the status of the few from their generation who made it further to school or worked in a town and then came back to the village dressed differently – as “domn de la oras” (gentlemen from the town), and with a superior attitude towards the people who never left the village.

When the conversation turn to the present day, both elderly and the youth recognized wealth as the main creator of status in the village. Though all of them still recognized the mayor and the priest as important figures in the community, this was more a recognition of an official position than anything else. Most of the younger informants spent some time abroad working and majority of the elderly had at least one close relative working abroad too, often in cities. Though many people had relatives living in the city, this did not seem to be a sufficient reason for a higher status in the village anymore. Instead, the ones who made money abroad and invested them in the village seemed to be higher up on the status scale in the village. Both honorifics “domn” and “doamna” were rarely used by youth during interviews. Nevertheless, whenever they talked about their material achievements, almost all the time they reported themselves to the situation of the one in the city.

The people I interviewed in town tended to answer the questions about rank and status more directly. Older informants, who moved to town during communism, answered that they moved to continue going to school which would give them a better job and a better social position that the ones they had in the village. The younger ones, whose parents came from the rural areas, mainly for the reasons mentioned above, said that they were all supported in school
by their parents because this will create a different status and position for them, things that their parents never had the opportunity to achieve. When asked about the honorifics “domn” and “doamna” they were able to answer directly in what context they use the terms and what the terms represent to them. They also admitted that on their regular visits to the relatives in the countryside they were treated with a sort of reverence because of where they came from.
CHAPTER 4: IDEAS OVER HOW STATUS IS PERCEIVED IN PRESENT ROMANIA

“Fame and power are the objects of all men. Even their partial fruition is gained by very few; and that too, at the expense of social pleasure, health, conscience, life.” – Benjamin Disraeli

I started this research as a result of my observations in the countryside of Romania, the various times that I’ve spent there, talking with local people and observing behaviors and ways of addressing each other. My research here has focused on how social status is constructed in rural Romania in the twenty-three years that passed from the fall of communism. My initial idea started from the field observations about the use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “domna” (lady) by the people in the rural areas regarding the people with education or the people coming from towns. During my literature research, my personal observations were backed up by explicit use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “domna” (lady) in the countryside or by the use of these two terms in various literature or speeches. As such I used these terms as references markers for the construction of social status in rural Romania. The research question then turns to, whether these terms are still used by the population in the countryside with the same meanings as they were in my preliminary observations and whether the construction of status in the rural areas of Romania is still based on these markers.
The literature review and the preliminary observations noted in the rural areas of Romania helped me go into the field with a solid understanding of how these terms were used in the past, what were the historic and social reasons for their usage and also my general knowledge about the factors that changed the society over these years. My expectation when I started my ethnographic work was that the majority of the people over 55 in the countryside will recognize the usage of “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) and would be able to answer questions regarding these terms. My reasoning for thinking of this age group was that they lived at least through two different historical, political and social periods, when a clear social differentiation between village and town was visible and accepted. As such, one of my main interests was to see if these terms were still used by the younger population and if so, in which context and with what meanings.

But although the use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) as markers for someone’s status are considered well known and accepted facts in literature or dictionaries, the ethnographic work showed that that’s not necessarily always the case with the people in the countryside. Indeed when asked about the two terms, the subjects, no matter what age, seemed unaware of their use of these words and the meaning the terms played in the construction of elites. This unawareness did not however seem to come from a resistance to, or disregard of my questions. But rather from the fact that the two terms were used commonly when people do not particularly think beforehand about what they say. The use of the two terms is more spontaneous than planned.

Though my fieldwork was based on open-ended questions, once in the field I still had to adapt my questions and my approach to every person interviewed. Different characteristics like

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9 I am referring here to the three historic periods: monarchy, communism and post-communism in Romania.
age, sex, and religion, level of education or wealth changed the initial approach and how I approached key issues about status and who is still considered “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady). For example, informants with a higher level of education permitted me to ask more direct questions regarding status, position in the village, and social differences between town and village. People with a lower level of education required a more indirect approach, with more introduction and often they required more questions. Age required a different approach too, for the oldest subjects had seen the terms change over a longer period of time while the youngest much less. Religion played a role especially when I had to make sure the questions did not offend the subject’s faith.

Also, in the countryside I had to avoid asking direct questions about social status and the creation of social status. Direct questions seemed to confuse the informants and made them more reticent to answer further questions. Instead, I had to use indirect and open-ended questions slowly leading up to the subject of status. This seemed to help the informants respond to questions about status questions. The situation was different when interviewing urban informants, where, because of their education (more than 70 percent of the informants in the town had higher education), their responses were more direct and focused.

