Hope, help, duty and disappointment:

Romanian mobility and its discontents

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explain a paradox: how is it that Romanian migrants voice a discourse of mutual avoidance and mistrust, when conationals' help underscores every level of their journeys? The argument proposed here is that, contrary to the dangerous naturalisation of Romanian suspicion under tropes of Balkanism, this sense of disunity is constructed everyday by a neoliberal configuration which transfers social security onto personal connections, but which precisely in doing so comes to turn connections into the idiom of voicing discontent.

To illustrate this, the thesis draws upon a year of multi-sited fieldwork conducted with Romanian migrants in a North London neighbourhood, and in a Carpathian village. Situating their departure within a discussion of the country's tortuous post-socialist transition, I show how the sense that there was nothing left at home gave rise to the widely shared hope that anything was possible abroad. For many of those who left, however, hope was not a frictionless return to Europe, but a journey made possible only by Romanian acquaintances who were called upon, much like in the imaginary of socialist informal economies, to arrange housing, legal status, or work in the UK. It is at this intersection of hope and help, where the duty to care for others and the concern to engineer one's own mobility come to clash, that discontent also emerges.

Focusing thus on the sociality of informal help which propels Romanian migrants' journeys, this thesis seeks to enrich the migration literature by reaffirming the figure of the migrant as a moral subject endowed at once with interest and affect. Looking at the formation of mistrust, another ambition of this project is to draw attention to the dangers of personalising mobility, in a political economic configuration where state-based social security is increasingly eroded.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

'Why did I leave?', twenty-five-year-old Doru looked circumspectly from across the table. He arched his thick eyebrows and pulled back on his chair, as if unsure of whether the question was asked in earnest or merely posed rhetorically, as if to catch him unaware. 'For the same reason you've left, for the same reason everyone's left'. 'Because you want a better life and you can't do anything in that hole of a country'.

Like many Romanians who moved to the UK since 2007, Doru had grown up in a village where going abroad to work had become a trajectory so normal, to question it was almost suspect. When the Foresta lumber factory that hired his parents was privatised and plummeted into insolvency, they and another thousand people in the surrounding county of Buzău lost their jobs (Bunila 2014). Nothing of a similar size had come to fill the vacuum since. The parents, for their part, resorted to subsistence farming on the plot the Romanian government granted them after de-collectivisation through the early restitution laws of the 1990s. [1] His elder brother, barely literate, became a shepherd who spent his summers in the high-altitude pastures in the mountains. Doru himself dropped out of school at just fourteen, and spent two years around the family home until a friend offered him work on a construction site in Bucharest.

'I never was afraid of work', he noted. Alert, his voice now raised, he made sure to dispel any assumption that he may perhaps have not tried hard enough. 'But what can you do?'. After the stream of pay in Bucharest ran dry, it was the same village in the Carpathians that Doru went back to. Savings vanished, and four more years passed helping around the family home. Years of making himself available to neighbours when and however needed. Years when it sounded like the future seemed to offer little more than minimal subsistence day by day. 'We barely had anything to put

[1] The 18/1991 law granted every household whose land had been collectivised a maximum of 10ha, and every peasant household who no land at all maximum of 0.5ha. A third of the land was distributed this way (Dorndel 2011).

on the table', Doru let out a sigh. 'What phones, what cars, what luxuries? You barely knew what you were going to eat tomorrow'.

It is little wonder how, after growing up during Romania's feverish decades of 'transition', when the political imaginary was saturated with promises of the good life that could be, yet when standards of living across the country failed to meet the promises of development or political normalcy, the prospect of working in London stayed open like a window into another future; a future unbound by the feeling that the trajectories of the haves and the have nots had already been written; a future that seemed free from the sensation one gained in his home county that, save for the lucky urban dwellers and politically connected who could harvest the fruit of open markets, ordinary Romanians like his parents seemed stuck.

Since the mid-1990's Doru's neighbours left and right had been going abroad and 'pulling' others with them. Coming back 'driving BMWs and clad in gold', as I often heard them described, wielding gadgets, and determined to build homes which rivalled those of local elites, they seemed to live a life the country no longer made possible. In 2012, luckily for Doru, the same childhood friend who once called him to Bucharest, offered him work in London. He had a little space to sleep in a home in the North London borough of Brent, where he told me in English, as so many migrants did when they described their living arrangements, that 'he shared' with several men he knew from home; men who found themselves having to navigate a taxing housing market, and who had little choice but to sublet, with or without realising it, illegally. He found a job on a construction site: first as a labourer, then as ground worker. Within a couple of years he joined, like a generation of Romanian migrants, the vast self-employed workforce which keeps the London skyline rising.

'It's not for everybody', Doru remarked mid-way through our interview. His first engagement, where working on the black market he laboured without either the protections of an employment contract, or the modicum of social security based on National Insurance contributions, paid him as little as £40 for a day's work. During that year he changed more sites than he cared to remember, in a string of casual engagements he negotiated on a handshake. There had been times when he was not paid, and he found himself having to borrow from friends to cover basic living costs; other times when he was laid off overnight, having to ask around for work and take whatever he was offered; and other times still when he found himself burning in just a couple of weeks of involuntary

idleness, the money he had saved in half a year. ‘But if you know what you’re doing’, he continued smiling now, a flicker building in his eyes, ‘you know us Romanians: we get by’.

For the remainder of our conversation, the life story Doru outlined seemed almost like a textbook example of network migration. Assistance from various Romanian connections punctuated every turn in a journey that would otherwise have remained out of reach. Transport, accommodation, work, and even the precious leisure time he had left, were all mediated by acquaintances. It was the young man who ‘pulled’ him earlier in 2012 that granted him a foothold in the fast-paced construction industry in the city. He taught Doru how to fabricate proof of address and employment, back when applying for a National Insurance Number seemed almost guaranteed to end in rejection. He arranged for someone to help him open a bank account and loan him a Unique Tax Reference Number, when the layers of digital bureaucracy that govern self-employment in the UK would have otherwise remained impenetrable. He helped him find a home he could afford, when the price of rent was more than what he earned in a month. Two years after his arrival, it was the same man once again, whose good word enabled Doru’s girlfriend Cristina, to also get her first job in London as a cashier at a Romanian corner shop.

After an hour and a half long conversation when the recorder went off, Doru’s story felt like yet another example where the power of personal networks circumvented structural barriers to mobility. Ingenuity and personal connections appeared to have helped him break through the post-socialist inequalities that had relegated much of Romania’s rural space to subsistence. The informal arrangements he struck with friends, in turn, appeared to have allowed him to bypass the transitional immigration controls which limited Romanians’ access to the British labour market. It was these everyday understandings too that helped him navigate British employment legislation and the vagaries of self-employment, and that enabled him to find ways around London’s undersupplied housing market. At every step of Doru’s journey, the artifices he recounted reminded me of James Scott’s ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985). They had the romantic valences of a solidarity of the poor (Graeber 2014a), invoked by critics of capitalism who hoped to form another ‘dangerous class’ (Hardt & Negri 2001, 2005; Standing 2014).

And that, it soon became apparent, would only be a partial reading. At the end, when we were ready to leave and the interview was slowly turning into chit chat, Doru took me by surprise when

in response to my question about his friends, he offered a remark of almost violent frankness. 'Friends, I don't have any friends', he stated. 'Romanians get on like dogs. If they can take something from you they will. If they can bring you down, they will'. Nodding at his statement, his nineteen-year-old girlfriend Cristina, who had been listening attentively in the confines of their room, but had kept quiet until then, added a note of her own: 'A friend in need is a friend in deed. It is a person who is there for you, ready to help when you're struggling. We've helped so many people over here, but God forbid it's our turn to need anything, they act like they don't know us anymore. And if they give you something, it's even worse, they act like they own you. That's the Romanian for you'.

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1.1. Thesis Objectives

This thesis sets out to unpack a paradox. How is it, I ask, that despite drawing on each other at every level of their journey, Romanian migrants harbour such negative conceptions of those who once appeared to lend a hand? Through which mechanisms do individual experiences with highly particular disagreements, come to endow Romanianness as a whole with implacably dark connotations, when it is conationals who mediated journeys abroad, conationals who assisted newcomers in finding homes and jobs, and once again they who made possible a future at a time when home seemed to have little left to offer?

For scholars who investigate the mobility of Eastern Europeans, this level of hostility towards one's ethnic group is, perhaps regrettably, a familiar finding. In her study of online Romanian communities, Ruxandra Trandafoiu labels such expressions of distrust in other Romanians a form of 'diasporic cannibalism' (2013 p. 81). Laura Moroşanu and Jon Fox (2013) discovered how even without invoking any personally disappointing encounters with their conationals, their Romanian interviewees did not hold back from sharing into a sense of shame and mutual avoidance. 'There is no smoke without fire', their participants noted, mentioning how they preferred to keep their Romanianness to themselves, than to seek the company of compatriots. To be read through that ethnic lens, it seemed, was to be subjected to an old interpretation as Europe's uncivilised other. This was an interpretation which had long been fashioned from outside, but which had also come, the authors argue, to be appropriated from within, as the lived and heard-of came to amplify each

other. It is noteworthy in this sense to remark how for Mariana Crăciun's (2013) '1.5 generation' informants in the US, Romanianness was a feature which needed drawing upon selectively, in a 'moral bricolage' which distinguished family values and Christian Orthodox traditions, from the corruption and ability to get ahead through bribery, which were regarded as a 'Romanian way of doing things' (2013, p.738). For Giulia Macri's (2011) participants in online migrant forums too, Romanianness was an ambivalent story of 'love and hate'. If Christian traditions, natural beauty, and a personal connection to the ancestral home conjured the love side of the story, woven around a certain romanticised view of the country, forum members' encounters with selfish compatriots abroad shrouded the Romanian people in accusations of moral bankruptcy.

In the case of Polish workers, whose long history of migration after WWII and earlier entry in the European Union has generated academic interest which far exceeds that paid to Romanians, the evidence of in-group hostility, despite a level of co-operation in practice, is even greater. There is a certain paradox, Michal Garapich (2012 p. 33) notes, in the way that 'people tell us that 'Poles hate each other' [..] but at the same time we witness a great deal of reliance on Polish networks and an emergence of numerous transnational social fields […] based on cooperation and trust.' There is an ambivalence (Svasek 2009), or 'binary opposition' (Ryan et al. 2009 p. 161) where, similar to what Doru described in the conversation which introduced this chapter, 'Poles are mistrustful of Polish strangers' (White 2017 p. 185; White & Ryan 2008) despite relying on ethnic networks based on cooperation.

Numerous other scholars have remarked upon the presence of a rhetoric of suspicion among communities who would otherwise seem to draw on each other at every level: in studies based in the UK (Garapich, 2007; 2012; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008; Ryan et al., 2009; White, 2017; White & Ryan, 2008), in Belgium (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2005), Norway (Pawlak 2016), as well as over the Atlantic (Bukowczyk 1996; Schneider 1990). Perhaps, Garapich (2012, p.33) provocatively argued, this type of negative stereotyping was even reified by the 'numerous academic accounts of migrants engaging in ruthless competition, backstabbing, mischievous practice and the like'. After all, the myth of competitiveness and individualism captured through popular expression such as 'Pole to Pole is like a wolf', or as Doru put it, 'Romanians get on like dogs', does not merely surface from the field, in the context of migration. It is also part of a wider discursive tradition of representing these nations, with roots that reach deep into how the Poles, Romanians, and other

subjects on the margins of Europe have been portrayed in, and in relation to, the Western public imaginary.

In her seminal thesis on Balkanism, Maria Todorova (2009) noted precisely how Eastern European countries long portrayed from the outside as Europe's peripheral subject, have come to develop a negative representation from within. In the case of Romania, it does not take scratching hard below the surface to note that unflattering stereotypes of competitiveness and materialism similar to those identified by scholars of migration, lay on a much broader basis of discontent fuelled at once from outside and from within. At the end of 2014, the year I started fieldwork, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis concluded his New Year's address to citizens home and abroad with a wish that spoke volumes in this sense. In a serene setting outside the government building, a warmly wrapped president framed by snowflakes falling in the background, wished Romanians prosperity, good health, and strikingly: 'that 2015 be the beginning of a Romania of normality, which we all desire' (Neagu 2014). Romania, it seemed, was trapped in a state of aberration.

The presence of such bleak assessments pertaining to an almost chronic condition, is notably abundant in Romanian public discourse. A recent survey on self-perception by psychologist Daniel David (2017), one of the many surveys which, anthropologist Vintila Mihailescu (2015) notes, have flooded the Romanian knowledge market since European accession, found that while respondents saw themselves as hospitable, they also expressed high degrees of mistrust towards conationals, and a sense of resentment towards the country that had acquired almost natural valences. Some of the best-selling works by contemporary academics, in turn, have transformed such tropes of systemic brokenness and mutual hostility into a veritable genre. Authors have likened Romanian discontent to a 'neurosis' (Zamfirescu 2012), as if a state of constant 'irritation' (Banica & Constantinescu 2007) with one's nation was a quintessentially Romanian attitude. 'Never mind the Balkans', British journalist settled in Transylvania, Michal Ormsby (2015), provokingly titled his book: 'here's Romania'. In a much publicised intervention, Daniel David (2015) summarised his findings into the 'psychology of the Romanian people' thus: 'we are cynical, sceptical, with a chronic mistrust in anyone beyond immediate family'. Even the celebrated historian Lucian Boia (2011), who earned a reputation after 1989 for painstakingly debunking the myths woven in Romanian historiography, did not express the same reservations around this contemporary mythology of a flawed Romanian psyche. From the cover of his best-selling volume, where on a degraded urban

background an emaciated horse is shown standing with its head gloomily lowered next to a communist era Dacia car, the author poses a rhetorical question to his readers: 'Why is Romania different?', the cover asks. It is not whether or how Romania may be different, or indeed from whom. Knowing readers are meant to accept that there is a negative particularity about Romanians. The historian, for his part, merely mobilises the authority of academic discourse, to add weight to the popular lamentation.

To talk of intra-Romanian hostility then, is to explain a paradox that has surfaced in the migration literature, but it is also to engage with a cycle of dark (self)-representation, which seems to have acquired a dangerously uncritical reception in Romania and elsewhere across the post-socialist space, where the failure to catch up with the Occident was portrayed and worryingly internalised as a form of 'civilisational incompetence' (Sztompka 1993). It is to contribute to the explanations provided by scholars of migration, who have identified mistrust in the field (Eade et al. 2006; Michal Garapich 2012, 2016; Ryan et al. 2008; White 2017), but it is also to take aim at challenging the naturalised myth of a fundamentally broken 'Romanian mentality' (Heintz 2008). There is a danger, as we know from the Foucauldian school of governmentality (P. Miller & Rose 1990), that the authority of a science which sits above (and not within) its subjects of analysis, can create the truths it portends to explain. It is not hard to imagine how the narrative that Romanians suffer from a moral deficiency, may provide a facile explanation for Romania's underwhelming 'return to Europe'.

The negative attitudes identified by my informants, I hope to demonstrate here, are neither natural, nor permanent. What I argue rather, drawing on observations with Romanian migrants, is that the disappointing stereotypes of a morally bankrupt people which have come to blend into the common sense, emerge on a background of precarity and frustrated mobility. A precarity that started at home, in the dispossessions unleashed by the shock therapies adopted after 1989, and the disenchantment with the country's apparent failure to align to Western standards. But also a precarity that continued in the UK, in Romanian migrants' encounters with a city which prides itself in being precisely the pinnacle of this regime, but where access to the security of a stable home is a privilege (Hodkinson & Robbins, 2013; Robertson, 2016; Smith, 2012), and the certainty of a job for life the stuff of legend (McDowell 2011; McDowell & Christopherson 2009; Standing 2014). If Romanians appear to 'get on like dogs', therefore, it is not because of any intrinsic national, or

Balkanic, predisposition to competitiveness; nor is it the 'toxic legacy' of socialist surveillance, which has mired so many Eastern European countries in the allegation of civilizational incompetence.

If such stereotypes are reinforced in the context of migration, it is rather because Romanian migrants have found themselves navigating a political economic constellation where the help of personal connections is rendered increasingly instrumental, yet where discourse does not encourage, and conditions of possibility do not enable, the survival of such arrangements. To speak of the paradox of Romanian discontent avowed in conversation despite mutual assistance in practice, is thus to speak of the neoliberal paradox of instantiating, and simultaneously circumscribing sites of mutual assistance. It is to take into account the tortuous transformations Romania experienced after 1989, where the country's failure to reach the promise of transition resulted at once in a desire to break with it all, and a need to draw upon the help of those who had broken free before; and it is to unpack how intersections of immigration, employment and housing policy in the UK have made living and earning possible only with the assistance of connections, while undermining their ability to last. If ethnicity has become the idiom of voicing discontent, this thesis argues, it is because it has been quietly designated as the instrument of contentment, by transferring social security onto the personal help exchanged between compatriots.

1.2. Romanian mobility to the UK

Like many of the countries beyond the Iron Curtain, Romania experienced a complex transformation after 1989, where ambitions to align its future to the Western present did not so much engender the market capitalism of plenty promised by development institutions, as give rise to new hierarchies of political organisation (Galbreath 2005; Verdery 1993), economic opportunity (Stenning et al. 2011; Voinea & Mihaescu 2012), and social class (Morris 2017; Stemming 2005). As 'shock therapies' (Klein 2007) of privatisations and public expenditure reduction took effect in the late 1990s, Romanians like Doru and Cristina's parents, similar to many citizens across the post-socialist space, found themselves experiencing a time of high inflation, unemployment, and severe urban rural inequality, where it became increasingly apparent that the promise of the good life was the privilege of the well-connected, the former apparatchiks (Alina Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Stoica

2012), and the lucky residents of urban centres who could experience the much awaited, but highly uneven, growth from foreign direct investment (IQLRS 2017; Zamfir et al. 2010).

For many Romanians therefore, the return to Europe once imagined in tropes of civilisation and development, took a literal turn manifested in countless journeys over borders (Horváth 2007; Sandu 2005a, 2006). This is perhaps the moment to explain my choice of 'mobility', over the more frontier-oriented 'migration', in the title and the content of this thesis. There is a danger, as Nina Glick Schiller and Noel Salazaar (2013) argue, that in appropriating the language of the state we reproduce the binaries which constitute movement over borders as an anomaly. In writing of mobility therefore, I hope to capture the fact that movement over physical borders is part of the normal spectre of human experience (Malkki, 1992), and paralleled by numerous other forms of flux and social transformation (Castles 2010; Van Hear 2010), which are not confined within the territory of the nation state. This is the movement of jobs out of the communities where my informants lived, for instance, which made it feel like there was nothing left to do at home; or indeed the movement Romanian migrants hoped to achieve along axes of social status.

Similar to the cases of Poland and the Baltic countries, which experienced double digit emigration rates, and where the 'Great Departure' (Dzenovska Forthcoming) was vocally problematized in the public imaginary (Garapich 2012) as either a drain to be contained or a resource to be tapped into, according to UN population division as many as 17% of Romanians are now believed to live abroad (Galka 2016a). Many of them went first to Israel, Germany and Hungary, where they had ethnic connections (Horváth, 2007), or took their journeys to the far shores of the United States (Sandu, 2005), whose Green card lottery adverts rang like jingles of a 'dream world' (Drakulić 1993) in the cable television instituted in the 1990s. Once Romania earned the right of visa free travel in the Schengen zone in 2002, and finally entered the European Union in 2007, many more found work in the labour hungry economies of older member states.

The year of 2014 when this project started, the Annual Population Survey estimated that 170,000 Romanians were living in the UK, and as many as 84,000 were residing in London alone (ONS 2014). By the time this thesis was finished, the figure stood at 411,000 nationwide – the largest increase of any migrant group in the UK, and second most common foreign nationality after Poles (ONS 2018). Like many of the Eastern European nationals who gained the right of free movement at the

European accession wave of 2004, they found jobs at both ends of the city's labour markets (Spreckelsen & Seeleib-Kaiser 2016). There were Romanian medical staff in the NHS, students and academics in British universities, and entrepreneurs in the city of London and across other highly skilled sectors (Csedő 2008; Parutis 2014). There were small-scale Romanian festivals of film, music and theatre, as well as a wealth of spaces of consumption strewn across the capitals' suburbs, where boroughs have witnessed a vast increase in Romanian migrants.

Overall, however, Romanians were over-represented at the low skilled, low paid point of the spectrum (Drinkwater et al. 2009; Dustmann et al. 2010; Jayaweera & Anderson 2008); where work hours are longer, the pay was smaller (Longhi & Rokicka 2012) and skills remained undervalued (Dustmann 1999). Like other migrant workers, but also similar to Britain's own 'generation rent' (Halifax 2015), who can hardly access the proverbial property ladder without substantial help from parents or generous pay cheques (Sanderson 2017), the vast majority of my informants resorted, just like Doru and Cristina, to collective living arrangements in houses where multiple occupancy straddles the boundaries of legality (DCLG, 2008; Smith, 2012). These were houses squeezed in a cynical mechanism, between a depleted stock that encloses formal living between unaffordable paywalls, and a legislation that criminalises informal occupancy.

On the simplest empirical level therefore, this thesis is about how they came to call upon and view Romanianness: the migrants who found that despite previous education, standards of living and self-definitions as farmers or as intellectuals with claims to cultural capital, they left Romania with a similar sensation that the future was eroded, and found themselves inhabiting gendered spaces of precarious work which transformed their socioeconomic standing (Cederberg 2017), and reconfigured the way they 'performed' their class status (Bonjour & Chauvin 2018). Men and women, some with decades of professional experience, others with just eight years of formal education, they shared the conviction that migration could open up possibilities which Romania lacked, but also the realisation migration opens 'contradictory class mobilities' (Parreñas 2015), where the possibilities encountered differed substantially from those they had imagined. How, then, might we unpack their discontent? The following section provides a more in-depth critique of the existing literature, and an overview of this project's theoretical framework.

1.3. Theoretical framework

Ever since Fredrick Barth's (1998) seminal essay called for the study of ethnicity at the margins, anthropologists have prompted us to consider claims to cultural difference as a question of performance (Eriksen 2002), negotiated through everyday actions (Fox and Miller Idriss, 2008) and moments of heightened intensity (Brubaker, 2004, 2006 p 208), rather than simply representing actually existing difference. In the study of migration in particular, scholars have warned against looking at migrants through an 'ethnic lens' (Schiller et al. 2006) that takes inter-group homogeneity for granted and risks reproducing ahistorical narratives of culturally incompatible 'us' and 'them' (Stolcke 1995). As Rogers Brubaker (2004, p174-175) put it in his thesis against 'groupism', ethnicity is not a thing in the world, but 'a perspective on it', which involves an element of self-narration, but also a reaction to the power relations and inequalities we all inhabit.

Much literature has attempted to unpack processes of identification among migrants, and citizens, by drawing attention to the other – an imaginary subject constituted to reveal what one is, by illustrating what one is not (Anderson 2013; Macri 2011; Pawlak 2016; Triandafyllidou 1998). A second approach has focused on teasing out to the multiplicity of social divisions, power relations, and localities which shape identification in the everyday, drawing attention not so much upon the singular relation between us and them, but rather to the vast power structures which affect migrants and citizens alike. This section explains how this project proposes to study Romanian migrants' negative stance towards compatriots. Combining a discussion of key approaches in the literature on ethnic identification, with a close review of the existing work on Romanianness, I propose a theoretical framework which gives due attention to othering - by examining the role that being European occupies in the Romanian imaginary, with all its classed, raced, and gendered connotations, and its fears of being marginal. However, I also note that while imaginaries of returning to Europe might mean a lot for the highly educated, it is important to acknowledge that they are less significant for subsistence farmers who simply migrate in search for better jobs, and less significant still when farmers and graduates find themselves inhabiting moments of unexpected interdependence. Building on this observation, I urge us to take seriously the way that ethnic attachment is informed at once by historically constituted hierarchies of 'us' and 'them', but also shaped in the present, in everyday encounters with neoliberal precarity which create unanticipated spaces of togetherness, and give rise to different forms of self-narration.

Learning from 'the other'

Rooted in psychoanalysis, in theories which sought to explain how the self is formed through the eyes of a distinct outside observer (Jensen 2011), the notions of other and othering have played a foundational role in critical studies of identification. In his landmark thesis on Orientalism, Edward Said (1995) argued that a literary tradition of depicting the Orient through essentialised tropes of mystique and exoticism served to entrench the West's global domination, by portraying its other as an inferior civilization, deserving to be governed. Bringing this line of inquiry into representations of Eastern Europe in Enlightenment thought, Larry Wolff (1994) pointed to a similar 'invention' of the region, as a space which lent itself to wonder, and to rule. For Maria Todorova (2009), it was the Balkans that came to occupy a liminal position of otherness-within, sharing some similarities with the old powers in the Occident, but needing still to be educated into full Europeanness.

It is not hard to see how the narratives identified by Wolff (1994), Todorova (2009), and other scholars who examined early geographies of representation (Bakić-Hayden 1995 p. 917), were reproduced in subsequent depictions of the East. The politics of the Cold War, Buchowski (2006) argues, positioned the Iron Curtain as a clear divider between the civilized us and a dangerous them, vilified as proponents of socialism, welcome only as its victims. After 1989, he continues, the discourse on transition posited post-socialist republics as the poorer, not-yet democratic part of the continent, constantly measured against the yardstick of reform, and labelled as ready, or still too underdeveloped (Noutcheva & Bechev 2008), corrupt (Gallagher 2009), or intolerant (Dzenovska 2018) to return. When Eastern Europeans did travel West, analyses of their representation in the press too pointed to an over-representation of petty crime, rough-sleeping, or one-dimensional depictions as labourers valued for their hard work, but hardly recognised as equals (Light & Young 2009; Vicol & Allen 2014).

If the imagination of Eastern Europe has been argued to constitute a Western other, this narrative is also important for the way in which it has informed Eastern Europeans' perceptions of themselves. In his much-cited theory of stigma, Erving Goffman (1968) argued that exposure to stereotypes may lead to processes of internal differentiation. Wishing to avoid association with the stigmatised characteristics of a group, Goffman explained, stigmatised subjects may also distance themselves from the group altogether, drawing new and selective boundaries between themselves and the rest. Orientalism, Buckowski (2006 p. 465) contends in his thesis on Eastern Europe, is 'a

spectre that haunts people's minds', and a tool for social distinctions across, but also within, state borders. 'It is virtually axiomatic', Todorova notes, 'that by and large a negative self-perception hovers over the Balkans next to a strongly disapproving and disparaging outside perception' (Todorova 2009 p. 88).

Theories of otherness and stigma have enjoyed a certain prominence within the literature on mutual avoidance among Romanian migrants. In her analysis of Romanians' 'love-hate relationship' to the homeland, Macri (2011 p. 130) argues that whether it is the Roma, who are accused in racialised tropes of tarnishing Romania's reputation, or other Romanians abroad, who are viewed as hard workers but also as unpolished peasants, 'our image in the eyes of the Others tends to put a significant constraint on who we are and who we claim we are'. Romania's Europeanness in particular, she notes, constitutes a topic of intense debate in her informants' interventions, which draw and contest the boundary between Europe and its Eastern border, much in the same way that political elites in Brussels and Bucharest do.

A similar angle which investigates how discursive distinctions between a civilised us and an undesirable them are experienced, is visible in Moroşanu and Fox's (2013) work, examining how Romanian migrants in the UK negotiate their negative portrayal in the British press. Building on Goffman's (1968) early argument, and in particular on Wimmer's (2008) and Portes' (2000) work, which examined how migrant solidarity could be weakened by exposure to negative discourse, the authors find that most of their respondents accepted the unflattering narratives of Romanian petty crime circulated in the press. As the tile of the paper reads, the majority of those interviewed noted that 'there is no smoke without fire'. When an alternative discourse was offered, it was one which stressed individual attributes of hard work and personal cunning, distancing the speaker from the unflattering representation of Romanianness, and leaving such stereotypes uncontested.

There is much to learn from this line of enquiry. The works of Macri (2011), Moroşanu and Fox (2013), Wimmer (2008), and others who adopt the lens of othering beyond Romanian studies (Guarnizo et al. 1999; King & Mai 2009; Kopnina 2006; Pawlak 2016), qualify the general focus on nostalgia in studies of diasporic identity, illustrating how long-running political hierarchies may trickle down, in processes of internal differentiation. Guarnizo and his colleagues (1999) make a similar argument, observing how stereotypes of drug trafficking fragment ties among Colombian

migrants to the US. As do Chen et al. (2011), who point to the erosion of trust among internal migrants in China, who are confronted with classed stereotypes against a rural population. This thesis too situates the discussion of Romanian migrants' negative conceptions of conationals in the country's complex relationship to the European Union, and in particular in the valorisation of Europeanness as standard of achievement by the Romanian political and intellectual elite.

Another insight from the literature which examines ethnic identification through the self – other dialectic, is the revelation of the classed constructions of deservingness, and its intersections with race and gender. In her ethnography of online forums, the comments which Trandafiroiu (2013) exposes were laden with classed critiques of conationals who were seen as peasants, nouveau riche and other such subjects derided for superficial materialism – though the author does not theorise the role of class per se. In the study of the '1.5 generation' of Romanians in the US, Crăciun (2013) too shows how her interlocutors' selective identifications with Romanianness were informed by the tacit hegemony of whiteness in American society, which enabled Romanian migrants to blend in, yet retain cultural specificities such as Christian Orthodoxy, in ways which residents of colour might not. This confirms findings by Fox (2013) and McDowell et al. (2008), who found that Eastern European migrants to the UK sought to capitalise on whiteness, and echoes the wealth of research which documents the racist stereotyping of the Romanian Roma by ethnic Romanians, through tropes of criminality, poor work ethic, and an Indian genealogy removed from the geographical and civilizational space of Europe (Marin & Csonta 2013; Romani CRISS 2011a; Tileagă 2015).

This attention to the role of class and its amplifications by other social divisions, which remain less theorised in the literature on Romanian migration, is another line of enquiry this thesis builds on, and seeks to nuance. Critical studies of citizenship note how all ideals of deservingness, be they framed as the good Pole (Eade et al. 2006; Garapich 2016; Pawlak 2015), good Romanian, or 'good citizen' (Anderson, 2013, 2015, p. 201) more broadly, foreground a particular classed subjectivity – in its economic form manifested in wealth, in its social form captured through the ensemble of relations one may draw upon, as well as in its cultural form marked by levels of education, claims upon morals, and that key Bourdeausian concept with a pretence to innate superiority: taste (Bourdieu 2006 p. 200). This subjectivity, feminist scholars contended, is in turn gendered, in ways in which socioeconomic marginality and femininity reinforce each other.

From the institution of a social contract which distinguished the political sphere from the realm of the family (Pateman 1988), the liberal narrative of a transition from the state of nature to civilization has been portrayed in male features of reason and aggression (Grant 1991). If self-sufficiency is a key attribute of the good citizen, this in itself rests upon a historically masculinised definition of work as gainful employment, which devalues the labour of care (Arendt 1958; Steedman 2009). Women's participation in the labour market, it has been argued, is often squeezed between adopting the masculinised features of well-paid jobs (McDowell 1997), or assuming the underpaid realities of professionalised care (Graeber 2018). Such discrepancies in pay and political recognition, are all the more evident when femininity intersects with race (Anderson 2000; McDowell et al. 2007; Parreñas 2015).

It is hardly surprising, in this sense, that Romanians who may seek to pass for tolerated citizens in the West, would distance themselves from conationals with gendered claims upon class status. In the UK, even a brief look at the media coverage of migration stories reveals that the boundaries between us and the other, are those that distinguish between the educated, economically self-sufficient and socially independent on one hand (Y. Taylor 2016), and the modestly literate, poor and dependent on the other. The foreignness of high earning 'mobile citizens', Anderson and Blinder (2011) note, blends in the cosmopolitan space of British universities and firms, while the foreignness of 'migrants' is rendered hyper-visible in gendered tabloid renditions: shabbily dressed men hunched over fruit in farms or congregating for manual work in the city, benefit scrounging women, who fail in their duties of care.

Class is also a particularly relevant axis of difference to explore due to the complex role it played in post-socialist societies. If socialist rule strived towards an ideal of uniformity, constructed ideologically around a valorisation of the industrial worker-citizen (Fitzpatrick 1993; Siegelbaum & Suny 1994), and imposed de facto through controls over distribution, this ideal did not erode other hierarchies –created around one's ability to wield political power, or fashioned conversely, around the ability to resist party rule with appeals to culture (Verdery 1996). The fall of Communist Parties also created an interesting new landscape of political representation and property relations, which were replete with possibilities for differentiation. Several ethnographers have documented how the privatisations of the 1990s gave free rein to gendered affirmations of status (True 2003) through the consumption of real estate (Humphrey & Mandel 2002), interior design (Fehérváry

2013), accessories and other goods which had once been the rare proceed of contraband networks (Drakulić 1993; Eglitis 2011; Ghodsee 2011). And several more documented the tensions which arose when people who had once laboured side by side found themselves being patrons and workers (Ashwin 1999; Buchowski 2006); or on the contrary, when people who had once enjoyed a certain sense of intellectual superiority found themselves losing their status to a new generation of nouveau riche (Jansen 2005; Patico 2008).

In her ethnography of intra-ethnic tension among Poles in Chicago, Mary Erdmans (2007) examines precisely one such class cleavage play out in the reluctance of the post-war generation of Polish refugees, who narrated themselves as freedom fighters, to welcome the newer generation of economic migrants, whom they regarded as simple workers lacking in cultural capital. Michal Garapich (2012, 2016) captures a similar division between Poles in London, where both the post-war generation of 'freedom fighters' and some contemporary migrants looked down upon compatriots who fit the image of the unpolished peasant-turned-worker, while Pawlak (2015) documents it between Poles with aspirations of cosmopolitanism, and the 'polaks' who laboured in manual occupations. With highly classed reflections upon conationals' shabby clothing, poor manners, and 'uncivilised' behaviours such as public drinking, Garapich (2016) shows, his informants simultaneously challenged the homogenising reading of Poles as a nation of low status labourers, and the nationalist myth that shared ethnicity amounts to solidarity.

This last series of examples illustrates the complex ways in which class is made and remade in the course of migration. This is something this project seeks to bring in the study of Romanian migrants' attitudes to their compatriots. Class location shapes people's aspirations and capabilities of moving (Van Hear 2006, 2014). It underscores immigration controls which govern international mobility (Bonjour & Chauvin 2018) and its outcomes (Castles & Kosack 1973), and it informs processes of identification (Però 2014). How, then, might we conceptualise class in Romanian migrants' relations to conationals?

For much of the 20th century, Van Hear argues (2014), social science thinking on class has been shaped by variants of Marxism, which describes it as position in the means of production, and considers subjectivity primarily to the extent that it translates, or not, into awareness of one's material conditions. Weber's definition of class as position in relation to economic life and standing

in the community, Van Hear continues, has also been influential. Yet as several studies of migrants and citizens have demonstrated amply (Cederberg, 2017; Parreñas, 2000, 2015), class is not merely a fixed background. Firstly, there is an elasticity to one's material means. In raced and gendered ways, admittedly (Glenn 1992; Wolkowitz 2006), in ways informed by age (King et al. 2014) and parenthood (White 2017), people can move into better jobs with time (Nowicka 2014; Ryan et al. 2015), and this type of mobility is one of the key drivers of migration. Furthermore, people also have numerous ways of narrating their positions. Class status, Parreñas (2015) argues, may be experienced in 'contradictory ways', as downgrades in occupation and income may be surpassed by the feeling of being more independent (Burikova 2016) and providing for one's family (Lopez Rodriguez 2010) – or conversely, as economic security comes at the cost of friendships and family relations (King et al. 2014; Nguyen-Akbar 2014). Migrants negotiate their class standing transnationally, in relation to their material conditions of possibility in the countries of origin and destination (Kelly 2007; Kelly & Lusis 2006; White 2017), but also, and perhaps most importantly, in relation to the value systems which underpin conceptions of high-status across state borders (Garapich 2016; Nguyen-Akbar 2014). If being middle class is generally associated with a position of privilege, there is great diversity between what exactly constitutes the Romanian and British middle, and just as much contestation over who is to be accepted, and granted the political capital of middle class-ness, within each county. If working class is associated with marginality, it is debatable to what extent people like Doru and Cristina, who grew up in poor families dependent on subsistence farming, continue to form a part of it, belong to an 'underclass' devalued by privatisations (Morris 2017; Stemming 2005), or are better seen rather as aspiring middle class Romanians, by virtue of their ventures abroad.

