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ARTICLE

Local Struggles as a Resource for Multinational Corporations: Romanian Farm Managers Facing Agricultural Commodity Traders

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ABSTRACT

Several multinational corporations engaged in the trading of agricultural commodities have been active in Romania for several decades. To explain this situation, international business studies put the emphasis on transaction costs and a series of variables that guide location choices. This line of reasoning fails to take proper account of local power relations. The notion of “field”, as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu, offers an alternative. In Romania, multinational corporations contribute to the formation of an entrepreneurial field in which the issue at stake is the exercise of local symbolic power. Their ability to collect and store grain in the long term depends at the same time on this structural organisation. To account for this situation, we need to examine successive decollectivization measures and the resulting benefits for multinational corporations. After the fall of the Communist regime, agricultural entrepreneurs first took advantage of the restitution and redistribution of land to cultivate cereals and oilseeds over vast areas. All of them aim to export their products. However, they have difficulty in controlling this choice due to limited storage capacity. As a matter of fact, multinational corporations engaged in agricultural commodity trading took advantage of a second reform package and now control the main silos. Entrepreneurs looking to sell their crops have to deal with these constraints. Their approach depends on the capital they have at their disposal. This led to internal conflicts, the developments of which we have examined between 2010 and 2017.

Keywords: Multinational Corporations; Traders; Intensive Agriculture; Romania; Field Theory

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1. Introduction

A handful of multinational corporations control the global agricultural commodity trade. Each of their subsidiaries has a small number of employees whose activity is limited to collecting cereals (maize, wheat, barley) and oilseeds (sunflower, soya, rape) on site. They buy the grain immediately after the harvest, when prices are at their lowest, and then monitor the Chicago Board of Trade in order to resell it on favourable terms—most often for export.

A great deal of research suggests that firms engaged in agricultural commodity trade focus on making short-term profits and limit their local ties, in order to be able to move their capital quickly to new locations when the economic situation warrants it ^[1-5]. New financial activities may amplify this trend. In order to speculate on futures contracts, some firms are setting up intermediaries in the main production sites for agricultural commodities: the aim is not to establish a foothold in specific territories by adapting to their characteristics, but to build up a global network and control information on available or potential stocks in order to make the most lucrative transactions ^[6,7]. However, a few localized field studies have produced different results: analyzed on a more precise scale, the agricultural commodity trade sometimes appears to be linked to local power relations ^[8,9]. The challenge is to explain these situations of local establishment more systematically.

International business studies provide some answers. The purpose is to clarify how the managers of MNCs decide which countries to invest in: the analyses focus on location choices and local factors influencing foreign direct investment ^[10-12]. The approach quickly leads to reasoning in terms of transaction costs: the central argument is that the managers of multinationals seek to limit uncertainty in local operations; it is important for them to be able to calculate with transparent information on the foreseeable effects of each decision. Setting up and maintaining a local subsidiary obeys these criteria.

The relevance of this line of reasoning is open to question. To launch the discussion, we will develop a six-part approach. In the first part, we will examine in depth the extant literature in international business studies. We will show that the proposals available in this field have several limitations. They do not allow us to consider

multinational corporations as being linked to local *power relations*. They offer a limited analysis of the *political conditions* under which multinationals' subsidiaries are established and maintained and do not take account of local *historical trajectories*. In the second part, we will formulate an alternative theoretical proposal based on the notion of field, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu. According to our analysis, multinational corporations have to deal with fields that are concerned with the exercise of local symbolic power. In the third part, we will outline the method that follows on from this approach and indicate how we used it in an empirical investigation devoted to agriculture in Romania—which accounts for 4% of gross domestic product. In the fourth part, we will present this case study. In Romania, the subsidiaries of seven multinational corporations share the task of collecting and storing cereals and oilseeds. Each of them takes control of large silos built under the communist regime. At the same time, some entrepreneurs have managed to set up huge farms for intensive agriculture. Deprived of storage space commensurate with the volume of their crops, they cannot delay transactions. In the fifth section, we will show that the capital they have at their disposal determines the positions they adopt in response. Some entrepreneurs are forced to sell their grain to commodity traders. Others organize their operations to bypass this step. In the sixth and final section, we will demonstrate that these divergences lead to symbolic struggles. Each entrepreneur argues that his approach is the most relevant and seeks to disqualify the others—which has the effect of maintaining a race for productivity, in line with the designs of multinational corporations.

2. Discussion of the Proposals Put Forward by International Business Studies

International business studies offer tools for analysing the local presence of multinational corporations. The starting point is to identify the key determinants of location choices ^[13]. Research focuses on foreign direct investment that occurs when multinational corporations invest in assets in foreign countries and establish a subsidiary to execute market-seeking, strategic asset-seeking and/or efficiency-seeking activities ^[14].

Authors who adopt this approach seek to provide a systematic analysis of the determining criteria^[15]. Their research is based on the “OLI paradigm”. It consists of explaining the way firms leverage resources—namely ownership advantages (O), location advantages (L), and internalization advantages (I)—to compete in foreign locations^[16,17]. To strengthen the arguments, international business studies draw on transaction cost economics^[10]. According to their postulate, multinational managers seek to limit uncertainty and that host country regulatory factors determine their investment choices^[18,19]. They tend to trade off a country’s poorer institutional variable in return for another where the institutional variable is stronger. For instance, multinational corporations are willing to invest in countries with less efficient entry and exit regulations and stronger contract enforcement^[20]. The location choices therefore look like “jurisdiction shopping”^[21]. This does not prevent forms of “bargaining”: managers can put pressure on local authorities by telling them that they will prefer another site if public policies are not in line with their expectations^[22–25].

This explanatory scheme applies to commodity trading companies^[26,27]. This may require the introduction of new parameters. For instance, it may be relevant to look at exposure to long-term climate change in locations where companies foresee competitive advantage^[28]. Trading firms can also consider pressure from financial activists concerned about the long-term environmental and social consequences of their operations^[29,30].^①

These analyses all focus on the strategic choices made by cross-referencing different types of information. They have three interrelated limitations, which prevent a proper assessment of the local integration of subsidiaries.

The first limitation stems from the fact that the research focuses on a simple addition of isolated “variables”^[32]. To understand local contexts properly, it is preferable to adopt a *relational* approach. Local operators position themselves in relation to each other and act according to their position in a structured whole, without any element being separately explicable. Multinational corporations can

① Institutional business studies claim to provide insights that are neglected by other approaches. According to some of their proponents, research focusing on “global value chains” pays little attention to the location choices of multinational corporations and concentrates instead on the conditions for “upgrading” each local business environment^[31].

have an influence on this whole: in the same location, producers need to find the right approach to these companies, considering what others are doing in the same situation.