Although the use of the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) to define someone’s place on a social scale was mentioned, directly or indirectly, in scientific and lay literature, these terms never became official or state recognized titles for the people with education or coming from an urban environment. The terms remained, throughout history, unofficial titles attributed by the people in the countryside to those who were above them on a social scale but were not part of the aristocratic or religious class. As such, once in the field, the questions had to be
formulated to avoid self or direct ascription with questions like “who do you consider “domn” and “domna”?”, “are you a domn/doamna”, etc?

The change of the political and social environment over the last eighty years – the three different historical periods - has altered how people see themselves and others. Social status did not disappear but continuously changed with the times and so did the reasons to consider someone higher or lower on the social scale then oneself. The unofficial titles of “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) did not disappear, or became institutionalized. But, because of the access that people in the countryside have had to education and wealth over the last twenty years, these terms did not seem to be related to social position but had become a polite form of address. During the monarchy and communist period, the elderly in the countryside pointed that the people with education - obtained in the city – or later the people who made it to the urban life were considered “domni” (sirs) because of their different ways of clothing and behaving. Today this was not necessarily the case. Today wealth can be a substitute for an education or an urban lifestyle.

During interview with different villagers this idea was expressed more or less directly. A blacksmith in his late 70s, talked about his education; he went to school only until 7th grade; from a class of 36 students only two went further to complete their education. When these two returned to the village they dressed differently and their attitudes changed to one of pride. One principal in a village, in his late 30s talked about how many villagers now work abroad, sending money home to build large houses and to purchase other status commodities. The village doctor, in her late 30s, talked about how money is not used to pursue education but to buy expensive cars and electronics. The elderly in the village still called people living in towns or with education “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) but this seemed to be just a part of their stories or
narratives rather than any conscious awareness of the meaning these titles. Of course their statements confirmed the use of these terms in the past to define people with education and/or living in the city. In this way though, these terms and their meanings were reaffirmed during the interviews as ones used by rural people to mark the difference between social classes.

As the literature review suggested too, these words had the power to exclude or include people in a certain social category – those with status but not part of the legal recognized class of aristocracy. This was especially true in the monarchy and later communism, when social distance could be marked and maintained by terms of address. This is true whether they were aristocratic titles, official (party) titles or informal titles created by the people in the countryside. The habit of using these titles remained part of the village’s elderly talk and narrative that still used them in daily life and during interviews. For example, the village church keeper who talked about her class mate who made it to town to further his education and eventually got himself a “doamna” (lady) from the town as a wife.

The post-communist period is marked by change and flexibility. Since the social situation in the post-communism period is characterized by a freedom of travel and greater access to information and things in a free market, people now can construct their own social image and their place in the social hierarchy. Hence, during the interviews both elderly and young in the village, all seemed to identify a new marker of social status today: material wealth. Almost to a man, in the majority of the people interviewed identified people who worked abroad and brought money back. They would spend their money on high status items of material culture. They did not spend their money on education. A former collective farm manager, in his 70s, mentioned how people who work abroad and come back wealthy now they believe they are the rulers of the village. The principal quoted before said something similar. He said that money
has become concentrated in the hands of a few, giving them a superior status in the eyes of the poor.

Today, education obtained outside village’s boundaries or an urban life style does not seem to create social distance anymore in the opinion of the people interviewed. Also the terms “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) were not used by the people I interviewed in the countryside to mark a different social class. Instead the terms have become more of a polite form of address used especially with people they did not know well or had just met.

The respect for education or urban life is still visible in the elderly but the majority of the other people interviewed identified other markers to indicate “elite” status. For example, when talking to people living in towns whose parents left the countryside to create more opportunities for their children, all of them talked about how their parents helped them to go further in school and so to have a better life than the one of the parents. Several people, especially the elderly, talked about the return to the village of the few who succeeded in towns or schools and how respected and welcomed they were. But majority of the people interviewed showed that the criteria that defines status is changing, the grounds used to create status is shifting. What is not at work here is necessarily a change of values regarding status, but definitely a change of the way to obtain status and rank. Today, education and relocation to the city were not talked about as bringing about or as examples of success. But working abroad, bringing money back to the village and building big houses and the purchase of other high status items were identified as examples of success.

