HEROS AND VILLAINS OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, HETEROTOPIC AND ISOTOPIC RELATIONSHIPS

Csaba Farkas; Csilla Lorincz

PhD Student; PhD Student – Babeș-Bolyai University

Abstract: After the fall of communism in Romania, the law changed to help to usher the private sector towards the global economy and facilitate economic creativity. The first private enterprises that appeared were in the hospitality industry: namely bars, pubs, terraces, restaurants, fast food restaurants, recently hotels, hostels, guest houses and the romanticized rural tourism. This essay draws attention to the changes that occurred especially in the food and beverage related sectors of the hospitality industry. The authority shift facilitated by the changes in law created HEROES and VILLAINS out of individuals who previously had opposite roles. The essay sets up ideas for a larger research into heterotopic and isotopic relationships with the help of Michel Foucault's works and theoretical guidance.

Keywords: Foucault, heterotopic, isotopic, heroes, villains

Premise:

Before I started studying sociology I worked as a cook and then as a chef for couple of years. The experience that I had was a local experience, it was experience from a quite large town but also it was a quintessential Romanian experience at the beginning of the millennium. At the time I was twenty-three years old and I thought what a wonderful choice I made, that I could go in training to be a chef. It never crossed my mind that there would be reasons outside of my control that would chuck me out from the comfort zone of my imagined life.

The first experience that I had was working in a small kitchen, for a midsized restaurant in my hometown. The owner inherited a family house in the town, with a flower garden in the front yard and a back yard with a dilapidated orchard. He transformed all of it into the restaurant. In the house was the kitchen, and couple of tables, in the back yard was built the storage shed, and the front yard was transformed into a terrace.

While the restaurant was operating, the owner used to spend all his time over there supervising and controlling everything. He had his own table where he sat with his friends; he had his own plate, his own glasses and his private eating utensils and his favorite foods. He used to have great dinner parties with his friends, but he also used to have quarrel sessions with employees, at his private table while the restaurant was full with guests. These two events seemed to fallow each other. The owner, while entertaining his friends, used to boost his successes in fighting the state and local administrative authorities. His heroism consisted in having success over the administrative authority which was trying to block him from conducting his legitimate, tradition oriented and

honest business. But when he quarreled with employees he many times called them thieves and bandits who were set up to strip him of everything he worked for, everything he built and everything he agonized for and he had unslept nights for.

Interestingly there were no planed hierarchies in his business. He was the boss of everybody and owner of everything. Every employee, regardless of rank or position was under him, even though he befriended some of the waiters, or he had closer relationships with some of the barmaids. One of the cooking aids he employed was his aunt. The relationship with him was rocky at best. We never knew what to expect. There always were disputes, or giving favors to someone. And from time to time he threw out somebody from the job for different reasons, which always changed and which meant that somebody else was hired. Since there was no hierarchy and we could not advance, thus nobody wanted the emptied position. It was like every other position in the business.

Sometimes he tried to lure well known chefs from other businesses to his own. He seldom succeeded to even have interviews with them. Those guys wanted to hold commanding positions, they wanted salaries as they had – at least - and they wanted to know two things: first of all, what is their schedule, and they wanted to know their job description. As employees we overheard some of these discussions, which took place at the aforementioned private table, and they always ended with departure and respectful but apologetic regrets.

It is noteworthy to mention that the restaurant's menu. At the beginning it was a small one with around 20 items on it. But those who used to come regularly to eat there they rarely ordered from it. They preferred to order foods invented from the ingredients listed under the menu items, they combined them into new items. The owner at first condoned this but then embraced it and fully encouraged it. Thus some of the new products made it into the menu. Thus after a time the restaurant which started as traditional restaurant, began to sell 20 types of pizza, it started to have a large array of salads like at a salad bar, and it started to advertise with a quite long list of kitchen sweets which looked like a menu at a pastry shop, and the restaurant even started doing take outs.

These changes came with a sudden cumber and aggravation of working conditions whiles the kitchen and the bar wasn't equipped for these changes. Information came from the owner in form of an order: that this is our new offer. Also he expected all his employees to just go along with the changes in the service no questions asked, and also without talks about the new job duties, or about the new schedules, or about working the extra time. Off course this was breathing ground for conflict, discrimination and social critique at every turn, at any time, at every level.

At that time I thought that all my problems originated with a boss-owner-manager individual who didn't know a thing of managing business and he also had some psychopathic tendencies. My second experience would almost confirm it and I thought I knew it best.

My second experience was working oversees at a prestigious hotel, also privately managed, but part of a hotel chain and also part of an international company. This hotel was placed on the outskirts of neighborhoods, at the margins of a business district. As a building was a nice architectural peace, it accommodated all the activities and the movements involved. It was built in a way that it was hard to get in and also hard to get out. It was built in a way that facilitated the visitors entrance mostly and the employees movement inside it. And also there were security checks for employees but at occasions even for the visitors.