The second limitation stems from the reduction of politics to incentives, to institutional guidelines that reduce uncertainty to a greater or lesser extent^[33], to connections with local officials^[34], or to the distribution of power within the multinational corporation as a function of individual ability to make the right calculations^[35]. It seems useful to consider local *political power relations* by adopting a broader definition, linked to the relational approach that we advocate. We can consider as genuinely political all struggles in which what is at stake is the establishment of a symbolic hierarchy—in other words, the capacity to assert the superiority of one response to multinationals over others.

The third limitation is that little attention is paid to history^[36–38]. Research on location choices examines past examples of investment for the sole purpose of identifying constant variables in firms’ orientations^[39]. Studies that adopt this approach do not take local history into account. They neglect the *historical trajectories* that explain the resources of local protagonists and condition their power relations.

To overcome these three limitations, a theoretical reformulation may be useful. The notion of “field” offers a solution to be considered. It provides the means to study power relations on a local scale, from a relational, political, and historical perspective.

3. Theoretical Reformulation: Field Theory as a Means of Analysing Local Power Relations

According to Pierre Bourdieu’s classic definition, a field is a space in which agents who possess different types of capital in varying proportions struggle to fix their relative value. Reasoning in terms of fields therefore implies uncovering a “*field of forces*”, structured by the objective distribution of capital, and a “*field of struggles*”, fuelled by the fight to define the most legitimate portfolio of capital and disqualify the others. Identifying a field requires a *structural analysis*: the approach consists of studying the objective distribution of capital and the positions it

determines, always defined in relation to each other, in a relational mode. At the same time, a *constructivist* reading is necessary: the positions identified give form to struggles for the definition of internal hierarchies ^[40].

The characterisation of a field involves two steps. The first step consists of listing the kinds of capital mobilised by the agents and studying their combinations. The three basic capital types are economic, cultural and social. Economic capital is based on monetary and financial assets, but also on the possession or control of means of production. Cultural capital consists of the mastery of knowledge and know-how: it is embodied when acquired skills guide practices in the manner of automatism, certified when it takes the form of labels (diplomas, titles, etc.), and objectified when it is materialised in distinctive equipment. Social capital is founded on the available address book ^[41]. An additional symbolic capital consolidates the whole. It is a kind of subjective duplication of each kind of objective capital, by which its social value is accepted as legitimate ^[42]. The second step required to define a field consists of accounting for “classification struggles”. Agents who position themselves in the field compete for the establishment of an internal hierarchy. They want their position to be recognised as the legitimate basis for control over the field; the symbolic power they seek to conquer or retain makes it possible to present their endowment of economic, cultural and social capital as constituting a specific capital, particular to the field and determining in the field ^[40].

To assess the scope of this explanatory scheme, it is important to specify what distinguishes it from competing proposals.

Harrison White’s analyses ^[43,44] first take a different direction. They focus on evolving social networks that exert an “influence” on actors’ behaviours. Chains of interaction are thus determining, but they are not themselves located within a restricting general framework. Bourdieu considers that these analyses “look for the basis of producers’ strategies not in the constraints inherent to their structural position but via their observation and deciphering of other producers’ behaviors.” According to him, they fail to “subordinate this ‘interactionist’ description of strategies to a structural analysis of the conditions that delimit the space of possible strategies” ^[45]. Bourdieu explains that the structure of a field is defined by the unequal distribution of

capitals and exerts its effects *independently of any interaction* ^[45].

Bourdieu’s theoretical proposals are also distinct from those of organizational sociology. The difference is blurred by the fact that authors who claim to belong to the latter also use the term “field”. The aim is then to chart out “organizational fields”. This amounts to studying “organizations that directly interact or are indirectly oriented to each other, and that in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” ^[46]. An organizational field takes shape when interactions between organizations intensify and when the increasing volume of information exchanged favors the development of a collective rationality ^[47]. The structure of the field acts as a filter for preferences and explains why the homogenization of organizational characteristics can occur ^[48]. Bourdieu departs from this analysis. He stresses relationships, “not between the concrete entities themselves – e.g., the specific organizations at hand – but rather between the nodes those entities happen to occupy” ^[49]. Although the distribution of forces determines the structure of interactions, this must not be confused with mere contacts between individuals ^[50]. In contrast to analysis that focuses on interpersonal networks, Bourdieu’s field theory focuses on “relations among organizations that may have no concrete ties to one another but that are, nevertheless, participants in the relations of force and contestation structuring the field as a whole” ^[49].

The proposals of network sociology and organizational sociology are combined in the recent work of Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam which aim at charting out “Strategic Action Fields”. By this formulation, the two authors mean “the attempt by social actors to create and maintain stable social worlds by securing the cooperation of others” ^[51]. Everything depends on “social skill”, defined as “how individuals or collective actors possess a highly developed cognitive capacity for reading people and environments, framing lines of action, and mobilizing people in the service of these action ‘frames’” ^[52]. Structural constraints are thus the *result* of interactions. Pierre Bourdieu’s framework is thus somewhat inverted ^[53].

If we follow the logic of the Bourdieusian theory, we can use it to re-examine the organisation of the agricultural commodities trade: in order to develop their activities, multinational corporations have to deal with fields where

the exercise of local symbolic power is at stake. They shape them in part by forcing local producers to position themselves in front of them—by pushing them to value their capital in different ways. At the same time, the continuation of their activities depends on the field: all agents who deliver grain to them seek to demonstrate an ability to produce more and better than other contenders for control of the field; their commitment to an ever more advanced productivist approach ensures a regular supply of cereals and oilseeds. This can be demonstrated on the basis of adjusted methods and data.

4. Methods and Data

To support our statement, we mobilize the results of an empirical investigation carried out between 2010 and 2017 on the relationships established between Romanian entrepreneurs and multinational corporations. We took steps to uncover “structurally determining” positions^[54] by characterising combinations of cultural, social and economic capital—complemented by endowments of symbolic capital. We were inspired by the protocol developed by authors who have themselves mapped fields without seeking to quantify the properties identified—by focusing on the qualitative effects produced by the combination of different social properties rather than on the volume of each^[55]. This approach allows simplified graphical representations and makes it possible to show the social distances between agents^[56] without proposing a multiple correspondence analysis.

We used the General Agricultural Census^[57] to establish general benchmarks. We then compiled the biographies of 57 managers (general managers and deputy managers) of the main agricultural enterprises incorporated with Romanian capital and engaged in the production of cereals and oilseeds. Our analysis is based on a collection compiled in 2002 (*Who's who in Romania*, Pegasus Press, 2002) and on the 9 editions (2008–2016) of a specialised annual publication (*Who's who in business. Cei mai importanti 1000 oameni din business*, Bucharest, Ziarul Financiar).