The changes that have taken place in Romania over the last twenty years have shifted the focus on status toward material achievement. Today, it is easier to earn money through hard manual work, work often done outside of Romania. The ability to earn money has created a new
elite in rural areas. People with education or urban lifestyles are no longer the models or markers of success that people in the countryside use to believe in. Instead of using “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady), today most of people interviewed identified rural people with visible material wealth as examples of success, growth and high social status. The new village “elite” are identified by their material success often obtained through manual work outside the country or through a family or personal business.

Today’s social conditions have decreased status differences between rural and urban settings and with that, the concept of the urban/educated people’s “superiority”. The things that can be obtained in town can now be obtained at nearly every store. Because of this, access to an “urban” lifestyle has become much easier for the people in the countryside. As such, an urban lifestyle or the education obtained in the city has stopped being representative of social status. Instead, material wealth has started to be considered the main sign of success and social status. Today material wealth can provide access to all the goods that were seen as to equivalent to the urban lifestyle.

During the interviews, most of the informants talked about their siblings and relatives who work outside the country. These people earn money and come back home to build bigger houses and invest in private businesses. Even when asked about how they see the people living in the town or people with education, rural people today do not admit to recognizing any social advantage. People from the urban areas also believed that material achievement plays a much more important role in status today than education. Wealth they said can decrease the differences between the rural and urban. In fact, in the rural villages wealth can sometimes create a higher social status than the same person could achieve in towns.
In the past terms like “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) were used to described only people with education and later also people living in the city. This created a gap between people living in rural areas and the ones living in the city. In modern post-communist times, it seems that equality can be purchased through material goods. Material goods have almost eliminated the use of these titles and at least in the eyes of those in rural areas, the differences between rural and urban.

This had little, informants said, little to do with social justice, or the ideological leveling of the differences between rural and urban areas. Rather informants see this leveling as product of the free market and the struggle for personal recognition and higher status by the people in the countryside. The social cachet of education and urban life has seemed to be replaced by the material power of possession. In the past the desire for social recognition encouraged rural people to send their children to school or they left their villages to work in a factory in a town. Today access to material resources has blurred the line between elites and masses. It has allowed people in Romania construct their own statues based on the power to purchase the lifestyle that once was equated with education or social rank mobility. As such “the cultivation of a certain lifestyle, not for the sake of it, but for the sake of the privilege” (Eisenstadt 1971: 33) seems to be the new norm for becoming a “domn’ (sir) and “doamna” (lady).

Moreover, whether talking with people in the villages or the ones who left the village for the town, the prestige given to a certain occupation was not necessarily equated with its economic reward. Salary was not always linked to prestige. What was more important than the economic return was whether the profession was considered “modern” (Eisenstadt 1977). The difference between rural and urban today is defined in terms of non-economic factors represented by high education or social background, things still difficult to obtain by people in
rural areas. But with the opening of the borders and the introduction of free market and travel, things like social background and education have become less important or more easily to overcome by the rural population. In an ironic way, the forty-five years of communism did not change as much in the rural areas as the twenty years of free market and democracy. In the past “legitimate taste” was linked to one of the dominant classes, those richest in educational capital and hence the appearance of unofficial titles like “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady) in the rural population’s speech (Roman 2007). Today Romania has the post-communism “nouveaux riches”, less rich in educational capital but richer in economic capital. They became more popular models for the people to emulate today.

This ability to obtain social status through the accumulation of wealth can also be linked to the forty-five years of communism Romania has been through. With periods of extreme shortage in almost every part of the domestic market during communism, differential access to goods or position favored the urban population. This may explain the desire of the rural population today to obtain an “urban” modern lifestyle and a life similar to the one of “domni de la oras” (sirs from the city). The changes after the fall of communism also brought a new phase in the rural life, the external work migration (Mihailescu 2010). As mentioned in many interviews, external work migration brought new social models to rural Romania and increased the rural population’s desire and ability to obtain modern things and have a “domni” (sirs) lifestyle.

The creation of status in rural Romania is influenced today by a strong consumer driven economy (Kideckel 2010). For the people in the countryside, with little education, to participate in this economy of consumption is the only way to achieve social status. To play an important part in this type of economy one needs money, and hence work migration - especially migration
abroad, through which money and hence status, can be obtained. Work migration and the accumulation of money is often faster than following the traditional path of education and building a career. The ethnographic work in villages and interviews there showed that money was invested in houses or other high status material goods, representing in the eyes of the villagers success and status. The visibility and tangibility of the material goods brought an immediate recognition of success. Material goods have become objects of desire for almost everyone who was trying to improve their social status in the village.