As a first attempt to capture this complexity, this project draws upon Bourdieu's conceptualisation of class as a set of economic capitals manifested in income, social capital consisting of personal connections, and finally cultural capital - institutionalised in levels of education, but also embodied and deployed symbolically, as a marker of distinction (Bourdieu 2006). This is an approach which has received wide currency across the mobilities literature (Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Van Hear 2014). Beyond simply deploying this conceptualisation to label participants as middle or working class, I trace the ways in which Romanian migrants mobilise these capitals to narrate their relations to Romanians and Romanianness at different points of the journey. While the expectations of

educated, urban born Romanians differed significantly from those of villagers, this did not preclude them taking up similar positions in the UK. Similarly, this thesis argues, if the unexpected 'thrown-togetherness' (D. Massey 2002 p. 294) generated new solidarities, it did not prevent the resurfacing of class distinction. It is these points of narrative divergence, where class is deployed to impose distance between conationals that I seek to capture.

In concluding this section, it is important to note that the works which inspired this project's attention to the social divisions that underscore identification, go far beyond the focus on online forums and interview-based research in current studies of Romanian relations, deploying periods of observation and active participation in the everyday life of migrant communities they studied. There is, in other words, more scope to nuance our enquiry into ethnic disassociation methodologically, with an approach which pays attention to the everyday, but also theoretically, in situating the relationship between the self and other within the syncopations of lived experience.

When I started fieldwork wishing to learn, much as Moroşanu and Fox (2013) did, how negative depictions in the British press affected Romanian migrants' conceptions of Romanianness, I discovered that with the exception of participants who had spent enough years in London to speak good English and consume British media, the stories of othering printed across the pages of tabloids had little bearing. Similarly, while some educated Romanians echoed the discourse against the Roma in interviews, such narratives were largely absent from everyday encounters, where the interdependence that came with living in the same crammed house trumped claims to separateness. As Garapich (2016) also noted in his discussion of Poles in the UK, strong views expressed in interviews, such as crass racism and snobbery, do not always match the behaviours people adopt in practice.

A key theoretical contribution this thesis hopes to make, is thus to recapture the lived element of boundary drawing, in the tradition established by anthropologists of mobility (Brettell 2002; Kearney 1986; Vertovec 2007). From the first studies of Latin American migrants to the US, which proposed the concept of transnationalism to capture the way that migrants developed meaningful relations across state borders (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton, 1994; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Schiller & Fouron, 2001; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), a wealth of works have drawn our attention to the multi-local, relational nature of identification. We cannot miss, Van hear (2010) and his

colleagues (Castles 2010; Lutz 2010; Portes 2010) argue, the fact that mobility is situated in wider processes of social transformation. Nor can we overlook, Anderson (2013) notes, the fact that ethnic boundaries are drawn at once by processes targeted at migrants, such as racism, xenophobia, or immigration controls designed to limit their mobility, but also by structural processes such as income inequality and patriarchy, which place tacit barriers in the mobilities of all citizens. If we are to push against the ethnic lens which takes cultural difference for granted, we must position the self-other dialectic within the power relations which constitute the everyday to begin with. The following section explains how I propose to graft Romanian migrants' discontent in a critical discussion of neoliberal precarity.

Capturing the everyday

To the readers of this thesis, the brief history of neoliberalism and the notable debate which has accompanied its adoption across the social sciences (Collier, 2011; Ganti, 2014; Hoffman, DeHart, & Collier, 2006; Kingfisher & Maskovsky, 2008; Schwegler, 2009) will likely be familiar. In one of the most quoted interventions, David Harvey (2007) defined it as 'a theory of political economic practices, which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2007:2). A theory of market superiority, in short, through the last century neoliberalism went from being the name of a fringe academic movement championed by a restricted group of European economists[2] (Jones, 2014), to witnessing a global expansion: as doctrine of market freedom, which moved ever further from the state protection included in the original provisions, towards an unfettered belief in deregulation; as political practice of privatisation, which became the central orientation of governments in the developed world through the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan, before being globalised by development institutions; and indeed as a means of describing social life in a world where the market becomes 'an ethic in itself' (Harvey, 2007 p. 2).

It is useful at this point to note that the accusation of individualism which belied Doru's statement, 'Romanians get on like dogs', is not a particularity of a migrant group, but also has strong echoes in the broader literature where social theorists reflect upon the breakdown of solidarities under

[2] I am referring here of course to the Mont Pelerin society founded by Friedrich Hayek, Frank Knight, Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, George Stigler, and later frequented by Milton Friedman.

neoliberal politics. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, linked the neoliberal attack upon social welfare to a 'restructuring of existence' (Bourdieu 2000 p. 82), where solidarities descend into 'a struggle of all against all, which destroys all the values of solidarity and humanity' (1998 p. 84). Richard Sennett (1998 p. 147) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000 p. 22) blame neoliberalism for 'a death of the we', while Fredic Jameson (1991) described neoliberal subjectivity as quazi-schizophrenia, trapped in a continuous present without any sense of history or belonging.

There is no shortage of metaphors among social theorists who talk of neoliberalism's general power to dis-embed, and it is fair to acknowledge that numerous scholars have noted the danger of using neoliberalism as 'a sloppy synonym for capitalism' (Ferguson 2010 p. 171), imprecisely rolled out to explain 'the horrors of globalisation' (Jones, 2014, p. 2), and to make sense of waning solidarity. In her review of anthropological engagements with the term, Tejaswini Ganti (2014) notes that an over reliance on this label poses the risk of eroding ethnographic particularity, using neoliberalism as catch all term (Collier 2011), as if all forms of destitution were the result of one and the same phenomenon.

This project is inspired by a body of literature which has also shown that we can 'take neoliberalism seriously' (Hann, 2006, p. 7; Makovicky, 2016a), not as a self-explanatory 'Leviathan category' (Collier, 2012), but as a collection of 'actually existing forms' (Wacquant, 2012): observable in the adoption of shock therapies of privatisation and public spending reductions in Romania, which have turned it into the country with the highest rate of urban rural inequality, and lowest public spending in Europe (Zamfir et al. 2010); noticeable in the housing policies in the UK, that simultaneously deny the poor access to contract-bound sedentism, while sanctioning informal arrangements of multiple occupancy; and visible above all in the normalisation of precarious work.

To situate my discussion of Romanian migrants' discontent in their encounters with neoliberal political economic configurations is thus to acknowledge that transnational migration is shaped by global systems of capital accumulation. One can hardly view the parallels between the privatisations which swept over the United Kingdom in the 1980s, and reconfigured the Romanian workforce in the 1990s as coincidental. Nor can one ignore the role that thousands of individual farmers, such as Doru, from Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, have come to play in the UK's low-skilled sectors. Engaging with this concept is a search for 'a ground on which to stand', as

Loic Wacquant put it (2012 p. 84), mount a political critique, and join the conversation opened by ethnographers who operate in the burgeoning field of 'dark anthropology' (Ortner 2016) and life lived in precarity (Allison 2013; Muehlebach 2013; Stewart 2012), where academic interest in documenting human experience is paralleled by a critique of systems of inequality.

It is important to clarify this term. The concept of precarity entered common usage in the 1990s (Breman, 2013), where labour scholars and critics of neoliberal politics used it to describe a certain normalisation of insecure employment (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989), which seemed to run against a decades-long politics of buttressing the employment contract with social protections (Adams & Deakin 2014; Deakin 2001). In practice, the vast literature which documents the precaritisation of work points to the rise of short-term contracts, flexible terms, self-employment and other such configurations which exclude their bearers from the safety net (Kalleberg 2009; McDowell et al. 2009; Standing 2014). By all accounts, these were trajectories all of my informants encountered, at least at the beginning of their stay in the UK. Beyond the type of work, however, there is also a condition of being, and a sociality constructed under the auspices of insecurity, which lends itself to anthropological enquiry - this is what the literature distinguishes through the notion of *precariousness* (Neilson & Rossiter 2005).

Judith Butler (2006) pioneered this ontological view of precariousness in her critique of American politics in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, where she prompts readers to consider every human body's vulnerability to harm. Much anthropological work has since built on this notion of insecure livelihoods. Sharam Khosravi (2017), for instance, deploys the concept of precariousness to characterise the hopelessness which settled among Iranian youth, faced with mass unemployment and a political regime whose authoritarianism seemed absolute. In Japan, Allison (2013) uses it to capture the state of being of a generation brought up in a society with a surplus of ambition, and a deficiency of care. This is not to say that precariousness is absolute. These accounts and others point to the existence of spaces for hope, care, 'relational autonomy' (Millar 2014), and everyday expressions of agency (Galemba 2012; Muehlebach 2013). When I talk about precariousness, therefore, I consider it as a condition of insecurity with a political economic foundation which shapes, but does not determine, Romanian mobility.

Migrants such as my informants, whose origins are bundled in the imaginary of a 'Global South', have long been identified as the targets of precarious jobs in Western economies' insatiable demand for flexible labour (Burawoy, 1976; Piore, 1979; Standing, 2014; McDowell, Batnitzky, & Dyer, 2009; Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly, & Spencer, 2006). As early as the 1970s, MIT economist Michael Piore (1979) pointed to their overcrowding in a so-called 'secondary labour market' of dull and dirty positions, designed to render developed economies competitive, while retaining a relatively high level of social protection for the prime tier of jobs occupied by (male) citizens. More recently, scholars have noted how immigration controls (Anderson, 2010, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2015), employers' preference for raced and gendered subjects who make for malleable labour (Anderson & Ruhs, 2012; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009; Ruhs & Anderson, 2010), as well as migrants' own poor knowledge of English (Lewis et al 2015), and their dependencies on the intermediaries who mediate the business of crossing borders (Bélanger & Wang 2013), have contributed to their continued clustering in the least protected positions.

And yet, despite the attention paid to the political economic conditions of migrants' precarity, ethnographic studies of how it is lived and negotiated remain more limited. From Piore's (1979) pioneering description of the migrant worker as 'homo economicus' (p.113), a quintessentially rational subject who is believed to trade off hardships abroad for status gains at home, studies have retained a tendency to view migrants as calculating actors within a 'dual reference framework' (Waldinger & Lichter 2003). Whether that referent was spatial, and attributed to the country of origin where migrants have been argued to gain in status, or temporal, and constructed through the prism of a better future, the logic of trade-offs seemed to squeeze out the lived present of precarious work. Similar to the way that studies of identification can reduce the lived complexity of intra-group tension to an appropriation of hegemonic categories of us and them, such accounts of precarious mobility can reduce agency to a calculative exercise, overlooking the intricacies of how precarity is navigated in the everyday.

A second theoretical ambition of this thesis is thus to recapture relationality. In this sense, I draw some inspiration from studies of migrant networks, which have posed a powerful challenge to the futurity-saturated, individualising tendencies of rational actor approaches. Scholars have long shown how spatial and social mobility are mediated by connections of conationals who can lower the risks for new comers, and cultivate the aspirations of those who stay behind (D. S. Massey

1990). More recently, a number of authors (Bakewell, Engbersen, Fonseca, & Horst, 2016; Bakewell, Haas, & Kubal, 2011; Haas, 2010; Menjívar, 2000; Ryan, Erel, D'Angelo, & Hetherington, 2015; White & Ryan, 2008) have also pointed to the power of networks to constrain mobility, by guiding new entrants into accessible but poor positions (Gurak & Caces 1992; Woolcock 1998), by building segregated ethnic enclaves (Portes, 1999; Portes & Zhou, 1993), or even by subjecting new entrants to exploitation from those who initially helped them over (Menjívar 2000; Palomera 2014).

This is something I seek to build on, and hope to take a little further. While studies of networks constitute a much-needed alternative to the individualising lens established by economists, their focus seems to rest on the distributive abilities of personal connections. Insufficient attention, White and Ryan (2008) argue, has been paid to how transnational networks are sustained or how migrants actually form new ties in the host society (see also Ryan et al 2015). The object of inquiry foregrounded seems to remain mobility outcomes - the type of jobs, housing and status migrants acquire through connections- , while the migrant herself as a living and breathing actor (Xiang 2014) endowed with personal aspirations and embroiled in collective obligations, blurs into the background.

The vignette which introduced this thesis illustrates how the exchanges of help broadly nested under the lens of networks are not impersonal transactions that simply function when the demand and supply are balanced, and break down into allegations of competitive individualism when they are not. They are also intensely moralised acts bound by an ethical order which governs what is to be given, to whom, and how failing to fulfil such expectations might be sanctioned. It is only this moral dimension, I believe, that can prompt the kind of vocal bitterness Cristina and Doru expressed in the introductory vignette through affirmations such as 'Romanians get on like dogs' (or indeed Poles are 'like wolves' to each other). A third theoretical ambition of this thesis, therefore, is to recapture the moral dimension of mobility, and unleash the analytical potential of networks: as mechanisms of risk distribution, but also as sites of individual and collective subject creation.

There is much to learn in this sense from broadening the theoretical framework once more, and situating Romanian migrants' relations with conationals within the vaster literature on '*informal economies'* (Hart 1985; Makovicky 2016b; Morris & Polese 2015; Pardon Hernandez 2016; Thieme

2017; White 2016). Romania has a long history of informal relations of mutual assistance, like much of the space beyond the Iron Curtain. A wealth of ethnographies have documented the practices of circumventing shortages in Eurasia (Bridger & Pine 1998; Morris & Polese 2015; Sneath 2006), and more broadly in the Global South (Castells & Portes 1989; Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006; Thieme 2017), drawing attention at once to the language of friendship and intimacy (Caldwell 2004) which surrounds them, and to the social sanctioning of those who appeared to violate the moral precepts of mutuality with individualistic behaviours. In their recent theorisation of economies of favour, David Henig, Nicolette Makovicky (2016a) and the contributors to their volume make a formidable contribution to this legacy of studying informality, by prompting us to consider such arrangements framed in the language of friendship as more than thinly veiled transactions, appreciating them instead as exchanges with a distinct sociality where instrumental motivations blend with affect.

I found it useful to think of my informants', and other migrants', means of navigating precarious mobilities, through this lens of economies of favour and its explicit focus on morality. Ethnographers who examined tactics of getting by in post-socialist societies provide illuminating accounts of this power of existential insecurity to constitute collective subjectivities bound by a duty to care (Graeber 2014b; Makovicky 2016b): in the poverty of Moscow, for instance, where Melissa Caldwell (2004) and Alena Ledeneva (1998) locate the Russian 'svoi'; in last Soviet's generation encounter with the looming violence of the state (Yurchak 2013); in the corruption witnessed by ordinary Macedonians after the fall of socialism, where Neofotistos locates the 'nash' (Neofotistos 2009), or in the hardness of the border, where Dzenovska finds officials recall the togetherness of 'savejie' (Dzenovska 2014), to name but a few. 'Svoi', 'nash', and 'savejie', these are all literal translations of the pronoun 'we', which have come, through usage in exchanges of favours, to signify a particular collectivity bound by an ethic of mutual care.

If there is another way of explaining Romanian migrants' much deplored disappointment with their conationals then, beyond broad appeals to mentalities, historical predispositions, or chronic cynicism, this thesis suggests we acknowledge the us-them dialectic, constituted in the context of Romania's historic depiction as Europe's other; but also that we take seriously the everyday conditions when Romanianness is called upon, and thus tested, in navigating the institution of insecurity.

Admittedly, the empirical threads which render visible the tension between hope, help, duty and disappointment are complex. They are situated at an intersection of migrants' own social locations, discursive representations, and encounters with macro political economic configurations. They span two field sites and two political regimes endowed with their particularities. There will be moments in this thesis, therefore, where reflection upon my informants' relations are preceded by incursions into histories of policy. Nonetheless, the effort seems a worthy task if it can disperse the myth of a competitive, mistrustful Romanian subject, and reveal how behind every caricature which appears natural, there lay encounters with a particular political economic construction.

1.4. Reflections on fieldwork

One of the key questions which informed the methodology of this project has been that of finding a field. Grounding the 'productive power sites' (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999; Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006) that make up the political economic background of my informants' journeys, within a spatiality that would lend itself to the embodied participant observation which forms the epistemological core of anthropology. Here I have drawn some inspiration from the conversations initiated by Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson and the contributors to their volume on anthropological locations (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). As anthropologists' attention began increasingly moving away from groups (Brubaker 2004) and space-bound communities (Hage 2005), towards issues of relationality and global flows (Appadurai 1995), the authors note, the nature of the field itself has shifted. Scholars of migration have been enthusiastic adepts of what George Marcus (1995, 1999) called 'multi-sited ethnography': an ethnography that responds to the mobility of informants, by setting the researcher herself on the move. This desired motility, Marcus (1999) stressed, could no longer be the traditional openness to being led by participants across space, but had to rest, rather, on a clearer focus on the argument. If one was to do justice to ever complex objects of inquiry, attention had to be paid to the epistemological biases (Fitzgerald 2006; Schiller et al. 2006; Wimmer & Schiller 2002), the histories (Basch et al. 1994), and ultimately the discontiguous sites (Hage 2005) that make up the phenomenon we seek to explain.

It was this insight that first highlighted London and Romania as two revealing areas of research. With its 7 million inhabitants, home to over a third of the UK's foreign born population and the largest number of Romanian migrants (Vargas-Silva 2016), London is the quintessential global city

that juxtaposes the 'command and control sites of capitalism' (Lewis et al. 2015), with the shadow army of migrant workers who fill the city's insatiable need for service labour (Friedmann & Wolff 1982; Sassen 1991; Wills 2010). Similarly, as the first point of my informants' journeys, I hoped that looking closely at Romania would enable me to answer migration scholars' call of challenging methodological nationalism (Amelina 2012; Schiller 2009; Wimmer & Schiller 2002) with its focus on the receiving states, by paying attention to the 'would be migrant' (Xiang 2014) – or, the subject who emerges before borders are crossed and mobility becomes reduced to yet another policy object to be managed (Anderson, 2013; McKeown, 2008).

Having noted that, however, after a couple of months of exploratory fieldwork in London, where I spent time identifying the boroughs with a high rate of Romanian residents, and looking for contacts in Romanian organisations, it became apparent that finding a gateway into the field, and scaling down the vastness of the city into a space amenable to ethnographic 'witnessing' (Hannerz 2003) was more than an exercise in mapping (Hage 2005). Multi-sited ethnography is neither about theoretical holism (Candea 2007; Falzon 2016), nor simply about being 'there and there' (Hannerz 2003). The field, as Matei Candea (2007) notes, continues to be a matter of the ethnographer's choice, which emerges at the point where sites delimited theoretically, along axes of power, and geographically, along axes of ethnic diversity, intersect with the resources of time, money, patience and indeed trust needed in any participative exploration of human life.

One evident practical issue was that migrants like Doru, who worked in short-term positions distributed across a multitude of locations in the city, hardly lent themselves to the kind of regular everyday observations that have informed ethnographies of solidarities in factories (Dunn, 2004; Korczynski, 2011; Ong, 2010) or corporations (Chelcea, 2015; McDowell, 1997; Miller & Rose, 1990). While a number of ethnographies have produced inspiring accounts of the fragile domestic labour conducted by women in the private space of the home (Anderson, 2000; Cox, 2006, 2007), I was interested in paying equal attention to the experiences of men. Since construction sites were unlikely suited for observation by a young female researcher, entering the field in London ultimately became a matter of finding informants who would talk to me regularly, allow me to join them in their leisure activities, and only when possible shadow them at work in a way that would not erode my, and their, security. I was firmly aware of the fact that I had set out to research a poor and 'hyper-mobile' population (Lewis et al. 2015), in one of the world's most taxing metropoles

(The Economist 2017). For those who worked on the black market or as self-employed contractors, every day off work spent talking to me would have meant a day without pay. I was also acutely aware of the fact that, for many of my informants, time off was a rare resource to be divided between family, domestic work and only occasionally a chance to unwind. Wishing thus at once to observe and to give something back, in September 2014 I began my fieldwork with a three month collaboration with a charity: the East European Advice Centre (EEAC).[3]

September-December 2014: East European Advice Centre

The EEAC is a charity based in the Polish Cultural Centre in West London, which ran an employment rights programme for A8 and A2 nationals trapped in what, at the time, the group called 'exploitative employment'. Being a small team with limited resources, yet keen to extend assistance with the help of volunteers, the EEAC equipped me with the training required to act as an employment rights service provider for three days a week. In part formally, in part learning by doing as is the case with so many charities which have to scramble for training resources, I received a thorough introduction into British employment legislation, the rights and fiscal responsibilities associated with different employment statuses, and the public and third sector routes out of precarious work.

On one level, volunteering as an employment rights service provider opened a rare insight into the timid interactions Romanian migrants from rural areas had with the disembodied, digitised institutions which regulate employment in the UK. While in the context of the charity the state was most frequently represented through encounters with the HMRC, which is the UK fiscal authority, and Job Centre, which is the institution that could issue a National Insurance Number for migrant workers, the observations made at the desk of the EEAC opened the way into a broader area of inquiry. Being a caseworker at the EEAC revealed much about Romanian migrants' citizenship and work practices, and the way the transition to the bureaucracy of self-employment contributed to precariousness.

On another level, through the tasks I performed at the charity, which ranged from simply writing CVs to helping Romanian workers challenge false self-employment, recover unpaid wages or dispute unfair dismissals, I gained a chance to establish a bond of trust which made soliciting

[3] The charity has since been renamed the East European Resource Centre.

interviews a more equitable exchange. This began at the EEAC, but continued to punctuate my relationships with informants throughout my time in the field. For better or worse, my position as a service provider who could explain concepts and bureaucratic processes which many Romanian migrants struggled with, ensured that our interviews were animated by mutual interest. In lengthy conversations with men in particular, which always possess a danger of drifting into an unwanted romantic register, as generations of female ethnographers have remarked (Hanson & Richards 2017; Sharp & Kremer 2006), my position as a service provider ensured that our relation remained professional.

During the 3 months at the EEAC, I conducted 24[4] in-depth interviews with migrants who came to the UK before the liberalisation of work restrictions, and who self-identified as ethnic Romanians.[5] I found some of my informants among the service users who approached the charity looking for help. They were generally men from Romanian villages, with modest levels of education and IT literacy, who had experienced in some cases not only years of precarious work, but also homelessness. I am indebted to my manager and colleagues for allowing me to use the organisation's premises to conduct interviews in a safe and supportive environment. I am also grateful for the way the charity entrusted me with joining outreach activities, as this was instrumental in widening my range of interviewees. For the duration of my internship and to the year this thesis was written, the EEAC has been conducting a series of outreach sessions in Romanian neighbourhoods, churches, or in partnership with the Romanian Embassy. Accompanying the project manager during these sessions, or simply conducting outreach on my own as a researcher-turned-EEAC-volunteer, opened access to a more diverse range of participants, who were not brought together simply by their status as help-seekers. If interviews conducted with service users of the EEAC involved Romanians who were caught in the grip of exploitative work arrangements - the type of subjects who would fit Guy Standing's (2016) notion of 'precariat' -, the informants I met outside also included workers and entrepreneurs who seemed content with their position. To simply call them middle or working class would be, as noted earlier, an opaque simplification. Among them there were graduates who worked in positions far below

[4] The decision to have at least 12 subjects within relatively homogenous categories of race, nationality and time of migration was informed by a study by (Guest, Bunce et al. 2006) which found that the majority of codes in thematic analyses of qualitative interviews emerged within the first 12 transcripts.

[5] Including Romanian Roma in the sample did constitute an early ambition, but given the difficulty in accessing them, and the diversity of their experience, this aspiration was postponed.

their levels of training, but were pleased with the trajectories their lives had acquired in the UK; and Romanians who had left subsistence farming to build highly successful businesses in London. What they were not, however, was members of the privileged population who enjoy the type of seamless continuity between good education, work, and living conditions, to claim without a dose of irony, elite status. Appendix 1 provides an overview of demographic variables - yet every one of my informants held, in one way or the other, an uneven mix of capitals whose role in self-perception, and the perception of other Romanians, will be unpacked in the course of this thesis.

Interviews took the form of life stories (Bertaux & Kohli 1984; Frank 1995; Geiger 1986; Peacock & Holland 1993), and offered a good overview of informants' convoluted employment histories, social networks and artifices deployed to circumvent the bureaucratic barriers erected by the transitional agreements, and the ability to weather precariousness through a mix of drawing instrumentally on conationals, on one hand, and a discourse of personal adaptability, on the other. Some of them were recorded and transcribed into English, but the possibility of taping them varied with the particularities of each conversation. In conversations with informants who had spent years in the UK and enjoyed a position of relative power, for instance, formalising the register by placing an audio recorder between us felt perfectly natural. In encounters with men the recorder even felt necessary, like a marker of professionalism which served to keep unwanted advances at bay. In other cases however, when participants felt vulnerable or apprehensive, fearing perhaps that a recording could be used against them, our discussion was only accompanied by detailed field notes. This explains a relative prominence of quotations from interviews with men throughout parts of this thesis.

It was these interviews that first revealed how, despite the prominence of other Romanians at every stage of their journeys, my informants' histories were peppered with passionate, but at the time opaque expressions of bitter disappointment at their conationals. At that point, it became apparent that if I was to uncover more about this ambivalence, it was necessary to complement the interviews and office based observation at the EEAC, with a broader look at Romanian migrants' everyday interactions with each other.

January-July 2015: North London neighbourhood

I spent the following 8 months in a North London Neighbourhood[6] with a high density of Romanian businesses and residents. Being able to act as a former service provider who could impart, when needed, knowledge of state processes, it was easy to earn the trust of workers. I came to spend most of my time observing interactions in local Romanian businesses: in a corner shop, in a butcher's, in a hairdresser's and a bar, where I paid regular visits or simply answered staff's requests for company. Given the nature of businesses, most of my key informants here were young women – the cashiers who worked at the till and allowed me to shadow them. They were gracious to introduce me to their customers and partners, to welcome me in their homes during the rare moments of privacy, and to allow me to accompany them during their domestic chores. This is where I met nineteen-year-old Cristina and twenty-five-year-old Doru, who make the subject of the introductory vignette. I owe much of this thesis to them. It was Cristina's trusting readiness to acquaint me with the numerous connections who mediated their journeys to London, that revealed just how much is at stake in offering help between Romanian conationals, and her network who shed light on the frustrations so many informants had expressed earlier with Romanians' selfishness. Finally, it was the days of observations in the corner shop which revealed the profoundly gendered experience of mobility, and the many layers of indebtedness that characterised young women's relations to bosses who were at once their partners, seniors, and gatekeepers. This is something I unpack in later part of the thesis.

It is fair to acknowledge that the modes of interaction I adopted over the course of fieldwork varied- in conversations with men and women, on one hand, but also depending upon the relational possibilities inscribed in the ethnographic field site, and method. In contrast to interviews I had conducted at the EEAC, which were more directed and frequently recorded, limited to one or a few encounters at most, and usually on the premises of the EEAC, there was a certain intimacy in the relationships I built in the Neighbourhood, particularly with women, which drew our work into a very different register. Over the course of several months I filled my days going from one business to another, spending hours by the till talking to cashiers, but also gradually getting to know their regular customers and neighbours, the local business owners and suppliers, authority figures and figures who intimidated, but who constituted, together, the Neighbourhood's diverse Romanian

[6] For the purpose of preserving participants' anonymity, I will continue to refer to under this generic name.

community. Similar to the experience of outreach I conducted at the EEAC, this opened access to a diverse pool of informants with a range of cultural, social, and material capitals. Above all, the aimless regularity of participant observation allowed my informants' views to unfold without the rigidities of interview schedules, offering a window into the contradictions which underscored their relations with conationals, and laying bare the tense mixture of interest and affect in their friendships. It was 'being there' and listening to cashiers' musings by the till, for instance, which revealed how the magnanimous boss of yesterday could be seen as a self-interested profiteer today; or which showed how an impassionate feeling of injustice could be muted by a sense of indebtedness.

It was also 'being there' and establishing long-term relationship with graduates who saw themselves as part of a certain sphere of intellectuals, that provided an insight into the sinuous affirmation, silencing, and reaffirmation of class in Romanians' perceptions of each other. The same university graduates who confessed during interviews that the experience of migration levelled their aspirations of intellectual superiority, the moment they realised that they were as likely to take up manual work and live in a shared house as peasants, also voiced indignation when they spotted conationals drinking in public, speaking vulgarly, or embodying other markers of unpolished behaviour. There were local newspaper editors who loathed the elitism of the Romanian political class, for instance, but who were themselves trying to create new educated subjectivities by encouraging readers to go beyond the drudgery of work, and engage with London's rich cultural life. These are contradictions I will unpack in the course of this thesis.

Many of these relationships stretched far beyond the confines of the high street businesses in which they started. My friendship with women led me to join them in walks, shopping, trips to school and children centres – though more rarely in their homes, which were shared and afforded little privacy. My friendship with two local newspaper editors, both men, led me to accompany them in newspaper deliveries at Romanian shops around the city, and even drew me into a brief period of reportage. The biggest exercise in following however, came rather unexpectedly, towards the end of fieldwork, when I decided to join Cristina and Doru during their regular trip back home.

August 2015: the village of Corbu

It is fair to acknowledge that this methodological decision came with a certain dose of serendipity. I had long considered Romania as a site where migration began. Every interview started by asking participants to describe their lives in the country, the time they began contemplating going overseas, and the moment when aspirations turned into actual plans. Towards the end of my fieldwork in North London however, it became apparent that without a glimpse of witnessing to accompany my informants' retrospective accounts, a certain ethnographic depth was missing. I realised that I had relied upon a level of auto-ethnographic imaginary - informed by where I had been raised, the power relations, inequalities, and aspirations I had encountered. Yet by the end of my observations in London it became apparent that while my experience as the only-child of liberal graduates in Bucharest had much in common with some migrants, it could hardly capture the sociality and sensibilities inherent in the trajectories of people like Cristina from Romania's villages. After all, they were rooted in a space whose poverty, opportunities for social mobility, web of relations and moral economies were very different from my own.

I lived with Cristina's family in a mid-Carpathian village I will call Corbu for the purpose of anonymity, and joined the couple in their social outings with friends. Most of the friends I met were other émigrés, on holiday back home from London. I also witnessed their encounters with young men and women who looked up to them as gateways into mobility. Above all, soon upon arriving it became apparent that this final fraction of observing Doru and Cristina's home village would be more than a means of adding descriptive depth to their interviews. 'Being there', once again, also provided a key angle for understanding the ambivalence of help which they, and so many of my informants, exchanged along their journeys. Back in the North London Neighbourhood I had spent countless hours listening to Cristina and her colleagues complain about work conditions, yet paradoxically portray their bosses as 'people like us': kind men who had helped them leave the village; equally, I would regularly hear their exasperation at the cost of helping what seemed like an infinite stream of newcomers, yet watch them lend a hand all over again. It was only after joining them in Corbu and observing the history of mutual help, and the weight of being interpellated as 'one of us', that I came to understand the moral obligations derived from shared precarity. It was being able spatialise this reference, in other words, that the paradox of sharing which animated this project from the onset fell into place.

1.5. Challenges, positionality

I have reflected on the challenge of spatialising a plurality of power sites, and of giving something back. Another practical matter notable for its methodological implications is that, apart from the short time spent in the village, I never lived with my informants. In a sense, this was unavoidable: I found a room I could afford in Camden Town, conveniently located between the EEAC and the North London boroughs with a large population of Romanian workers where the charity conducted outreach, and was unable to break the tenancy agreement in order to move to the Neighbourhood. This is how I found myself joining the growing trend of mobile urban ethnographers who resorted to 'taking the subway to the field' (Passaro 1997).

It would be dishonest to not acknowledge that I wish I had more access to the relations my informants entertained inside the home. Given the weight the discipline traditionally attributes to embodied observation, breaking with the practice of co-locality resurrected the spectre of the impostor ethnographer more than once. However, like a number of ethnographers who have reflected on their 'hybrid' position as insiders and outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Halstead, 2001; Moroşanu, 2015b; Paechter, 2013), I have come to believe that those layers of otherness were in fact my greatest strength in the field. It was the alterity configured through my home in Camden Town, origins in Bucharest, but also the range of embodied cultural capitals my informants could aptly detect, that enabled me to render strange the intimately familiar subjects of urban migration, precarious work, and scepticism towards conationals.

On one level, being a native speaker of Romanian was immensely valuable in accessing organisations and individual informants. The bridges established around nationality were reinforced by the fact that, for all the imaginary of elitism inherent in doing a PhD at Oxford, my informants could recognise how I had plenty of my own precariousness – as an undergraduate student, I had worked a fair share of cash in hand jobs in bars and hotels; as a PhD candidate, despite the privilege of being supported by an ESRC studentship at a time of shrinking funds, the levels of assistance was far below London living costs, and the strict 3-year deadline left me scrambling for cash, time, and utility in a way which had much in common with my own informants' lifestyle. Acknowledging such common 'vulnerabilities' between observer and observed (Behar 2014) enabled us to build rapport and sensitised me to the sociality of precarious work, without

falling into the trap of contemporary 'modern day slavery' discourses that view migrants as passive victims of exploitation (O'Connell Davidson 2015).

Yet were it not for a simultaneous recognition of each other as different, such shared sensibilities could have easily turned into what Daphne Patai (1994) called the 'nouveau solipsism' of the reflexive turn in anthropology, where ethnography risks becomes as much about revealing the observer, as it is about explaining the observed. One potent source of difference came from my position at the intersection of distinct knowledge networks. On one hand, by not being from the Neighbourhood I regularly felt, and was also openly seen by some informants, as an unknowing subject. The great methodological utility of this position rests in the fact that ignorance prompts education. Many informants often felt compelled to explain 'how things work around here', revealing details of the Romanian contraband, work relations and local mafia with almost unhoped for levels of insight. And just as pedagogy prioritises the educator as agentful subject while pacifying the student, my position as a novice in the local knowledge network allowed me to remain an unthreatening curious presence, even when HM Revenue and Customs undercover officers raided the businesses that practiced contraband and levels of suspicion were at their highest.

At the same time, however, I was also a subject who wielded a type of knowledge of rights and responsibilities that was rare in the Neighbourhood. Using this register and sounding at times like a service provider, was a useful tool in interactions with young, single male informants, and helped dispel any unwanted digressions into a romantic register. In other cases, such as Cristina's, when drafting a CV appeared like the way out of a dangerous and toxic job, my help was the first step of gaining trust and establishing a deeper relationship as confidantes. In other instances still, the ability to draw on academic knowledge enabled informants who had university degrees to find in our conversations a rare occasion to reaffirm themselves as educated graduates. As so many of them noted aspirations of 'bettering themselves' by undertaking further training, and expressed the need to speak to 'people like [themselves]', I became aware of the ways in which work in precarious conditions had eroded that sense of intellectual achievement.