We studied the activities of 24 agricultural companies established in Romania in depth. To account for the standpoints of agricultural entrepreneurs, we examined the articles published in 12 agricultural magazines (*Lumea*

Satului, *Revista Ferma*, *Revista Fermierului*, *Agrimedia*, *Recolta*, *Profitul Agricol*, *Gazeta de Agricultura Agroazi*, *ABC Agricol*, *Rodul Pământului*, *Banii Fermierului*, *Agro-intelligenta*) dans quatre organes de la presse nationale (*Cotidianul*, *România Libera*, *Adevarul*, *Ziarul Financiar*) and in four local dailies (*Arcasu*, *Monitorul de Neamt*, *Mesagerul Neamt*, *Ziua de Constanta*). In addition, we conducted 16 interviews with the managers of large agricultural enterprises.

To properly investigate the data collected on these bases, a historical perspective is necessary. As a preliminary step, therefore, we need to use secondary sources to examine decollectivization measures and the resulting benefits for multinational trading companies.

5. Taking Advantage of Decollectivization Measures: An Initial Context Favourable to Multinational Trading Companies

After the Second World War, the Romanian communist regime imposed a twofold collectivisation principle. “State agricultural enterprises” were formed with the land of large landowners who owned more than 50 hectares. They had to generate profits to feed into “wage funds” and pay their employees. The consolidation of plots of land smaller than 5 hectares then allowed the formation of “agricultural production cooperatives”. In return for working on the collective land, the “cooperative farmers” were authorized to cultivate “individual plots”, sell their produce on the private market and earn additional income^[58,59]. In the 1990s and 2000s, the authorities introduced two sets of reforms that had overlapping effects. First, they organised a redistribution of land. Some people took advantage of this and established themselves as agricultural entrepreneurs. They took over large farms and developed a strong production capacity. The government then privatised the silos that had previously been controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. A few multinational corporations involved in agricultural commodity trading acquired them and managed to keep them. They collect grain after each harvest and claim to impose their tariff conditions on the large producers.

5.1. Redistribution of Agricultural Land in Favour of Local Entrepreneurs

The dismantling of the agricultural production cooperatives initially made it possible to initiate the dynamics of land accumulation and to consolidate new enterprises step by step. In 1990, the families who had been cultivating individual plots spontaneously took possession of them. In 1991, law n°18 confirmed the change: it officially dissolved 3,800 cooperatives and redistributed to all their former members the title to plots of 0.5 to 1 hectare. At the same time, the heirs of landowners affected by collectivisation measures benefited from a restitution policy, whether or not they had retained an agricultural activity^[60,61].

The agents who ran the agricultural cooperatives managed to accumulate some wealth under the communist regime by cultivating individual plots of land on a larger scale than their subordinates had. The money they had accumulated was used to bribe a few officials who drew up false certificates, and they finally obtained some land in addition to the plot of land they were entitled to. Two additional measures then enabled them to expand their base. First, under the *law on leasing* (No. 16/1994), a farmer can make use of a plot of land by paying the owner a fixed rent in cash or in kind. Many families to whom land has been returned but who do not wish to farm it directly opt for this formula and thus have a guarantee of a stable income^[62]. From 1997 onwards, the liberalisation of the land market facilitated transactions. It allowed the purchase of land from owners who did not engage in agricultural work themselves and who preferred an immediate income. Lease contracts and acquisitions make it possible to set up farms that each cover several thousand hectares.

In contrast to the agricultural production cooperatives, the state-owned agricultural enterprises remained in place after 1990. In order to meet the demands of international creditors, the government finally decided to privatise a large number of them in the early 2000s: an auction procedure (*licitatie*) allowed it to sell each one to a single buyer, without modifying its contours^[63,64]. In 2001, Law 268 introduced another formula: it allowed the administration to grant concessions of 20 to 49 years in return for an annual “fee”. Whether they are owners or concessionaires, the agents who took control of the former state agricultur-

al enterprises did not hesitate to extend their domains by acquiring adjoining land or concluding leasing contracts. These steps enabled them to set up huge farms, sometimes spread over several tens of thousands of hectares.

These successive decollectivisation measures afford access to land in different ways. Insofar as they cultivate cereals and oilseeds over vast areas, all agricultural entrepreneurs aim to export their products. However, they have difficulty in controlling this choice due to limited storage capacity: multinational corporations engaged in agricultural commodity trading took advantage of a second reform package and now control the main silos.

5.2. Privatisation of Storage Space in Favour of Multinational Trading Companies

The collection network for agricultural raw materials inherited from the communist period remained in place in 1990, under the name Romcereal. It became a commercial trust with majority public ownership. In order to comply with the requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission, the Romanian authorities finally organised a two-stage privatisation process. First, in 1995, the company Comcereal was established. The branches formed in 41 counties (*judete*) managed medium-sized silos. All of them found buyers during the year. The National Agency for Agricultural Products (Agentia Nationala a Produselor Agricole—ANPA) then took over the larger silos, located in the major cities and along the Danube. Initially, it remained under state control. The IMF subjected it to scrutiny and soon required its dismantling into 29 local units, all of which were named Cerealcom. The government privatised these new companies between 1997 and 2006^[63].

Seven multinational companies involved in agricultural commodity trading acquired the majority of the silos of Comcereal and Cerealcom. They built new storage facilities in addition to them. Romanian agriculture was of obvious interest to them: the terminals in the port of Constanta on the Black Sea are accessible by river and allow them to charter ships to North Africa, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent.

In 1996, Cargill opened a subsidiary in Romania and assigned 600 employees to it in 17 cities. The firm’s headquarters—established in Minnesota—intended to develop

the collection of agricultural raw materials on site. Between 1997 and 2011, its local branches acquired 38 silos near the Danube and equipped themselves with barges that each transported 3,000 tonnes of grain. The purchase of a terminal in the port of Constanta in 2013 completed this logistical development and provided a storage capacity of over 750,000 tonnes.

The trading company Alfred C. Toepfer has also been investing in Romania since 1997. Although its head office is located in Hamburg, since 1983 it has been dependent on the American firm Archer Daniels Midlands (ADM), which controls 80% of its capital. Its local subsidiary acquired seven silos from Comcereal and Cereacom. It had ten other silos built to increase its storage capacity to 220,000 tonnes. The acquisition of a fleet of barges and the development of a terminal in Constanta, in partnership with the port operator Minmetal, completed the package in 2011.