Admittance into the hotel as an employee was procedural, with interviews, trial periods and courses on procedures and on things to do on different occasions and also to know expectations. For employees also this meant that they had to wear uniforms, name tags, they had to participate on daily instructions, and if it was needed than carry protection kit for different jobs. There was no exception from these rules.

Admittance for guests was a hassle as well. Guests had to log on computers to make reservations and to check confirmations by phone. Or they had to phone in for reservations. Almost with no exception the hotel never admitted guests without reservations. Also for the banqueting halls guests had to have invitations, they had to confirm their intention to be present, they were sometimes checked by security at the entrance to the premises and they had their prearranged places at the tables where they were sited and these places were signaled with name cards placed there. Sometimes there were exception from these rules, and guest could sit around, but these were rare occasions.

The hierarchy at the hotel was clearly explained, and it was quite tall. It offered opportunities to climb it and to feel accomplished, to promote achievement. There were more experienced colleges, who were trusted by the higher ups and newbie's had to listen to them, they were immediate supervisors. They also had to feel in periodically reports about coworkers in order to help their evaluation. Writing these reports was considered a step before promotion, a preparation for more important role at the job. These reports were gathered by department heads and concentrated, and together with the evaluations they sent them to the general manager's office for review.

At this place I saw the first time things that I heard many times but I never saw until than: punch clock, organizational chart and job descriptions. The punch clock was an electronic time keeper operated by a computer, and every time somebody started working, it had to check in by placing next to the clock a magnetic card, and also when leaving the work place it was required to check out with the same method. This helped to calculate time spent at the job, and also to calculate hourly salary. The job descriptions were in accordance of the law, the regulations and the internal prescriptions. Everyone submitted to these. With the job description every employee was assign to a work station. That was also new to me. I had to work mainly one kind of work all day long. This wasn't a place like I was used to, where I had to do from toilet cleaning, preparing – cooking and even serving the food too. At this job the opportunity was to perfect oneself in each and every task they had to do in order to run the kitchen, the restaurant, the hotel.

When I started to work, there was a moment right in the first day, when the head chef came and said that at this kitchen there are things done in a particular way, and he expects me to work as it is needed there and to not be creative unless he asks me to be. I asked him, what exactly does he mean by this? He said that I should forget how I worked on my previous workplace and I should concentrate to learn how things are done at this place.

Actually it wasn't hard to accommodate to this new work environment. Every activity had its own place, and more often its own room. Also the experience working at every station and the stories that came out as a result were seemingly choreographed. Almost every coworker had the same story. This meant that some of the employees in the kitchen were interchangeable between

them. They had the same movement, the same gestures, they read the instructions in the same way, they were thinking in the same way. Even as timing, everything was planned at the minute detail and they could perform the task similarly.

But also guests had similar experiences. They experienced order, discipline, timeliness, cleanliness, promptness. They were also required to conform to control checks, recommendations and guidance. They could count on the fact that things worked like a Swiss watch. In a way their movements, gestures, expressions and their experiences were choreographed too. Thus almost all of them were pleased, and their stories of gratitude were like written in carbon copy.

One of the most striking experiences was the one where I participated in plating food for 2500 person banquet function. This was basically a military operation, where everybody had its place, and function, so much so that at the moment of doing this job people were indispensable and irreplaceable. This lasted almost two hours and required all the food-and-beverage stuff to participate in it: the cooks, the assistants, the dishwashers, the waiters, the servers, the attendance, bosses of different departments. Everything was planned, detailed; they used walky-talkies and permanently checked the status of the operation.

In preparation, there was a 30 meters long table and on both sides were people. On one side there was the kitchen stuff, and on the other side there were people from all the other departments. And on occasions even people from accounting or management got their hands on to do this thing. So the kitchen staff placed items on the plates. Everybody had just one thing to do. Placing items on the plate was mapped out before hand, and kitchen stuff had been shown where to place items on the plate in accordance to a preset diagram. Those who were on the other side of the table also had just one thing to do. Moving the plates one at the time and moving them one person/ station/ food item at the time. This was like a huge conveyor belt, a huge human centipede. At the end of this long table there were individuals who checked places for accurate placement of food items, there were ones who place sauces if there were needed, others cleaned the plates, others cleaned the rims of the plates, and yet others cleaned the underside of the plates. These plates with food on them were covered, numbered, and placed in hot boxes to keep them hot until serving.