1.6. Ethics

In concluding these reflections on fieldwork, it is worth noting that while I have taken the welfare of my informants as my utmost priority, a notable ethical challenge was always, already inherent

in the phenomenon I was studying. By its very definition precarious work rests on insecurity (Rodgers & Rodgers 1989; Standing 2014), however active the workers themselves may be in resisting narratives of victimisation. There were numerous times when what I witnessed was not only unlawful, such as the case of contraband or subletting, but also deeply exploitative. What seemed like the normal practice 'around here' for informants, such as wages of 4GBP/hour and 12h long shifts, to me looked like a severe case of abuse, where the authority of the bosses was paralleled by their status in the village, the moral capital acquired by pulling people out, patriarchy, and seniority.

One ethical conundrum thus consisted of holding a number of competing moral obligations: firstly, according to a personal code, there was a level of sympathy for those who laboured hours on end for puny wages, or what philosopher Peter Higgins (2013) called a prioritisation of the disadvantaged; secondly, according to a disciplinary code (ASA 2011), it was to protect the identity of all informants, regardless of their virtues; finally, there was the theoretically informed duty to acknowledge human agency. After all, as vocal as they were in their assessments that 'no one helps here', none of my informants ever portrayed themselves in terms of vulnerability, despite being very aware of the insecurity of their work. In order to address this, I decided to unlearn the habit of preaching employments rights, which had become second nature after my work with the EEAC, and become an attentive, but less active, observer. Wishing to avoid the Marxist trap of suspecting workers who seemed content with their arrangements of false-consciousness, I decided against 'saving' anyone against their will, and simply making my employment rights expertise available when and as required.

All information which may lead to the identification of participants has been anonymised: their names, the titles of businesses that employed them, and the neighbourhoods where we met. The only name I have retained was that of the EEAC, and this was with my manager's accord. I have audio recorded interviews when this was allowed, but I draw on all conversations and observations acquired, as long as participants were briefed on the nature of my project. While this deviates from the sociological norm which prioritises written consent and audio recorded data, I believe that thoroughly talking informants through the project was both more suitable, and more valid than merely getting them to simply sign a form. This is especially the case given the legacy of surveillance in the public imaginary of post-socialist nations, the fresh memory of signing declarations under

coercion, and the power of clipboard-wielding knowledge workers to coerce a transfer of data. For this reason, I have strived to make informants aware of my intentions for the duration of our interactions, and not simply pin it down to a hasty formal agreement that can easily be acquired under pressure. [7]

This issue of communication brings me to the final ethical challenge of this project. The year I started, speculations regarding the number of A2 nationals who might 'flood' the UK filled the pages of newspapers (Light & Young 2009; Vicol & Allen 2014), rendering their presence in the British public imaginary inescapably visible. This was neither unusual in the UK tabloids' long history of xenophobic bursts, nor new to Romanians themselves. Long before their migration to the UK was big enough to attract the attention of the media, Romania had been problematized as one of Europe's laggards (Noutcheva & Bechev 2008) undeserving of EU membership (Gallagher 2009; Dimitris Papadimitriou & Gateva 2009; David Phinnemore 2006a), and its emigrants regularly featured in stories of petty crime, benefit abuse, or rough sleeping across the continent. Notably, as anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu (2013) remarks, this sustained representation as Europe's peripheral subjects from the outside, also created a current of zealous counter-representation from the inside. The Romanian Government, as well as civil society actors, have long engaged in a quest for rehabilitating the country's image; from publicly funded advertisements portraying an 'eternal and fascinating Romania' (Surcel 2006) as a tourist destination in Western media, to openly racist, paradoxically un-European attempts to attribute any negative stories to Romania's own 'abject' other (Tyler 2013), the Roma (Tileaga 2005; 2007, 2008).

I frequently found myself at this intersection of discourses, particularly in interactions with educated and materially comfortable Romanians with claims to middle class status, for whom recognition as fully European was a thorny issue. There were times when some informants expected me to empathise with racialised, classed categorisations of undesirables (see also Moroşanu, 2015b; Romocea, 2014): the Roma who shame us, the benefit scroungers who profit from our work, the immigrants of colour who were even less European. I found myself politely

[7] Every time I met a new participant I began by explaining my interest in precarious work, then reiterated my position as researcher by reminding participants whenever I asked more questions, that I was doing it for 'my book'. When talking to informants for whom academic denominations meant little, 'the book' has been a much more accessible way of describing my research interest than any reference to doctorates, which also rendered clear my intention of communicating findings to a larger audience.

asking probing questions, but holding back from the normative stance I would have taken otherwise. This, I dare argue, points to a level of dishonesty inherent in fieldwork, particularly when it gets close to home. It was a joint dishonesty towards the self, who was silenced by its disciplinary framing as understanding subject, and towards informants, who were problematized through the necessity of being understood.

A rather more uncomfortable scenario emerged when I found myself not only rallied in an expectation of empathy, but in the quest for counter representation. I realise how, by virtue of my nationality and profession, I was interpellated as a subject who had the power to communicate and thus, I believe it was assumed, a duty to redress the popular discourse on Romanian migrants. 'There are also Romanians who…', was a phrase I heard endlessly during encounters with officials and activists. At times, this was expressed imperatively: 'You have to talk about the Romanians who…..'; or, more troublingly 'It was an embarrassment that you didn't talk about…'. [8] The specific subject my interlocutors wished I represented instead, varied: 'Romanian doctors', 'the positively integrated', 'our elites'. What was implicit nonetheless, was that this group of subjects worthy of portrayal did not include the poor, the insecure, the everyday rule-benders.

I tried to diffuse the immediate awkwardness of such encounters by arguing that I am not seeking to sell a country brand or to exhaustively represent the Romanian diaspora. Romania's preoccupation with its image has long been documented (Mihăilescu, 2013; 2015), as has that of other Eastern European countries (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Buchowski 2006; Todorova 2009; Wolff 1994), and there is little need to convince the readers of this thesis of the virtues of Romanian migrants. If there is a duty that emerges from remembering 'where you left from', I like to believe that I fulfil my own by acknowledging that below the glow of an elite minority, many more Romanians had to navigate precarious configurations of immigration controls, employment and housing policies. If there is a demand for a positive representation of Romanianness, it is precisely the geology of that demand, at the level of discourse and everyday practice, which I set out to unpack. [9]

[8] This was the private comment of a representative of a Romanian trade union, in response to my presentation on the intersections between Precarious work and Contraband, in a panel on Migration and Crime at a conference organised by EZA and UNAIE in October 2016.

[9] I also like to entertain the thought that an ethnography of Romanian migrants' means, and barriers, of getting by with the help of friends can inform initiatives targeted at the normalisation of precariousness – it

I can only hope that these arguments made my interlocutors more open to thinking and talking about precariousness and its representation. On another level, however, their criticism raises important questions on whether, as anthropology has moved home, the exoticism of subjects once constituted along colonial lines is now replaced by the exoticism of class misery – the 'suffering slot' Robbins (2013) talked about, which replaces cultural alterity with the spectacle of pain, violence, and oppression. There is always a danger, as Rancière (2004) powerfully argued, that in seeking to give a voice to those presumed voiceless, we portray the poor, or the other, as subjects incapable of self-representation. In unpacking their lives and proposing solutions with the authority of social science, the philosopher argues, we deny the legitimacy of a politics the poor always, already lead through poetics and quiet dissent, camouflaged in everyday aesthetic choices.

Rancière poses a challenge one can ruminate on for a lifetime. In this thesis, I hope to have found a space where a critique of the structures which configure Romanian migrants' negative identification of conationals, leaves room for equal consideration of my informants' worldviews. In situating their disappointment in the journeys through hope, help, and duty, I try to resist the temptation of dichotomous narratives of submission and resistance. Instead, I view Romanian migrants' discontent as something that is configured through many axes of power, but I contend, as in the Foucauldian tradition, that all power holds within the potential for its reinterpretation.

1.7. Chapter structure

The material covered in this thesis rests on data that spans multiple methods, registers, and sites of observation, as well as a variety of social divisions which inform in distinct ways how mobility and identification are experienced: intersectionally (Brah & Phoenix 2004; Hancock 2007; McCall 2005) across divisions of class, age, gender, and in the case of this project in particular, across time lines which distinguish between Romanians who arrived before, and those who came after the liberalisation of transitional controls in 2014. In order to capture this diversity of experience without fully submitting the readability of the text to a formulaic juxtaposition of intersections, the chapters that follow graft the discussion of Romanian migrants' discontent onto a narrative arc centred around the journey of Cristina, her helpers' from the village Corbu, and a few university

has, at least, informed the charity model of the Work Rights Centre, a charity I started during fieldwork, which is thankfully still active.

graduates I converse with at length in the Neighbourhood. If the number of informants appears small, therefore, this is a narrative choice; one which seeks to foreground the complex constellations between political economy, mutual help, and expressions of disappointment, but which in doing so must sacrifice, to some extent, the plurality of individual stories outlined in depth. Another deliberate narrative choice has been to start with discussing Romania's own brand of neoliberalism first, grounded in observations I conducted in the village, and only then to trace my informants' encounters with the familiar political economic configuration of the UK. While the chronology of data collection was rather different, this narrative is a more faithful reflection of the story experienced by my informants. Finally, every chapter begins with an introductory vignette, then opens up into a discussion of how Romanian migrants negotiated their mobility with a little help from conationals.

Chapter 2 situates my informants' departure in a brief history of Romania's post-socialist transformation. Pointing to the vast rural-urban inequality and political corruption the country witnessed since the early 1990s, this chapter shows how despite urban liberals' enthusiastic calls for setting Romania on course for Europeanisation, the only 'return to Europe' available for many Romanians was via individual journeys into the service sectors of Western economies. Having sketched this history of development, the chapter then reviews the different waves that have contributed to Romania's high emigration rate.

Having outlined the political economic contours of a complex transition, **Chapter 3** begins to move towards the subjective experience of living in a country whose future seemed to have imploded. Starting from the idea that 'there is nothing to do here', a motif which kept recurring in conversations with my informants, but also far beyond in the literature on East-West mobility, this chapter reflects on how despite the promise circulated in the discourse on transition, for many Romanians the prospect of the good life seemed eroded. Whether experienced as destitution, as my informants did in the countryside, or as political betrayal, as those from urban areas recounted, the feeling of hopelessness had acquired almost chronic dimensions; and with it, I continue to show, moving West emerged as a future that could be.

Chapter 4 proceeds to unpack the numerous transnational markers which contributed to reaffirming the image of the West as a space of hope. Juxtaposing the discourse espoused by the

Romanian president, who portrayed the diaspora as the promising depository of 'Occidental mentality', with my informants' own conspicuous investments from below in vast homes, cars, and jewellery acquired with capital earned abroad, I show how for subsistence farmers and the urban middle class alike, the West emerged, in different ways, as a space of promise; a space that contoured with its glare Romania's own sense of entrapment.

Having outlined this antithetical dynamic between home and abroad, **Chapter 5** then begins to look at the ways in which Romanian migrants who saw themselves as having nothing, could reach towards the space of boundless potentiality. It is here that I focus on the role of informal economies of help in the practice of mobility. Bringing the network paradigm familiar to the migration literature, in dialogue with theories of favour exchange developed by economic anthropologists, in this chapter I propose to conceptualise Romanian migration too as a process animated by interest, a concern with one's personal mobility, and driven simultaneously by an affective register of obligation to care for the 'people from here'. If networks have been shown to go so far in propelling migration, I argue, it is not only because of the material gains they engender, but also because of migrants' recognition of each other's co-dependency.

Chapter 6 takes this examination of responses to co-dependency further, by shifting ethnographic focus to London. For all the hope my informants had nurtured upon departing, here I show how the city imagined as a beacon of modernity was in itself replete with pockets of precarity: engendered by the transitional immigration controls which funnelled Romanian migrants towards self-employment, but also conjured more broadly by an erosion of work and housing security which affected migrants and citizens alike. Starting thus with an overview of London's precarious grooves, in this chapter I show how Romanian migrants' previous class aspirations were toned down, enabling the emergence of a new form of togetherness constituted around Romanianness: as register of being, of bending rules, and of staying mobile with a little help from friends.

Chapter 7 continues to trace these appeals to mutual assistance, noting however that relationships are never fixed. What starts as an act of grace, for one, can easily descend into a form of profit making for another, the same way that what looks like exploitation from the outside, may well be seen as fulfilling one's duty from within. This chapter thus focuses on the slipperiness of help. I show how the togetherness invoked in mobilising help can rupture when those who first appeared

to lend a hand ended up abusing, and how the uniform imaginary of 'people like us' can wither away, when some people become bosses or head tenants, and others are confined to the subservience of staff, or tenants who sublet.

Having drawn attention to this instability, inherent in the subjective nature of recognising one as being worthy of help, but also cultivated from the outside in the transfer of social security onto personal connections, the final **Chapter 8** exposes Romanian migrants' sense of disappointment, around the realisation that one is on one's own. If allegations that 'nobody helps' and 'Romanians seem to get on like dogs' are prevalent, we can see here that they are hardly the product of a broken Romanian moral core – even though much literature contributed to naturalising this idea. What I argue, rather, is that Romanianness becomes the idiom for expressing discontent, the same way it is called upon as an instrument of mobility. When Romanian migrants gravitate in a political-economic configuration which rests on transferring social security onto personal connections, it is the personal too that takes the blame, when aspirations are frustrated. Situating then this sense of disappointment derived from lived experience, within the macro hierarchies of deservingness, which prompted Romanian migrants to admonish conationals' classed, raced, and gender behaviours for falling short of standards of civilization, this chapter concludes by illustrating how two discourses with distinct genealogies, can naturalise Romanians' negative self-representation.

CHAPTER 2: POST-SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATIONS

Doru and Cristina were both born and raised in Corbu: a small village of no more than 450 inhabitants, situated in the rolling hills of Buzău Valley where the vast arc of the Carpathians starts to sweep Westwards around the Transylvanian depression. To get a sense of its world, it is useful to remember how at the time fieldwork began, Romania boasted the highest economic growth rate in the European Economic Area (Economica 2014). The country's transition, the World Bank noted, had been over from 2008 (A. Dumitrescu 2008). Now a full member of the European Union, liberalised, privatised, and open to commerce, it was only a matter of time and business incentives until regions across the country too would feel it. If that was the case, Corbu seemed to need much more of both.

A single unelectrified rail line opened in 1909 (Ionescu 2004), was the main public transport link which connected Corbu and its surrounding network of villages, to the county's main urban centre. Built in 1909 by an Austrian company to facilitate the transport of timber from the forest covered hills, over the years the line became the main artery for freight, goods, and commuters, who gathered down from the communes to the four small stations dispersed along the valley (Turnock 2001). With a maximum speed of 50kph, and frequent delays during the summer months, when dilated rail tracks reduced the train speed to a safe but slowly cadenced lull, the 70km journey from the old county capital at the Southern end of the tracks, to Nehoiu, the once booming logging centre at the Northern end, could easily take the better part of an afternoon. Depending on the weather then, the station which aserved Corbu and its surrounding commune was located anywhere between one and three hours away from the city.

It was after one such long journey across the county, where the train crossed Buzău's vast sunflower fields sloping upwards through the hills, and past the occasional rusty freight car lodged outside an empty station, that I first met Cristina's younger siblings. The meeting was warm and welcoming. With their older sister away for a few days on her first trip to the seaside, 13-year-old Iuliana and 17-year-old Constantina Iancu had taken it upon themselves to organise the journey like veritable hosts. Home, I soon found out, would be another few kilometres uphill - not the easiest of treks in the baking August sun, when the only running minibus service stopped for the school holidays. But with the gracious help of *Nea*[10] Marin, a farmer in his 40s, whom the girls convinced to come downhill for the afternoon, our journey started with a welcome relief. We crossed the rail tracks to his well-seasoned Dacia 1310 – a familiar sight on Romanian roads since the 1980s. Hands were cordially shaken, luggage nested in the boot next to the bags of shopping the girls had not missed the opportunity to make from the one supermarket by the station, and our party of four veered upwards.

'Do you like the road?', Marin interjected from the wheel, as the car slowly pushed its way out of the shadow of the four storey blocks of flats erected around the station, along the newly asphalted slopes. 'It's a new one built this year', he continued, to my young hosts' approving nods. We spent the first few minutes appreciating the smoothness of the surface. Had I arrived a year before, Iuliana added spritely, the journey would have taken rather longer; and that too was only if the weather was dry enough to make it driveable. 'Good timing', I thought to myself, if seven years after the so-called end of transition was what it took to lay the first sheets of asphalt. A large yellow-starred blue plaque announced in capital letters to all passers-by, that this was an infrastructure project funded by the European Union.

As we wound uphill on the serpentines, small glimpses of European modernity sprang with similar conspicuousness across the scenery. We saw the handsome homes of migrants and new entrepreneurs, with concrete foundations and modern light fittings, standing not far from modest buildings with walls made of clay and straw. The neatly trimmed yards with garden furniture and concrete footpaths of the former, contrasted with the fuzzy hay stacks gathered for animals in the

[10] Familial appellative for an older man.

latter. A couple of times Marin waved when we overtook a familiar horse and cart, and received a nod when a faster German car with foreign license plates overtook us.

Around half way up to Corbu we crossed the centre of the commune: a small square which hosted a recently repainted Orthodox church, the local secondary school attended by children in the five neighbouring villages, and a 'universal shop': a 5m by 5m space assembled in what before 1989 used to be an outlet for the local cooperative. In the same square, a recently renovated police station stood next to the mayor's office. Outside its freshly painted walls flew the Romanian tricolour – and right by it, the blue and yellow starred flag of the European Union made an appearance once again.

After another few minutes we slowed down. For all its extraordinariness, the asphalt had not made it that much further from the mayor's office – nor had the glimpses of that European promise of development its smoothened surface cast at first. This modernity, it seemed, stopped at the centres of political economic interest, like the socialist one had once stopped at the quarries, river banks, and concentrated settlements which lent themselves to mining; for resources in nature, and in labour (Dzenovska Forthcoming). Now flanked by orchards and pastures on both sides, and homes that got sparser and considerably more modest, the road too turned into a more testing pitted dirt track. As a courtesy to Marin's faithful but tired Dacia, we continued the steepest final leg of our journey on foot.

We passed one of the two shops in Corbu, greeting the men who sat outside. Opened in the early 1990s by a woman who used to work as an administrator at the cooperative, the shop was more of a concrete extension of her home which sold toiletries, bread, and the sort of everyday foodstuffs villagers could not grow themselves. At day, it doubled up as post office. At night, it seemed to turn into a lively space for conversation and for drinking: a bottle of beer, a glass of wine, but mostly the home-distilled plum brandy, Țuică, which came in plentiful supplies at this time of the year. We crossed ourselves when we spotted the village church, and made our way further past the small bungalow that constituted the primary school. 'That is where all the children go', Iuliana instructed me, now rather enjoying her new role as my guide; that is also where, I later learnt, from the ages of seven to ten they were all taught collectively in the same classroom. 'The New Madam (*Doamna*) is lovely', she confessed; but like the Doctor at the surgery down in the

commune centre, she drove every day from Buzău and did not spend much time in the village outside school hours. We stopped to greet every neighbour we encountered: old women with their hair tied under a batik, who paused their chores and came up close, curious to learn what we were planning; shy children, whom Iuliana placed in a sketch of local families like an able ethnographer; and teenagers, all known to Constantina, who like herself divided their summer school break between socialising and a range of daily errands.

As we made our way further up on the quiet dirt track to the Iancu's home, past the fowl that were flocking in the ditches, and the cows that were making their own way back from the pastures, I recalled one of the few descriptions of the village I could find, in a survey of Buzău county's settlements from 1892 (Iorgulescu 1892 p. 378). Under the entry for Corbu and the commune we had just driven through, the 19th century geographer had noted succinctly: 'largely agricultural with 2 carpenters, 2 bootmakers, 1 ironmonger, 3 bakers and 1 stone carver, served by 2 schools, 4 churches, and 3 bars'. Much had changed since the time of writing. And yet, it was hard to shake the sense that, for all the conspicuousness of recent European funding, the village seemed as close to that depiction, as it was to the promise of development ushered by the asphalt road. Perched upon the hills, and isolated if not by distance, then by access from the county's urban centres, one wondered where the traces of Romania's modernisations had gone; and how, as Katherine Verdery (1996) noted, after almost half a century of transitioning the village felt somewhat closer to the imagery of feudal settlements, than to the modernity of either socialist or European projects.



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This chapter argues that the story of Cristina's and Doru's departure from Corbu is, in many respects, a reflection of Romania's polarised post-socialist transformation. This is a transformation which contains at once the records for the highest economic growth rate in Europe, and for the worst urban-rural inequality (IQLRS 2017); the largest popular appeal for Europe from within, and the most pronounced reservations over its accession from outside (Gallagher 2005; Dimitris Papadimitriou & Phinnemore 2008); one of the highest rates of emigration, despite encountering the most restrictive controls over intra-European mobility

Understanding how we got here is key to unpacking the phenomenon of Romanian migration, and to examining the contentious role played by personal connections through the course of this thesis. As migration scholars have noted over the years, migration is not just the crossing of state borders (Anderson, 2013; McKeown, 2008; Xiang, 2014). Mobility sits at intersecting 'regimes' (Schiller & Salazar 2013) of state, capital, and human interventions. Macro processes (Castles 2010; Alejandro Portes 2010; Van Hear 2010) of global capitalism can make moving to more developed economies the only way out of destitution at home. Mezzo connections between networks of individuals can cultivate aspirations (István Horváth 2008; Levitt 1998; D. S. Massey 1990; Schiller & Fouron 2001), and make migration a real possibility. All of these affect, in turn, the way mobility emerges at the micro level of families and individuals.

This chapter situates my informants' movement in the context of Romania's complex post-socialist transformation. Not all of those who left did so to escape. Some Romanians emigrated out of need, in search for work, while others did so in pursuit of personal development, ideals civilization or political fairness. There is a clear discrepancy between the mobilities of Romanians from villages like Corbu, and of those who enjoyed the relative comfort of an urban lifestyle, higher education, and stable waged employment. Despite these differences however, this chapter shows how the journeys undertaken by Cristina, Doru, and others from neighbouring villages, are part of a momentous flow of out-migration, spurred in large part by inequalities and corruption. If the 'return to Europe' was the chief political ambition for Romania post 1989, for many Romanians this return took a literal turn. This chapter outlines the political economic context.

2.1. A brief history of Romanian socialism

Like much of the area that constitutes modern day Romania, until the mid 20th century the county of Buzău was primarily a rural area (Ionescu, D. 1979). Agriculture still resembled the feudal system where most peasants worked the plots of a small class of landowning boieri, and other economic activities were limited to commerce in artisan crafts (CJB 2010 p. 9). According to the archives of the County Council (CJB, 2010), the eponymous county capital was a small provincial town of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, constituted by mud roads and bungalows disconnected from any utilities, where the main economic activity was trade. The entire region began acquiring an industrial component at the end of the 19th century, after the surrounding provices to the South (Wallachia) and East (Moldova) of the Carpathian arc left the spheres of influence of the Ottoman and Russian empires, and a series of reforms were instituted to lay the foundations of the first autonomous Romanian state. The opening of the national railway (Turnock 2001) turned the small town of Buzău into a strategic node in the network which linked the young Romanian capital of Bucharest to the towns of Moldavia and Transylvania (Petcu 2012). The early trades in wheat, meat, and wool documented during feudalism developed into vaster bakery, meat processing, and textile enterprises.

The industry was further diversified during the interbellum. The autonomous principalities of Wallachia and Moldova had gained independence at the end of the 19th century, and Romania became a kingdom under the rule of Price Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (Carol I). The annexation of Transylvania in 1918 marked the beginning of a period of development countrywide, which in Buzău manifested through the opening of a metallurgy factory and an oil refinery (CJB 2010). Notable as these changes were, however, they paled in comparison to the radical transformation which the county, and Romania at large, incurred after the coming to power of the Communist Party in 1947.[11]

Despite being the smallest and least ethnically representative Communist Party to take power in Europe (Boia 2012), the Romanian Communist Party backed by Soviet support, embarked upon a series of programmes which followed the Soviet blueprint so closely, historians label its first years

[11] As Hitchins (2014 p. 226) explains, the institution of People's Republic of Romania on December 30th 1947 was the culmination of three years of attempts by the Romanian Communist Party and its supporters in the Soviet Union to seize power.

in power as 'the Stalinist decade' (Verdery, 1991). A series of reforms shifted the country's ideological orientation away from Western Europe, whose support had been sought in the XIX century struggle for independence, and towards the USSR. Street and city names were changed in an attempt to de-commemorate the kingdom (Light et al. 2002), learning Russian became compulsory in schools, and even the spelling of the country's name was symbolically sovietised by changing it from România, to a more Slavic looking Romînia (Verdery 1991). Industries were nationalised, joint Soviet-Romanian companies were established to facilitate cheap exports of grains and raw materials to the USSR, and land was collectivised. In line with the government's policies countrywide, all of Buzău's industries went under state control during the first decade. By 1962 when Party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej declared Romanian collectivisation complete, the farms of Buzău, like 96% of the country's arable surface, were included in a system of collective production (Kligman & Verdery 2011). State farms (*IAS*) formed from the plots expropriated from vast landowners paid workers wages and distributed food across the country. Collective farms (*CAP*) harvested the land and kept the livestock 'donated' by peasants, rewarding them with benefits in kind. Overall, as Kligman and Verdery (2011, p. 88) remark, 'Romania's collectivization is the story of how the Romanian Communist Party, with its Soviet advisors, managed to gain near-total control over the food supply'.

Few of the residents I spoke to in Corbu were old enough to remember the transformation itself, which reached the village in 1961, and in many parts of the country involved a violent confrontation with party cadres. But for Petre Iancu, Cristina's father, the memory of work in the CAP downhill where as a teenager he helped his family drive the oxen plough, remained vivid. His own parents, he recounted, were poor peasants with no more than four years of primary education. 'It was hard', Petre noted thinking back of his childhood, 'but we all knew each other: a cart of hay here, a cart of wood there, we knew the woodsman, we got on with the technician, we managed'.

After they finished school in the mid-1980s, both of Cristina's parents found jobs in the enterprises established in the county. Like much of Romania after 1964, Buzău had experienced a veritable transformation in the second half of the 20th century, once the Romanian Communist Party passed its so-called 'Declaration of Independence' from the Soviet Union (Hitchins 2014 p. 273). Unsatisfied with the USSR's plan to relegate the country's economic production to agriculture, and leave manufacture to the more developed socialist republics like Poland and Czechoslovakia,

Gheorghiu Dej distanced Romania from the USSR in order to continue industrialisation independently. A new complex stretching over 318ha was inaugurated in the Southern part of Buzău. Cast iron, steel wire, concrete ballasts, as well as glass, plastics and railway part factories were all established at that time (Ionescu, 2004; Ionescu, 1979). With the coming to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965, a programme of systematic urbanisation (Sampson 1984) was instituted to further push for the transformation of Buzău from a marginal provincial town, into a developing urban centre. Throughout the Sub-Carpathian county, like in Romania at large, existing towns were expanded, and rural settlements such as Nehoiu were upgraded to urban status (Turnock 1991). The residential areas of the county capital, which previously consisted only of cottages (Petcu 2002), were reconfigured too in order to accommodate the emblematic concrete blocks of flats needed to house the city's new workers. The population of Buzău grew tenfold under this programmatic urbanisation, from just 50,000 in the 1950s to 500,000 at its peak in 1992 (Ionescu, A.M. 2004).

For Petre, who took up a job in a leather factory in the city after he finished eight years of school, joining the industry had been a promising prospect. The commute to work via the Austrian-built train line took an average of three hours in total, but he was 'happy to leave the blasted yoke behind'. Mari, for her part, worked in Foresta, a large lumber processing enterprise located in the town of Nehoiu on the Northern end of the rail tracks. 'Everyone had a job', she recalled, not without a hint of the reminiscence so many ethnographers captured among workers and peasants, who found the certainties of socialist organisation implode in the 1990s (Creed 2010; Kideckel 2008; O'Neill 2014). 'If back then someone told us that the leather factory would stop existing', Petre continued, 'I would have laughed in their face, that is how many people worked there every day'.

Through the tinted prism of memory, even the one decade of socialism the Iancus had experienced was remembered as a period of steadiness. The same way that, scholars note, socialism offered many Romanians access to an improved standard of living, and to a believable vision of the future as technological progress. Joining the industrial proletariat, Kideckel (2008) argues in his ethnography of the mining community in Jiu Valley, had been as much a means of improving one's material condition with access to utilities and services which were only available in towns, as it had been a means of feeling meaningful in a national imaginary centred on the industrial proletariat.

After all, Romanian socialism took a particularly intense ideological turn in the 1970s. Inspired by his visit to North Korea and Mao's China, Ceaușescu returned with a vision which merged the old goal of industrial development, with a new interest in the power of ideology. His infamous speeches in 1971, known as the 'July theses', ushered in the beginning of what Dennis Deletant (2006) called a form of moral puritanism, which did as much to exalt the role of the proletariat, as it did to condemn intellectual work unaffiliated with socialist goals, and to censor authorship. It is not hard to see how, positioned at once as harbinger of economic development, and as a pillar of the country's moral order, the worker became the ideal citizen of Romania's 'nationally tinted socialism' (Verdery, 1993; Verdery, 1991) after the 1970s. 'If we speak about the creation of conditions of full equality between the sexes', Ceaușescu noted in his address to the Central Committee, 'this means that we must treat all people not as men and women, but in their qualities as party members, as citizens, for which they are exclusively judged according to their work contribution' (in Kligman 1998 p. 27).

The stability socialism offered workers was, of course, neither experienced homogenously (Burawoy & Verdery 2000), nor devoid of other significant imitations. For all the invocations of unity under the seemingly raceless, genderless subject of the worker, differences continued: in the social protections afforded different ethnic minorities, as well as in men's and women's gendered relegations to so-called hard and light sectors of the industry (Fischer & Harsanyi 1998). One of the greatest paradoxes experienced by women under socialism, was that their emancipation through work did not preclude the expectation that they fulfil, in addition to their proletarian duties, domestic duties as mothers and housekeepers. Gail Kligman's (1998) harrowing ethnography of family planning, documents the drama that unleashed when in the name of providing for the welfare of the nation, the regime instituted a draconian policy of policing reproduction. The infamous Decree 770 passed by Ceaușescu in 1967 to criminalise abortion, created a new generation, diminutively known as *decreței* (children of the decree). In addition to spurring a population growth, the measure prompted a tragic rise in deaths of women, who attempted clandestine methods of pregnancy interruption, in the incarceration of doctors and others who dared to assist them, and in the cases of child abandonment - deplored in Western media through the 1990s as Romania's infamous orphanage crisis.

A similar ambivalence can be said to have characterised other processes. Collectivisation, Kligman and Verdery (2011) note, was at once a transformation which brought the poorest to subsistence levels, and a traumatic experience for those peasants suspected of being, or sympathising with, land-owning 'enemies of the people' (*chiabur*). Urbanisation too was far from instituting uniform modernity – despite Ceaușescu's commitment, from 1973, to 'systematise' Romania's urban development (Diaconu 2013). In response to my question about the time she first contemplated leaving Romania, Laura, an informant who had grown up in a newly industrial town in Transylvania, provided a fascinating account of the pseudo-modern flats her family lived in. Fully cast in concrete, but unequipped with either central heating or insulation, workers' blocks turned into veritable cool boxes in the freezing winter temperatures, which dropped to as low as -20°C in her Transylvanian county. The only way to avoid freezing, she recounted, was by burning gas in improvised stoves. This echoes David Turnock's findings, which show how development concentrated in industrial and extractive centres, leaving remote villages, such as Corbu, still connected by a sluggish infrastructure (Turnock 1991). Planners made little effort to understand the nature of the village (Sampson 1984). In urban areas, during the most intense decade of systematisation, whole neighbourhoods were effectively razed to the ground (Deletant, 1995, p. 309).

Above all, beneath the narrative of stability there was the well documented presence of surveillance (Deletant 1995; Pacepa 1987; Verdery 2014), and the unfolding drama of shortages. Moving peasants to blocks of flats, Turnock (1991) argues, had been as much a means of supporting industrial development, as it had been a means of undermining the independence of the peasant cottage. While moving to an urban centre could mean access to utilities, waged work, and better resourced public services, in many cases this comfort also came at the cost of proximity to the vast web of Securitate agents, who conditioned any attempts at mobility that fell outside those vetted by the Party, upon entering their network of informants (Pacepa 1987). As for the shortages seen widely, but simplistically, as a 'chronic' (Kornai, 1980) condition of socialism, Romania experienced its worst crisis in the 1980s. Having managed to look like one the more liberal states beyond the Iron Curtain just a decade earlier by increasing trade with the West, joining the IMF and World Bank, and even earning the status of US Most Favoured Nation, in the 1980s Romania experienced its darkest decade. A devastating earthquake in 1977, the Gulf oil crisis that made the cost of manufacture soar, and Ceaușescu's desire to assert the country's independence by repaying the

foreign loans taken earlier during the decade of apparent openness, turned the 1980s into a testing time even for subsistence.

Most economic output was channelled to exports, causing severe power and food shortages, which bit especially hard in the city. Commodity prices were raised, and workers' wages were cut in an attempt to keep up with the debt repayments. Throughout the same time, it is worth remembering, while in the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev was advocating for *perestroika* and *glastnost*, or policies of restructuring with an aim to democratise governance and give voice to a level of opposition (Pesmen 2000, p. 7-8), Nicolae Ceaușescu's totalitarian tendencies increased. The repression of the Securitate and their control over cultural production was intensified. The only media available, save for the shortwave broadcast by Radio Free Europe, was the two hour evening programme of news. All while the ruling couple's personality cult, and their support for expenditure on grandiose construction projects such as the 'People's house' (now the Parliament building) in Bucharest, defied the national picture of extreme scarcity. It is little wonder how in 1989, even the growing network of Securitate agents, and Ceaușescu's attempts at omnipresent ideological control, could not stifle an eruption of discontent.

2.2. The tortuous transition

The series of events the Romanian public imaginary now remembers as the December 1989 revolution, brought shockwaves around the country – and indeed around the world, as Romania became the only state beyond the Iron Curtain to put a violent end to communist rule (Vulliamy, 2009). An estimated hundred thousand people, gathered for a televised rally outside the Party Central Committee in Bucharest on December 21st, turned against the Ceaușescus. The crowd of workers, bussed in from industrial centres as per the custom, remained silent to the Securitate agents' cue for cheers, and in a previously unthinkable turn of mood, started jeering. Shaken, Ceaușescu managed a temporary appeasement of the rally with unscripted promises for higher wages, higher pensions, and more generous school allocations. By the end of the day, however, the fragility of the regime had spread. Further demonstrations broke out in cities across the country, and clashes with the military, who followed orders whose origin remains disputed to this day, left dozens dead. By the morning of December 22nd, the army had switched sides. Undefended and in broad daylight, the Ceaușescu couple fled the capital in their helicopter. Their car was intercepted,

they were caught, tried in a brief show trial, found guilty and executed on Christmas day. Their last moments alive were filmed and shown on national television; as were images of young protesters storming government buildings in Bucharest, seizing the infamous archives of the Securitate, and symbolically cropping the socialist coat of arms from the Romanian flag (Kozinski 1991).

The point blank execution of the Ceaușescus, and the confusion over the night of violence that ensued did not remain unquestioned (Ratesh 1991; Roper 2000; Vulliamy 2009). To this day analysts in Romania and beyond dispute whether the events of December 1989 did indeed constitute a spontaneous popular revolution, or whether they were more akin to an inside coup orchestrated by Communist party members who feared, as historian Keith Hitchins (2014 p. 290) notes, that Ceaușescu's growing authoritarian tendencies at a time when European socialism was loosening its grip over political freedoms, would spell an end to their own rule. Contested as the spaces behind the scenes may have been, however, and uncomfortable against the narrative of a peaceful transition to democracy, for the men and women at the front of the uprising the first moments of freedom were also a cause of celebration.