The Swiss firm Glencore established itself in Romania in 1998 and set up a subsidiary specialising in the collection of maize and wheat (Glencore Protein Romania). It also acquired a river transport company (Rombarge Transport) and a terminal in the port of Constanta. Together with the purchase of Comcereal's silos, this equipment enables it to store and export 3 million tonnes of wheat and 2 million tonnes of maize per year.

In 2002, the American multinational Bunge gained a foothold in Romania. The managers of its local subsidiary bought vegetable oil factories and concentrated on collecting oilseeds (sunflower and rapeseed). They then acquired and built refrigerated silos. Their total storage capacity exceeded 300,000 tonnes.

Already the owner of several agrochemical complexes in the world (Togliattiazot in Russia, Impact Fertilizer in Australia, Nutricion de Plantas in Colombia, Shanxi Huarui in China), the Swiss firm Ameropa opened a subsidiary in Bucharest in 1996. It took control of Chimpex, which was then the largest operator in the port of Constanta for the transport of cereals. Its activity was given a new impetus in 2008 with the purchase of 14 Comcereal silos near Constanta. The acquisition of 4 other storage units in the city allowed it to increase its total capacity to 600,000 tonnes. A fleet of 18 25-tonne lorries is used to transport the cereals.

For a long time, Nidera concentrated on Latin America, but since 2002 it has been investing in Romania. It is specialised in the trade of sunflower and hybrid rapeseed and acquired two Cereacom silos equipped with an adapted aeration system. The firm then raised Dutch capital and organised its activities from Rotterdam. The Chinese conglomerate COFCO took control in February 2014. A few months later, it bought the United Shipping Agency terminal in the port of Constanta and thus acquired the means to store 250,000 tonnes of agricultural raw materials; the facilities are accessible by truck, barge and rail. In 2016, Nidera-COFCO built 6 vertical silos of 3,000 tons each near the river port of Corabia.

For several years, the French group Louis Dreyfus collected agricultural raw materials in Ukraine and Russia without seeking to develop its activities in Romania. It took a new direction in July 2014: its managers mobilised local intermediaries and tasked them with collecting oilseeds in the Danube plain and receiving them in the port of Constanta for transport to their final destination. Jabbar Kanani was their main partner. Originally from Azerbaijan, he came to Romania in 1975 to study medicine and eventually settled there and found a job in a state-owned company producing and distributing vegetable oil (*Centrala Uleiului*). After the fall of the communist regime, he took over the Ulvex factory in the same area, which was affiliated to his former employer and became part of a first privatisation movement. By supplying the major Romanian retailers and enabling them to cope with shortages, the businessman made significant profits and was able to acquire the Comcereal units in the Buzau county in 1998. In 2000, he combined all his activities to form the Agricover group. The sale of Ulvex to Bunge in 2007 allowed Kanani to build new silos and develop a storage capacity of over 700,000 tonnes, entirely dedicated to sunflower and rapeseed. Kanani then focused on the collection of oilseeds. Since the company could not transport its goods internationally and could not find outlets directly, it supplied Romanian processing companies and carried out transactions with multinational traders. The signing of a supply contract with Louis Dreyfus finally enabled him to develop his activities on a more regular basis.

The multinational corporations that developed trading activities in Romania all took advantage of the pri-

vatisation of Comcereal and Cerealcon. The agricultural entrepreneurs who followed the trajectories described above barely stood in their way. In the majority of cases, they did not have the necessary funds at the right time and were not in a position to acquire the units offered for sale. Building new silos is also expensive. The installation of an ordinary tank—with a capacity of up to 5,000 tonnes of grain—costs around 500,000 euros. The bill is even higher when the installation includes a refrigeration and aeration system.

Unable to store all their grain and impose their conditions on the trade, Romanian agricultural entrepreneurs are all faced with the same structural constraint. They try to cope with it or to escape it by mobilising the capital they have at their disposal. The initial endowments and the trajectories initiated through these endowments after the fall of the communist regime were therefore decisive. They gave shape to a field.

6. Organising the Field of Agricultural Entrepreneurs: A Structural Combination of Multinationals with Local Power Relations

The positions of agents in the field depend on the capital they are able to mobilise. They form a structured whole, whose architecture is based on two axes. The first

axis shows a gradation between strong *specialisation* and very *diversified* economic commitments. The agents at one end of the scale are exclusively involved in the production of cereals and oilseeds. Those at the opposite end invest massively in other activities. The intermediate positions depend on the distribution of assets and the place that field crops occupy in the whole. A second axis distinguishes between producers who *confront* the trade after each harvest and those who have the means to *bypass* it. In the former case, agents grow cereals and oilseeds for export and are forced to sell them immediately after harvest to multinational corporations that collect agricultural raw materials in Romania. All of them contest the conditions imposed on them, without having the ability to change them. In the latter case, the agricultural entrepreneurs avoid any transaction with commodity traders. Some have signed a direct supply contract with a foreign firm promoting a “voluntary sustainable standard” or holding a private label. Others have diversified their activities and set up agri-food holding companies: they grow cereals and oilseeds on a large scale to supply production chains that they control entirely (livestock farms, slaughterhouses and meat packaging units; dairy farms and dairy product companies; millstones and bakeries, etc.) (Table 2). By crossing the two axes orthogonally, we can distinguish four sets of “structurally determining” positions (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the entrepreneurial field (2010–2017).

	Diversified Activities		Bypassing Commodity Traders
Confronting Commodity Traders	I. Niculae (InterAgro)		A. Porumboiu (Comcereal SA Vaslui)
	M. Anghel (Cerealcon Dolj)	S. Poienaru (Agrofam)	
	N. Sitaru (Elsit)	V. Nica (SC Agrichim)	
Specialized Activities	C. Tarata (TCE 3 Brazi; Agricost)		P. Petrescu (Agro Exim)

Table 2. Company profiles and business orientations.