Also when it was about serving it, there was a team work, a team effort. There were individuals who took out these hot plates from hot boxes, and placed them on large trays. Every tray held as many plates as persons set at particular tables. Servers had a diagram of the seating arrangements and they served particular two or three tables. Their movements were shown on the diagram, and this path's never interfered with other server's path. There were two man teams. One held the trays with the plates; the other took them and placed them on the table. In this manner 2500 people were served in matter of minutes. Everything worked as a machine.

For things to go smoothly there were cameras placed at key points of the premises. The images were fed to the security booth, and also department heads and the general manager had access to some of the images. Everybody had their place and things to do, so there were no problems.

One of the peculiar things that I found annoying at first was the requirement to use a hand washing station, where employees individually had to go at least every hour, but more often the better. This hand washing station was peculiar because everybody had a personal cod to punch in on

a key board, with the cod of the hand washing station in order to the water to be dispensed for hand washing. I found out that these stations were monitored and individual punches were fallowed on charts. If some employee had not washed his hand it was detectable quite rapidly by the computer program and sent a warning message to the head chef. But also regular checks were held and individuals never new, that luminescence material were placed in the soap or in the sanitizer. Those who made the control had to illuminate black light on the hands of the individuals in order to know they had washed hands or not. After a while everybody get so used to this method to washing hands that became automatism. People went to wash hands even in their time off work, at parties or whatever activities they were doing.

If employees broke the rules, or they didn't fallowed guidelines or recommendations, they were penalized. These penalties were annoyances at best, but if someone amassed couple of them then it became serious and penalties would feel heavy punishments. The other interesting thing it was that employee's drunk coffees and energy drinks at work. I was amazed at the quantities consumed. Every morning almost everybody had coffee and at the change of shifts, those who came for the afternoon, they drunk energy drinks to keep them going.

Interpretation:

These experiences took me to think hard about the conflictual situations in the hospitality industry, particularly to the experiences I had in Romania. The first experience was a heterotopic (Foucault, 2006) experience. There was a founding precedent, transformation, personal authority, looking at the past and renewing the founding precedent periodically. We could saw the non-continuous power, the centralization and redistribution, distinguishing signs, the moving around, the supplement of threats, the heterotopic relationships, the lack of hierarchy, the perpetual differentiation, the lack of connection and articulation with other businesses, the capacity to incorporate everything, the lack of division between normal and abnormal and the lack of reestablishing rules, the all encompassing incorporation and acceptance of everything. Also there were expectations, there was ceremony of branding, and we could observe the information flow from top to bottom, and the lack of personal responsibility. Also there was a belief that without a permanent presence of the owner-boss, the business wouldn't work. And I have to draw attention to the fact that the authority was quite ambiguous. At one hand the authority of the owner was patrimonial and ambitiously traditional, but on the other hand his authority was charismatic. He boosted his heroism fighting the communist state at local and national levels, which wanted to put him in a position of inability to function, and also he fought the villains in-house, the employees who were thieves, robbers, uneducated and ungrateful to him, who offered them a job.

This initial experience in itself was typical at that time because those who started their own businesses promoted the idea that institutionalized businesses which were rule abiding, hierarchical, Benthamian, organized, tactically dispersed and in connection with the state authorities – those were communist type of businesses, state operated businesses, socialist business and their business model was a new model of business, a private business enterprise, where they were required to be creative economically, but also organizationally. That's why they had to force their way into the economy, they had to fight state authority at local and national level, and they had to create

opportunity and space for their new business ventures and they guarded it also from every petty thief and hustler who could endanger it.

To have a clear understanding of the distortion in their discourse there's the second experience presented, which is not in opposition to the first one, but it contrasts it and raises it's elements to clearly show that private business ventures can be rule abiding, hierarchical, Benthamian, organized, tactically dispersed and in connection with state authorities at local and national levels.

The second experience was isotopic (Foucault, 2006) experience. The architecture, the claustration, the power relations, the hierarchy, the admittance procedure, interviews, the existence of confederates, the classifications, tactical disposition and tactical distributions, differentiating diagnoses, the rule of law – rules-and-regulations, the institutional control, confrontation scenes, the "mise-an-scene", the non reciprocity of power relationships, the observed Benthamian elements, the information flow from bottom-to-top, the no-exemption rules, the use of orthopedic apparatuses, the calculated punishments and the use of drugs – showed the existence of a business model which was eradicated in the private sphere of business ventures in Romania, at that time. This type of business venture was considered communist, socialist, harmful, non-productive, non-beneficial and even damaging. The heterotopical type of business venture was considered new, innovative, productive, beneficial to the economy and profitable.

Interestingly these isotopic experiences were experiences about normal operations in the hospitality industry. Conflicts that appeared were considered normal and integral part of these operations. What greatly interest me are the non-normal operations. It seems that non-normal operations were heterotopical in nature. But interestingly non-normal operations happen also when these institutionalized, isotopic businesses had to deal with employees and guest who are somehow not conforming to the mold set to be normal.