During the interviews it became clear that for Romanians a new way of constructing one’s status seem to have emerged. Often I was told that everyone wants to be modern and better than one’s neighbor. New models brought from the towns or the countries where Romanians worked, often seemed to have created a status competition inside the boundaries of villages. Rural people have stopped looking up to the urban life or educated people as models of success. Instead people in the villages have begun to emulate members of their own villages who received local status and rank recognition.

In the past people in the countryside used to call the educated people or the ones coming from the city “domn” (sir) and “doamna” (lady). This elite was never institutionalized but survived in the villagers’ imagination for decades. Perhaps in the same way today, rural people are constructing another, another unofficial elite but this time one based on who in the village possesses or exhibits the most wealth and as such have become the new status model to strive for and emulate.
CHAPTER 5: FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS. NEED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

“All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move” – Arabian proverb

Romania is an East European country in transition. Many expected that twenty years after the fall of communism would have ended the transition period. But this is not the case, this East-European country still needs to adapt its way of thinking and living to the new capitalistic models. For Romanians, things in the world seem to change rapidly and sometimes abruptly in very short time, often without making much sense. Modernity is invading both rural and urban environments through all the social channels: media, tourism, work, commuting, education, urban-rural contact. People, ready or not, need to find resources to cope with these changes to survive. At the same time, the free market, the freedom to travel and work wherever someone chooses, give people the freedom to create a new image for themselves and to create new standards for placing others in the social order. In the context of the past, becoming part of the elite was either impossible or extremely hard to do. Today Romanians are not limited anymore to the unofficial or official class they were born into. They have the freedom to change their position. Today, without an aristocracy or a single dominating political elite, self-identification and self-positioning in society’s hierarchical ladder seems to Romanians more free than ever.
This research can contribute to a better understanding of the cultural and social changes modernization has brought to Romania. Though there is some literature on the role the aristocracy has played in Romanian history and culture (Djuvara 1999, Djuvara 2009, Ionescu 1958, Livezeanu 1995, Samoila 2008) this work has looked the elites as givens not as something achieved or ascribed within Romanian society. The present research brings into view how the rural people define which categories they use to make sense of themselves and others at this moment in time. This research shows that the shifts in honorific titles are not simply linguistic events but social and cultural ones and ones that, depending on how people use them, can denote important social changes in a society and culture.

The transition period and subsequent modernization has meant that Romanians have had to learn how to adapt very quickly to their environment and, to do this successfully they have had to learn new social and material skills almost every day. The result is that Romania’s passage from socialism to capitalism can be a laboratory for anthropological research on some of the discipline’s central and emerging themes. Among these is how the elite is self-constructed and self selected over time. Another is how shifts in the structure of elites can play out in a culture’s economic and cultural transitions. This research will add to the literature on Romania because while elite’s positive and negative effects has received much attention, the literature is almost silent in how elites are defined and emerged since 1989 (Barlea 2003, Constantin 2010, Ghinea 2007, Kideckel 2010, Mihailescu 1996, Mihailescu 1997, Mihailescu 2010, Petre 2008, Roman 2007, Samoila 2008, Verdery 2003, Verdery 2008). The study of the elites can also lead to a better understanding of the way people behave, understand and accept each other especially in times of social stress. This research can also help us to understand how the transition period made certain things more possible or less in Romania today. Understanding how Romanians
think about (and categorize) each other will also help the rest of the world better understand their culture, especially those who have a stake in Romania’s future.

The ethnographic research for this thesis started in the summer of 2011 but it also rests on years of participant observation in different rural areas of Romania. Since modernization affects in different ways the urban and rural areas, an ethnographic research about the creation of status in Romania in general would have been difficult to accomplish and undesirable considering the different historical and social past of the urban-rural split in Romania. Since most of my preliminary participant observation was in rural areas it made more sense to concentrate my efforts on the transformation within rural areas and the creation of status in villages during one historical period.

I went into the fieldwork with certain expectations about what people will tell me about themselves and the others. My expectations came from the literature and previous field observation. But, how people see each other and themselves in rural Romania, how they see their lives and their successes is much more complex and intricate than a simple differentiation between two classes can ever capture. The informant’s openness and answers contributed to an interpretation of what “domn” (sir) and “domna” (lady) mean at present in rural Romania. There is still much research to be done on the construction of status in today’s Romania. The country has changed so often and quickly, new models of the social order adopted or accepted every day, that it is very difficult to divide Romanians into the same old social, hierarchical categories anymore. If we better understand how this is occurring in Romania today, this could help us better understanding of a people’s choices and the decisions they have made.
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