Company	Size (in ha)	Owned Land (in ha)	Priority Crop Type	Other Activities
InterAgro	55 000	19,000	maize, wheat, barley, rapeseed	Petrochemicals, insurance, tobacco, winegrowing, hotels and restaurants, car cleaning
Comcereal SA Vaslui	54,000	43,000	rapeseed; sunflower	Oil, flour mills, bread-making, livestock farming, dairy products, food stores
Agrofam	17,800	2,300	maize, wheat, barley	Livestock, dairy products
SC Agrichim	2,200	800	maize, soybeans	Methanisation
Agro Exim	2,300	2,300	organic wheat, maize, forage crops	None
Cerealcom Dolj	24,000	4,000	wheat, barley, sunflower	Winegrowing
Elsit	2,680	2,600	maize, sunflower	Mechanical services for cereal growers
TCE 3 Brazi; Agricost	56,000	80	maize, wheat, sunflower, soybean, rapeseed	None

6.1. Confronting Trade / Diversified Activities

The entrepreneurs who confront the trade and who develop diversified activities occupy similar positions in the field. Those with the clearest characteristics on both axes control vast conglomerates: far from concentrating their investments in cereal and oilseed crops, they engage in very diversified sectors—without seeking any form of integration. Their agricultural production therefore remains compartmentalised. However voluminous it may be, it is only suitable for transactions with multinational corporations. This orientation is the result of a particular combination of capital. It requires cultural capital acquired before 1990 in a state enterprise or in the communist apparatus: familiarity with the workings of the socialist economy allows them to make the most of privatisation measures and to acquire the right enterprises at the right time. Recipients of this endowment have also used their former responsibilities to build up economic capital; they then reinvest the gains made by buying new companies. Their social capital is based on connections in the political parties that exercise power at the national level, but also on ties in local government—useful for obtaining leasing contracts. Finally, their symbolic capital imposes the image of flamboyant businessmen, who take big risks and play winning ‘tricks’.

Ioan Niculae distinguishes himself in this respect. An agent of the political police (*Securitate*) at the beginning of the 1980s, he then became head of exports in a petrochemical company. Using his political connections, he managed to take control of several companies in the same sector after 1990. His empire then extended to the insurance company Asirom, the national tobacco company (Tutunul Romanesc) and the football club Astra Ploiesti (soon moved to Giurgiu and renamed Astra Giurgiu). The entrepreneur also acquired a 5-star hotel with a restaurant on the Black Sea, a network of 50 car washes and 334 hectares of vineyards (Crama Voievodului). The company uses part of its profits to buy and lease agricultural land. Formed on this basis, the InterAgro group managed to cultivate 55,000 ha in 2011 (of which 19,000 ha were owned).

Some entrepreneurs diversify their activities to a lesser extent but are better able to stand up to the trading companies. The economic capital they had acquired through their responsibilities in the socialist economy enabled them to develop a new activity after the change of regime, to make large profits quickly and to invest massively in the production of cereals and oilseeds. Their cultural capital is not based on specialized training related to agriculture, but rather on a practical knowledge of the rules of international trade—acquired through previous professional experience.

The social capital that completes this endowment includes political relations and connections in the administration, as well as a few contacts in brokerage firms or banking groups. The symbolic capital that tops it all highlights an ability to align with ‘international standards’ and to project oneself beyond national borders to develop large-scale business. Mihai Anghel combines all these assets. After training as a mechanical engineer, he held positions of responsibility at the Dacia car company (at the Craiova site in Dolj county). In 1991, he used his savings and contacts to set up Bozo Com, a company specialising in importing car parts and agricultural tools from Poland. In 1993, the purchase of two tractors enabled him to set up a new company (Oltyre) and add services for farmers in Dolj county to the scope of his activities. In 2000 and 2001, the purchase of two former state-owned agricultural companies (Redea and Segarcea) enabled him to build up a 4,000 hectare estate and devote himself directly to growing cereals and oilseeds. Nearly 10,000 leasing contracts quickly consolidated this empire. Under the name Cerealcon Dolj, the company covered 24,000 hectares in the counties of Dolj and Olt. It had more than 60 employees. At the same time, Mihai Anghel bought a 300-hectare vineyard (Domeniul Coroanei Segarcea). But exports of wheat, barley and sunflower seeds remain his priority. Thanks to relationships forged in his former businesses, Cerealcon Dolj signed direct supply contracts and managed to sell some of its harvests in Jordan and Egypt—without depending on the multinational trading corporations.

6.2. Confronting Trade / Specialised Activities

Farmers specialising in the production of cereals and oilseeds who confront the trade occupy positions in the field that differentiate them from the above-mentioned entrepreneurs. Those with the most characteristic attributes on both axes still rely on a combination of distinctive types of capital. Their cultural capital is based on technical training unrelated to agriculture. Their social capital consists of strong support in the administrative apparatus and some support in the main political parties. Initial investments in other sectors of activity have enabled them to build up initial economic capital and then to convert the land of former state-owned agricultural enterprises to farmland, sometimes adding leasing contracts. The symbolic capital

mobilised on this basis emphasises their desire to defend national enterprises, whatever their corporate name; it highlights the figure of the captain of industry, capable of succeeding in agriculture as in any other field and always committed to carrying the torch of ‘national economic interests’. Culita Tarata is a good example of this combination of forms of capital. After training as a chemical engineer, he joined a tannery complex in Neamt county in 1981 and rose through the ranks to the position of managing director. In the course of his rise, he established close relations with several local Communist Party figures. After the change of regime, he maintained strong ties in the decentralised services of the Ministry of Agriculture. This address book encouraged him to leave his post in 1994 to found the company TCE 3 Brazi. The new entrepreneur became wealthy by investing in timber exploitation: using his connections in local government, he obtained logging rights from the public company Romsilva in the mountains of Neamt county (Muntii Neamtului)—without adhering to the rules of contracting. The company’s profits allowed him to lease 10,000 ha and to build up a livestock farm with 2,500 cattle, 10,000 sheep and 20,000 pigs. In 2001, Culita Tarata gave up all these activities to take control of a former state-owned agricultural enterprise, known as Insula Mare a Brailei, and to focus on growing cereals and oilseeds. By obtaining a 20-year concession, he managed to exploit nearly 56,000 ha of fertile land between two branches of the Danube. A few legal problems soon forced him to declare his company bankrupt. A “partnership contract” with the company Agricos allowed him to continue his activities. Founded by a relative who served as his nominee, this company obtained a 49-year concession on the land of Insula Mare a Brailei. It set up an irrigation network covering 37,000 ha. Controlled by a centralised computer system, the installation guarantees high yields. However, it is of no use when discussing the prices set by multinational trading corporations.