Denis Deletant (2016) notes in his field observations in the wake of Ceaușescu's fall, how the euphoria was most visible in urban areas. The symbolism of European-ness, a potent theme among Romanian intellectuals since the mid-1800s (Djuvara 2013), had given the December events a momentous character in the city – as had the fact that urban residents' subjection to shortages and surveillance were more intense. In Bucharest student protesters chanted 'Europe is with us!', while newspapers printed enthusiastically 'we are returning at last' (Verdery, 1991, p. 2). Street names were changed again to commemorate the revolution, or restored to their interbellum titles (Light 2004), while art manifestations celebrated the end of censorship. An interim government branded the National Salvation Front promised that, in its quest for returning to Europe, Romania would at once embrace liberal democracy, development and for the first time, as Verdery (1996) notes, a vibrant civil society.

It was not long, however, before the ideology of return lost its sheen, and the inability of the programme to engender its many promises became visible to many Romanians. One main source of concern that led the EU trade commissioner to remark upon his first visit in 1990 that Romania was 'far off from the EU' (Gallagher 2009), was that for all the promise of change, the interim

government included in fact old party apparatchiks and former Securitate agents. Katherine Verdery (1996) meticulously traced how, having capitalised on the moralised suffering of dissidents, such as writers persecuted under Ceaușescu, the former elite ensured their continuity in power, then consolidated their position by sealing the Securitate archives which could have compromised them, and by splitting the government along the lines of old political affiliations. If countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic began their lustration process of declassifying secret police archives in 1991, in Romania it wasn't until 1999 that the wealth of Securitate files became available (Verdery, 2014). The newly formed left leaning Social Democrat Party headed by the former Communist Party member Ion Iliescu, won the 1992 elections in coalition with the far right Party for Greater Romania. Iliescu dismissed the early calls for reform of the Europhile liberal opposition as unpatriotic wishes of an urban intellectual class. Demands for market reform were portrayed as attempts 'to sell the country' by 'agents of foreign powers' (Verdery 1996, p. 111). Instead, his government supported an 'original Romanian democracy' (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006) which accommodated a heavy handed state and continued to subsidise loss-making industries to ensure the support of peasants and industrial workers (J. R. Friedman 2007a, 2012), only to see them crumble a few years later.

A vast body of literature blames Iliescu's attempt to fashion an in-between market economy for the disastrous inflation in the early 1990s, the ensuing unemployment, over one million lawsuits over property restitutions, and the creation of an oligarchic business class (see for instance Gallagher 2005; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Roper 2000). Advocates of market reform blamed Romania's inability to meet the many promises inherent in the fabled return to Europe on 'predatory political elites' (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007, 2010): career politicians seasoned in the Communist Party, who engaged, allegedly, in corrupt allocations of public funds, and who sabotaged monitoring by the European Commission. The change of political leaning in 1996, however, with a government formed of a liberal coalition intent on setting the country back on its course to Europe, brought its own sets of wants. The combination of 'freeing' the economy through so-called shock therapies of privatisation, sale of state assets, and an ideological commitment to the reduction of state provision in favour of market mechanisms at all costs, have led scholars at the Romanian Academy's Institute for Research into the Quality of Life, to label the country's incipient transition as 'a decade of impoverishment' (Zamfir et al. 2010 p. 27).

Many industrial communities deemed uncompetitive, such as the Făgăraș chemical workers documented by Friedman (2012), the Jiu Valley miners studied by Friedman (2011) and Kideckel (2008), and indeed the industrial complex of Buzău which remained vivid in my informants' imagination, went from being the heart of socialist citizenship, to witnessing soaring unemployment. In the localities where industry closures were not followed by any viable replacement, and where the infrastructure did not facilitate commuting to more affluent areas, unemployment rose and property prices plummeted. Average wages and pensions crashed, while the level of GDP only returned to 'pre-transition' values in 2004 (Nicolae, 2018). For the first time in the late 1990s, the trend in internal migration established under socialism reversed, as laid-off workers found relief from decaying towns into the minimal but self-sufficient practice of subsistence farming (Zamfir et al. 2010). Agriculture too suffered from what analysts have labelled a lack of a model to replace the work of collective farms. From the mid-1990s to the present day, studies have continued to highlight how poor infrastructure, limited absorption of European development funds, and the absence of a mechanism for ensuring the distribution of agricultural produce beyond the village (Dorndel 2011; Mihăilescu 2000; A. Mungiu 2010) continue to keep Romania's rural space stuck in an agrarian model, rather than an agricultural one. An overview of holdings indicates that over two thirds were classed at subsistence level measuring under 1ha in size, over a quarter at semi-subsistence level, and only 0.3% as commercial farms (Page & Popa 2013 p. 8). [12]

It is only fair to acknowledge that what was already a radical and little tested doctrine of privatisation and state shrinking, was paralleled by nepotism and bribery, which had less to do with ideological neoliberalism imposed from the outside, and much more to do with local political actors. This combination of sudden liberalisation and corruption was something that for residents of Corbu was intimately familiar. Foresta, the largest factory in Nehoiu where Cristina's mother used to work, was brought to financial ruin no later than four years after privatisation (Bunila 2014). An investigation found the new owner guilty of fraud and involvement in organised crime, concluding with a three-year prison sentence. That, however, did nothing to mitigate the local unemployment which ensued. If before 1990 Foresta employed over 3000 staff, a search in the Romanian Companies Directory reveals that its remaining successor employs just over 400, and is

[12] Overall, more than half of utilisable agricultural land was either used at subsistence or semi-subsistence.

followed far behind by small enterprises of fewer than 100 employees each. A similarly bleak economic situation characterises Pătârlagele, a locality officially labelled as a town today, where Corbu's nearest railway station is situated. Pătârlagele only received an upgrade to urban status in 2004, as Romanian authorities were seeking to meet European criteria for urbanisation (Lixandru 2015). The locality itself has just over 2000 people, but in an effort to urbanise, the mayor branded the villages in the commune 'future veritable economic neighbourhoods' (quoted in Ionescu, A.M. 2004 p. 141), effectively using their combined population to exceed the 5,000 inhabitants limit specified by the law for urban settlements. Despite the formal upgrade and enthusiasm of the local officialdom, Pătârlagele failed to develop. The largest employer today is a construction firm with just over 100 staff, followed by a bakery with 50 employees and very small lumber processing firms.[13] More importantly, an investigative report notes (Lizandru 2015), its rebranding as urban excluded it twice over: from accessing European funds for rural development, but also from drawing private investors, who were unconvinced by the quality of the infrastructure and the small purchasing power of the local market.

It must be noted at this point that the failings which affected Pătârlagele were not uniformly represented in the county, or across Romania at large. Industry closures in the early 1990s in the county capital Buzău were offset by foreign direct investments and a generation of Romanian entrepreneurs (CJB 2010), who ensured the continuity of some industries and added several new enterprises. According to a recent economic profile (Panaete 2014), the town continues to manufacture railway parts, break plates, car parts and other steel base, as well as host an active agro-industry, plastics, and recycling industry. This matches a trend which, at the level of the national average at least, points towards recovery. After a recession in the period from 1990 to 1992, and another during the mass privatisation of the late 1990s, the Romanian economy grew steadily, interrupted only by the financial crisis of 2008. Inflation too followed a similar trajectory, going from rates of over 200% in 1991, to a sustainable decrease towards the 2000s. Starting in 2015, for three consecutive years Romania registered one of the highest economic growth rates in Europe. Judging by the picturesque tourist resorts in Transylvania and the Black Sea, furthermore, and by the bustling centres of cities like Bucharest, Timișoara, Cluj, and others which witnessed a

[13] This is based on data from the Romanian Companies Directory.

sprout of cultural life, spaces for consumption, and arts events, many Romanians also enjoy a comfortable standard of living.

Beneath the national referent however, and the examples of affluence concentrated in cities, there lies a picture of inequality and ambivalence. Emerging from one of the harshest versions of socialism practiced in Europe at the end of the 1980s, in 2010 Romania was the country with the smallest rate of public spending within the EU (Zamfir et al. 2010). Scholars at the Centre for Research into Life Quality note that business-incentivising policies cannot lead to sustainable development on their own. Low tax rates and conditional social assistance adopted by successive liberal governments will not do the job of state investment into infrastructure, education, and reskilling programmes for the unemployed. Nor will expensive branding campaigns which promote the pristine rural landscape, such as the infamous million Euro logo ordered under the liberal government in 2010 (Stan 2013), do the job of airports and railways in reviving tourism.

If after 27 years large cities have benefited from foreign investment, rising wages and property prices, the countryside continues to fall behind in every aspect of development. According to the county file published by the Romanian Statistics Institute (INS 2015a), in 2015 Buzău, where two thirds of the county are rural, had a joblessness rate of 9.5% (ibid p. 6), or almost twice the size of the national average, and gross earnings of 2,028RON (approximately £390) per month (ibid p. 5), which came to a quarter below national levels. In rural localities access to utilities such as running water and gas continues to be the exception, and standards of education and healthcare are well below average (European Commission 2017). Rural residents have lower incomes, are more likely to be in poverty, and less likely to experience the positive changes registered at the level of the national economy (Zamfir et al 2010, p. 23). The conclusion of the most recent report by the Institute of Quality of Life Research (IQLRS 2017 p. 40), is a bitter reminder of the tortuousness of the country's much awaited return to Europe. 'After 27 years', the report summarises, 'Romania is placed on the last position, together with Bulgaria, showing development gaps compared to European standards, but also to the other former socialist countries in the EU; An underdeveloped, impoverished country, with a de-industrialised economy and disorganised agriculture, an economy incapable of providing jobs for the entire population, low value-added jobs and a demoralised community'. An economy which, the report could have continued to note, is also marked by deep divisions along gender lines.

It is interesting to remark, as Magyari-Vincze (2003) does, how in the context of corruption and faltered European integration, women's issues in Romania were side-lined as a less substantial, marginal problem. Yet as Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000 p. 37) argue, post-socialism reconfigured gender in numerous and complex ways. Substantial changes occurred in access to work, in images of masculinity, femininity and marriage, and in narratives about life course and strategy. If a privileged sector of women enjoyed more involvement in politics, in board level representation, and in the ability to build new identity politics around consumer goods, for others post-socialism meant an exacerbation of destitution and an increase in subjection to domestic violence. In families such as those of Jiu Valley, David Kideckel (2004) shows, where it was men who were most visibly affected by the closure of mines, women were subjected to the physical and verbal violence of partners who found themselves relegated from the ideal subject of socialism, to the casualties of market reform. Overall, the Gender Inequality Index (EIGE 2017) positions Romania as the country with the highest discrepancies between men and women's life chances. If women are generally better educated than men, they are also likely to be poorer, more unemployed, and more subjected to violence. Perhaps most worryingly, like in the case of urban-rural divisions, where studies effectuated seven years apart confirmed the same trend in inequality, the discrepancy between men and women too fell by a marginal 2.5 % increase between the 2005 and 2015 assessments. [14]

These figures do not negate the fact that, overall, standards of living and opportunities for political expression have increased. As Anne White (2017 p. 29) notes in her ethnography of Polish migration, 'it is important to distinguish problems of the early 90s from the current situation'. However, it is also important to shed light upon the inequalities which underlie a narrative of national evolution. To understand the polarised socioeconomic landscape engendered by the transition to a market economy, is thus to get a sense of the everyday shortages of goods, and of hope, which framed Romania's emigration. To grasp the tensions between the technocratic blueprint of a return to Europe, and the corruption which ensued, is also to locate the roots of Romania's tense relationship with the Union. For all the enthusiasm ordinary Romanians expressed towards Europeanisation, their accession was regarded with more than a little scepticism by

[14] This picture collates a variety of indicators. Work equality worsened, for instance, but equality in income increased. By the authors' own admission, progress has been slow at European level on the whole, although Romania's position in the aggregate Gender Equality Index (51.2) is also below the European average (65).

member states and analysts, who criticised the Romanian political elite for assuming European-ness 'like a gift' (Boari, Gherghina 2009), in order to reach a popular objective (Mungiu 2007), without complying with the institutional reforms required (Noutcheva, Bechev 2008, Boia 2011, Tănăsoiu 2012a).

Gallagher (2009) and Tănăsoiu (2012b), for instance, suggest that joining the European Union was the result of excellent PR on the part of the Romanian government, who was able to champion reforms in border security, privatisation, and child protection, which constituted a sensitive subject for the EU's delegation in light of the orphanage crisis in the early 1990s, and where Romania made significant progress (Iusmen 2015), while hiding the continued corruption and poor public administration. Geopolitics too was mentioned as a likely aid against the Union's reservations. Romania's support of NATO in the 1999 Kosovo war, Phinnemore (2008) argues, earned it a powerful ally in the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair at the time, who advocated for its accession to more sceptical member states like Germany and the Netherlands. The country's fortuitous coupling with Bulgaria as Europe's two 'laggards' (Noutcheva, Bechev 2008), was also argued to have worked to its advantage. The power of the popular discourse on 'returning to Europe', Papadimitriou and Phinnemore (2008) conclude, must be acknowledged. The support of Europeanisation visible in the Romanian media, and the interventions of intellectuals who stressed a European past, made it nearly impossible for the EU to turn its back to the East. The moment it opened Negotiation Agreements in 1999, the authors stress, the EU made a rhetorical commitment to admitting Romania along with the rest of the CEEs states.

The accession of Romania and Bulgaria thus set a new precedent for the European Commission. Negotiations were characterised by more conditionality agreements, stricter monitoring, and even an exceptional clause which allowed the EU to supervise reform after official accession, virtually dispelling the fantasy of European unity by conditioning membership upon an explicit hierarchical relationship (Tănăsoiu 2012). The freedom of movement of their citizens, that much publicised pillar of the European market, also met stricter restrictions. As the Eurobarometer began capturing increased scepticism towards further accession among the Western European public (Toshkov 2014), and an ever vocal far right press portrayed Romanian and Bulgarian migrants as undesirable armies of paupers, benefit fraudsters and petty criminals (Vicol & Allen 2014), a series of transitional immigration controls were also imposed upon Romanians' and Bulgarians' mobility.

Having provided this sketch of the country's tortuous political economic transformations, in the next section I look at how the project of returning to Europe took a literal dimension.

2.3. Romanian emigration

Crossing borders had been a highly guarded privilege during the decades of socialism, when citizens who travelled beyond the Iron Curtain could apply and almost always get political asylum, risking to pierce Ceaușescu's myth of a life of plenty (Horváth, 2007). With the exceptions of workers placed in the Persian Gulf, where the right to settlement and family reunification were restricted, and of party members who travelled with diplomatic passports, all those who wished to travel had to be vetted by Securitate officers. Applying for a passport, which was required to exit the country, could involve anything from having one's family placed under surveillance, losing one's job, or being forced into becoming an informant. As former Securitate officer Colonel Ion Pacepa noted in his 'Memoirs of a communist spy chief' (1987), while there was no guarantee that a passport would be granted, attempting to obtain one was sure to place the applicant and her network on the agency's radar for monitoring potential 'enemies of the nation'.

The only cross-border movement that was quietly encouraged during the socialist period was ethnic migration. At the end of WWII an estimated 350,000 Jewish ethnics were living in Romania, second only to the 3 million living in the USSR (Fassmann & Munz 1994). By the fall of the regime, the Romanian Jewish community had almost disappeared. A 'gentleman's agreement' (Pacepa 1987) struck in the 1950s between the Romanian and Israeli secret services awarded selected Romanian Jews exit visas for Israel, in exchange for Israeli funded investments in Romanian agriculture. The exchange was halted temporarily, Pacepa recounts, when Ceaușescu came to power and was shocked by the revelation of the deal. Soon afterwards, however, Ceaușescu not only resumed the agreement with Israel, but demanded that investments in livestock be supplemented with cash payments for every émigré (Figure 1). The deal proved so profitable that, in 1967, a similar agreement was struck with West Germany, leading to the exodus of 230,000 ethnic Germans over his remaining years in power (Fassmann & Munz 1994).

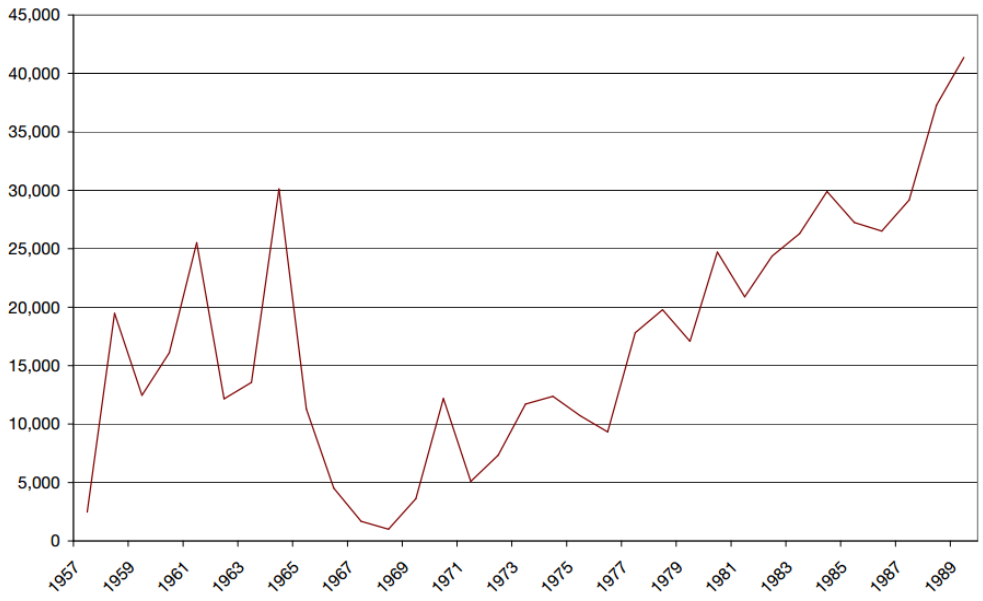


Figure 1 - Emigration from Romania during communism. Source: Hovarth, 2007

Throughout this time, while Jewish and German Romanians were cynically traded for cash, Westwards migration was officially discouraged (Deletant 1995). For Romanian majority ethnics the unexplained freedom of minorities to exit was a source of frustration and a catalyst for racism. This was also the case for Hungarians who, lacking a sympathetic foreign government with a valuable currency to facilitate their movement, had not only been excluded from a similar deal, but were also subjected to Ceaușescu's programme of ethnic assimilation. It is not surprising, therefore, that immediately after the 1989 revolution Romania witnessed a huge rate of ethnic migration (Figure 3). Many of those who had been denied the chance to leave before, took advantage of the liberalisation of passport administration and border controls. As can be seen in the figures included, almost 100,000 Romanian citizens left in 1990 alone, settling in the states that harboured old diasporic connections, but also seeking refuge from the spike in nationalism the country witnessed after the regime change (Verdery, 1993). For the first time during the early 1990s, a vast number of Roma minority ethnics subjected to increased persecution (Hockenos 2013) applied for asylum in Western Europe, primarily Germany, but also in Austria and Italy. Overall, Horvath (2007) notes, the first four years after the fall of Ceaușescu, as many as 350,000 asylum applications were submitted.

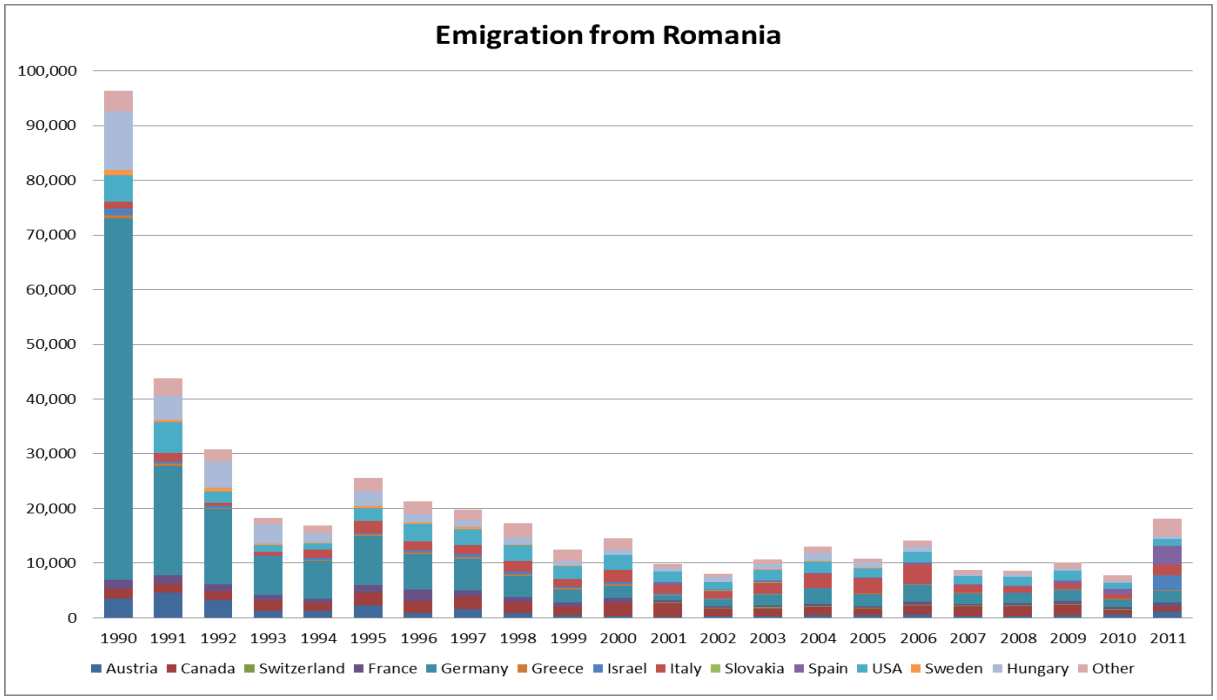


Figure 2 - Based on data from the Romanian Statistics Institute[15]

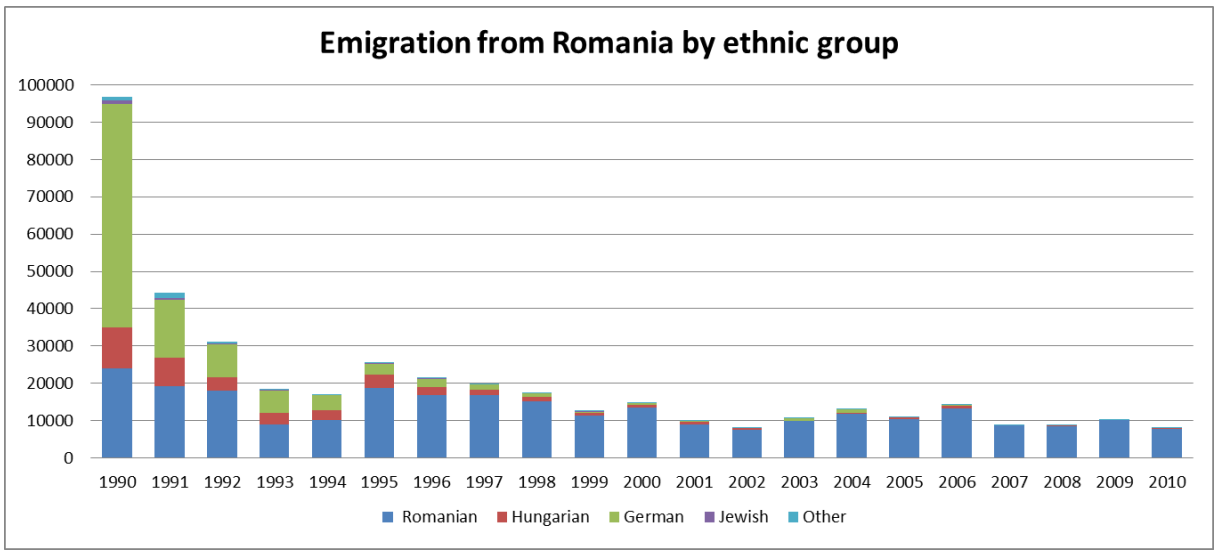


Figure 3 - Based on data from the Romanian Statistics Institute

The liberalisation of border controls after 1990 also enabled the formation of more varied and circular migration trajectories. Dumitru Sandu (2006) identified three waves of labour migration. Firstly, soon after the large ethnic and refugee migration of the early 1990s there was a noticeable migration of highly skilled workers who applied for visas to the US, Canada, Turkey and Israel. The disenchantment with the failure of two successive transition governments to bring about the

[15] The Romanian Statistics Institute (INS) draws on administrative records from the police and includes only Romanian citizens who have officially changed their country of residence. The figures are thus likely to be a vast underestimate of temporary and circulatory migration. They provide, nonetheless, a useful indication of the spike in ethnic migration after 1989.

democratic reforms desired by an urban elite, it was argued, contributed to an early and permanent brain drain. The second wave, twice the size of the previous one, corresponded to the start of privatisations in the mid to late 1990s. Despite not having a right to travel or work in Europe, Sandu (2006) remarks, hundreds of thousands of Romanians, mostly subsistence farmers and residents of small towns who had been laid off, found jobs on the black market in Italy and Spain during this time. Emigration rates tripled once again after 2002, when Romanians gained visa free travel in Schengen, and a new Office for Labour Force Migration was created to negotiate bilateral agreements with Western European states who wished to recruit Romanian workers. It did not take long, however, before migrant networks had become so established and demand for labour so high, that the majority were already bypassing formal channels into legal employment, relying instead on their personal connections, and on Italian and Spanish authorities' own tolerance of black market work.

A final acceleration in departures emerged once Romania officially acceded to the European Union in 2007. [16] Even when older member states adopted transitional arrangements which limited Romanians' and Bulgarians' access to their labour markets and welfare, [17] prioritising access to low skilled positions and self-employment in an attempt to curb migration, people continued to move. The majority pursued the already familiar destinations of Italy and Spain. Once the financial crisis hit and migrant workers engaged on easy-hire-easy-fire contracts were the first to lose their jobs, more went to Germany and, finally, to the UK. Today, figures from the Annual Population Survey show, Romanians make the fifth largest country of birth in the UK, [18] and the third in London. [19]

[16] Although it is unclear whether these were new migrants or old ones who could legalise their work status.
[17] Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria and the UK all upheld restrictions for the maximum time allowed of seven years after the new members' accession. Denmark, Greece, Hungary and Portugal maintained them for two years, Ireland and Italy for five, while Spain imposed them for two years, only to reintroduce them once again in 2011 for Romanian nationals, in response to large scale migration.
[18] After Poland, India, Pakistan, and the Republic of Ireland.
[19] After India and Poland.

Overall, data from the UN Population Division suggests that 3.4 million Romanians (Galka 2016a), or 17% of the population (Galka 2016b) live abroad.

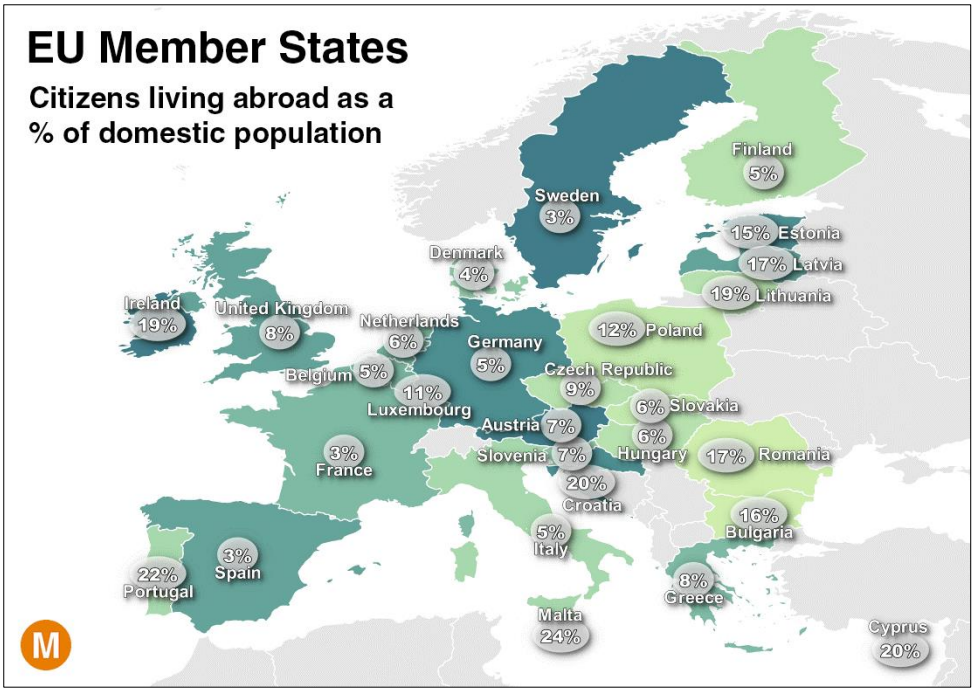


Figure 4 - UN Population Division data analysed by Galka (2016b)

2.4. Conclusion

Pinpointing exactly what led to the rural-urban inequality and subsequent emigration exceeds the scope of this thesis. Somewhat paradoxically, critics have argued that this was both due to not becoming liberal enough (Roaf et al, 2014), and to do doing too much, too fast, and too soon in the name of the free market, at the detriment of social security (IQLRS 2017; Zamfir et al. 2010). Anthropologists who worked in the post-socialist space have long challenged the narrative of incomplete liberalisation adopted by economists and political scientists, and the orthodoxy of international development institutions. In their introduction to the edited volume on change in the post-socialist world, Verdery and Burrawoy (1999) mounted a trenchant critique to the teleological notion of transition. Despite the connotations of linearity and evolutionism in this catchphrase that dominated the post-socialist imaginary for years, the transformations which ensued were, as we have seen here, much more complex. We can hardly speak of full or partial transitions, since it was neither clear what exactly Romania would transition to, nor evident how it would go about it. What occurred in practice was not a controlled progress towards democracy and affluence driven by free

market capitalism, but a syncopated journey where old strategies of survival, political actors, and ways of doing politics, continued alongside the novel language of transformation.

Ethnographers noted how the fall of socialism was as surprising for peasants and industrial workers in the country (Friedman, 2007b; Kideckel, 2008; Verdery, 1996; Yurchak, 2013), as it felt liberating for residents of large cities. It brought as much novelty in consumption, as it reproduced old informal economies of survival, and it received as much enthusiasm from intellectuals, as it triggered nostalgia in people who felt left behind. Above all, while it made some Romanians rich overnight, it left others feeling stuck in pockets of destitution.

In Romania, as elsewhere, poverty is a spectrum which maps onto a rural-urban divide, but cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional geography. This chapter has illustrated how contrasts between Romanians who lived comfortably and those who felt stuck were visible within Corbu, where handsome homes stood next to adobe cottages, but also across the county, where the minimal economy of small towns like Pătârlagele contrasted with developed urban centres like the county capital of Buzău.

Whether it was too much or too little liberalisation that relegated segments of Romanian society to the margins of modernity, is harder to determine. Yet we cannot normalise the discourse of transition, with its bipolar focus on the past and future, while ignoring the present and, as Dzenovska (forthcoming) notes, its contemporary dispossessions and disenchantments. To some Romanians, like Doru, Cristina, and their network from Corbu, the promise of work abroad was a means of reclaiming a future – making life a little more liveable. To others, like intellectuals disappointed with the political establishment, it was an ideational search for civilisation. This is something I unpack in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: ‘TRANSITION’ WITHOUT A FUTURE

‘There is nothing to do here’ said Mari, Cristina’s mother. We were having a cup of coffee on the family’s half built concrete porch, during that time of the day when every living creature had been fed, the house had been cleaned, and all that remained was to wait for the evening. Every day Mari woke up just after dawn to prepare breakfast for her husband, feed the fowl and pigs, and let the three cows out on the pasture. As soon as the girls were up it was time for cooking, then washing dishes, and more cooking for lunch, only occasionally interrupted by neighbours who came in to borrow one tool or another, or just linger for a chat. Her husband Petre was generally out at work. After the factory that employed him in Buzău closed, he started working intermittently for a small wood processing workshop down in Pătârlagele - going in when there were orders, falling back on social assistance and subsistence farming when business was low or the road too cratered by the rain to travel. During August’s hay stacking season, with his horse and cart he was in high demand. He woke up at daybreak, harnessed the animal, loaded the cart with forks and rode to the plot of whomever needed their hay carried down to the village. Every now and again Mari and the girls joined in for the day and helped rake the dried grass into bundles. When there was no paid work to do, occasional domestic tasks kept the parents busy for days. Slaughtering a pig was at least a two man job. Trenching the meat and preparing it for preservation took another day’s work of chopping, grinding and smoking. As did juicing the tomatoes and peppers grown in the garden in preparation for winter.

For all the domestic chores, however, even in the busy hay making season there were times of slow brewing inactivity; rainy days when the mud road was too slippery to travel, when the village was left isolated, and all that remained was to sit on the porch or visit. If for Mari and Petre these hours could provide a welcome respite from physical work, rest for her legs swollen with varicose veins

by the heat, and his knee injured and never quite recovered, for their seventeen-year-old daughter Constantina they loomed in the air like a bad omen.

'We are too poor to send them to university, that's not for us', Mari mentioned that afternoon in response to my question about the girl's future after graduation. She shook her head and raised her shoulders, as if dismissing a self-evident fact. Romanian university is relatively cheap, and arguably much easier to get into than 30 years ago due to the high rate of emigration, low fertility rates and an ageing population, which have left many faculties competing for intakes (Mihăilescu, 2015). High achieving students have their tuition fees waived, and a modest social bursary awards those from low income families up to 110 Euro every month, or the equivalent of just over a third of the National Minimum Wage (UBB 2017). Yet without a politics of cultivating social mobility, and governments that have for decades side-lined plans of rural development, neither the bursary, nor the prospect of a university education in itself seemed realisable for Mari and her daughter; or indeed for many of Romania's rural residents, where only a small fraction of 3.6% achieve tertiary education, and as many as 19.5% drop out before finishing compulsory school (European Commission 2016 p. 3). [20]

The thought of Constantina's enrolment in a Romanian university thus seemed far removed from the family's network of possibilities. But a thornier source of discomfort which filled quiet afternoons with tension, was that no one could imagine her doing something closer to home either. This was not for lack of trying. Like her sister before her, Constantina had long started making her own pocket money by working as an 'Avon lady': becoming a direct seller for the American cosmetics company which boasts a 130 year long history of 'empowering' women around the world to be 'their own boss' (Avon Inc 2017). Like the legions of women and girls recruited in Avon's international network, Constantina ordered the beauty products from a catalogue, picked them up from the village shop with all the other post, stored them in her room then sold them on to the neighbours, accumulating a small percentage share of every sale. And like so many Romanians enchanted with multi-level marketing, with their promise of quick gains through personal cunning (Verdery, 1996), she saw the business as a means of carving her independence.

[20] A worrying trend shows that in addition to being much above the European average of 11% (third behind Malta and Spain), the Romanian dropout rate has also been the only one to increase since European Accession (European Commission 2016).

She was better dressed, more beauty savvy, and more able to support the costs of outings with her partner than other girls her age. Every young woman in Corbu who used makeup had bought it from her, once Cristina went abroad. But the prevalence of the multi-level marketing system says as much about Romanians' fabled entrepreneurship-by-need, as it does about the geographically skewed, and gendered access to employment. A minimal-capital-maximal-labour type of business, where all costs are offloaded onto individual sales agents, from the nominal joining fee to finding customers and processing their payments, the sort of direct sales work Constantina and her sister undertook was symptomatic of the discrepancy between the liberal culture of individual entrepreneurship (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999), and the classed and gendered conditions of possibility of the countryside: where most of the already reduced salaried positions available were in the male-oriented extractive sector, and where subsistence farming provided a lifeline that was accessible, but hardly desirable to the educated young. Even with this small monopoly on cosmetics, the door-to-door business was far from providing her with a fulltime lifeline after graduation. Nor did the Iancus own a car to help her travel to nearby towns, where she might find some form of permanent work.