It has to be taken into consideration that at the end of the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's there were big political and economical changes in the world. All of the satellite states of the former Soviet Union changed their political system and also started transitioning from centralized economies to liberal-capitalist economies. But also during these times the existing liberal-capitalist economies changed and they brought social changes as well. It was a sudden transition from modernity to post-modernity (Thomas & Walsh, 1998) of the western world. These changes happened fast, and they were all encompassing in the Romanian society. They produced anomy in the society at every level (Merton, 1938). Investors thought that economic innovation and changes in the organizational system was the new way to do business. Thus new types of work relationships were born. These relationships were new to those who experienced it after soviet type centralized and planned economies in state-monopoly-capitalisms (Kautsky, 1983). Investors were the owners of business, but they were also bosses, administrators, economists, contractors, suppliers, HR managers and PR managers. They had a combination of traditional and charismatic authority (Weber, 2015). Foucault (1967) called it heterotopical relationship.

Those who are caught in heterotopical relationships are occupying one of the three possible positions. Individuals *on the apex of the relationship network* are in central position. Compared to them *every other individual's position is in subordinate position* which is perpetually in change and

renegotiation. Those who occupy the top position see themselves as heroes. They are in perpetual contest, they strife for keeping their position, they struggle and battle national, state and local authorities. Also they have engagements with *individuals who are seen as menace, risk, competition and rivalry* for their top position. These individuals, who are perceived as menace and risk, are put in a position where they can't keep their social status, where their social recognition is denied and as a consequence their presence is not tolerated and they are discriminated against. Their loss of status means that their existence is criminalized. Thus name calling designates them and pins them to a role and function as villains. They perceive these heterotopical relationships as damaging and destructive. These individuals perceive the investor-boss-managers as psychopaths. They lack the means to articulate the constant renegotiations of the relationship and to understand their constantly renewed and aggravated working conditions. They don't perceive structural and social changes; they pinpoint all of their misfortune on the criticized investor with new and revolutionary ideas, which seem to lack clarity, vision, uniformity, conformity, order, discipline and structure. This is how the bosses are becoming newbie's to management and uneducated in the imaginary of the vilified individuals.

But as presented in the second, isotopic experience – private economic enterprises can function and can be structured and organized in tactical dispersions; Benthamian elements can be deployed and hierarchically organized management can function with the help of confederates; rules can be enforced, and uniformity and conformity can serve the order and discipline of the disciplinary apparatus to create profit and entitle economic growth. Unfortunately the isotopic types of relationships were associated with state-monopoly-capitalism and not with healthy business practices. As a consequence economic revival meant that heterotopic relationships, which were like islands in a sea of isotopic relationships – would prosper. (Foucault said that isotopic relationships were like island in a sea of heterotopic relationships, but he was talking about pre-modern times)

Those individuals who were vilified in the new economic context were those who criticized the heterotopic experience of the newly formed private economic enterprises. Thus the owner-bosses-managers-investors-benefactors could justify their efforts to reform not just the economy but also the new political system. Those who were vilified were seen as a reminiscent of the communist era, they were seen as successfully converted to the socialist ideas, and they were the typical "new man", the ideal of the communist propaganda. They became the new enemy of the system even though their social critique was oriented towards keeping the positive results and against the total disintegration of the economic system. But the new entrepreneurial classes' efforts to start businesses cleanly on absolutely new grounds were in such a contrast with this social critique that vilification of those who raised their voices was unavoidable. Thus those who held socially acknowledged positions in communist times became villains and those who were socially shunned in communist times because of their novel economic ideas became the new heroes in present times.

Bibliography:
Foucault, M. (1967). Of the other spaces: utopias and heterotopias. Notes for a course published with the title "Des Espace Autres" in Architecutre/ Mouvement/ Continuite – journal.

Foucault, M. (2006). Psychiatric power. Lectures at the College de France 1973 – 1974. Edited by Jacques Lagrange. Translated by Graham Burchell. Palgrave McMillan: New York, USA. ISBN: 978-1-4039-6922-1. (p. 406).

Kautsky, K. (1919/ 1983). Terrorism and Communism. in P. Goode, Karl Kautsky. (1983). Selected Political Writings. London: Macmillan. access from 'State Capitalism' in the Soviet Union M.C. Howard and J.E. King. : http://www.hetsa.org.au/pdf/34-A-08.pdf

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*(5), 672-682.

Thomas, H., & Walsh, D. F. (1998). Modernity/ Postmodernity. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *Core Sociological Dichotomies* (pp. 448). London: SAGE.

Weber, M. (1919/ 2015). Vocation lectures. Hackett Books: Illinois, USA. (p. 177)