Some agents occupy a slightly different position: they were still obliged to sell their crops to the trade, but at the same time developed some complementary activities which enabled them to escape, to a small extent, the grip of multinational corporations. They held positions of responsibility in collective units at the end of the communist regime and were able to derive some material benefits. They

then signed numerous leasing contracts and acquired the land of former state agricultural enterprises. Some of them also diversified their sources of income by engaging in additional activities, always linked to their specialisation: some were involved in tractor maintenance and repair, others in the provision of agricultural services, and still others in the multiplication and distribution of industrial seeds. All of them have cultural capital based on technical knowledge and certified by a degree in agricultural engineering or agricultural mechanics. Their social capital is based on connections in local government—useful for signing leasing contracts—but also support in the political parties in power. Their symbolic capital is based on the achievement of high returns, always attributed to an openness to technological innovations and an ability to make the most of them. Nicolae Sitaru offers a perfect articulation of these types of capital. This son of cooperative farmers obtained a degree in agricultural mechanics in 1984. Employed by a swine complex, he became responsible for fodder production and was able to benefit from informal remuneration. In 1993, he set up a business specialising in the sale of spare parts for agricultural machinery. His profits enabled him to buy a few tractors and to become a service provider for the surrounding cereal farms. The development of this activity gave him the means to found the company Elsit in parallel and to lease 80 ha in the municipality of Ciochina (county of Ialomita). In 2002, the entrepreneur became the owner of a former state agricultural company in Orezu (in the same county) and managed to cultivate a total area of 2,600 ha. He is committed to using different hybrid varieties from one plot to another, in order to take account of the soil properties of each plot.

6.3. Bypassing Trade / Specialised Activities

In contrast to the positions outlined above, some agricultural entrepreneurs specialise in the production of cereals and oilseeds and sell their production directly to foreign companies, without going through the multinational trading corporations. Those with the strongest orientations on both axes claim to be engaged in ‘niche agriculture’ (*agricultura de nisa*) in order to fit into narrowly defined export channels. Their economic capital progressively took shape, based on the profits yielded by a first activity, then by leasing and selective purchase of agricultural land: their

acquisitions aimed to group plots of land suitable for a particular crop; the expansion of their holdings therefore did not involve *en bloc* acquisition of a former state agricultural enterprise. The cultural capital that ensured the success of such operations did not derive from training in agriculture or experience in a state agricultural enterprise or an agricultural producer cooperative; it resulted rather from studies in law or economics and experience of international commerce. The social capital that accompanies it is based on connections in the world of business, big banks, and consultancies. Symbolic capital enhances the effects of this endowment: it emphasizes a flair for innovation, a capacity to reach beyond the national borders and a fine awareness of ‘international demand’. Petrisor Petrescu here serves as an example. At the head of the Agro Exim company, he devotes 2,300 hectares to organic farming and signs contracts for direct supply with foreign firms; at the same time, he runs the Delta Dunarii Organics company, which groups thirty or so producers who altogether farm 12,000 hectares organically.

Less exclusive approaches on each axis make it possible to occupy a fairly close position in the field: some agents count on contractual commitments, but only for part of their production. They also develop a few complementary activities that provide them with a stable income. Their cultural capital is based on a degree in agricultural engineering and experience of large-scale agriculture acquired under the communist regime. It is linked to their extensive social capital, consisting of contacts in the decentralised services of the Ministry of Agriculture, but also ties maintained with the institutions that teach agronomy. The economic capital added to this endowment comes from the acquisition or leasing of contiguous land. In some cases, agents with this capital are able to consolidate it by taking control of a former state-owned agricultural enterprise. They link up with foreign importers seeking direct supplies, but also with firms that entrust them with the multiplication of industrial seeds or with companies specialising in biomass production that install methanisation units on their land. The symbolic capital they develop through their multiple commitments points to a visionary approach, an ability to project themselves in the long term and to develop strong partnerships. Viorel Nica combines all these attributes. After obtaining a degree in agricultural

engineering, in 1989 he joined the state agricultural company of Movila (in the Ialomita county), specialising in the production of cereals and oilseeds. He left this position in 1992 to create the company SC Agrichim and to approach small owners who did not live in the countryside. By signing more than 700 leasing contracts, the new entrepreneur managed to cultivate almost 1,400 hectares. In 2001, he used part of his earnings to buy out the former collective farm that had employed him. This acquisition allowed him to expand his farm by 2,200 ha and to make new profits. Between 2001 and 2007, SC Agrichim devoted 1,500 ha to the cultivation of genetically modified soybean varieties. In 2008, the president of SC Agrichim signed a contract with the German seed company DSV to dedicate 1,600 ha to the multiplication and dissemination of hybrid rapeseed varieties adapted to the Romanian climate and soil conditions. In order to double his production capacity on the rest of his land, he also invested 1.5 million euros in an irrigation system. The pumps and the hydraulic network that were set up generated further electricity costs. In order to achieve complete energy independence and increase his earnings, Viorel Nica had a large photovoltaic plant built in 2014. At the same time, he mobilised several graduates from the school where he was trained, who were themselves employed by a consultancy firm (CRM AgriCommodities). Through them, he managed to sign a contract with the Romanian subsidiary of Danube Soya. Created by Austrian and German supermarkets, this private label allows products made from conventional soybeans—obtained “without genetic engineering”—to be marketed under a distinctive label. Like all the producers involved, Viorel Nica agrees to comply with restrictive specifications and to have his crops certified by accredited inspection bodies. In exchange, Danube Soya guarantees him a “premium” price and allows him to bypass the multinational trading corporations.

6.4. Bypassing the Trade / Diversified Activities

The positions that complete the field are closely linked to the establishment of integrated agri-food chains. The entrepreneurs who occupy these positions do not limit themselves to the production of cereals and oilseeds; they directly add value to all or part of their harvest through processing activities, without relying on trade. Those who

occupy the most characteristic position have acquired substantial economic capital by carrying out activities unrelated to agriculture before concentrating their investments on field crops and the agri-food industry. This organisation allows them to process their crops in their own factories, without ever having to sell them to commodity traders. Their cultural capital is not based on technical knowledge or experience in agriculture; it is not certified by any diploma related to their new activities but comes entirely from their business practice. The social capital that complements this is rooted in long-standing relationships with senior officials, but also in familiarity with the business community. The agents who display these properties mobilise symbolic capital that allows them to present each of their achievements as the manifestation of a happy balance between ambition and temperance: they flatter themselves with an ability to aim high and invest large sums, but refuse to pose as intrepid gamblers and prefer to emphasise the balanced management of their assets. Adrian Porumboiu is one such entrepreneur. A former professional referee, he went into business in 1999 by acquiring Football Club Vaslui. His first successes allowed him to buy 34 state-owned agricultural companies and to sign numerous leasing contracts. The entrepreneur then developed his activities on 54,000 ha (of which 43,000 are owned). He also added two oil factories to his portfolio, which allowed him to process his rapeseed and sunflower production directly, as well as three flour mills and nine bread-making complexes, two cattle farms and a dairy factory. By opening a chain of more than 300 shops, he finally has the means to sell his products directly throughout the country.