The quiet hours on the porch had thus become an uncomfortable preview of the following year, with its looming prospect of involuntary idleness. Once school stopped providing her with a direction, that steady sense of evolution which formal education is uniquely able to conjure, her mother's bitter assessment that 'there was nothing to do' in Buzău would soon become a reality of immobility. Examples of this were, after all, abundant in the village of Corbu and beyond. With the exception of acquaintances who had gone abroad to work, or the privileged children of the shop owner, mayor, and a small number of other wealthy farmers who could afford to pay for their move to university, after finishing school the majority of young people of Mari's daughter's age had resorted to doing the subsistence farming work of their parents. This had been the case of Doru before he went abroad, and of Cristina before he helped bring her over. A similar fate was now looming on Constantina's horizon.

The prospect of casual work was not an isolated example limited to Corbu. Countrywide, the National Institute for Statistics (INS 2017a) found that only 73.4% of residents labelled economically

engaged[21] were working in formal, contract-bound employment in 2016. The remainder included what the INS labelled 'unremunerated family workers', women like Mari in the largest part, who spent most of their time with domestic work, and so-called 'free-practising individuals'. The picture of abundant free practice presented by the survey, however, does not capture a reality of numerous small businesses, as the label might suggest at first. A look at the Romanian Office for Commerce indicates that only a fraction of 4.5% of the so-called economically active were formally registered as running a self-employed business.[22] The discrepancy rests rather on a methodological artifice which defines as 'free-practising' any person who undertakes activity in their own unit or business without hiring staff, and which can thus include anyone from business entrepreneurs, casual day workers, or individual agricultural workers (INS 2015b p. 20).

For the post-transition government, this blending of precarity into a picture of abundant economic activity could allow the praise of low official unemployment figures[23] (5.9%) and 'champion' growth rates (5.2%), in President Iohannis's words (Medifax 2016), overlooking how beneath the story of recovery lurks a reality where many still labour for subsistence. For Constantina, however, the moment of graduation, when one was expected to carve one's way towards personal independence, came to articulate an uncomfortable strain. She did not speak English, had no desire to leave home, and was attached to her boyfriend, Andi. Unlike her sister's partner, Doru, whose parents were even poorer than the Iancus, Andi came from a wealthier family, had a car and a job as a kitchen assistant at a restaurant down in Pătârlagele, and felt too comfortable to seriously contemplate leaving. But he was too young to start a family, and a penchant for gambling made saving enough for a place of their own unlikely within the foreseeable future. Constantina was thus torn between fearing a breakup, and feeling that unless she moved away she would become a drain on her family. Her mother, Mari, had to face nudging a second child away from home, knowing all too well from Cristina's journey that once they were gone there was little she could do to support them. Her father, who had tried to work in London soon after Cristina left but had failed to save due to the bad knee, found himself in the uncomfortable position of depending on his daughters,

[21] Defined as having worked for at least 1hour in the reference week.
[22] Given that this is an average which includes cities and villages alike, it is likely that registrations in the countryside are even lower, and thus the number of peasants without any stable employment much higher.
[23] The unemployed are defined as people aged 15-74, who (1) lack a job, (2) are available to start work within two weeks, and (3) have been looking for work over the past four weeks (INS 2017b p. 2).

despite being only in his late-40s. ‘You think it’s easy to know her alone among strangers?’ he once noted.

When the subject of graduation came up therefore, the entrepreneurial seventeen-year-old who ran from her bedroom what the Statistics Institute would call a small beauty business, would suddenly withdraw into a nervously evasive child. ‘I don’t know what I want to do’, was what she repeated in response to my hints at life beyond school, before suddenly remembering something that needed tending to, and making a polite escape. Much of the discussions about her future came instead from conversations with her older sister, who was quietly looking for a way to bring her over to London, and from those with her mother. ‘She’s softer, she likes to be at home, she is not like the other one to fight her way through the world’, Mari told me with a sigh, when Constantina was out of earshot. ‘But what can she do?’, came her inevitable rebut, uttered rhetorically as if to confirm an expectation that was looming in the air: ‘what future can she have here?’.

We could not think of anything. The absence of the future had in fact crept up in interviews throughout the year - always with the same sense of inevitability, and always with a familiarity I struggled to contest. Had I not left at the same age, after all? Mari looked out at the road. With the silence that sank in, the answer to my question about what life held for Constantina after graduation was clearer than any articulation: a total, complete sense that there really was ‘nothing to do’. The futures we could fathom from the lives of those that stayed hardly seemed like a future at all, for social mobility was nowhere on the horizon. As my time in the village progressed, it became increasingly apparent that as soon as school ended, and the prospect of unwanted immobility became an ever closer reality, Constantina would likely follow into her sister’s footsteps.

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The reference to 'nothing' which seemed to have engulfed the Iancus' life in Corbu featured over again in interviews with migrants I encountered in London, who sought to explain why leaving Romania felt like a necessity. It occurred in conversations with those left behind, who found it natural that the young and able should try to make something of themselves elsewhere, and in the observations with would-be migrants (Xiang 2014) who, like Constantina, were learning to fathom the prospect of a departure from the everyday conditions of their stay.

Leaving from this motif of nothingness, in this chapter I continue to unpack the relation between Romania's tortuous post-socialist transformation and mobility. If earlier I drew attention to the regional, race, and gender inequalities, here I focus on how the promise of transition was experienced on a subjective level, in the motivations of men and women who left. Precariousness, I argue, starts at home in the feeling of entrapment, and in the sense of inevitability that has come to surround the prospect of moving abroad.

This chapter begins to trace the formation of that subjectivity in light of the discourse that filled the Romanian political space after 1989. I argue that, while the logic of transition had turned the future into the central theme of the post-socialist public imaginary, couching within its distant referential perimeter boundless expectations of affluence, democracy, and recognition as European, for people like the Iancus that future never came. Most importantly in the context of this thesis, the transformations that ensued not only fell short of the ideal, but also filled many Romanians with a sense of hopelessness. To illustrate this relation between the promise of transition, and the hopelessness of post-socialism de facto, I propose a distinction between the technocratic future, a vast project of modernisation pursued programatically through European integration; and the future as personal security, or one's ability to simply imagine the continuity of her life across time, uninterrupted by occurring crises. Here, I refer to the crises in social security which engulfed rural settlements like Corbu, but also the crises in confidence in the political establishment, which was particularly felt by the urban dwelling and highly educated. Peasants and self-proclaimed intellectuals disenchanted by Romania's course, found themselves trapped in a continuous present; and with it, mobility along the social scale emerged increasingly as movement across borders.

3.1. A future ‘of impossible fullness’

Despite the fact that the fall of socialism took many by surprise in Romania and elsewhere (Boia, 2012), futurity soon became the main organising idiom of post-socialism. The very promise of transition, with its inherently teleological, evolutionary logic, was hinging on a programmatic break with the past (Hartman 2007). Socialist forms of economic organisation and welfare provision, socialist political alliances, but also so-called socialist mentalities and forms of personhood were portrayed as belonging to an antiquated time that had to be left behind, if the benefits of free market capitalism were to be reaped. If, as Lucian Boia (2012) argues, the jeering at the rallies in December 1989 was driven originally by discontent with the austerity of the 1980s, rather than a national yearning for a total regime change, the restlessness snowballed into the most enthusiastic support for the European Union in any part of the continent (European Commission 2004 quoted in Beacháin et al. 2012 p. 188). Despite the reservations and wavering of the first Iliescu government, who resisted the market reform demanded by the IMF and resented monitoring by the EU, by the mid-1990s acceding to the European Union had become a political priority shared by every Romanian government.

Once European accession negotiations were opened effectively in 2000 (Euractiv 2006), the issuing of acquis chapters by the European Commission provided a technocratic blueprint for Romania’s development. Everything from common security policy, to company law and the environment was systematically subjected to scrutiny, recommendations, reform, then vetting by the Commission. In total, in order to accede to the Union 31 such areas of policy had to be addressed, and formal assessment of the country’s move towards the European standard continued well after accession (European Commission 2005). It is interesting to note the similarities between this transitional teleology conjured around reintegration into Europe, and the socialist teleology structured, as Caroline Humphrey (1983: 94) notes, around the achievement of technological progress, such as production quotas, urbanisation, or particular scientific advancements.

An important particularity of the discourse of the totalising discourse of transition, however, is that beneath the technocratic progress measured in piecemeal reform, the everyday mobilisations of its future stretched much further. As David Phinnemore (2006) noted, the evolutionary logic of transitioning also unleashed ‘great expectations’: an undercurrent of popular imagination which

filled sterile references to technological and institutional modernisation, with endless hopes of the good life that could be. The good life which hitherto had merely revealed itself in glimpses enabled by smuggling networks (Calugareanu 2015; Chelcea 2002; Drakulić 1993), but that after the liberalisation of the press and market was endlessly reimagined through Western imports of media, consumer goods, and what Walter Benjamin (2008) aptly called their consumer 'dream worlds'. Like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Romania's post-socialist future was built around imaginations of the Western present (Dzenovska Forthcoming).

This was a future which earned its popular currency not from the any particular promise of growth, reform, or more efficient public administration, but precisely from its indefiniteness. From its ability to lend itself to the personal imaginations of a people who had lived through the worst decade of repression. Borrowing Zizek's term, Todd Hartman (2007) conceptualises this inflation of expectation under the trope of futurity as a 'utopian object of impossible fullness': an aesthetic of temporality whereby the future can stand in for a 'deferred social order' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003, p. 137), and make up for a present that seems abnormal or simply 'not quite there yet', as European monitors quoted in the Romanian media regularly reminded the public. A powerful expression which captures this mix of hope and indeterminacy was the very slogan that drove liberal candidate Traian Băsescu's successful campaign for presidential elections in 2004. Back then, when formal accession to the European Union was top of the national agenda, Băsescu's landmark pledge to the voters, printed on billboards and endlessly reiterated through his presidency, was quite literally an open wish for a better tomorrow: 'may you live well!' (*Să trăiți bine*).

In some respects, Romania has made significant advancements from its configuration under Ceaușescu, at least from a technocratic perspective. The steady rate of national economic growth noted earlier, a freely elected government and legislature, and access to civil liberties of expression, family life, and political association similar to those enjoyed within the old democracies of the West. Accession to the European Union in 2007 in particular has been portrayed as a landmark of modernisation. Even with the vocal reservations of EU officials, the New Year's Eve of December 31st 2006 drew throngs of Romanians into the streets, including this author. Calls that Romania had successfully exited the cluttered antechamber of transition and joined the free world followed soon afterwards. First, it was president Traian Băsescu (9AMNews 2008) and the World Bank (A.

Dumitrescu 2008) who stated in 2008 that 'transition for Romanians is over'. Next, a choir of media outlets and pubic intellectuals joined (Hitchins 2014 p. 309).

Despite the notable achievements, however, evidence that the promise of the future had not come for all was hard to ignore when, underneath the narrative of modernisation, a mix of mismanaged privatisations, poor infrastructure and uneven investment pushed many Romanians like the Iancus back into the precarity of subsistence farming. Measures taken in the name of market reform eroded jobs, purchasing power and social assistance, and along with them dented people's ability to experience, or simply believe in the possibility of, the Romanian good life. Evidence of this disbelief is abundant. In Romania, O'Neill (2014), Kideckel (2002) and Friedman (2004) have all found that unemployment among their respective informants in the homeless neighbourhoods of Bucharest, the mining towns of Petroșani, and the industrial town of Feldioara, caused a profound sense of angst. A totalising boredom, according to O'Neill, which deprived his informants of the very will to live, and that in Kiedeckel's account articulated a vicious cycle of family breakdown, illness, and self-doubt.

Evidence of similar disenchantment is also visible across the post-socialist space, in ways which do not always map onto material insecurity. In her work on the transformations of Latvia, Dzenovska (Forthcoming) found that the sheer bareness visible in the depopulated countryside and the slow ruination of socialist infrastructure, was experienced affectively as an erosion of the certainties that made up the fabric of everyday life. Jansen (2014), in turn, found a similar loss of normalcy in Sarajevo after changes to the city's gridding system, while Elizabeth Dunn (2004) and Anne White (2016 p. 415) documented it in Poland, in the context of privatisations and, respectively, writing about the perceptions of the long-term unemployed.

What I want to draw attention to here is not merely the ensuing impoverishment and people's day by day struggles – although they too go far in puncturing the claims of neoliberal advocates of development through market reform. Poverty had been an everyday reality during socialism for many, and anthropologists have gone far to document tactics of getting by (Bridger & Pine, 1998; Chelcea, 2002; Drakulić, 1993; Ghodsee, 2011; Kligman & Verdery, 2011). Rather than direct exposure to material insecurity then, what seemed particularly disheartening was its continuation, and at times even exacerbation, at a stage when the promise for a better life had acquired such

currency in the public imaginary. The affective significance of impoverishment did not come so much from having to scramble to get by, but from having to do so at a time when the good life was portrayed to be within reach. It was in the context of great hope, in other words, that great hopelessness set it.

3.2. Of ghost villages and immobility

Interviews with Romanians who, like the Iancus, came from struggling rural areas, abounded with references to a sense of total immobility, expressed as an inability to envisage life as going on. The discontent they voiced was no longer about a particular failing in economic reform, in land restitutions, or in the management of public administration. Their words were far from the critical language of European accession negotiations, which enclosed Romania's insufficiencies within Chapters that could be opened, remedied, then closed once and for all. What emerged from our conversations, rather, was a sense that what was broken was simply too profound to mend: 'the system' was flawed from within, as my informants put it.

> I think it is more and more sunken. People look sad. Year by year people have greater and more profound problems. I just don't see them happy. The vast majority of people I see, the people I know, people like me, are unhappy. All of them would emigrate if they could. If they had the means to leave, the place would become a ghost village.

These were the words of forty-four-year-old Costachi, a former weightlifting champion from a modest family of subsistence farmers, who came from a village in the North Eastern county of Iasi, and used to work as a technician in a factory that closed in 1996. After he lost his job, Costachi recounted, he, his mentally disabled wife, and their teenage son were 'almost dying of hunger'. It was only fear, he confessed, that prevented him from joining the people in his village who were already crossing the border illegally before Romania obtained visa free travel, by trekking on foot through the mountains and camping wherever they could. As soon as an opportunity opened up and an acquaintance offered him a chance to work in Italy, he was gone. The Italian venture was short lived and exploitative, and he returned within a year. But as life had not gotten any better, when a new opportunity to work in London arose he pursued it without hesitation. After two years of back breaking work in the city's carwashes, when his health deteriorated so much that he even needed a two week hospitalisation, he finally landed a job as a cleaner on a construction site, where he was paid at National Minimum Wage rates. He saved enough to bring his family over, and

confessed to never even considering a return. 'People look more and more sunken', he told me. This, it became clear, was no longer the kind of superficial or temporary degradation which could be attributed to a transitional phase. This 'sunkneness' Costachi recalled reading on people's faces spoke rather to a somatic degradation, which seemed to have acquired chronic permanence. For as long as he was an able bodied, working age man, he continued, he was determined to make a living abroad.

Like Costachi, other informants anchored a similar sense of degradation of the country in their particular experiences with a lack of jobs, poor wages, and minimal social assistance, which seemed to make the prospect of returning but a distant plan for retirement. Thirty-four-year-old George and his wife, both raised in villages in the Moldavian county of Suceava from equally modest families, had gone to Spain as soon as it became possible to do so legally. He had worked as a self-employed contractor in construction, while his wife, a former professional athlete, found a job as a sports instructor. With their combined earnings, George recounted, they had enough to live comfortably, but decided to go back when the recession hit Spain's construction sector and it became apparent that he would soon be let go. Equipped with their savings, and reluctant to return to the rural farmstead of his parents, they rented a flat in the county capital. He went back to his former job in interior repairs, while she stayed home to look after their little daughter. The three years they spent in Romania, before they found themselves having to leave again, were a tough reality check:

> I used to rent in Spain, and I rented in Romania. The difference is that with one wage I could support three people and not miss anything, whereas in Romania, I had to keep borrowing just to cover daily expenses and live with that stress. That's the hardest part, when you have to deprive your kid of the basics. I couldn't buy a whole pack of nappies, it was too expensive, so I had to buy them individually. If she peed I couldn't change her right away, I had to wait for the nappy to fill up to save some money.
>
> We had to get by from one day to the other... so we said ok: 'we'll sacrifice ourselves and buy the necessities for the child'. But eventually we didn't even have enough for her. Child benefit was 200RON per month until she was two, then after two years it was 40 something RON, as if the child stopped needing things...

Around the time of George's return, Romania had reached the point where it had the smallest rate of public spending of any European country (Zamfriescu et al 2010). When the recession hit, the liberal government of Traian Băsescu adopted what the Financial Times labelled the most brutal

austerity policies in the Union (Bryant 2010). Public sector salaries were cut by 25% at once, social assistance was reduced by 15%, the number of state employees cut down by 8%, and universal VAT raised by five percentage points to 24% (StirileProTV 2010). To get a sense of the magnitude of the reforms it is worth noting that around the same time Greece, which was on the brink of default, planned public sector wage reductions of only 15%, and those were staggered over 3 years (Gow 2012). In Romania, the president took pride in avoiding the bailout that was needed to keep Mediterranean economies afloat, and welcomed the fact that the country had escaped, for once, the trend of being placed at the bottom of European hierarchies.

For George and his family the conditions of possibility that ensued bordered on the absurd. Leaving once again to work abroad came to appear not only inevitable, but almost embarrassing, as if his past desires to return were nothing but immature romanticisations of a life that was no longer possible: 'I had missed that life in the cottage, the country life you read about in Creangă's Childhood Memories' he explained, referencing a 19th century book of memoirs known to every Romanian school graduate, where author Ion Creangă nostalgically recalls the tranquillity of an unadulterated country life. 'But', George then continued bitterly, I've learnt that it's better to miss poverty than to experience it'.

It is revealing to note that many of the Romanians I interviewed had migrated to one or more destinations before coming to London. This was particularly the case of men from villages, with minimal levels of education, who recounted taking up work in Spain, Italy, and Germany most frequently, and some of whom had worked in as many as four different countries before coming to the UK. The moment of return provided an awakening insight into just how little was left to hinge one's hopes upon. Other informants recounted trying to give life in Romania a chance by bringing back savings and a business idea, but finding that the savings disappeared in a matter of months. I heard stories of a second hand shop, a bakery, and a bold recycling business that all went bust, sending their owners back on the road. As Andrei, a Law graduate who tried to open a recycling business by using all of his parents' savings put it: 'if you want to bury the money then go ahead, start a business in Romania'.

Having had a chance to experience what life was like abroad, at the source that had inspired the liberal elite's enthusiastic vision for transition, many thought they could see more clearly where

the country really stood. George and his wife had not only come back to realise that they could barely make ends meet for their family, but also that few of their friends were still left at home. As in Dzenovska's account of Latvia, the North Eastern Romanian region of Moldavia too seemed to have emptied, and with the vanishing of people and the ruination of the landscape, the sense of 'sunkenness' Costachi referenced in his intervention too deepened. Echoing this idea of destitution inscribed in the material environment, Laura, the thirty-five-year-old woman who had grown up in the Transylvanian town where blocks of flats lacked heating, described her feelings about her home town in the admonishing lyrics of a popular Hip-Hop song, which generated national consternation in the late 1990 with its violently worded critique of transition. 'The majority live behind the grey blocks - taller by the road to hide the hunger, taller by the road to hide the conmen' the first verse started, before going into a chilling portrayal of material and moral decay (*Dupa blocurile gri, stam noi majoritatea* – BUG mafia). Like the 'sunkenness' referenced by Costachi, and the precarious getting by 'from one day to the other' described by George, the grey Laura and the Hip Hop group observed was inside and out (Fehérváry 2013); like a nagging metaphor inscribed at every step in the environment, in the blandness of the cold concrete which resonated with a feeling that hope was futile. As Costachi noted in his intervention: 'If they had the means to leave, the place would become a ghost village'.

It is interesting to reflect here upon the discursive power of absences. The spectre of the village utopia George imagined, before his awakening encounter with Romania's cost of living, threw into sharp relief the sense that the present appeared to have no future. Several other informants contrasted the emphemeral promises of transition, to the imagined stability of socialism. Sounding similar to people documented by anthropologists across the Eastern European space (Berdahl, 1999; Creed, 2010; Ghodsee, 2011; Mungiu, 2010), who associated socialism with a sense of stability, George continued:

> We thought things were going to be better, but we had no idea what we were in for. In a way I think things were better back then, at least you were sure that you had somewhere to work, and had the certainty of tomorrow. If you walked on the street at any point you were safe. Now people get killed for 20 RON. [24] Back then you had that certainty. Now you have nothing. You don't have a park to take your kid to, everything is destroyed and no one does anything.

[24] One Romanian RON is now equal to 20p.

Needless to say, not everything was as deplorable. Big cities like Bucharest, Cluj and Timișoara are bustling with new business and rising property prices, and despite George's reference to lawlessness Romania is a country with a relatively low rate of violent crime. It stands far behind the United States, for instance, and its rate has been dropping, not rising, from the early 1990s (NationMaster 2017). But it was the encounter with local, and not the abstract statistic of national growth circulated in official discourse that lay behind George's subjective sensation that desperation had given rise to lawlessness, and returning to Romania simply held no promise.

3.3. Intellectuals and betrayal

Lengthy transcriptions of experiences with, and reflections on, destitution filled pages of my notes, and could certainly fill chapters here. I had heard of people who left as a result of job losses, wages that could no longer cover the costs of living, untenable mortgages, or health events that depleted their savings. I will resist the temptation of elaborating the 'suffering slot' (Robbins 2013). Equally, It would be an exaggeration to portray Romania as a space of universal doom, since plenty of new endeavours have taken off in urban areas and some parts of the country. What is interesting to note here however, is how the sense that there was nothing left to hope for mentioned by informants like George and the Iancus, was also echoed by Romanians whose material conditions and professional stability were indeed comfortable. They were young people with university degrees that enjoyed the security of contract-bound employment, for instance; people who lived in the city in flats they were not forced to share; or those who had networks of friends and wielded enough disposable income to be comfortable, yet who still felt like there was something sabotaged in the Romanian present that needed escaping from. In other words, despite not experiencing material precarity, these were Romanians who experienced precariousness, as a form of existential insecurity generated by political transformations (Allison 2013; Khosravi 2017; Neilson & Rossiter 2008).

Liliana was a fifty-year-old journalist born in one of the mining towns in Valea Jiului. At the time of the 1989 demonstrations, she recalled, she was a twenty-four-year-old high school graduate on her 'way to becoming the ideal citizen of the Romanian Socialist Republic'. She had been a 'pioneer' during school, and had enlisted in the Union of Communist Youth (UTC) as a teenager. 'In a couple of years' time', she added with a hint of irony, 'I would have become a party member'. The

revolution took her by surprise – as it did with many in Romania and elsewhere (see Yurchak 2006). In lowered voice, as if making a confession, she noted that in the first presidential elections she voted for former Communist Party member Ion Iliescu - 'that was the political culture of the town'. It was only several years later that she moved to the Transylvanian town of Deva, where she acquired a degree in journalism and finally 'became of the right' (*de dreapta*).

Becoming of the right, as Liliana put it, was not a mere change of voting preference. It was a whole existential transformation, a veritable micro-transition in personhood, which was shaped through the social and professional networks, the mentoring, and the opportunities for learning afforded by her move to 'the city'. The Transylvanian town of Deva is a small community of just over 60,000 inhabitants. A citadel of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, it witnessed a programme of urbanisation in the 1960s, when streets were asphalted, blocks of flats erected, and homes connected to utilities as elsewhere in the country, but it also saw the emergence of an art scene and its establishment as a tourist destination, which were invigorated by the development funds obtained after European accession (PMD 2007). Unlike Liliana's native town of Petroșani, which had been developed and eroded with the rise and fall of coal extraction, then relegated in the public imaginary as a miners' bastion, deplored for supporting the Social Democrat Party's violent crackdown on protesters in Bucharest, the apparent liberalism of Deva was steeped at once in its ability to attract investment after 1989, and in its reputation as a town for the intelligentsia.

It was thus in 'moving to the city', and along the class spectrum, that Liliana described beginning her new 'intellectual life' of writing for local publications, attending literary circles, reading poetry, and participating in general in what she called the city's 'public life'. To be 'of the right', she noted solemnly, reading off a memoir she had prepared in advance in anticipation of our meeting, constituted a moment of awakening:

> I didn't know about dissidents. I hadn't read all these authors, I felt I had been brought to my knees by all the misinformation we had been forcibly fed. I only came into contact with our real literature then. I tried to internalise everything and, intuitively, I wanted democracy and freedom.

It was not long afterwards, however, that Liliana's recently found faith imploded; and with it, the hope that Romania could create the conditions of a good life. The 2012 parliamentary elections, won by a controversial alliance of the pro free market National Liberal Party, the socially

conservative Christian Democrat Party, and Ion Iliescu's left wing Social Democrats, constituted a tipping point:

> I hadn't even thought about leaving Romania before. I had my own flat, my job, my friends. But in 2012 I was so disappointed, that I think if I hadn't left I would have gone mad. I was disappointed by the CDR, DA, USL, by all of them….I felt that if I didn't leave that moment I would have had a depression – I am not the type, I am usually very strong, but back then I didn't know what was going on with me….
>
> The lack of jobs and money were a motivation for some, I know that; but people can fight those things, they can. But this was a different matter. People couldn't accomplish themselves professionally. Doctors, economists, teachers left, and they could have formed generations. But they left because of the system. Because, like in the legend of Manole, everything we build we destroy.

The literary reference to the legend is a particularly powerful way of capturing the loss of hope experienced by a segment of the Romanian intellectual middle class who had taken it upon themselves to follow, and to shape, the life of the nation. For a class who saw it as their mission to educate Romanians into the spirit of liberal democracy, whose nationalism was not so much expressed in flag-waving but, as Ghassan Hage (2003) put it, in seeing it as their responsibility to fashion the value system of the nation, the feeling that 'the system' was the same, and that the future was little more than a reproduction of the past, was too much. In the legend Liliana referenced, a master stonemason hired by a voivode to build a church realises that the only way to accomplish his vision and prevent the walls from caving in every day, is to sacrifice the thing he loved the most, and cast his wife within the structure. For Liliana, the sacrifice had been twice made, and twice betrayed. First, she referenced the blood spilled when protesters in Bucharest forced Ceaușescu to flee. The sacrifice more personally devastating however, had been that of the liberal ideal she had come to turn into a raison d'etre after the revolution. If hope is an agentful invocation of a future-to-be, as Marxist philosopher Erns Bloch (1995) framed it, a method of attempting to align the present towards it, as Miyazaki (2006) argues, the political machinations and the spectacle of a country that seemed to be siphoning the people who could 'have formed generations', left little worth hoping, or staying back for.

Liliana's carefully crafted life story captured with great flair the particular mix of utopia and disappointment experienced by Romanian intellectuals. What is also important to note here, is that for several other informants who enjoyed a similarly privileged socioeconomic background, but shared less of her preoccupation with 'forming generations', the imagery of corruption and the idea

that Romania held little promise had become so self-evident, that it precluded historical explanation altogether. And this, I believe, was the most dangerous offshoot of the impossible fullness of transition: the internalisation of a cycle of failure, like Manole's ever crumbling wall, which appeared to have less to do with political decisions taken at particular moments in time, and were expressed as an inherent predisposition to failure inscribed in the people.

'Why did I leave?' Twenty-seven-year-old Sorin asked rhetorically (as many informants had done). 'Because it's a shithole of a country, full of corruption and mafia'. Similar to Liliana, although much younger, Sorin had grown up in the fast developing urban centre of Timișoara where he had studied Psychology, and where he confessed growing up in a 'positively middle class' family who could have arranged a job for him at any old corporation. At the time we met he was living on a canal boat in the South of London, and working for a homelessness charity that had begun a controversial programme of dispersing Romanian rough-sleepers. The imagery of living on the crammed boat and doing night shifts in the city's underpasses was rather different from that of working in a corporation – both in terms of pay and cultural capital. Having joined him on a night shift, it appeared that Sorin was effectively doing the work of border agency officers, only without the pay cheques and the personal security of the job. For all the tension of the night shift we had just finished however, my question as to why Romania felt less appealing sounded irritating, like a reductionist take, perhaps, which overlooked the simple adage that it takes more than material comfort to fashion a vision of one's good life.

Whenever I interviewed young and well educated Romanians who matched my own experience of growing up in a large city, with parents who had made efforts to go to university, who saw themselves as critical intellectuals, and who made an effort to prepare us for an eventual departure, it was hard to shake the sense of déjà vu. Neither Sorin, nor myself, nor other informants of a similar background had known when, where, or how long the departure would last for. I distinctly remember telling my parents on camera in the early 2000s that when I grew up, I wanted to work in Silicon Valley. I doubt any of us knew much about Silicon Valley at the time. Unless the high-tech heart of San Francisco Bay is a hub of anthropologists, that early hope is likely to stay enclosed in the VHS recording. Yet for all the naivety of the age, the fact that the ambition to move had set in so early speaks volumes about just how ingrained the sense that Romania was a place without a future had become. Not only did we feel like there was nothing to do. We also seemed

convinced that there would be never be anything, anyway. As Sorin voiced it most brusquely, this was the kind of conviction that precluded proof, and operated on a gut level.

In many respects, the fact that young, urban Romanians who lived materially comfortable lives learnt to aspire to leave is understandable, in light of Romania's Europhile history. The importance of returning to Europe after 1989, and the existential disappointment that ensued once it became apparent that, even as a member, Romania was yet to catch up, had been particularly visible among the highly educated middle classes, who viewed themselves as intellectuals. It was also for them that post-socialism was not only a way of going forward, but one of going back to the future. Since the 1800s Romanian political elites had strived to claim a place at the European table. The very formation of an independent Romanian state was a struggle to exit the sphere of the Russian and Ottoman empires, by demonstrating cultural propinquity to Western Europe.

Historian Neagu Djuvara (2013) documented at length the programmatic Europeanisation of the Romanian political elite, and the way in which claims to Europeanness once mobilised in the quest for independence from the empires of the East, such as that of being descendants of the Roman Empire who speak a 'Latin language in a Slavic sea', were seamlessly woven into the fabric of middle class distinction. In the 19th century, for instance, the Cyrillic alphabet was replaced with the Latin one, a constitution was written following the Belgian model, and key institutions of the newly-formed Romanian state were established according to the French blueprint. Speaking French, studying at one of the universities of Western Europe, swapping Ottoman robes for suits and appropriating Parisian mannerism, all became markers of Romania's newly emerging bourgeoisie. From the moment of independence in 1877, and until the Communist Party took over power, historians note that Europe remained a standard of achievement in the functioning of institutions, in artistic production, and in the everyday fashioning of the middle class alike. If before 1947 authors like Creanga, whom George referenced in his longing for the countryside, did seek to temper the overzealous excesses of modernisers too keen to import every Western cultural formation, Europe gained renewed power under socialism, when even the most innocuous imports became a marker of dissidence through culture.

It is not surprising, then, given Europe's long history in the Romanian middle class imaginary, that the tortuousness of transition after 1989 was vocally resented. Nor did it help that the country's

progress was being constantly assessed in the process of European accession, prompting endless comparisons with neighbours to the East and West of the Iron Curtain. Wielding the authority of quantitative measurements, European Commisssion reports and academic assessments by political scientists pointed out with frustrating regularity Romania's inability to catch up with its more developed Eastern and Central European counterparts. Findings pertaining to socioeconomic inequality, corruption, and slow reform, conjured an image of entrapment in the past; a 'laggardness' (Noutcheva & Bechev 2008), or inability to emerge from its 'Balkanism' (Gallagher, 1997; Dimitris Papadimitriou & Gateva, 2009), that prevented Romania, and its similarly slow neighbour Bulgaria, from achieving the modern telos promised by transition advocates.

Throughout this time, Romania's own governments went to great lengths to challenge the narrative of marginality and sluggishness, by attempting to rehabilitate the country's image. A number of high profile country-branding campaigns were distributed in Western media, in an effort to stimulate foreign investment and tourism (Neag 2012; Stan 2013; Surcel 2006). A more sinister and endeavour to challenge the country's marginal position through whitewashing, has been the discursive, and actual, persecution of the Roma. As Shannon Woodcock (2007) persuasively demonstrates, the Roma provided an easy scapegoat every time the Western public questioned the deservingness of Romanian citizens through stories of petty theft, rough sleeping, begging or benefit abuse. By attributing behaviours that fell short of the European fantasy of a sanitised, white worker citizen (Anderson, 2015) to the Roma, the Romanian political elite sought to challenge the country's own unflattering position in European hierarchies.

This segregation of the Roma in practice (Marin & Csonta 2013; Peric 2011; Romani CRISS 2007, 2010, 2011b; Surdu et al. 2011), and their strategic othering in attempts to rehabilitate Romania's image have stimulated a wealth of research, including among Romanian migrants (Moroşanu and Fox 2013, Crăciun 2013, Macri 2011), and many of my informants reproduced this discourse. What remains less known to the Anglo-Saxon audience, however, is how the pressure to be recognised as modern, and a full member of Europe, generated a similar practice of blaming Romanianness itself.

Sorin's blunt assessment that 'Romania is a shithole of a country' did not come out of nowhere. Year on year, as anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu (2013) noted, the national media diligently

reproduced the admonishing conclusions of vertical European rankings, in a spectacle where endless self-assessment came to constitute an endless confirmation of Romanian backwardness. From being simply a summative label, a way to call Romania's particular, albeit numerous failings across its European accession programme, tropes of sluggishness, laggardness and Balkan exceptionalism acquired causal connotations, almost as if Romania suffered from a distinct predisposition to being left out of modernity. For Romanian commentators, like for my informants, the inability to catch up was no longer a matter of bad governance, but a question of national character; as if a 'Romanian mentality', (2006, 2008) prone to compromise and rule bending was what was keeping the country behind.

This was visible in the obsessive proliferation of rankings quantifying everything from macro levels of development, to individual levels of pessimism, personal values, and self-perception, but also in notable interventions by public intellectuals. A wealth of works by indigenous authors expressed 'irritation' (Banica & Constantinescu 2007) with the country's inability 'to civilise', its immaturity (Mihailescu, 2013; 2015), 'victim complex' (Boia 2011, 2012), Balkanism (Ormsby 2015) or even 'Balkan neurosis' (Zamfirescu 2012). The conclusions to historian Lucian Boia's thesis on 'Romanian difference' border on the cynical: Romania's most prized national artists, Boia affirms, drew their inspiration from Western European ones, and were far behind continental cultural movements; dissidents under communism were not as resistive as the public imaginary portrays them, nor did their fabled resistance through culture pose a substantial challenge to the regime; the historical figures Romanians pride themselves with most, he ends, were in fact not Romanian ethnics. As if echoing the assessments of European Commission reports, but taking them to a new level of predetermination, the historian tells his readers from the very first pages: 'everything starts from an impressive delay' (Boia 2012 p. 9).

The historian's efforts to uncover some of the mythologies that lay behind conventional Romanian history are not without merit. What remained less problematized, however, was that the authoritative academic voice contributed merely to a plurality of discourses perpetuated from above and below, where historical particularities came to fade into the background, generating a narrative of predetermination; a narrative of crumbling walls, as Liliana put it, or a bottomless decay, in Sorin's formulation, which suggested that the ruination one encountered in buildings and

inscribed upon people's faces had less to do with exogenous historical encounters, and more to do with who Romanians were.