The agents who have a more central position on the two axes have cultural capital acquired under the communist regime. They trained as agronomists and then held positions of responsibility in an agricultural production cooperative or a state-owned agricultural enterprise. Their social capital is based on personal connections developed during the same period. After the change of regime, this gave them privileged access to the decentralized services of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as familiarity with the business community of agricultural production (input suppliers; agri-food companies). Solid economic capital rounds out these properties. This does not come from involvement in agricultural companies and associations,

but from more directly remunerative activities—linked to their first specialization (input distribution; sale of agricultural machinery; provision of services for farmers, etc.). The profits from these activities are then used to acquire large areas of farmland (bought outright or placed under a concession system) and, at the same time, to buy a few silos. Intensive cereal and oilseed growing generates new profits, some of which are used to develop complementary activities (particularly livestock farming) and acquire processing units. The symbolic capital that accompanies these multiple investments allows them to present themselves as the bearers of a project that is both complex and balanced, accessible only to those who can embrace several activities in a single movement. Stefan Poienaru presents himself in this light. He holds a doctorate in agronomy, and for several years ran the Stelnica state agricultural enterprise in Ialomita county. In 1991, he moved to Fetesti (in the same county) and set up Agrofam, a company specialising in providing services to local farmers. In 2000, the young entrepreneur obtained a 49-year concession covering more than 5,400 hectares in the municipality of Gradistea, in the south of Calarasi county on the banks of the Danube. In 2011, he successfully applied for a new concession and was granted the right to farm a further 840 ha in the municipality of Stelnica. By signing 5-year leases with neighbouring landowners, he was able to build up an estate of 17,800 hectares. Agrofam also acquired a livestock farm, as well as a slaughterhouse and a dairy products factory.

The positions revealed form a structured whole. Each has significant effects insofar as it can be related to the others. The agricultural entrepreneurs are all faced with the same structural constraint: none of them has a storage capacity proportionate to the volume of their crops, since the multinational corporations control the main silos. Each one mobilises the capital at its disposal in response. Classification struggles inevitably result: whether they confront the trade or bypass it, whether they concentrate on the production of cereals and oilseeds or develop a more diversified activity, agents do their best to ensure that the superiority of their approach is recognised. This orientation itself conditions the local activity of commodity traders. In order to stand out in the field, producers who sell their grain immediately after harvest have no choice but to emphasise an ever-greater commitment to productivism; they supply the

companies that control storage space and exports all the more effectively.

7. Maintaining Classification Struggles: Stability through the Quest for Local Symbolic Power

The classification struggles that can be observed in the field of Romanian agricultural entrepreneurs are inseparable from the pressure exerted by commodity traders: they relate to the hierarchisation of the solutions adopted in the face of the multinational corporations that collect and resell grain. Several oppositional games determine the contours of this situation. Tensions are emerging among the large, specialised farmers as well as among entrepreneurs engaged in diversified activities.

7.1. Distinguishing between Specialised Activities

Entrepreneurs specialising in the cultivation of cereals and oilseeds are clearly divided: those who can afford to bypass commodity traders represent 30% of the total; those who have to confront multinationals account for 70% of all ^[57]. The former denigrate the latter. They receive a lot of criticism in return. To promote their own approach, all agents involved in this controversy use the same methods: they organise field exhibitions to which they invite renowned agronomists, politicians and journalists. They expect the press to relay their message, with the symbolic backing of all the personalities present.

Specialised agricultural entrepreneurs who confront the trade use exhibitions to showcase their openness to innovation combined with their pragmatism: they claim to test new varieties, new treatments or new agronomic approaches in order to calculate their yield before investing in them. According to their discourse, a true agricultural entrepreneur must develop a taste for experimentation, regularly call their practices into question and display a strong capacity for adaptation—in contrast to the timidity and passivity of farmers who are content to occupy a “niche” or follow specifications imposed by a supply contract. Culita Tarata uses this assertive process. The ‘test plots’ (*loturi de testare*) used successively by TCE 3 Brazi and Agricost are used to compare multiple combinations

of inputs and agronomic techniques, and then to select the most effective. In order to glorify their approach—and to discredit those who do not follow it—the company’s managers make targeted communication efforts. From 2001 onwards, they organised an annual event called “Field Day on the Big Island of Braila” (*Ziua Câmpului în IMB*). In June 2011, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of their installation, they expanded its scope and scheduled four ‘Open Days’. Guests included a Secretary of State from the Ministry of Agriculture, the President of the Presidential Commission for Agriculture, members of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies’ Agriculture Commissions, and 150 mayors. The organisers offered a guided tour of their experimental plots. They presented their enterprise as “a real laboratory of Romanian agriculture, of which the whole nation can be proud” and deplored the fact that not all farms were following their example (*Revista fermierului*, 26 July 2011). Culita Tarâta then repeated the event on an annual basis.

On the same principle, Nicolae Sitaru has been organising “maize days” (*Zilei porumbului*) every year since 2010. He welcomes researchers, elected representatives, and journalists to his property in Orezu (county of Ialomița) to present an “experimental field” of 55 ha. His argument is that the hybrid seeds marketed by multinational agrochemical companies are not all suited to local conditions. Comparative trials carried out on “microplots” show broad variations. A “maize growers’ championship” extends the annual event. Competitors are divided into categories according to the natural conditions they face and the agronomic techniques they use (irrigation; ploughing or direct seeding). At the press conferences following each award ceremony, Nicolae Sitaru explains that a “successful farmer” must use hybrid seeds methodically and selectively, without ever relying on a definitive formula: he stresses the need to test new proposals every year. Producers bound by supply contracts lack responsiveness, he says. They seek comfort and hinder the development of the national economy. The message quickly turns into advocacy: ‘In our country, anyone who produces 4 to 5 tonnes of maize per hectare is happy with himself. I want to fight this mentality. That’s not the way to move forward. We need to achieve much higher productivity to be competitive. I think that a productivity of 8 tonnes per hectare

should become the norm for Romanian producers’ (*Ferma*, 11 October 2011).

Targeted by this discourse, the specialised agricultural entrepreneurs who bypass commodity traders point to the limitations of their critics. They accuse them of being blinded by the lure of short-term gain, reproach them for their inability to project themselves beyond the next harvest, and deplore their inability to develop complex economic strategies—the only effective way to deal with the constraints imposed by trading corporations. Each retort is accompanied by comments which underline the solidity of their own economic projects and the extent of their vision. Viorel Nica engages in symbolic work of this kind. Every summer since 2007, he has been organising a “Field Day” (*Ziua Câmpului*) on his farm. A “demonstration platform” highlights his agreement with the seed company DSV and presents the varieties best suited to local constraints. The entrepreneur also spotlights his partnership with Danube Soya: under this label, he exhibits 24 varieties of conventional soya and invites visitors to compare 80 different combinations: attendees can appreciate the effects of several phytosanitary treatments and observe the variations introduced by the density of sowing. Journalists who cover the event praise the virtues of the contractual approach. According to them, a relationship of trust and a long-term perspective allow for feedback: farmers who engage in this approach are not content to test standardised seeds and products; the information they collect and transmit is used for targeted improvements (*Revista Ferma*, 25 June 2014; *Lumea satului*, 17 June 2016; *Business Agricol*, 16 June 2017).