An interesting intervention which illustrated this ethnicisation of underdevelopment came from Marin, a fifty-three-year-old carpenter who had worked in Israel, Italy and Ireland before coming to the UK:

> You know how in Romania someone builds a motorway, but in a year's time it's ruined. […] So many innocent children died and nothing changed.
>
> We need different mentalities, a different kind of judgement, getting down and doing the work; remember what Nicu Ceaușescu said: the things your father built in 20 years, you can't even paint in 20 years!

It cannot be argued that socialism represented a preferable alternative of government for Marin. He was all too aware of the shortages and repressions of the 1980s to wish for their return. What that period held, however, was a glimmer of work ethic, when things were done well enough to sustain a life without crises, and where Romanian 'mentalities' were different. 'A different kind of judgement' was Marin's reference to an irreparable moral brokenness rooted not in history, but in the people, which had become the lamentation of a generation. As if echoing the works of intellectuals who sought to diagnose the flaws of Romanian character, it appeared that for Marin too it took much more than a change of government, a new political leadership, or even a different political class to end the state of aberration the country appeared to be dwelling in. If the ruination was be undone, it seemed, what was needed was a different mode of being altogether which was simply less Romanian.

Similar associations of Romanianness with moral corruption were visible at different levels of the public imaginary and media discourse. In a recent opinion poll administered to the diaspora, two thirds of émigrés responded that they were not planning to return because of the 'Romanian mentalities'.[25] Above all, the narrative of ethnic deficit was most apparent in the November 2014 presidential elections, where the liberal candidate Klaus Iohannis, a German ethnic, stood against the well-seasoned Social Democrat (and Romanian ethnic) Prime Minister Victor Ponta.

There was no question that, as a fresh face in the political arena, with a modest but successful background in leading the Transylvanian town of Sibiu, Iohannis had none of the legacy of sleaze

[25] Corruption was the most popular reason, mentioned by 83% of respondents, followed by the standard of living (71%), mentalities (66%), jobs (52%), satisfaction (48%) and others (15%).

which pursued the Social Democrat candidate – a legacy which ranged from accusation of corruption in office, to plagiarising his doctorate thesis. Yet it was revealing that it was the liberal candidate's Germanness, as much as his political record, that motivated many of his supporters. 'Only another German can pull us from our eternal boycott of history', best-selling writer Mircea Cărtărescu remarked in light of the election (quoted in Cercel, 2014). His words were echoed by dozens of members of the diaspora, whom I joined outside the Romanian Cultural Institute in London on the day of presidential elections.

Having spent the better part of eight hours outside the sumptuous Belgravia building, talking to would be voters in a queue which snaked stoically around the block, it was hard to miss the sense that candidates' political programmes, or indeed any distinctions between left and right allegiances, were of marginal importance. What seemed to hold more currency was Iohannis' cultural attunements. A novice on the national political arena, and a less than charismatic presence on camera, as even his supporters acknowledged, listening to voters' grievances conjured the sense that Iohannis's sheer ethnic constitution held the key to the foundational reform in personhood Romanians needed: the power to 'organise us', 'civilise us', and offer 'something else' as I heard those in the queue recount.

Parallels between the queue to vote, which wrapped around the expensive Central London square, and the queues to eat, which had punctuated everyday life in the 1980s, did not escape unnoticed. 'The last time I queued so long was for bread during Ceaușescu's times!' cried a man sardonically at one of the many television cameras that were broadcasting the spectacle of the diaspora locked out of polling stations. Or, as another put it: 'that's where the Romanian looks good, in the queue'. Being huddled in the rain along the pavement, embodying a configuration which raised the spectre of never-ending want, made the foreignness of Klaus Iohannis all the more appealing. 'We need another German to get us out of this', one voter said echoing the fiction writer, in a reference to the late-19th century period of Romanian history, when Prince Karl of the German dynasty Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, was asked to rule over the newly united Wallachian and Moldavian provinces. That transfer of power had been, in fact, a coup. A Conservative-Liberal coalition forced prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza to abdicate after his own zealous attempts to modernise acquired authoritarian tendencies. That detail, however, seems to have become confined to the footnotes of history. Like Carol I, whom history books now portray as a harbinger of modernity, and whom

the public elected as the second 'greatest Romanians' in a poll, in the eyes of ordinary migrant voters and public intellectuals in Romania alike (Cercel 2014), Klaus Iohannis emerged as the new German 'phenomenon' (Boia 2012, p. 133); the phenomenon needed to jolt the country out of its Romanianness, and back into Occidental normality.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the promise of the future as an all-encompassing category of hope, gave rise to an equally wide reaching sense of hopelessness. The future of impossible fullness simply did not come. In its place, there rose a general feeling of entrapment, an overwhelming sensation of nothingness, as Mari put it, where life felt stuck in cycle of survival. What that nothing meant for my informants, varied widely. People like the Iancus, Costachi, George and Marin, who grew up in the village, acquired their sense of entrapment from the destitution that engulfed the countryside and deindustrialising small towns. Nothing to do, manifested quite literally in the absence of opportunities for work and internal mobility.

We have seen how behind Mari's succinct statement that gives this chapter's title, there lay a worrying rate of economic inactivity, hidden by statistics which boasted a high national GDP and a low rate of formally registered unemployment. By contrast, for informants like Liliana, Sorin, and indeed myself, who shared none of the material concerns of rural residents, the future had been discursively eroded. Narratives of corruption, insufficient reform and an incompetent political establishment, had dented the middle class's own belief in the possibility of a European future for Romania. Like in much contemporary Romanian literature, therefore, in the imaginary revealed by my own informants it appeared that what had once been particular policy failings turned into a dramatic discourse on broken Romanian mentalities, and a national fate destined, like Manole's crumbling monastery, to implode. It is within this feeling of entrapment that attitudes towards migration are formed. When Romania seemed to offer nothing, the space West of the border emerged as a category of hope where the future might once again be seized. This is something the next chapter explores.

CHAPTER 4: WESTWARDS MOBILITY AS OPEN PROMISE

We were driving down the asphalt road which stretches along the river valley, cutting through the Buzău hills: Mari, Petre, their friend Sandu, their youngest daughter Iuliana and myself; warm and dusty after winding down the windows all the way from Corbu, but happy to squeeze on the back seat of Stelian's old Daewoo Cielo. Since the Iancus' other children were out shopping in the neighbouring towns, the parents thought it fitting to take a day off hay stacking to show me some of the local landmarks. The Amber museum and stone church in the village of Colți were a must. So with a phone call and the promise of a litre of Petre's home distilled brandy, the Iancus persuaded Sandu, who was an old friend from the factory, to volunteer his car for the day and join us on our trip to Colți.

Before we even made it to the museum, the heritage tour seamlessly turned into an overview of the region's histories of mobility, and immobility, told through the lens of real estate. Like much of the Romanian countryside, Buzău was an architectural mosaic where vast, boldly coloured concrete villas boasting custom made exteriors, stood next to old, white washed houses made of clay and straw. 'The big one with the red roof and iron fence', Petre pointed out, 'belongs to a former cooperative administrator who opened up a shop after the revolution'. 'It is a fine house', Sandu added, 'but not nearly as beautiful as the Mayor's'.

Like the priest, the pharmacist, the teacher who drove up to the school, and other members of the traditional middle class, the mayor was part of a distinct local elite. An elite villagers greeted formally and addressed with reverence, whose good life was as visible to people like the Iancus, as

it was firmly out of their reach. Before the revolution, Mari explained, the mayor was a technician at the cooperative. 'He wasn't a worker, he had a higher job, I don't remember exactly', she said; 'he had connections, but he was there with the rest of us'. Just how deep those connections were, and how different from the informal arrangements most people mobilised during socialism, we could only guess. But what they seemed to have done, according to Mari's account, was enable him to navigate the convoluted phases of land restitution, and make a small fortune of the plots he seized: those which had belonged to his family, as well as those of the former priest who died without any heirs before 1989, and of the expropriated *chiaburi* – the vast property owners demonised by Romanian communist ideologues, whose descendants apparently never returned to claim their land.

A certain 'elasticity of land' and property relations, in Katherine Verdery's (1994) formulation, which had confounded many of the poorest, also firmly established the mayor of Pănătău at the top of the local hierarchy - as it had done, in fact, with numerous socialist era bureaucrats turned 'local barons' in the 1990s (Adevarul 2014). 'He kept most of it for himself', Mari noted, pausing and nodding as if revealing a fact that needed little explanation. 'But', she continued with renewed attention, 'he also gave some people a bit more, he gave us a bit too, so of course they liked him and voted for him; now he has a farm down in Sibiciu and two children, both with flats and jobs in Buzău. They've established themselves well, there is no doubt about that'.

Since the second round of restitutions, the mayor had been in office for 16 consecutive years, and had changed so many parties that neither of my hosts could recall which alliance he was currently a member of. A look at the local media (Dancu 2016) indicates that when he first started he ran with the Liberal Democrats, who were the party in government at the time. He then joined a broader liberal coalition, before switching to the opposite side of the political spectrum entirely and linking ranks with the social democrats. Any political affiliation seemed, in fact, to be of secondary importance. Without any challenger in the last elections, and popular among voters, for whom he was the face of minimal but welcome state subsidies, the mayor elected with 100% of the vote embodied the good life that had only come for some. The good life of the 'New Rich', to borrow Humphrey and Mandel's (2002) phraseology; people who were once 'like the rest of us', as Mari put it, but who could read the fast changing landscape of property relations, and navigate the renewed convergence of ownership and status that followed decollectivisation (Buchowski 2009)

in a way ordinary peasants rarely could. These were people whose good life was almost universally presumed to have been carved 'with connections': an informality that captured, as White (2016) noted in her observations of Poland, both the erosion of security engendered by casualised employment, and the connections needed to circumvent it; strings pulled and hands greased, whose shadowy imaginary captured not so much illicitness, but the impossibility of replication by the majority (Dunn, 2004). They were people who had grabbed an opportune moment that was long gone, and who remained through their possessions as visible to villagers as they were distant from their realm of possibilities.

It was interesting to remark that this sense of separateness did not appear to characterise the trajectories of neighbours who had gone to work abroad in recent years. As the car slowly continued its dusty journey north we spotted a large, two story breeze block construction. An ornate iron fence was enclosing it from the outside, while private security guards were watching over the building materials within. The vast lemon yellow villa, by far the largest we had spotted, rose like a mountain in the centre of a flattened, concrete covered yard. At Petre's request we slowed down and squinted, so he could see just how much progress had been made since the last time he had spotted it. PVC windows and doors seemed to have recently been added, judging by the protective film that was still on; the inside was bare, and no one was working on site yet, but judging by my interlocutors' attentive observations, alterations had clearly been made.

The house, they informed me, belonged to Florin Savu. Florinel, by the familiar appellative, he was one of the first people to go to work in England in the early 2000s. I had already heard his and his family's story roll off the tongues of villagers in Corbu in several versions, each time recounted with a dose of awe and just a hint of envy, as if it were a local rags to riches legend. 'When they were little they were even poorer than us', Mari had noted earlier that week. 'The children walked around with bogies dried on their nose, broken shoes on their feet, they barely had anything to put on the table, you wouldn't have thought that anything was to come off them' she added, as if to emphasise that for all their wealth today, the Savus had once been as poor as everybody else. The breakthrough moment, however, was as vivid as the imagery of the young penniless children. 'Florin had an older sister, Crina, married to a Gypsy who worked for the national railway', I heard in another conversation with Marin. 'He was the one who first went to London hidden in an apple car. He pulled his wife with him, then Crina pulled her younger brothers and sisters over the years'.

By the time of my fieldwork, eight out of the twelve siblings had gone to work in the UK, followed by many of their friends, their children once they were old enough, and many of their children's friends in turn. One way or the other, whether it was by helping with transport or by arranging employment, by sharing information or just by creating a network that could do all these things, it became apparent that the Savus had become an element of everyone's journey abroad. For his part, since his departure in the early 2000 Florinel had managed to open a shop selling Romanian products in North London. He had partnered with another local émigré in founding a successful minivan transport business which ran trips across Europe three times a week, and had built one of the largest houses in the area. All despite leaving school early and growing up on the brink of destitution in a family who, as Mari noted, seemed at the time to have nothing in store.

There was little doubt that an element of envy and resentment crept up in the conversation as we slowed down to examine the concrete mammoth. Florinel's flamboyant taste in exterior decorations, his preference for oversized spaces, his allegedly cold relationship to his mother who, little Iuliana insisted on stressing, 'was still living in the village in the same run down house' of his childhood, and his reputation for being stingy with his workers were all mentioned by my hosts. Nonetheless, unlike the mayor and shop owners, unlike the local elite of administrators-turned-barons, whose fortunes couched in connections past seemed permanently out of reach, it was precisely the intimate familiarity with Florin and his family's present that conjured them as harbingers of a future that could be. It was Florin's nephew, Sorin, who had helped Doru leave the village. It was in his North London shop that, in response to Doru's pleas, Cristina was given her first job after graduating from high school. The stingy wages he paid her yielded the remittances which helped the Iancus cover the costs for private tuition for their younger daughter Constantina - she was only months away from taking an exam where as many as half of Romanian students, including her older sister, failed on their first attempt. They covered the informal costs of hospital bribes when Petre needed a knee intervention. They helped the family invest in mobile phones and an internet connection, and financed the digging of a well in the family's own yard. That, everyone made clear, was no small achievement. By drawing water from the family's own well, Petre was able to improvise a sewage system, build a bathroom, and equip the family home with running water. Improvised and dependent on the weather as it was, filled with unfiltered minerals which stained the new bath tub within weeks with a rusty film of iron deposits, with the money Cristina

sent back after a year of work abroad, the Iancus had fashioned a basic utility the state had failed to provide for rural residents in more than two decades since the revolution.

With their vast networks and their ability to mediate journeys, the Savus thus became the would-be employers which that part of the county had lost after the downsizing of the furniture factory. When a lopsided development placed the lives of the poor far from those of career politicians and university educated professionals, they filled with their conspicuously displayed markers of affluence, the role of an accessible middle class. A see-through class whose middleness was not so much measured in income, as it was in the rags-to-riches legacy they created; in a story of personal transformation from nothing, which for onlookers like the Iancus offered a grain of hope.

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Through a closer look at the representation of migrants' journeys, this chapter illustrates how emigration emerges as a category of hope (Pine 2014). Given the destitution which engulfed some parts of Romania, and the sense of betrayal registered by the urban middle class, I show how many Romanians found hope for social mobility through the physical act of moving West. I begin by unpacking these imaginations of migration as the future that could be. At the intersection of official discourse, which posits the diaspora as the political force with the potential to unlock 'the Romania of normality we all desire', in President Klaus Iohannis' words (Neagu 2014), but also of everyday encounters, where returning émigrés display conspicuous markers of affluence, the West emerges as space of infinite potentiality. Framed in terms of 'civilisation', 'potential' and 'politeness' by the highly educated, or portrayed more pragmatically as a space where one could make a living, in the case of Romanians who contemplated moving out of material necessity, Westwards mobility appears nonetheless as a promise. Even when for returning migrants themselves the displays of goods acquired abroad were more reflective of the standard of living desired, than of the one achieved, for those who stayed behind the myriad of individual displays of wealth contributed to conjuring the West as a space where the future could finally be made. Understanding this imaginary, I conclude, is key to grasping the intertwining of perceptions of Romanianness, with the experience of mobility.

4.1. The glimpses of hope in transnationalism

Ever since the 1990s when the study of migration entered the radar of textured, ethnographically informed accounts (Brettell 2002, 2003; Kearney 1986; Vertovec 2007), anthropologists have documented migrants' abilities to entertain meaningful connections across countries of origin and destination. Ethnographers working with migrants from Latin America to the US initially (Portes et al. 1999; Schiller 2009; Schiller & Fouron 2001; Smith & Guarnizo 1998 to name but a few), then gradually exploring European mobility (Anghel 2008; Ban 2012; Faist 1998, 2010; Pine 2014; Ryan et al. 2009; Sandu 2005b; Vertovec 1999; White 2016), have highlighted the emergence of 'transnational circuits' (Rouse 1991), 'networks' (Hannerz 1996), 'social fields' (Levitt 1998, 2001; Levitt & Schiller 2004) or so-called 'social spaces' (Faist 2001), which transcend the boundedness of nation states. As travel and communication technologies become more accessible, they argue, flows of people, money, but also norms and identities (Levitt 1998; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011), came to link sending and receiving communities, bringing many of the transformations experienced by migrants abroad at the heart of the public forum at home. Orchestrated 'from above' (M. P. Smith & Guarnizo 1998) by states and official discourse, but also increasingly 'from below', through migrants' own cross border journeys, transnational circulations of people and ideas interconnect with local practices (White 2016) and values (Pine 2014), weaving glimpses of lives built abroad, into assessments of what the future should hold at home (István Horváth 2008); or indeed, into aspirations of where a better future might be built.

To understand the promise of the West for Romanian migrants, it helps to continue the discussion of the country's long infatuation with Europe opened in the previous chapter, and to examine the transnational imaginary engineered 'from above' by president Iohannis's election. The footage of Romanian migrants standing at the gates of their embassies across the continent in order to exercise the basic right to vote, had struck a powerful chord with the liberal media in the country. Aerial pictures of interminable queues were circulated through the day as an example of the Social Democrat Party's abuse of power and continued sabotaging of democracy. If the electoral office had failed to recognise the need to provide more voting stations for Romanians abroad, the critique went, blame lay with the Social Democrat Prime Minister - also a candidate in the presidential elections, who was accused of silencing the political voice of the right leaning diaspora. The very public humiliation of voters forced by their own state to wait in the rain on the streets of European

capitals, articulated yet another metaphor for Romania's awkward position in hierarchies of Europeanness, where the popular desire for a return to the normality of Europe seemed forever betrayed by the 'red plague'[26] perpetuated by the Romanian left.

On this background of embarrassment, which filled Romanian media for weeks, once results came in to indicate an overall majority for the liberal candidate, with an overwhelming 90% support rate abroad (StirileProTV 2014), it became apparent that the newly elected president Klaus Iohannis would not fail to garner the political potential of the diaspora. Within months of election Iohannis declared his commitment to making the diaspora 'a national priority in real terms' (Dumitrescu, 2016). There were notable initiatives aimed at symbolically including those who lived abroad in the nation's political imaginary through the declaration of a 'National Day of Romanians Everywhere'. There were attempts to increase their political representation, through the introduction of a postal vote and the creation of a 'Congress for Romanians Everywhere'; as well as policies aimed at stimulating their investment, by promising to double the capital of anyone who returned to open a business in Romania. What is more interesting to remark upon, however, was how along with these attempts of engaging and rewarding the diaspora, the Western space where they were living too acquired renewed positive connotations.

Romanians abroad have an extraordinary 'potential', the president noted on the occasion of the newly declared 'day of Romanians everywhere' (Presidency.ro 2016). Their work abroad was not just portrayed as an instrumental decision motivated by the simple fact that remittances played a significant role in the Romanian economy. Emigration was also portrayed as a way into a different mode of being: a Western cure for the complex economic, political, and moral aberration Romania was argued to be trapped within.[27] Endowed with skills, attitudes and mentalities worthy of learning from, equipped with capital, but above all exposed to the way things are done abroad, the diaspora was key to his administration's explicit wish to engender 'the Romania of normality we all desire' (Neagu 2014). 'A different Romania', 'of things well done'. 'An occidental country', as he

[26] This was the name attributed to the Social Democrat Party during protests.

[27] From a realpolitik perspective, of course, the President's attempts to include the diaspora in the public imaginary could also be viewed as a tactic of countering the Social Democrats' sway over the Romanian South and East – a sway articulated with the help of local mayors who, similarly to the one in Pănătău, commanded enough respect among the local population to maintain his function regardless of the party he represented.

noted on the launch of his candidacy (HoNews.ro 2014), 'on a path with precise objectives, where the next generations have a future'.

This was but a glimpse of what we could call Romania's most recent expression of transnationalism from above, where president Iohannis' personal determination to reward the diaspora for its support shrouded the West too, as the space of its formation, within an imaginary of hope and civilizational superiority. Another facet of this imaginary was manifested in the many transformations the country witnessed 'from below', in the everyday embodiments of affluence which trickled with the flow of remittances. As the country with one of the highest rates of emigration in Europe, where an estimated 17% of citizens live outside its borders (Galka 2016b), Romania has widely experienced the effects of remittances sent by the diaspora. According to the National Bank (BNR 2014) an average of five million Euros was sent back to the country from Romanians abroad every year since 2005, exceeding both the value and the reach of the foreign direct investments which, transitologists had promised, would follow after the adoption of market reforms. In 2014 alone, the final year included in the estimate, economic remittances amounted to as much as 3% of national GDP (INS 2014). Even after the financial crisis, the report stresses, when many migrants returned from weakened Mediterranean economies and the sums sent back dropped significantly, to half of their previous values, remittances continued to be instrumental in propping up household consumption and ensuring subsistence in rural areas. Above all, as the architectural landscape of Buzău County indicated so plainly, the money invested in property development contributed to a sustained boon in construction, and articulated along with it a very visible manifestation of what work abroad could offer.

Driving down the roads of Buzău County, the footprint of years of emigration was inscribed at every level of the fast changing landscape. Everywhere we went modern breeze block constructions at various stages of completion were dotted in between peasant cottages and socialist era concrete buildings. With a myriad customised layouts which seemed catered to each owner, and not planned by a broader development project, they stood like witnesses to the many syncopated fortunes which had arisen since the revolution. With dashing exteriors and bold colour choices, they emerged like a mosaic of little futures built by the families who had taken it upon themselves to engineer social mobility.

Most of the Romanian migrants I interviewed, who had a plot of land in the country, and who had spent enough time abroad to save, had either finished or were working on completing a building project at home. At the time I visited Corbu, the Iancus' home was just beginning to grow, with its new bathroom and half-built concrete porch, which kept extending with every transfer of remittances Cristina sent from London. In other cases, Romanians who had spent many years of work abroad recounted building veritable villas. Thirty-one-year-old Iuliana, for instance, a social policy graduate with a Master's degree, affectionately spoke of the construction her family were erecting as the 'home away from home'. In the moments of respite, when we waited for her nephew to finish school, she would often share details of wall colours and garden features she had chosen. Slowly and in seasonal batches, she explained, with money earned over the course of the year and using a mix of kin and privately hired local labour, with every trip back to Romania the plans she and her husband conjured abroad would turn into a few more solid cubic metres.

When exactly would they get to live in it? That question was harder to answer. Like the journalist disenchanted with Romania's corrupted version of liberal politics, Iuliana recounted that 'it [would] be very hard to come back'. 'We would have to open something, probably something in agriculture', she explained. 'We would need a business of our own otherwise you can't survive, that's clear'. Neither she nor the partner she met in London, a Romanian man with half her years of education who worked on a construction site and was the family's sole breadwinner, 'had that kind of money'. The fact that their two young children would soon start school also put the prospect of return within a hazy horizon several years down the line; as did the fact the she had stopped working from the moment she became a mother.

Despite the uncertainties which surrounded the conversation on when and how they would come back, however, Iuliana's commitment to the villa was unwavering. 'You, child, have the most beautiful home in the village', she recounted, channelling the words of an elderly neighbour who singled her home out from the numerous other construction projects in the area. More than an investment to be couched simply in the language of return, the building felt like a source of comfort and intimacy; an embodied of hope, if not of presence, which spoke to the good life that could be.

At the level of the Romanian media, the phenomenon of vast but empty homes was well documented. In 'Pride and Concrete', a suggestively titled project which documented migrants'

flamboyant building ventures in a northern Transylvanian county, the contrast between migrants' villas and their elders' adobe homes was portrayed with thinly veiled disappointment. The 'curse of the concrete', the storyboard notes, 'forces the young to invest their hard-earned money in multi-floored houses in their native villages' (Calinescu 2013) - even though, it was implied, there is little hope of them ever being used during their owners' youth. Hollow concrete mammoths expertly captured by the project's photographers, are displayed as metonyms for an emptying countryside. Their owners' detailed stories of sacrifice, in turn, cast the buildings in a sense of futility, as if they represented someone else's ambition.

It is in light of such reactions to the contrast between what exists and what is desired, that it seems useful to reflect upon the many meanings imbued within capitalist consumption - in its advanced and nascent forms alike. If private property is the foundation of liberal personhood, as John Locke argued in the Second Treatise, when he noted that 'every Man has property in his own person', several ethnographers have remarked how in the context of post-socialism property acquired a particularly formative dimension (Dunn, 2004; Drakulić 1993; Ghodsee 2011; Berdhal 2005; O'Neill 2015). Consumption was the 'organising metaphor of post-socialism', Daphne Berdahl (2005 p. 239) noted, portrayed as an everyday means of returning to European 'normality' (Rausing 2002). In her ethnography of a privatised Polish factory, Elizabeth Dunn (2004) powerfully illustrates how even something as innocuous as fruit juice could be constructed as an affirmation of the liberal self. To choose one's product was to express one's freedom; to spend was to claim affluence; the same way that to buy a niche or custom made commodity was to manifest one's individuality, challenging the utilitarian attitude to production of socialism, with a deliberate excess of aesthetics.

There was no mistaking the preoccupation informants who grew up in villages displayed for the aesthetic of the goods they purchased abroad. Colour, that most striking and often ridiculed feature of Romanian migrants' houses, was according to Fehérváry (2013) the free world's antithesis to the grey dullness of socialism. Whether displayed by Romanian migrants in breeze block behemoths raised next to adobe cottages, in New Russians' lavish country dachas (Humphrey 2002), nouveau riche Serbians' flamboyant clothes (Jansen 2005), or the Hungarian middle class's daring choices of interior design (Fehérváry 2013), extravagant displays of affluence captured the virulence of post-socialist subjects' claim to the good life promised by transition. Several informants also spoke at length of their investments in powerful German made vehicles, designer clothes, extravagant

weddings and jewellery. Virtually every man I interviewed among those who grew up in a village aspired to own a powerful car, even when the cost of insurance was close to a month's rent, and the vehicle remained scarcely utilised in London due to the expensive parking and congestion taxes. Saving for a BMW in particular, with all its connotations of hetero-masculine power, was a popular aspiration. One family I encountered were happy to pay the price of a month's accommodation to rent a new model BMW X5, just for the privilege of returning home in it, rather than in their regular VW hatchback. If cars were generally the realm of men, women paid as much attention to their bodies. During the month of July, the time before many Romanian migrants returned to the country for annual trips, beauty salons in the North London Neighbourhood were filled with women, and a few men, who signed up for manicures, eyebrow threading and fresh haircuts, in an attempt to prepare their aesthetic as closely as possible to the moment of return.

In her critical appraisal of consumerism in Latvia, Eglitis (2011) argues that a culture of consumption which portends to speak to everyone, obscures the class inequalities and erodes the critical vocabularies of transition, with individual-centred tropes of taste and lifestyle. However, as transparently flamboyant as migrants' purchases appeared from the outside, it is important to note that such displays of property were not uncritically performed. Behind the carefully orchestrated spectacles of affluence inscribed in bodies, cars and in constructions, many of the Romanian men and women I spoke to were highly aware of the discrepancy between the image of luxury they portrayed a couple of times a year during brief trips back home, and the personal sacrifices undertaken routinely in order to raise the savings needed to cover them. 'Of course you come back in a nice car, you wear a shirt, gold chain around your neck, and you look good', twenty-four-year-old Victor told me, describing his regular trips to the Moldavian county of Focșani. But that, he added, was just the surface. 'Who is to know that in England you're really wearing brooms out sweeping construction sites?'.

Victor was a young man in his 20s who grew up in a poor village in the county of Focșani, and went abroad to escape the pressures of poverty and an abusive father. It was hard to read, through the finer fabrics and shimmering watch he wore, how before their acquisition there had been times when he was bullied by the people who helped him migrate, times when he found himself completely alone without a direction, and months when he experienced utter destitution, without any contact with his family. At the time we met in London, he had just started a contract-bound job

on a construction site, but he was still subletting in an overcrowded property, and struggling to save. Yet like Iuliana, who was aware of the disjunction between the home she and her husband built in Romania with money earned in London, and the uncertainty of when they would live in it, Victor's knowledge that his shirt and chain were purchased after years of arduous work did not prevent him from appreciating the small comfort of looking, and of hoping, for better.

During our month in Corbu, Cristina and Doru too were protective of just what we could reveal of the living conditions they navigated in London. I was firmly instructed that stories of her cash in hand work and squabbles over money were to be kept for our ears only. The time back home was one to look good, with their jewellery and their car, but above all it was a time to feel good: gain the confidence that they too could make a success of working abroad the way the Savus had, and ensure that parents would not worry for their wellbeing any more than they already were. Similarly to Iuliana and Victor, who found comfort in the goods they bought despite past sacrifice and indeterminate futures, the expenditures the young couple displayed upon their return remained artefacts deliberately chosen for their power to represent the good life that could be. Much of the time we spent in Corbu had been on the back seat of their 4x4. Since, like so many other men, Doru had been keen to buy himself a car but had never passed a driving test, our trips were conducted through the forest and across the mountain plateau, on the rough terrain away from the eyes of the police. 'Was it not dangerous?' I asked. Doru shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He suspected that someone would eventually tell on him (as it happened in the end), but the moments of racing with Sorin and his crew seemed too tempting to be missed. Cristina, for her part, returned with gifts for family and neighbours, like a confident earner with the flexibility to spend. The tab, it remained unsaid, would be picked upon her return to London.

Conspicuous displays of consumption (Veblen 2005) could thus be mobilised to render the bodies and lifestyles of migrants legible in particular ways. In part disguising a world order, as Bourdieu (1985) argued distinction does to middle class domination, in part creating one, as Rancière (2005) posited when he likened working class politics to a project of aesthetic imagination, they constituted simultaneously a claim to status that was desired, and a concealment of precarity that existed; an embodiment of a capitalist sensibility which sublated individual mobility into consumption, and a camouflage of the complex journeys overseas which remained, behind the glare of designer goods, marked by histories of personal struggle. At stake, I want to highlight, was

not ignorance of the reality across the border, but a gesture towards the reality that could be. A vision many young informants were careful to project, and to protect upon their returns, and one which offered, for all its choreographed nature, a glimmer of hope to those who were still living in the grey.

4.2. The need to leave as 'away sickness'

There were times when being in the company of returning migrants felt like being in the presence of a local celebrity. The Savus rarely ever travelled alone. In Corbu we drove together in convoys that seemed to replicate the histories and power relations created as they brought each other over through the years: Sorin and his wife, the first to leave with the help of the family network, were at the front, aboard their brand new 4x4; Doru, Cristina and myself, were in the middle in his unregistered car. Another two young men whom Doru himself had 'pulled up', followed closely behind. There were moments when windows were wound down, radios turned up, and music blasted loud enough to let houses a hundred meters in each direction know we were on the move. There were instances when they scattered the neighbours' flocks of hens, flattened the hay left to grow atop the hill for an entire summer, and scared the shepherd's herds into frenzied dashes on the plateau. They did it with the impunity of patrons and remained largely unchallenged. Everywhere we went, whether it was to make an appearance at the yearly fair for St. Mary the Virgin, or grab a meal in the pizzeria down in Pătârlagele on a weekday, their presence was almost magnetic. We were greeted courteously by young men who complimented their cars, who sometimes offered to buy Doru and Sorin drinks, and who waited expectantly for a seat at the table. Even Cristina, who had only left for one year and was far from achieving a comfortable level of material security, was approached by girls her age; acquaintances from high school, for whom she was no longer just a peer, but also a potential way into London.

'Do you know what you want to do after you finish?', I asked a high school senior who approached the group one evening at the pizzeria. The men were busy playing pool, and Cristina was updating social media, so even if just to feel less excluded, the time felt ripe for conversation. In response, however, the young woman uttered just one word: 'England'. Seconds passed before another word was said, and we just nodded in acknowledgement, smiling like strangers who stumbled upon a common experience too familiar to describe. As the quiet of the dining room was filled by the sharp

sound of the men's cue sticks aiming at billiard balls, it was hard to shake the sense that, for many of the young Romanians who remained behind, the appeal of migration, ingrained as it was at every level, precluded scrutiny.

The notion of affect is useful to reveal social transformations which are too intensely experienced to reveal themselves at the level of language. Brian Massumi (1995) theorises affect as a register of sensibilities manifested in the ways in which people perceive the world through embodied reactions and symbolic mediation. If language is the domain where perception is qualified and simplified, Massumi (1995 p. 91) argues, affect or 'visceral modes of appraisal' (Connolly 1999 p. 27) offer a lens through which to capture transformations whose intensities preclude organised expression. Throughout interviews it often felt that asking questions about why one was planning to leave was naïve. I was struck by the ways in which informants who were highly articulate and specific in descriptions of their journeys, would turn to a syncopated register whenever we approached the subject of wanting to relocate. If the first part of our conversations, where we dwelt on the moment when they started contemplating the prospect of leaving, produced evocative accounts of first impressions during trips abroad, memories of friends who had left, or other particular encounters that had prompted them to imagine the West, whenever we came to discuss what they thought would await, answers resorted to vaguer references: 'wanting something more', wishing to 'experience something else' or, as per that evening in Buzău, simply wishing to go. This vagueness, it must be noted, could not just be attributed to villagers who had limited means to research what awaited. It was also present, and in fact most striking, in interviews with highly educated middle class informants who seemed to switch from one register to another the moment I tried to unpack what made leaving so appealing.

Claudiu was a thirty-nine-year-old museology graduate from the town of Vaslui, who came to London in 2007: 'as soon as it became legally possible', he made sure to add. A passion for punk music and an enthusiasm for biking had already led him through several long trips overseas, soon after he finished university. That, he recounted, was how he discovered what it meant to enjoy the open road. It was a period of traveling and exploration, when he learnt that with every return what seemed to be growing was not a desire to settle, but a yearning to go back out. A certain 'away sickness' (*dor de duca*), he added, which appeared to creep up every time he crossed the borders

back in from Hungary, and the wheels of the bike began to skid around 'the holes in the roads' once again.

'I had gone travelling with my bike around Europe', he began:

> When I first got out of Romania and saw Hungary, the state of their roads and their houses I thought it was all wow! Then the further West I got, to Austria, I was… blown away [in English]! Then Germany, with those little towns, I was in love with everything.
>
> When I got back to Romania I felt like I was sick, like I had 'away sickness', you know? I was craving civilisation, good roads, politeness, everything. Just imagine that feeling you have when you return to Romania once you have spent time out here. You know how it is, you are just struck by all the grey; the grey of the roads, the grey in the blocks of flats, the grey in people. I wanted something else.

When the pitted roads started at the border, and the same omnipresent grey followed on, it was hard to escape the sense that the material decay transpired into an internal erosion of being. Like living canvases of existential ruination, as Dzenovska (Forthcoming) aptly puts it, the people who looked 'sunken', 'heavy' or 'stressed' in my informants' depictions, spoke to a transformation that evaded the contours of verbal articulations, and took hold of the register of sensibilities (Massumi 1995). I reflected earlier in this thesis on the depth of disenchantment indicated by motifs of somatic ruination. It is interesting to follow the development of this register of embodied sensibility, and remark here how, for Claudiu, the contrast between the ruination from home and the glimpses of development abroad slowly gave rise to a desire to leave which manifested as 'away sickness'.

To speak of that sickness was to give voice to a visceral, embodied reaction, which captured at once the hopelessness from home and the necessity to part with it. Similar to the radical language with which some informants had painted Romania in tropes of nothingness, Claudiu's account betrayed a longing for a different way of life completely – much like the president did in his own account of the diaspora's 'human potential'. However unclear the everyday contours of this life were, with Hungary, Germany and Austria blending into one image, he 'loved it' all with an intensity which become tormenting. This was an intensity that felt hard to describe and awkward to account for, but that made sense when experienced in contrast to the feeling of 'home sickness' (*dor de casă)* which he found himself unable to experience.

It is telling that, just as president Iohannis spoke of the diaspora's potential, Claudiu defined the appeal of the space 'abroad' in broad tropes of 'loving everything', as if what was required was a complete transformation. Questioning him on closer examples of just what London had and his home town lacked to have made worthwhile the journey did not take us very far. While he had few doubts that leaving Romania was what he wanted, when we talked about why he chose the city in 2008, he admitted that he knew very little about it, and had in fact never even intended to move to the UK. London was merely a changeover city he had planned to visit en route to New Zealand, the original destination he envisaged, whose imagery of open roads fascinated him at the time. That within a few days he decided to stay, and abandon his ticket to the Kiwi Island in the whim of a moment, is another indication of the general appeal of the West. Whether it was New Zealand or England, the physical site seemed merely incidental to the fantasy category of the good life that could be.

Like Claudiu, other highly educated informants recounted wishing to go much further afield: to the US, Australia, with one even mentioning Japan. Others still recounted choosing the UK only because it was the European country where they were confident they had the language abilities to manage – although by European, 30-year-old accountancy graduate Ioana stressed, she meant 'one of the more civilised countries, not Spain and Italy where everybody goes to pick strawberries'. How exactly that mobility would happen remained a mystery. Like the young woman in Corbu for whom the future after graduation meant 'England', without further qualification, few of the older graduates I interviewed knew what lay in store either. Their references spoke more to fantasy than to any particular plans of jobs or living arrangements in London. 'Politeness', 'civilisation', 'a meritocratic country', or 'a different lifestyle' were some of the motifs deployed in response to my questions about what made them move to the UK; as were 'the Big Ben', 'The Beatles', 'or you know, their tea drinking culture'.

With hands gesturing wildly and shoulders raised, these were hardly motivations in themselves, but references designed to make legible the organic assumption that the West was a space of promise. A promise which, several graduates stressed, was not formulated in relation to material insecurity the way it had been in the cases of people like Cristina and Doru, whose families were barely subsisting before their departure, but that was searching rather for the openness of 'something more'.

Several of the Romanian migrants I interviewed were well-seasoned professionals in their 30s, who described having flats and good jobs in white collar sectors in Romania. Like Liliana, whose story was introduced in the previous chapter, another Romanian woman made it clear that she and her husband 'were not dying of hunger'. At 24, Laura already had a job in a car part factory in a town in Transylvania, where within just three years she had advanced from being a worker around the assembly line, to qualifying as a sub-engineer. She recounted joining the company from the beginning, going through numerous quality training sessions, and having a good relationship with the management that would have likely kept her materially secure. 'We were ok financially', she noted, 'we were more than ok'. Yet in 2004 she recounted risking everything to follow into her husband's footsteps and come to London. They had learnt about a network of passport forgers who had previously enabled some acquaintances to navigate the Dover Calais border, and decided to take their chances. Getting her Czech ID, as it turned out, was a shot in the dark: 'you had to go at a certain hour, to a certain carriage, in a certain train that came from Bucharest and was going to Sofia, and give the person who opened the door two pictures and an amount of money', she explained. Within two weeks' time the process had to be repeated hoping that, 'at the same train by the same carriage, someone would come back with your new passport'.

The much dreamt trip to London was Laura's first venture out of the country: all on her own, armed with memorised instructions and an expensive forgery whose effectiveness she had no means of checking. She had been advised to buy a return ticket to the French capital in order to avoid raising suspicions upon crossing the Hungarian border in the Schengen zone, to spend a night in a hotel in Paris, then to buy a second return ticket to London. For all the preparations, however, that first endeavour ended only with a reminder, inscribed in her passport, that the fantasy space of the West was still delimitated by hard frontiers. 'My nice Romanian passport', she recalled ironically, 'got a big black cross on it; inside a rectangle, like that, which said FRAUDULENT BORDER CROSSING'.

'Bang!', she slammed her hand on the coffee table, impersonating the border guard who discovered the forgery. 'There you go', she was told. 'This is who you are from now on!'. The implacable guard brought her out through the back door where the fences were, and explained once again just where she stood: 'Here', she leaned over to one side impersonating the moment: 'England- No!'. 'Here', she noted as her hand drew an imaginary arc in the air, 'France, Europe –

Go'. After that first thwarted attempt which left her trailing her suitcase on the motorway until she hitched a ride back to Paris, Laura did in fact manage to make it to London, where she had been living and working with her husband ever since. At first posing as a Czech maid who worked in hotels, then opening a cleaning company which sent other Romanian women to work in British homes, the year Romania entered the European Union. At the time of our interview in her house in South London, she seemed content. She and her husband had a happy marriage, and were pleased to have recently bought their first home – they were in fact the only informants who owned property. Reading perhaps a note of sadness in my face, tense after her vivid account of trying to evade the Calais border control, she concluded with a clarifying addendum: 'we didn't have material problems, we lived comfortably'. At that moment her eyes scouted the room, up and around, circling over the spotless furniture as if trying to find something to hook onto. Unable to find the answer embodied in the room the words came out unpolished, like a simple confession: 'We just wanted something more'.

Similarly to the president, who imagined the diaspora as a depository of potential kindled by Western civilisation, for Romanians such as Laura and Claudiu moving Westwards seemed to hold infinite potentiality. Like an all promising fantasy of the good life, the geography of Europe and the value space of the Occident which encompassed it, lent themselves to infinite appropriations of a different future. The tropes many of them drew upon to describe their expectations from Westwards journeys were not drawing so much on particular expectations of jobs, or education, but on a different way of being altogether. Frustrating as it may be for the ethnographer who finds comfort in the explicitness of the discursive, the weight of Europe and its magnetic power among the Romanian middle class lay precisely in the indefiniteness of these interventions, and the appeal to an almost psycho-somatic understanding. It lay in its fuzzy descriptions as what could be, which opened up endless ways of imagining oneself as upwardly mobile. 'It did not matter where one went', noted Ioana, another young graduate from a well to do family, recalling the time she was studying in a highly competitive high school in Transylvania. The school noticeboard gave pride of place to the alumni who had managed to go to university abroad:

> 'We looked at their faces every day. I can't even remember what countries they had gone to. USA, Canada, England, the further the better. But there was always this idea that if you went abroad, wow, you were someone'.

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how through its long-running valorisation at the level of political discourse, and its reaffirmation by the glimmer of remittances on the ground, the West emerged as a category of hope. If, for the urban middle class who felt betrayed by the system, it was a space of infinite potentiality, expressed through vague references to 'civilisation', 'something else', or simply 'more', for Romanians like the Iancus whose immobility was inescapably inscribed in rural destitution, it held a promise of affluence. Collectively, a myriad embodied markers of individual assent constituted a statement about the power of migration to engender a type of social mobility that had stopped appearing plausible at home. When staying put seemed to offer nothing but the predictability of subsistence or political corruption, every house added to the county's multicolour landscape, and every powerful car or smart dress spoke to what could be achieved by being mobile. Despite migrants' own private reservations regarding the discrepancy between the good life claimed, and the sacrifices it took to engender it, the transnational flows they were engaged in offered those who stayed behind a rare space of hope. Migration was, as Francis Pine (2004) noted, looking backwards at the life that seemed unliveable, and forwards into the good life that could be.

Hope, however, is not a bimodal phenomenon (Miyazaki 2006). Cross-border mobility is not merely a matter of desire to be acted upon individually, but is also deeply embedded in 'fields of opportunities' and 'frames of reference'(de L'Estoile 2014); conditions of possibility and ways of thinking of oneself, which constitute the networks that many have to draw upon when making the journey westwards. I have noted in this chapter's introductory vignette how, unlike the distant wealth of the traditional middle class and political elite, migrants' affluence was situated in a narrative arc which those who stayed behind could expect to make their own. The next chapter continues to unpack the power of this togetherness, with a look at the moral economies which animate networks from within.

CHAPTER 5: THE MORAL ECONOMY OF MIGRANT NETWORKS

It had been raining intermittently for days. The hay Petre normally collected in August for his neighbours needed time to dry, and the water had turned the road into a treacherous muddy swamp that left us little to do but potter around the household. It was one of the slow afternoons which provided just the right occasion to make Petre's plum brandy. Out in the back yard, the long timber eves of the family's shed provided shelter from the rain. After all, making Țuică was not the kind of process enjoyed in isolation. The Iancus, Petre's brother, and his wife Angela who lived a couple of doors down, brought several kilograms of plums from their orchards, fermented and ready for boiling. Marin volunteered a large plastic barrel, to be filled with cold water and help with vapour condensation. A new pure copper pipe, the most expensive piece of the assemblage needed to carry the alcohol vapours from the oven and through the condensation barrel, was supplied by Gabi.

Gabi was one of the many émigrés who had returned that summer for a break. Older than Doru and Sorin, closer in age to the Iancus, he had gone to London in 2012 with the help of another man brought over by Florinel. Like everyone from Corbu, he too had first been given a hand with accommodation, then managed to find a stable job as a forklift operator in a warehouse, and continued to contribute to the movement of others. As our hosts were gathered around the barrel, watching the sweet brandy trickle out, we found a quieter spot on the old porch. It was there, just out of earshot, but sharing in the spicy smell of fresh liqueur, that Gabi provided one of the most memorable insights into the pressures that come with being turned into a cog in the mobility of others, while wishing to engineer one's own ascent. It was his intervention that best captured the

ambivalence of being simultaneously intercepted as one of us, those raised having to rely on each other to get by, and one of them, the few who seemed to be already getting ahead:

> People tell me that I haven't changed, that I am one of the few who hasn't. And why would I, he noted tapping the floor with his brand new boots.
>
> From the earth you come, to the earth you return. This is my home, this is where I can relax. I try to come back here three or four times a year, even if just for a weekend. It's for things like this that I keep coming.

He nodded to the party of Țuică makers, gathered around the hot brandy that was slowly trickling out. Then, pulling closer and glimpsing at the distance between us and the rest of the party to make sure we were out of earshot, he let out a sigh:

> But every time it's the same story; people have expectations, they imagine that everyone who is working abroad can't move for money (*nu mai poate de bani*). They see you driving a nice car and think: that's it, he's made it (*s-a ajuns*). They don't know how hard it is, they don't know how hard you have to work for it. So it's always the same: can you find something for me? Go on '**boss'**, can you help me too? Just today when I went to get a cup of coffee down in Pătârlagele, someone came up and asked if I could bring them over. Every single time.

He then paused and looked around the back garden, at the fowl that were picking grains of the softened earth, and the children who were sitting on upturned buckets, slouching forwards as they watched their parents sip.

> Of course I try to help, he noted with a sense of exasperation. **I haven't forgotten where I've left from**. If it hadn't been for someone here I wouldn't have gone there either, **people help each other**. I brought my wife over, I brought my father, I brought a couple of boys from around here. If I'm busy and I can't help them myself that's not a problem, I have plenty of people there who can.
>
> But I can't bring everybody. And with some, you bring them and they start making demands: that you are charging too much for the room, that you're doing some sort of business behind their backs. Last time someone asked me why I kept the money my boss at the warehouse gave me when I got them hired. Hear this: he said that it's his work and he should get the money!
>
> But of course I would get something, otherwise my boss would have to pay more to a recruiter!
>
> And isn't it on my skin that I bring them? Isn't it my wife's food that they eat, and me who keeps them before they get something?
>
> My God... In this world you have to know that if you want to make something of yourself, you have to be ready to do anything. What is that, asking me to give them my commission? In this world when you want to make something of yourself you have to start from down low, you understand me?

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For Romanians such as the villagers from Corbu, migrating without the assistance of personal connections such as those described by Gabi was unthinkable. From Crina Savu's first departure in the 1990s, to that of her siblings, their children, their neighbours and acquaintances, going abroad meant appealing to a form of help: with arranging travel, with finding work, and with navigating overall the novelty of journeys over borders. Focusing on these exchanges, this chapters unpacks the moral economy of migrant networks.

Scholars have amply documented the ability of networks to minimise the economic and psychological costs of migration (MacDonald & MacDonald 1964; D. S. Massey et al. 1999; Portes 2000; Ryan 2011; White & Ryan 2008). More recently, the literature also problematised networks' power to entrap, and some members' tendency to see them as a burden, rather than an opportunity. And yet, the ways in which one comes to enter a network, and even continue to contribute when networking becomes a drain, remain less explored. In a literature focused on gains and losses, jobs acquired or precarious journeys reproduced, the sociality of sharing (Widlok 2013) which enables networks to develop, seems to have received less attention. And without it, I would argue, without understanding where sharing sits within the 'relational matrix which constitutes life' (Strathern et al. 1990 p. 8), the frictions that arise when expectations of help are frustrated too remain minimally explained.

Drawing on the rich ethnographic depository which documents informal exchanges in the post-socialist space, and in particular on the recent theorisation of favours by David Henig, Nicolette Makovicky and their colleagues (Henig & Makovicky 2016a), in this chapter I propose to think of the help mobilised in migrant networks too as a moral economy which straddles interest and affect. More than a simple quest for survival, I argue that entering a migrant network is an ethical act premised on the way in which giver and receiver see each other as members of a moral community. A community bound, as Gabi put it in the vignette, by a recognition of where people 'have left from', and by a shared subjection to power which conjures a duty to assist those left behind. Understanding the moral economy of migrant networks, I conclude, is key to understanding the transfer of social security upon personal connections, and thus the constitution Romanianness through everyday exchanges of help.

5.1. The absence of morality in migrant networks

As early as the 1960s, chain migration was defined as 'that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants' (MacDonald & MacDonald 1964 p. 82). Douglas Massey and his colleagues (D. S. Massey et al. 1999) famously described networks as a specific form of social capital which can decrease the economic, social, and psychological costs of migration, through personal exchanges. Interpersonal ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin connect migrants with former migrants and non-migrants in sending and destination areas (D. S. Massey et al 1993, p. 448), enabling even those who could otherwise never make the journeys on their own to follow into the steps of people who left before them (Epstein 2008). 'Bridgeheads' (Böcker 1994), it is argued, pioneer migrants such as Crina and her husband, reduce risk and encourage subsequent journeys along the same patterns, creating a veritable cumulative culture of migration (Horváth 2008), which is seen to increase aspirations for leaving, and evade even the most stringent controls on mobility (De Haas 2010).

It is fair to acknowledge that the role of such personal networks has been instrumental in the history of Romanian emigration. I have shown in an earlier chapter how during the first years after the fall of Ceaușescu, when passport controls were finally liberalised, hundreds of thousands of Romanians crossed borders West. In 1990 alone almost 100,000 citizens of Jewish, Hungarian and primarily German ethnicity left with the help of diasporic connections. But it was after the shock therapies instituted in 1996 that the rate of migration increased exponentially, and personal networks became key to Romanians' transnational mobility. Twice as many people headed westwards between 1996 and 2002 than earlier, pushed by the staggering loss of 3.5million jobs and the destitution that ensued (Sandu 2006). Even before 2002, when Romanians lacked the right to travel or work in the Schengen zone, scholars documented how networks of kin and neighbours mediated illegal border crossings (Anghel 2013; Elrick & Ciobanu 2009), and ensured that newcomers got a foothold in the black markets of Italy (Bleahu 2007) and Spain (Bleahu 2004).

As the intensity of these flows increased and accession negotiations proceeded, so emigration began entering the procedural framework of the government. In 2002, the year Romania gained visa free travel in Schengen, an Office for Labour Force migration was established to organise the

recruitment of labour via bilateral agreements, oversee job agencies, and mediate work and travel projects in the US (Horváth, 2007). Three times as many Romanians are believed to have left between 2002 and 2006, in the majority of cases by drawing on the increasingly larger, circulatory networks (Ban 2012; Bleahu 2004; Mara 2012; Sandu 2005b, 2005a). Personal connections, Boswell and Ciobanu (2009) note, were particularly relevant in countries like Italy with weak 'systems of inclusion', where low state support placed responsibilities for social security squarely with individuals. They helped newcomers circumvent restrictive policies that limited access to the legal labour market (Romana & Vasilache 2009), and tended to reproduce patterns of movement into the same neighbourhoods and jobs (Bleahu 2007; Elrick & Ciobanu 2009). Even though the membership of the network itself was found to be changing (Şerban & Voicu, 2010), with new migrants joining, and more experienced ones withdrawing in time, personal connections as a whole continued to form the backdrop of migration, particularly for Romanians leaving rural areas.

There was little doubt about the importance of connections in the journeys undertaken by my informants. Before going to London, Cristina had only left Buzău a handful of times, and even then it was together with her family, to visit relatives. Doru himself had visited Bucharest only once, and that trip too had been organised by Sorin, who had already arranged a job on a construction site for him. A minimal level of English and IT literacy, the absence of computers, and indeed their lack of familiarity with the everyday habit of finding answers independently by tapping into the amalgam of information stored on the internet, made planning their journey independently unthinkable. 'Who is going to go like that among strangers', answered a man in Corbu, when after a long conversation where he confessed the frustration of waiting for years until Florin brought him over, I asked whether he ever considered going on his own. The thought of doing so seemed simply absurd: 'everybody needs someone', he added; 'someone to blow a little air under your wings'.

With the exception of young and middle class university graduates who had grown up in cities, exposed to digital technology, language training and Anglo-Saxon for media long enough to feel confident in their abilities to plan their journeys, this was the profile of most of my informants. The necessity of having someone to help was visible in the very words they deployed to describe their journeys. In conversations with people from Corbu, for instance, one did not simply 'go', 'move', or 'emigrate' abroad. Rather, as I have noted through this thesis whenever I reproduced their voice

directly, one was ‘pulled’ or ’brought over’, as if set into motion by an outside force with a unique power to dislodge, and not moving independently whenever he or she wished.

It is interesting to reflect, in light of the dominant discourse which portrays the migrant as homo economicus, how rarely the narrative of a sole acting utility maximising agent occurred in practice. The only men and women who recounted leaving on their own were the university educated and highly skilled: privileged young people like the shopkeeper’s daughter, whose parents had made sure she went to university in Romania, then paid for her Master’s degree in the UK; recent graduates such as Iuliana, who had the foresight and technological savviness to arrange an au pair position in advance; or experienced professionals, like Liliana and Claudiu, who despite not having secured anything beforehand, trusted, at the very beginning of their journeys at least, that the savings they had accumulated over years of employment in Romania, were enough to enable them to dedicate several days to finding something in London.

In a bitter twist of irony, the same appeal to the fantasy of independence, an extreme entrepreneurship reliant only upon one’s power to adapt, had also featured in the narrations of the very poorest. Young men such as Victor, who described his life in Romania as balanced precariously ‘on the brink of starvation’, made his own way to London, after relations with his workmates in Italy broke down. No one ‘pulled’ him anymore. Victor left alone after a fight in Sicily, slept rough for weeks, and spent the better part of his first year in London working cash in hand. ‘I came risking it’, he began recounting his journey. ‘I risked myself’ he later added. Grammatically awkward, even jarring to middle class ears trained into policing the symbolic power of language (Bourdieu 1991), this reappropriation of ways of talking about risk captured with unequivocal directness the gamble of going it alone; a gamble that was total, and where hand, stakes and deck were rooted in the self.

For the people in Corbu, as for the majority of informants I interviewed in London, the realm of possibilities sat between the two extremes. Neither wealthy enough to trust their ability to move on their own, nor desperate enough to have to do so, they relied upon others. Friends, neighbours, and distant acquaintances, widely read in the literature under the lens of networks, but most often referred to in my informants’ speech under the simpler idiom of: people who ‘helped’. It is useful to pause here for a moment, and reflect upon these differences in emic and etic language. None of

my informants ever used the term 'network', as scholarly accounts of mobility do, unless we happened to be talking about individuals they suspected of running veritable criminal gangs, where the appeal to an exclusive, web-like system reflected the existence of an actual organisation. To talk of 'networks' when they described the multitude of encounters with Romanians who had facilitated different parts of their journeys abroad, would have been as meaningful as to speak of 'grids', 'chains', or any other inanimate forms of organisation, which did little to capture the complex moral understandings negotiated in practice, the sense of urgency deployed, and the appeal to an ethical recognition from the other. For what is asking for help, if not an indication that one cannot be without another? This brings us to a particular shortcoming of the network literature, which this and subsequent chapters seek to address.

In light of earlier scholarship, which tended to view migration as either an individual pursuit of higher incomes, or a passive response to world systems of capitalist dispossession (D. S. Massey et al. 1993), the networks metaphor provided a fruitful heuristic device for capturing the meso level (Faist 2010) of mobility, constituted through the myriad personal mediations that accompany journeys overseas. If the first studies in this sense suffered from what Roger Waldinger (1999, p. 229) provocatively called 'inevitabilism', assuming that an untold number of jobs could sprout from the action of one pioneering conational, more recent scholarship (Bakewell et al. 2011, 2016; Haas 2010; Menjívar 2000; Ryan et al. 2015; White 2017; White & Ryan 2008) has also pointed to the power of networks to constrain mobility, by guiding new entrants into accessible but poorly paid positions (Gurak & Caces 1992; Woolcock 1998), by building segregated ethnic enclaves (Portes 1999; Portes & Zhou 1993), or even by subjecting newcomers to exploitation from those who initially guided them abroad (Menjívar 2000; Palomera 2014). It is precisely such competition for access to a limited resource pool that, as Portes (2000) put it, constitutes a 'negative form of social capital'. Old members who tire or can no longer afford to help drop out in time (Şerban & Voicu 2010), while competition for a place in a narrow niche carved by past migrants is argued to lead to individualistic behaviours.

For all the prominence of interpersonal connections, however, the concept of 'network' with its connotations of organisation, betrays a certain mechanistic focus on what newcomers gain or lose, which says little about the moral levers mobilised in that pursuit. Robert Putnam's (2001) work on social capital provides a noticeable influence in this sense, and is visible in the attention scholars

dedicate to whether ethnic 'bonds' inhibit cosmopolitan 'bridges' (Moroşanu, 2015a), in the preoccupation with capturing the point when migrants step out of ethnic networks, or in mapping to what extent the prevalence of ethnic connections contributes to migrants' socioeconomic disparities in receiving societies. But the help exchanged in practice is not a mere resource distribution mechanism. A focus on 'networks' tells us little about just how one comes to turn a mere acquaintance into a veritable 'tie' (Granovetter 1973) who can actually open economic opportunities, and through which artifices of persuasion resources that are already scarce come to be shared ever more. Such a focus, we could argue, corresponds to a more general uncoupling of the moral and the economic, which were intertwined in the Aristotelian notion of *economia (οἰκονομία)*, but have since been conceptualised as two distinct spheres of human action.

Economic anthropologists have shown that the idea of an economy based on narrow self-interest is, largely speaking, a fiction of capitalist doctrine (Hann & Hart 2009; Hart et al. 2010). According to Götz (2015), who chronicles the term 'moral economy', it was Enlightenment scholarship, the chief influence in understandings of economic action to this day, that drew a sharp distinction between economy as sphere of self-interested action intent upon growth, and morality as principle of conduct concerned with right and wrong. Proposing the concept of 'human economy', Hart and his colleagues remind readers that 'people always insert themselves practically into economic life, [yet] what they do is often obscured, marginalized or repressed by dominant economic institutions and ideologies' (Hart et al. 2010 p. 4). Similarly, de L'Estoile (2014) proposes to do away with 'the idea of the economy', speaking rather of 'fields of opportunities'. 'Moral', 'human', or 'diverse' (Gibson-Graham 2008), these are all attempts to re-inscribe personhood in the study of exchange.

In the same spirit, closer attention to the idiom of help foregrounds the moralities that make mobility possible, beyond the imagery of networks which simply function when demand and supply are balanced, and break down into allegations of competitive individualism when they are not. To focus on help is to recapture the moral basis that governs who is worthy of being assisted, how assistance is offered and returned, or indeed when it may be withdrawn. Above all, it is to prioritise how people read each other, and to conceptualise their exchanges beyond the transactional element, towards a closer account of sociality: 'a dynamic relational matrix', as Long and Moore (2012) define it, 'within which human subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are coproductive, continually plastic and malleable, and through which they come to know the world

they live in'. This chimes, as other migration scholars have observed (Bakewell et al. 2016; De Haas 2010; Portes 2000; Ryan et al. 2015), with Bourdieu's own, but often overlooked, definition of social capital as a mix of resources shared, and interpersonal relations mobilised in their sharing. Preoccupied with the jobs, houses or information which migrants exchange, a literature focused on 'observable transactions' (Widlok 2013) misses 'the more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu 1985, p. 248).

For residents of Corbu, asking for the help of the shopkeeper's daughter who had gone to London to study and had since become an assistant manager at a hotel, would have been as unlikely as asking the mayor to chip in with making Țuică. However many jobs and rooms she may have been able to impart, in the local hierarchies of the village her class position as the educated child of a wealthy family situated her far from the imaginary of 'people from here'. Similarly, if we are to begin to understand the tensions Gabi captured in his intervention, and grasp the frictions generated by the feeling that one is either asking for too much, offering too little, or appears to not be grateful enough, it is necessary to start unpacking the source of their expectations. What are the conditions that make some, but not others, seen as subjects who can be called upon? Why is it that not answering the call creates such disappointment?

To understand this, I propose viewing the help mobilised in migrant networks a little differently. Not as a resource sharing arrangement which would limit our attention to well-trodden inquiries into integration and segregation; nor as a mere adaptation to the novelty of going abroad, which would reproduce the policy-based view of migrants as no more than border-crossing subjects. What I propose instead, is to situate the help Romanian migrants exchanged in their journeys to the UK, within the vast history of informal economies (Castells & Portes 1989; Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006; Hart 1985; Morris & Polese 2015; Pardon Hernandez 2016) documented by ethnographers, from Hungary (Kornai 2000) to Mongolia (Humphrey & Mandel 2002; Sneath 2006), and from the beginning of socialist collectivisation (Kligman & Verdery 2011) to the 'new dispossessions' (Humphrey 2002 p. 21) of the 1990s.

5.2. Acquaintances, connections and relations

Inquiries into informal exchanges have long constituted one of the staples of post-socialist anthropology (Buyandelgeriyn 2008; Hörschelmann & Stenning 2008). Numerous ethnographers

have documented the arrangements ordinary people developed to circumvent the shortages of socialism, and later to navigate the destitutions engendered by the inflation and unemployment caused by transitional shock therapies. As the first country beyond the Iron Curtain to allow fieldwork by Western anthropologists (Verdery 1996 p. x), endowed with all the gripping Cold War narratives of chronic shortages, totalitarianism and surveillance that fascinated American ethnographers in the 1980s (Ghodsee 2011), Romania has been the quintessential site of investigation into the power of 'acquaintances, connections and relations'. [28]

Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman (2011), for instance, trace the emergence of informal economies to the process of agricultural collectivisation. If status had once been a matter of visibility, they argue, the class war waged by the Communist Party against land owning *chiaburi* turned obvious displays of property into a burden. Instead, they note, peasants learnt to split possessions with kin, formally declare owning small plots while bribing party cadres to overlook the discrepancy, or even mixing grain produced at the collective with sand, in order to trick the central quotas. Similar strategies of making life more liveable through an underground world of personal connections were documented in accounts of consumption (Calugareanu 2015; Chelcea 2002). Borrowing Daniel Miller's (1995) concept of a 'culture of shortage', Liviu Chelcea (2002) recounts how residents of a Transylvanian village would bribe officers guarding the border with Hungary, smuggle goods over, and disseminate them via a myriad underground networks of neighbours and kin.

Far from being limited to the precarity engendered by a controlling state, as liberal advocates of market transition often argued, such personal arrangements continued to be documented well after the fall of socialism, in Romania and beyond (Creed 2010; Dunn 1999; Ghodsee 2011; Henig & Makovicky 2016a; Humphrey 1999, 2002; Humphrey & Mandel 2002; Kaneff & Abrahams 1996). Ethnographers produced gripping accounts of the mutual assistance networks developed among the homeless of Bucharest (O'Neill 2014), in mining (Kideckel, 2008) and industrial towns (J. R. Friedman 2007a, 2007b), where workers found themselves without a livelihood after industries were shut, or among the Black Sea fishermen (Dorndel 2011), who resorted to poaching when poor land redistributions and the privatisation of fisheries depleted stocks. Like elsewhere is Eurasia,

[28] During the 1980s Acquaintances, Connections and Relations (*Pile, Cunoștințe și Relații*) was the humorous popular reinterpretation of the acronym PCR, which stood for the Romanian Communist Party.

help from connections (Caldwell 2004; Ledeneva 1998), barter (Humphrey 1999; Woodruff 2000), petty theft, and a myriad other informal arrangements that blurred the boundaries of legality, were necessary to 'make do' (Reed-Danahay 1996) when precarity became an everyday reality.

So enshrined had these tactics become, that the ability to 'get by' creatively with a certain tolerance of rule bending has become a national stereotype inscribed in the Romanian language, and explored in countless artistic adaptations. Cristian Mungiu, one of the country's renown film directors, won some of his accolades for works that depicted the tragicomic means through which ordinary Romanians circumvented socialist controls over everyday food consumption (Mungiu, 2009), or for those that documented the drama over women's attempts to find alternative means of having abortions (Mungiu, 2007). A recent collection of oral histories which earned the praise of public intellectuals, was the suggestively titled 'Black marketers, entrepreneurs, survivors' (*Bişniţari, descurcăreţi, supravieţuitori*) (Rostás & Momoc 2013), which captures precisely such creative means of defying shortages. As anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu (2013) remarks, for all 'the emperor's new clothes' acquired during the period of so-called transition, for all the claims to modernisation through European accession, an ability to manage by bending the rules, by drawing on informal connections, and by cutting corners continues to be regarded as the defining feature of the people. 'The Romanian', the anthropologist reminds us, 'gets by' (*Românul e descurcăreț*) - dedicating then several essays to unpacking different variants of this cunning subject.

There is of course nothing intrinsic in Romanianness that is predisposed to such informal strategies. Padron Hernandez (2016) identifies a similar stereotype in her work with Cubans who lived in a comparable scenario where one had to manage with little provisions. If the Romanian language avers to how north of the Danube people 'get by', Hernandez notes the prominence of the expression that 'Cubans invent'. Such stereotypes are not even limited to the post-socialist space. As early as the 1990s Reed-Danahay (1996) found the same motif of cunning in France. Like Romanians today, the French peasants she researched took pride in 'making do' (or *se debrouiller*, the literal translation of the Romanian *descurcăreț)*. Other authors unpack the prevalence of an imaginary subject who endures by creatively recycling, repurposing and seizing the moment in Russia (Caldwell 2004), with appeals to the depths of soul (Pesmen 2000), in the former Soviet republics (Dzenovska Forthcoming), among Kenyan youth who hustle (Thieme 2017), or among

Jamaican migrants on a council estate in the North of England (McKenzie 2015), who equally bring 'getting by' to the status of a local virtue.

Common as this exaltation of cunning to a national stereotype may be across the region however, the existence of the motif in the Romanian public imaginary as a quintessentially Romanian feature, is a testament of how deeply rooted the need to look after oneself through personal means has become. While I had not set out to research the informal arrangements developed to 'survive' (Bridger & Pine 1998; Drakulić 1993) socialism and its aftermath, nor do I think that survival is the adequate lens to capture the complexity of relations deployed under the guise of informality, I was surprised to note just how present these references still were in the memory of my informants, and how connected to the means through which new migrants earned the help they needed with their journeys over borders.

Recalling the time when, as a teenage boy, he was signed off school to guide the oxen cart at the collective, and how his family got by with the help of the police and the woodsman, Petre captured the foundational role of personal connections. The woodsman at the time was no other than the father of Florinel Savu, the man who had helped Cristina and others from Corbu come to London. After the old man passed away, it was Florin himself, along with his siblings and widowed mother, who were on the receiving end of help. Long before his eldest sister Crina emigrated to London and went on to establish a successful transnational network, for the few years when her younger siblings were 'roaming the roads with dried bogies on their noses and broken shoes on their feet', it was only the villagers' charity which kept the Savu family from falling into utter destitution.

Doru too, to whom the Iancus appeared to owe a lot after the instrumental role he played in Cristina's journey, had much to thank them for. The very fact that the Iancus condoned his early relationship with their daughter was a significant favour. He was born to one of the poorest families in the village, with semi-literate parents who had long stopped working, and a level of education so minimal that, had he stayed in Romania, he would have had few chances of making it further than his elder brother, a shepherd. The family had not forgotten that even against the authoritative advice of the priest, who according to Mari had doubted that a boy of his standing deserved Cristina's attention, the Iancus 'treated him like one of our own, sat him at our table and helped him when his own parents took their hands off him'. Since then, there had been moments when

their favours were close to a lifesaver. It was Petre, for instance, who prevented a young and naive Doru from going to prison when he was caught stealing electricity, and was charged with a fine his family could have never afforded. He donated his modest salary to pay the bail, back when he was still working for a small wood processing business, and got other neighbours to contribute to make sure the boy avoided incarceration. Even in 2016 after Doru had long started to make a life for himself in London, it was Petre's connections at the police station that saved him from prison when a jealous onlooker reported him for driving his unregistered car.

The traces of help offerings past, documented in Romania's ethnographic legacy, were thus visible at every level: in the cultural formations that continued to emerge in the Romanian mediascape, in the memories of villagers, and in the everyday interactions which punctuated life in Corbu. The Țuică-making party described at the beginning of this chapter, where it took three family units to put the distillation assemblage together, was only the most flavoursome. Țuică itself, like the Hungarian Palinka (Palinca in Transylvania) documented by Hann (2016), lubricated favours like an informal currency between neighbours who knew each other: when the Iancus needed to be mobile, such as the times where it took a couple of litres to convince Sandu to drive us to the Amber Museum; when tools had to be borrowed with indefinite terms of return, or even when neighbours could not afford to pay Petre straight away for a day's labour. I distinctly recall Mari's excitement one evening when he entered the living room and playfully dropped a sweaty bundle of notes on the table. Down payments were hardly the norm. There had been times when Petre worked for goods, others when he worked for brandy, and others still when he laboured knowing that, as so many of my informants in Corbu put it, 'people help each other'. Or more literally translated from Romanian, where the verb 'to help' can be reflexive and oriented towards the speaking subject as much as it can be active and directed somewhere else: 'you help yourself through another' (*te ajuți cu unul, te ajuți cu altul*), so that relationality is virtually embedded in representations of the self. Having taken a brief look at the practice, then, how can the theoretical lens of sharing favours explain the relations that animate Romanian migrants' networks now?

Together in need

For scholars of socialist and post-socialist Eurasia, Henig and Makovicky (2016) note, the favour has become akin to an academic shorthand for a plethora of practices as diverse as barter, bribery and

corruption. A concept defined broadly to capture practices undertaken below the radar of the state, and couched, as Chris Hann (2016) notes, in a Cold War representation of socialism as doomed to shortages (Kornai 1980), the notion of favour emerged as the conceptual antithesis of formal, contract bound economies. Much like the literature on migrant networks, however, with its focus on what is visibly exchanged, studies of favours too have often centred on the economic aspect; the things transacted and material outcomes which, Humphrey (2016) writes, have left the particularity of the human relation that animates them underexplored.

In their recent exegesis on this matter, David Henig, Nicolette Makovicky (eds. 2016) and the contributors to their volume push us to think beyond the immediately visible transactional element. There is a particular sociality to favours, the editors argue, which is neither akin to survival, nor to a thinly veiled deployment of connections for one's personal interest, and merely disguised in the language of friendship. Rooted in a pragmatic need to get by as they may be, there is something distinctive to favour exchange that goes beyond the reciprocal transactionalism of like-for-like returns, and the instrumentalisation of acquaintances for material again. There is a certain 'grace' at play (Pitt-Rivers 2011), the authors argue; an aesthetic (Reeves 2016) of gratuitousness and friendship, which lifts favours over and above what can be counted (Pitt-Rivers 2011 in Humphrey 2016 p. 56). Rather than being a simple informal economy, therefore, a system of impersonal transactions governed by the central rule that what is owed must be returned, the editors prompt us to view favours as more akin to a sociality where what is given is inextricably linked to who is helping, whom is being helped, and how they see each other in the world.