Field exhibitions are a way of maintaining classification struggles. However, their organisers are united on a second front: beyond their differences, all the specialised agents are opposed to those who develop diversified activities. The agents they all criticise have a common fault: they do not programme events on their properties. However, they do not form a homogeneous group. Some are involved in the production of cereals and oilseeds at the same time as they are engaged in other, non-agricultural businesses. They have to sell their crops to commodity traders. Others bypass this obligation by setting up integrated agri-food chains. The latter present the former as businessmen who have nothing in common with authentic farmers and who

exploit the land for immediate profitability, without contributing to the in-depth structuring of national agriculture. They emphasise their own involvement in long-term projects and their local roots.

“Agriculture is a special business. You can’t say, ‘I’m going to be successful in agriculture because I was successful in oil’. If you want to succeed, you need special knowledge. Those who try to do everything at the same time... they can’t succeed in agriculture. They can maintain their business for a few years. But it can’t last, because they don’t make the right choices at the right time. They just manage things, without trying to adapt, because they don’t understand the possibilities, all the combinations that you can have” (interview with the managing director of a specialist agricultural company without contractual commitments, 4 June 2014).

Agents who are engaged in diversified activities and have to contend with multinational trading corporations reply by portraying their accusers as narrow-minded, trapped in habits acquired under the communist regime and incapable of thinking like “real entrepreneurs”.

“There are guys... they are not capable of really thinking within a market logic... Market logic means taking risks, trying things. It means being inspired by what is done elsewhere. You say to yourself: ‘Why not, I’ll try it and we’ll see what happens’. To have this mindset, it is necessary to have experience in other businesses. It is necessary to have taken risks. It is necessary to have understood what it means to take risks. That’s it. The market is about risk. If you don’t understand that, you’re not really working on the development of agriculture. You can say: ‘I’m a specialist, here are my diplomas, blah, blah, blah’, but you don’t get real results. You’re not really an entrepreneur” (interview with the managing director of a conglomerate forced to deliver its rapeseed production to commodity

traders, 7 June 2014).

To express their differences, entrepreneurs engaged in diversified activities also use symbolic marking procedures: they organise prize-giving ceremonies. The ceremonies scheduled in each case reflect modulated positions.

7.2. Distinguishing between Diversified Activities

Agents who develop diversified activities and bypass commodity traders earn a number of distinctions at the main agricultural fairs in Romania. The Agralim exhibition takes place every year in Iasi. One evening is devoted to the “Gala of Agricultural Excellence”. A panel made up of journalists and representatives of foreign labels awards the “Farmer of the Year” prize. It also awards runners-up prizes in the categories “crop diversity”, “performance in several varieties”, “experimentation with new varieties” and “development of local agriculture”. Competitors can win the same honours at the Indagra exhibition, organised since 2006 by the Bucharest Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and at the Agra Expo exhibition scheduled every autumn in Cluj-Napoca since 2015. In all cases, the recipients give a speech at the podium before talking to journalists. They talk up the merits of integrated projects and present them as models of economic strategy, effective in the long term to escape the grip of multinational corporations—as opposed to approaches that impose the compartmentalisation of different businesses, with no real concern for coherence. The articles that report on them are adorned with photographs that show them in the middle of their fields, wearing their work clothes.

Agricultural entrepreneurs engaged in diversified activities but who are forced to sell their crops to commodity traders can count on another reward circuit. They gather at ceremonies organised in the most prestigious hotels in Bucharest and reproduce the principles of distinction used more generally in the business world. The “AgroFin Gala” has been held every year since 2013 and ends with the presentation of the “Award for Excellence in Agricultural Business” with great fanfare. Since 2014, the “Top Agribusiness Gala” also distributes about ten annual trophies. The journalists invited to the event add portraits of the winners to their articles. The winning farm manag-

ers pose in dark suits. They give speeches that emphasise their stance: in order to keep commodity traders in check, “Romanian agriculture” must, in their opinion, take advantage of economic know-how acquired in other sectors; only businessmen with previous successes to their credit can ensure its development.

These positions form a highly structured whole. They maintain intertwined struggles that contribute to the consolidation of the field. In order to stay in the game, agents must all enhance their capital and demonstrate an ability to produce more efficiently than the others. Those who deliver their harvest to commodity traders have no choice but to commit themselves further to the path of productivism: when they make large investments to acquire new agricultural machinery, experiment with new inputs and new agronomic techniques or improve the irrigation of their farms, they aim at both material gains and symbolic rewards—which are inseparable. In short, the structure of the field forces them to act in a way that is favourable to multinational corporations.

8. Conclusions

To analyse the establishment and maintenance of local subsidiaries of multinational corporations devoted to the trading of agricultural commodities, theoretical consolidation is necessary. Proposals from international business studies have limitations due to their links with transaction cost theory. They lead us to consider the investment strategies of headquarters and reduce local situations to a series of variables that guide location choices. This line of reasoning makes it impossible to grasp the dynamics of local relationships, their political dimension, and their historical roots. An analysis in terms of fields offers an alternative and overcomes these limitations. Our case study offers an outline of what this approach can achieve. In Romania the modalities of decollectivization make it possible to observe very clearly organisational principles that elsewhere might be at work in a less visible form. Multinational corporations are taking advantage of local structuring factors, by taking control of the main silos. In this way, they create constraints that agricultural entrepreneurs must adapt to: each agent adopts a specific approach to trading companies, differentiating it from those adopted by its competitors. Large agricultural entrepreneurs are coming to the

fore by following clearly dissociated trajectories and by mobilizing differentiated types of capital – which are all part of the history of the communist regime and the changes that have taken place since its collapse. The resulting political power struggles have a material basis, but their dynamics are also symbolic: the primary objective is not to produce more in order to increase one’s profits in isolation, but to assert the superiority of one’s approach over others and to fix the hierarchy of the field to one’s advantage. The steps all farm managers take to enhance the value of their production are part of a political organization and are inseparable from struggles in which what is at stake is the exercise of symbolic power. This organization is partly conditioned by the multinationals, but it also ensures the reproduction and intensification of the productivist logic that serves their purposes. The local roots of multinationals cannot therefore be reduced to choices of location and a series of variables.

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