By the time I arrived in Corbu, it was clear that, while some migrants like Florinel had developed veritable businesses on the backs of those he pulled over, for the majority of those who lent a hand, helping was more likely to constitute a source of material discomfort, if not outright impoverishment. During our time in London I had witnessed numerous fights between Cristina and Doru, where she complained about having to spend her time and money traveling the city, guiding the young men and women he had once promised to pull up in their trips to the bank, or to their National Insurance Number interviews. The cost of a return Underground trip was as much as she made in one hour, and the long shifts she signed up for left little time for anything beyond the domestic chores - which were closely scrutinised by her head tenant. It was more than once that I heard her label Doru's generosity as misguided, citing how whenever he needed to borrow money,

their ‘so-called friends’ turned their back on them. ‘That’s what he’s like, he gives and he gives’, I heard her say in exasperation. And still, after months of witnessing her protests, on our trip back to Corbu it was as if past objections had never been uttered, and the same promises of help that had triggered discord through the year, were once again extended.

We had driven out of the village, up through the forest and towards the mountain plateau. After minutes of ascending, weaving our way through thick pine trees, then slicing through the long grass atop, Doru led us to a hamlet where he wished to greet an old friend. Even compared to Corbu, the place seemed time forgotten, tucked on the brim of the plateau, hours from the train station downhill. A dozen adobe homes had fences made of sticks. Perhaps another half a dozen seemed long abandoned. We parked the car in the grass by a sturdy metal shed, and came out to meet Doru’s friend, Nicolae. Tall, well-built and dressed in denim and a tight fitting T-shirt that seemed suited for an urban outing, Nicolae was one of the many men Doru had helped make the journey abroad, and was pleased to have used the money earned to open a small shop in the metal shelter. Hands were shaken and shoulders cordially patted. We were offered drinks on the house, and were invited to sit at the wooden table outside.

Within no more than a couple of minutes, Doru was already surrounded by two more young men curious to learn about his life in London. The encounter in itself was not unusual. Doru had mentioned in several conversations past that he had helped so many of his neighbours, he had lost track. This was just one moment when I could clearly overhear benign enquiries about work and pay, converge towards the apropos suggestion that Doru lends a hand. What stood out, however, was Cristina’s detached acceptance of the agreement being struck. After months of hearing her complain about the pressure of catering for his connections, I was struck by how at peace she seemed with the conversation that unfolded. She knew all too well why the boys were so ready to flatter Doru, and why everything we asked for was free. They were stuck, as she herself had been, and he was a way out. It was likely that within a few months she too would become a cog in their mobility, as she had been for the several other neighbours Doru introduced over the past year. These were the new men she would have to guide, perhaps even share a house with, and run errands for. Yet there and then, gathered around the wooden table in the warm August breeze, she seemed happy to busy herself with pictures of the landscape, as if the exasperation she had voiced through the year in the confines of her London room belonged to someone else.

As we got back to the car, I could not help but ask the couple why they were so ready to take on a mission they knew almost with certainty was destined to frustrate them. 'I thought you got tired of bringing people over', I started. Had things not been hard enough in London, I continued from the back seat, to warrant holding back from making promises. Doru's considered reply, from the wheel of his gas guzzler, spoke volumes. 'They are poor, what can you do?'. Cristina remained silent and stared into the rear-view mirror, watching the hamlet shrink in the distance. 'It can cost me however much it will, I know it will cost me', he continued calmly, looking over the plateau as if seeing into year to come. 'But then', he added with a sense of implacable duty: 'I have not forgotten where I've left from'.

There was something about having 'left from here' that continued to root Doru and Cristina, as it did Gabi earlier on the porch, in the moral community of the village. Something that went beyond the sheer familiarity which comes with stemming from the same county, and that spoke rather to a familiarity of experience; an understanding of the conditions of possibility encountered by the boys who asked to be pulled up then, in the hamlet, but that had once been equally experienced by Doru and Cristina in Corbu. To turn one's back to pleas for assistance, would have been to ignore the decaying adobe houses and the time forgotten settlement. It would have meant to forego the long history of past dependencies, and to ignore the fact that, despite the cars, clothes, and villas erected with money earned abroad, returning émigrés too had once been as exposed to the precariousness that reigned at home, as the young men and women who were waiting for their chance to make a living elsewhere.

I noted earlier how favours are more akin to a sociality. Observing how the sight of the poor hamlet made Doru and Cristina acquiesce to bringing yet more young men over, as if the destitution that was inscribed in the environment at every level precluded questions about how they would then cover the costs, it was hard to shake the sense that, to open oneself to helping another, was to recognise that shared precarity breeds inter-dependence.

David Graeber (2014b) explored this power of need to articulate a duty to care, in his history of debt. A parent who raises a child, Graeber argues, or an onlooker who saves someone from drowning, do not do it because they have something to gain. What animates their response, rather, was the realisation that, if left alone, they would be simply helpless. I found it useful to explain the

offers of help my informants extended, by thinking of the togetherness that could stem from shared subjection to historically situated conditions of possibility. A togetherness in practice, in the lived experience of authoritarianism, poverty, or the sense of immobility that engulfed the rural areas of post-socialist Romania. But also an internalised togetherness that manifests in a collective subject: 'people like us', members of a moral community. Like the Russian *svoi* (Caldwell 2004; Ledeneva 1998; Yurchak 2013), the Latvian *savejie* (Dzenovska 2014), or the *nash* identified by Neofotistos (2009) in Macedonia, the Romanian men and women from Corbu who recognised each other as having 'left from here' mobilised a public formed through precariousness, and bound by a moral duty to act upon it.

It was rarely clear just what helping would entail in practice, how long one would be hosted for, what the job they received was going to be like, or indeed if they could afford to pay for this at all. In fact, it was precisely because of the indeterminacy of such promises that, while working at the East European Advice Centre, many of the cases we were referred were Romanian migrants who had hoped they would be welcomed by acquaintances upon arrival, but found themselves stranded. Promises had been extended but phones had stopped ringing, and they found themselves on their own. There was a particular intensity to the need to promise in the first place, which made saying 'no' to 'people like us' a delicate affair –though, as it became apparent, saying yes when one could not afford to also had nefarious consequences.

Forgetting where one left from was thus not simply missing to pay a debt, for lending a hand to those who stayed behind could hardly absolve one of all duties to care. To forget was rather more akin to pretending to be something else, a different person altogether. To 'let the money get to your head', as I had heard Mari put in in the private moments she admonished Doru's own excesses of materialism. To get so enthralled by the present of affluence, as to erase the past of precarity, and to efface with it the relations that had made life liveable. It was to pretend that the good life embodied in the conspicuous possessions acquired abroad was more than the result of hard work, and to make a claim to the kind of separateness that characterised the mayor or members of the traditional middle class.

For all the effort put into showing the extent of their mobility, the cars, homes and jewellery displayed conspicuously, none of the returning Romanian migrants I spent time with wanted to

appear to have forgotten where they left from. I found it telling that before we even started talking about how hard it was to honour everyone's requests, Gabi first insisted in stressing that he had not changed. Tapping the earth with his boot, sipping the simple brandy the Iancus were preparing, it was as if every movement of his body indicated that he was still rooted in the sticky grip of the mud. London did not feel like home, he confessed. Beyond the appearance of affluence, he was living in a city he disliked, working long hours, and ultimately longing to come back – however uncertain he was about when that would be or just how he might manage. Fielding requests for help from people who approached him with persistence, and what looked to him with choreographed humility, felt uncomfortable. It was the 'boss' appellative that bothered him the most, with its undertones of patronage. He was not a boss, like the mayor or members of the traditional middle class were, but the child of peasants who had just found work in a warehouse. It had not been that long since he too was living in the village, with its one muddy road which, in afternoons such as the one we met, quite literally bound residents to their homes. It would not be that long either until he would come back and, albeit armed with capital earned in London, he would likely face the same conditions that drove him away to begin with.

Like Doru, who did not hold back from making promises left and right, Gabi drew on his own precarity in London to demonstrate that even when he could no longer help, he was still from back there. The neighbours, for their part, knew that raising the spectre of the poverty once shared could rein those émigrés who seemed enthralled by the sheen of luxury, back in the imaginary of people like us. Even Florin Savu, who had built a veritable fortune, was known by the familial appellative Florinel; not Mister, nor even the semi-formal idiom *dumneata*, but by the same diminutive he had acquired as a child. His elderly mother continued to live in the old adobe house from where he and his siblings were remembered streaming out 'with broken shoes'. She wore a torn wool cardigan, long skirt and hair covered with a batik like the rest of the old women, fetched her water in plastic canisters from the communal fountain, and spent time drinking at the village store. She was a gossip, Cristina and her sisters told me. She did not hesitate to stop them in the middle of the road whenever our paths crossed, then fire a barrage of questions which pushed the boundaries of discreetness. Young Iuliana Iancu in particular hated her ways of feigning tiredness, so she thought, just to make children carry the heavy water canisters back to her house.

But it was precisely these irritants driven from everyday intersections in the space of the village that prevented Floarea Savu, and her now vastly more affluent offspring, from acquiring the aura of distinction of the middle class. The spectre of destitution once shared by her children, and the poverty she continued to embody, cast them within the moral community of 'people from here' - mobilisable then, and mobilisable now, in a way the traditional middle class could never be. For all the status claimed in conspicuous consumption, émigrés remained people who could be called upon. Interpellable through the spectre of precarity once shared, they could be asked to help even when it was unclear whether they could afford it, and even when it was doubtful whether the costs of their efforts would be repaid at all.

Acknowledging it: 'you have to start from the bottom'

The moral collective of people who 'left from here' thus enabled poor Romanians to make journeys which would otherwise have remained decidedly out of reach. It allowed acquaintances to develop into what scholars of migration have more broadly termed as ties, and their own networks to become part of the social capital of would-be migrants. It would be naïve, however, to romanticise this and imagine that socialities of favour rest on frictionless exchanges. Just as the Romanian cultural depository of films, literature, and popular expressions abounds with references to people's ability to engineer creative ways of managing shortages, it is equally rife with motifs of backstabbing, betrayal and self-interestedness. After all, it was the frictions between Romanian migrants that formed the object of this research to begin with. How, then, might we make sense of the disputes over help, when they appear to rest on a claim to disinterestedness?

This is where it is useful to unpack the second element of exchange, that of return. Much of the scholarship on sharing has been premised on a need to challenge the fiction of self-interested, utility maximising agents perpetuated by economics, noting that not everything hinges upon an expectation of like-for-like returns (Graeber 2001, 2014b; Widlok 2013). At times, Makovicky (2016, p. 213) remarks, the language of favours even prohibits overt indebtedness, with references such as 'friends don't pay' or the more common 'don't mention it'. This absence of explicit mentions of a debt equal in size to the thing first received, however, does not preclude an expectation of return in some form; an acknowledgement of the gesture that recognises the effort one was granted, and the togetherness that enabled it. Drawing on Pitt-Rivers' (2011) concept of 'grace', Caroline

Humphrey (2016) equates this ineffable anticipation of return in favour exchange with a reciprocity of sentiment. An incalculable 'reciprocity of the heart' (Pitt Rivers 2011 in Makovicky 2016, p. 203) unbound by precise material expectations, which looms, however undefined, in a horizon of anticipation. This is a reciprocity akin to communism, according to Graeber (2014), which rests on the tacit assumption that, should the roles ever reverse and the need for help arise from the opposite direction, the other will make herself available, when and however needed. Rather than a return of a thing first exchanged then, we could conceptualise this as a return in one's subjective disposition to care back.

It is not hard to see this expectation of openness to be called upon, reflected in the vignette that introduced this chapter. 'If someone brings you over', Gabi noted, 'you have to be ready to do anything'. It was imperative, he thought, that the effort he put into lending a hand was acknowledged by new migrants' self-fashioning as flexible subjects. Picking up whatever job was available, learning the skills on the go, and moving on before they turned into a material burden for their host. After all, this flexibility was not an arbitrary demand, but one that would account for the precarity of his own experience – the axis of commonality mobilised in help to begin with. As he stressed that afternoon, the appearance of privilege and a life of plenty in the eyes of those who stayed behind, did little to erase his own material constraints abroad. He had not 'made it', he was still in motion. He was not 'boss', but the child of peasants, who continued to have expenses like everyone else. 'Isn't it on my wife's food that I keep them?', he added.

Food, of course, cost money. As did the rent and the trips to the bank and the National Insurance Interview he would likely have to make in order to assist newcomers with finding jobs. To ask that they erase pretences and learn to look after themselves felt only natural. It was to recognise that, however non-contiguous and hard to ascertain from Corbu, precariousness did not stop abroad. Jobs were often short term and insecure, men like himself who were fathers of young children were usually the sole earners, and bills had to be paid. Like 'people from here', who were trying to get out of the village, migrants in London too were continuing to struggle with engineering their own mobility. It felt insulting that the acquaintance he brought over to work alongside him at the warehouse, dared to enquire why he had kept the commission earned for the recruitment. The gesture hurt for its explicit deployment of quantification, which punctured the tacit nature of help,

but it offended above all for implying that Gabi was in a position to profit, like a distant patron, and not just lend a land like a member rooted in the same community.

There is a certain indeterminacy to the return of the heart; the return in subjectivity as I propose to call it, which remains both prone to negotiation, and to reconfiguring friendships. Humphrey (2016) notes that the return of favours is as interpretable as it is intensely moralised. Just as to 'forget where one left from' was seen as a false claim to transcending status, so failing to express the grace of acknowledging the help received was to violate a relationship. More than forgetting a debt, it amounted to disappointment, to failing as a person. Ethnographers who documented favour exchanges in the post-socialist space described how, just like Gabi's friend's attempt at tab keeping dissuaded him from lending a hand again, friendships were severed when one failed to honour obligation. People who abused the game of *blat*, Ledeneva (1998) reminds us, were excluded from the circle. Soup kitchen Muscovites found hoarding, Caldwell (2004) notes, were omitted from the circle.

The sense of disappointment Gabi confessed to was but one of the many disputes which arose at the intersection of an open-endedness of expectation, an intensely moralised duty to help, and the need to look after oneself. As Henig and Makovicky (2016, p. 2) remind us, favours make for slippery ethnography, and they make for even slipperier practice. Abiding by the moral imperative to look after the poor in the village did not preclude aspirations to care for oneself. An act of helping framed in the language of gratuity, such as bringing someone over, could also bring quantifiable material benefits, such as earning a commission. At times the profit was merely an unplanned offshoot of a selfless intention; in other cases, I will show in the remainder of this thesis, it amounted to outright exploitation.

The indefinite nature of favour exchange, which leaves both what is offered and what is to be returned open to interpretation, can thus easily transform a relationship of mutual assistance into one of hierarchical patronage. For favours blend with obligation (Reeves 2016), and the boundaries between interest and moral duty are porous (Pesmen 2000). Above all, as Makovicky (2016) notes, favours are not a mere reflection of static, immutable relationships, but also constitute the medium through which connections are built, reconfigured, and at times severed. They remain open to

contestation by the actors who exchange them, and equally open to erosion when the material grounds they rest upon are differentially experienced.

Nowhere is this more likely than in migration. In journeys premised, as I have shown in the previous chapter, not on a reproduction of what is, but on a desire for 'something more'. And nowhere is it more likely than in novel encounters with a neoliberal order, which circumscribes the grounds for hospitality (Reeves 2016). Economic anthropologists draw our attention to how favours are hardly limited to the shortages of socialism and its 'legacies'. Chris Hann (2016) warns against exaggerating the distinctiveness of the socialist economy, and against the risk of reproducing Cold War binaries that pit the informality in shortage economies (Kornai 1980), against the efficiency of capitalist market economies. 'Whenever we speak of capitalism or socialism', Keith Hart and his colleagues similarly note (Hart et al. 2010 p. 5), 'we are referring to just part of what goes on in an economy, perhaps to the art that makes it historically distinctive'. Favours and contract, like any degree of formality and informality, are inherent in every economy. Just as Karl Polanyi (1944) punctured the liberal claim to separateness between market and state, by demonstrating that the rise of markets in the Western world has only been possible through a degree of state intervention, so in practice neither state nor market fully meet their respective myths of efficiency and bureaucratic transparency. The human economy de facto, as Hann and Hart (2009 p. 1) push us to conceptualise it, is constituted by networks of buying and selling, where a level of rule bending is always possible.

To that, I would add, the exchange of favours and its particular morality are actively encouraged by the withdrawal of social protection from work, and the gradual transfer of responsibilities for protection onto individuals and their connections. If critics of neoliberalism have pointed to the way it disembeds (Polanyi 1944), liquefies (Bauman, 2000), erodes traditional class solidarities (Bauman 2001; Sennett 1998; Standing 2014), and makes reflexivity (Beck et al. 1994) the new modus operandi, it also normalises recourse to informal exchanges of help. Fleeting and unstable, wrought with disputes over who gives, how much, to whom, and for how long, these are neither socialist legacies, nor accidental inefficiencies, but systemic transfers of duty to care onto personal connections.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter sought to contribute to the migrant networks literature by directing our attention away from the element of resource sharing, and towards the moral levers deployed to access support in an unfamiliar journey. Situating the help my informants claimed from returning émigrés within Romania's long history of informal exchanges of mutual assistance, I have argued that breaking with the immobility from home rests on the mobilisation of a distinctive sociality of help. 'Where you left from', the reference my informants frequently mentioned in conversations about migration, invoked a public shaped through poverty, and bound by a moral obligation to look after each other.

Interpellated as 'people who left from here', returning migrants like Gabi were thus drawn within the bounds of an ethic of responsibility: mobilisable then, and still accessible now despite the possessions acquired abroad, in a way the local political elite and traditional middle class could never be. As Gabi himself recounted however, 'you can't help everybody' – and some of those you help turn out to be a disappointment. Cultivating the momentum opened by the ethnographic encounter on the Iancu's porch, I began reflecting here upon the way in which an expectation of return in personhood creeps up, even when explicit references to indebtedness are missing. While the memory of being 'from here' prevented migrants from acquiring the distant status of local elites, helping did involve a cost, and a return in some form was expected. To break this expectation, I have shown here, was not just to prioritise a care for the self over a collective ethic of responsibility. It was to fail a moral test and thus to disappoint as a person.

The end of this chapter provided but one example, which used the canvas of one relatively simple ethnographic encounter to hash out the elements that constitute the sociality of helping. Having thrown into relief the role of precarity, the appeal to personhood, and the instability of indeterminate returns, in the next chapters I situate these relations in the spaces of need my informants encountered abroad in their encounter with a neoliberal political economic configuration. Shifting ethnographic focus to London's own precarious corners, I show how the category of 'people from here' too expands into a new, and much vaster collective subject: 'Romanians'.

CHAPTER 6. THE UNIFYING POWER OF SHARED PRECARITY

Tucked at the end of the Northern line, around the old Roman Road (A5) which slices vertically through the city, between the former industrial estate of Cricklewood and the parish of Edgware, the Neighbourhood was like a dense Romanian microcosm nested in an area imbued at every level with traces of mobilities past. As soon as one set foot outside the tube station, amidst a cacophony of independent Afro-Caribbean, Afghan, and more generally titled Afro-European businesses, it only took a few steps down the high street to spot the first Romanian shop. Bright red and open plan, a neon tricolour flashing at the top, it was just one of the vast businesses which had opened in the area over the course of several years. No further than a few steps up, past the plastic crates laden with fruit and vegetables imported from around the world, and the rows of iced fish that filled the pavement, the distinctive blue of Lebara posters with their adverts for cheap international phone plans, marked the presence of a growing Romanian community: a butcher's, loaded with the pork staples of Romanian cuisine, a little bistro, that served the usual sour soups and hearty stews, two beauty salons and several other supermarkets. Together, they formed the local facet of a group of migrants whose size in London had grown in a few years from a mere 11,000, at the time of European accession, to as many as 91,000 the year I started fieldwork (APS2016). [29] Together, the national census reminds us, they had contributed to making Romanian the second most spoken language after English in the area (O'Brien 2014).

[29] And became the fifth largest community in London by country of birth.

There was something distinctively domestic in the look and feel of the Neighbourhood; in the simplicity of local businesses, built out of red brick houses; in the food displayed in plastic bowls and sold on the pavement for a pound; or in the cash transactions merchants operated - in their dealings with clients, and in the payment of their staff alike. Save for the stores, small and independent as most of them were, and concentrated around a T-junction on the Roman Road, the rest of the Neighbourhood felt like a quiet web of residential streets, connected by double decker buses to London's northern outer boroughs of Brent, Barnet and Harrow.

It did not take long to realise, however, that the domesticity one could read into the fabric of the Neighbourhood was not the quaint one of affluent market towns, but rather one of a satellite suburbia whose flux of residents had for generations sustained the city's cycle of industrial rise, fall, and reformation. Until as late as 1924, when the underground line was extended further into the outskirts to Edgware, the region stretching north along the Roman Road was but a collection of fields; pastures inhabited by peasants in the largest part, equipped with inns which housed tradesmen en route to the capital, and which came, since the introduction of railways in the second half of the 1800s, to serve as haymakers for the teams of horses needed to carry goods to and from the train stations opened south and east of the road. Much of the southern part of the A5, museum archives of the borough of Brent (BMA 2007) note, was industrialised at the end of the 19th century. The Midland Railway depot built in 1867, the Phoenix Telephone Company, and the vast aviation and munitions factories spurred by the First World War, were a catalyst for gradual urbanisation. By 1939, the Cricklewood portion of the A5 had become the core of a vast industrial estate: electrified, linked by trams and omnibuses, populated by homes connected to the sewer network, and indeed inhabited by successive waves of migrants.

Jewish refugees had long moved into the Neighbourhood from London's overcrowding East End, and later from Germany, when Nazi persecution mounted in the 1930s. Irish migration, first spurred by the famine in the 19th century, picked up after the Second World War when local labour was insufficient to clear the slums left by unregulated building, and repair the damage left by aerial bombing. The labour shortage also drew migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia, so that by 1981 there were pockets around the A5 where as many as 37% of residents were foreign born (BMA 2015). The arrival of Romanians since 2007 constituted thus but the most recent addition to a long history of mobility; one that came after a period of industrial decline in the 1970s and 1980s,

when many of the factories of the Cricklewood estate were shut, but one that responded also to the subsequent reorientation of economic activity towards small workshops, services, and construction.



At every step of the main junction, people and businesses spoke of the Neighbourhood's relegation from an annexe of a local industrial powerhouse, to an annexe of a much vaster, and more unpredictable economy of 'gigs' (G. Friedman 2014). Faceless manikins displayed outside the local hardware shops in steel-toed boots, hard hats and high-vis jackets, bore a quiet reminder of Romanian men's usual trajectory towards self-employed positions in construction. The discount shops which sold a variety of cleaning products nearby, mirrored the prominence of domestic work in the lives of women. Then dotted in between, in a space small enough to fit within a couple of bus stops, no fewer than four pawnbrokers, three betting shops, and one casino opened round the clock stood as witnesses to the unpredictable work trajectories and sinuous earning curves encountered by many residents. It is telling that local assessments by the boroughs of Brent and Barnet (N. Jones 2014), as well as the national Index for Multiple Deprivation, highlight the Neighbourhood as ranking in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in England (Barnet Council 2015).

It was thus here in this corner of the city, which spoke at once of desired mobilities and unanticipated stasis, of individual ambition and unexpected spaces of togetherness, that I met Cristina almost every day; at work, most of the times, in Florin's small but bustling corner shop on the A5, then every now and again at home, in the property she shared with seven other housemates on one of the residential streets that connected to the main road. This is where I met highly educated informants like Claudiu, who was a regular customer and a striving entrepreneur of his own; or peasants who came in to the shop every day for the usual supply of energisers and contraband cigarettes Florin sold below the counter. This was, above all, the space where it became apparent just how, for all the diverse ambitions Romanians held of the imaginary West, when faced

with the reality of the city many of the classed imaginaries of civilisation which had animated their expectations seemed to be reconfigured by the realisation that: 'everyone was poor in London'.

'No one cares how many degrees you have on a construction site', said Dorin, a man who ran an electrical business, having explained how the company he established contracted, at exactly the same rates, qualified engineers and Romanians like himself, who had but secondary education and a lifetime of manual experience. If one wanted to get ahead, he explained, one had to leave pretences of intellectualism at the door. Nor did it seem to matter just how much privacy one had the privilege to enjoy back home, when an exorbitant rate of rents and a digital barrier of credit checks pushed formal housing out of the realm of possibilities of so many. Similar to the construction sites in the city, which seemed to turn graduates and peasants into workers, or the Romanian shop floors in the Neighbourhood, where men and women with all levels of education bumped into each other in the queue for cigarettes at half the market rate, the residential grids of the Neighbourhood were filled with properties that harboured intimacies few of their inhabitants had anticipated. Three bed terraced houses designed for industrial workers' nuclear families in the 1920s, whose living rooms had recently been converted into extra bedrooms, now brought together around the crammed space of their kitchens families with children, who shared with young couples like Cristina and Doru; migrants who had lived abroad for years, and those who were experiencing the novelty of the city for the first time; or single men from villages, who went abroad to escape destitution, but came to share with professional women like Liliana, who had left in search 'for more'.

'They started here and they pulled each other over', noted Claudiu jokingly one day. 'And they brought their Romanian ways with them!' he continued. In its reconfigurations of class distinctions, it seemed that the city reaffirmed a new collective subject. If there was a 'Romanian way' of navigating, as Claudiu said, it was through an ability to thrive underground. It was a way to keep moving, as many of my informants suggested, when they accompanied their references with gestures that imitated the contortions of a snake which aptly weaved its way around obstacles. However quietly, and defiant in the face of rules that governed income tax, housing, or tobacco duty for that matter, the 'Romanian way' was how my informants had come to refer to their ability to get by. It was the sociality of a subject who could face adversity with wit, cunning, and most of all with a little help.

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This chapter examines the power of precarity to create instances when migrants from distinct walks of life find themselves building commonality around Romanianness, using this axis of identification to navigate the hurdles constituted by language barriers, the novelty of the journey, and a political economic constellation which normalises insecurity. If the long history of informal economies was reaffirmed when those who stayed behind hinged their hopes for something better upon the help of migrants 'clad in gold', here I show how neither the spaces of social immobility, nor the practice of drawing upon connections 'from here' to circumvent them can be confined to the imagery of post-socialist shortages, or brushed off as side-effects of an incomplete transition. For all the hope my informants nurtured upon departing, and the years during which Romanians were told that the future lay Westwards, their journeys overseas too were replete with barriers: in their mobility across state borders, across divisions of labour, or indeed across the city's housing market.

Shifting ethnographic focus from Romania to the London Neighbourhood, in the first part of this chapter I begin with a brief overview of barriers, and what I call 'spaces of precarity': those spaces carved through the systematic erosion of social security, where new forms of togetherness emerged. Starting with the transitional immigration controls, which channelled Romanian and Bulgarian migrants towards the least protected positions in self-employment, I then open up the discussion to a broader precaritisation of work and of housing in the UK since the 1980s. To understand the broadening of the collective subject of 'people like us' is, after all, to understand the political economic configurations that instantiated it.

Having outlined the macro aspect, the second part of this chapter begins to unpack the subjective dimension of navigating precarious spaces with appeal to connections. Many of my informants, I begin to show here, found themselves doing jobs, inhabiting homes, and sharing intimacies they never imagined they would be encountering. For all the aspirations articulated at the beginning of their journeys, with their search for European civilisation and their belief in an infinite potential for mobility, many realised in fact, how the conditions of possibility they encountered in London resembled much less the narratives of return to civilisation envisaged at the beginning, than they did the general movement of 'the Romanian': a modest subject constituted through the familiar imaginary of uphill struggle; the Romanian who comes here and who 'has little choice'¸ as one of

my informants put it, but to take up what is available, and to draw upon the informal help of conationals to get by. It did not take being from the same village, I argue in the final section, to conjure the sort of ethic of responsibility I encountered between people in Corbu. The moment one faced the urgency of finding a place to live, it mattered less whether one's housemates were old acquaintances, friends of friends, or simply other Romanian migrants. Nor did it matter, when faced with the pressure to keep finding work in the short-term cycle of self-employment, whether one got help from a peasant, or a migrant born and raised in Bucharest. As the radius of precarity expanded, so broadened the collective subject of 'people like us'. And with it, this chapter shows, the more salient axis to be drawn upon was that formed by Romanianness.

6.1. The spaces of precarity encountered in the UK

Transitional immigration controls

In 2007, the year Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union, several member states imposed a set of 'transitional' immigration controls upon the mobility of their citizens across the old parts of the club. Even after European Accession, it seemed, the much-awaited upgrade from Balkan marginality into full European citizenship required, still, a degree of transitioning. The reticence had accumulated over the years. In much of the Western public, political scientists showed (Cuperus 2005; Weßels 2007), plans for further European enlargement began to be regarded with a certain scepticism towards the turn of the millennium. To many voters, the earlier accession of Central and Eastern European States in 2004 had not only made the Union considerably larger overnight, but also articulated new and sharper cleavages across its members' levels of development, which prompted fears of mass migrations.

Nowhere were these anxieties over the uncontrolled movement of the new European poor more visible than in the UK. Just three years before Romania and Bulgaria joined the union, the UK had witnessed an influx of Central and Eastern European migrants many times larger, and indeed more polarising than anticipated. [30] While a report commissioned by the Home Office (Dustmann, Casanova et al. 2003) estimated that only around 13,000 A8 migrants would come to the UK after

[30] Although the authors of the report commissioned by the Home Office had warned that the findings were erroneously interpreted (Lowther 2013), given how the 13,000 estimate was based on a scenario in which all the other member states were expected to open their borders equally.

accession, from 2004 to the moment Romania joined the EU, their number increased by more than two and a half times, totalling 671,000 (Vargas-Silva 2015, p.4). Added to an earlier increase in the number of asylum applications from refugees from Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Kosovo, which 'hit the Labour government like a whirlwind' in the early 2000s (Watt & Wintour 2015), the accession of Poland other former socialist countries, had generated a momentous backlash in the British Isles.

A poll by Ipsos MORI shows how the importance of migration for the British public reached its highest level after this enlargement, both at the level of individual attitudes expressed in the survey, and at the level of enquiries constituents sent to Members of Parliament (Duffy & Frere-Smith 2014). 'Polish migrants take £1bn out of the UK economy', ran a headline in the popular Daily Mail (Slack 2007). 'Some Poles claim benefits twice', was another in the BBC (A. Goldberg 2007). Splashed cross the broadsheet and tabloid media, every new statistic which pointed to the growing A8 presence in the UK, seemed to fuel yet another spectacularised story of foreign intrusion upon national welfare (Spigelman 2013). Familiar allegations that migrants depress wages, displace indigenous workers, drain the social welfare budget and erode national identity were reaffirmed once again, as they had been deployed against previous waves of migrants from the Commonwealth (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 2005; Dean 1992; Spencer 2011). And with them, on a backdrop of suspicion, the accession of Romania and Bulgaria too, as the two countries long marked for being the union's undeserving laggards (Gallagher 2005, 2009; Noutcheva & Bechev 2008), was treated with a couplet of vocal reservations, and a call for stricter restrictions on mobility.

The transitional immigration controls which were imposed in the UK for the maximum seven year period allowed by EU law, granted A2 nationals the right to move freely across European borders, but limited permission to reside beyond three months to only: those who could demonstrate that they exercised a treaty right as students, and who thus had to be registered at a recognised college or higher education institution; to self-sufficient individuals, who would have to prove, if intercepted by the Home Office, that they had enough funds to not require British social assistance and that they possessed a form of sickness insurance which would not burden the NHS;[31] and

[31] For years the requirement for Comprehensive Sickness Insurance, which meant having either private medical cover, a valid EHIC issued by the home country, or an agreement between the public health providers of the sending and receiving countries that guaranteed the transfer of costs, remained little known. Invisible to universities, NHS medical practitioners and other civil society actors drawn into the process of everyday

finally, to those migrants who were self-employed. [32] For the duration of the transitional period, therefore, working under the auspices of the employment contract remained a privilege. Some skilled positions were open, but only to those migrants who were affluent, young, and educated enough to navigate a points-based application for a Registration Certificate (also known as the blue card) under the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme. An employer sponsored Accession Worker Card (also known as the purple card)[33] was made available for a limited category of shortage jobs, on condition that no suitable resident workers applied. Two additional schemes allowed a quota of individuals to fill jobs in agriculture and food packing - isolated as they were in rural areas, and well documented for demanding long and anti-social hours (Spencer et al. 2007) which only enabled minimal interactions outside ethnic groups (Cook et al. 2011a, 2011b). In every other case, employers found to be hiring a Bulgarian or Romanian national without the required authorisation were subject to criminal prosecution and a £5000 fine, while migrants themselves were liable for on the spot fines of £1,000, prosecution, and up to 3 months' imprisonment (UKBA 2011a, p. 7).

Squeezed, therefore, between a requirement for work authorisation which was inaccessible, and the criminalisation of unauthorised work, for the vast majority of Romanians who migrated to the UK before 2014, and indeed for many of those who followed into their footsteps afterwards, picking up the same arrival strategies, the only route into legal residence was to learn to self-manage, self-insure, and become self-employed; embrace the least protected form of earning legally available in the UK, and accept a position which grants workers no access to any of the rights that had been gradually negotiated into the British employment contract after the end of the Second World War (Deakin 2001; Deakin et al. 2007).

bordering since the Immigration Act 2006, the CSI had arguably been demanded selectively; from the homeless, the beggars, and other undesirables when the Home Office needed legal grounds for their administrative removal. Its power to exclude became most visible to the general public after the Brexit referendum triggered an increase in applications for Permanent Residence, and a host of students, recent graduates and previously inconspicuous migrants learnt they had been residing unlawfully during the periods when they were not working and not holding a CSI, only when they were denied residence.

[32] This is based on the UKBA publications, available on the government archive.

[33] This applied to all but a few jobs: airport-based operational ground staff, au pairs, domestic workers in private households, ministers of religion, overseas government employees, postgraduate doctors, dentists and trainee GPs, private servants in a diplomatic household, representatives of an overseas news outlet, sole representatives, teachers or language assistants on an approved exchange scheme, qualified nurses coming for a period of supervised practice (UKBA 2011a:5).

The familiar fashioning of docile labour

In many respects, the trajectories which Romanians were nudged into undertaking were typical of a deeply rooted trend of channelling migrant workers into the dull and dirty jobs of developed economies (Burawoy 1976; Ciupijus 2011; Piore 1979; Waldinger & Lichter 2003; Wills et al. 2009). Scholars who examined the political economy of immigration controls (Anderson & Rogaly, 2005; Anderson, 2010, 2013, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015; O'Connell Davidson, 2013, 2015), have long pointed to the power of the state to limit mobility in order to fashion subjects fit to fill capitalist needs for docile labour. Ever since Marx's (2004 [1867]) seminal account of primitive accumulation, which pointed to how English peasants 'freed' from feudal estates were simultaneously policed into servitude with laws that criminalised vagrancy, and measures that undermined self-sufficiency by enclosing access to commons, scholars have persuasively documented how beneath the liberal narrative of state-market separation, there lay a history of complicity. States created labour markets, Polanyi (1944) famously posited, by regulating human mobility. From the 14th century statutes passed in England to ensure wages would remain low after the Black Death decimated the country, and until the late 19th century, the history of the employment contract was largely articulated through legislation which reproduced the fiction of an independent labour market by restricting subject' ability to move. It is telling, historian Yan Hairong (2008: 16) argues, that until the end of the 19th century, employment relations were expressly framed in the legal language of servitude. And nowhere is the power of the liberal state to fashion docile labour more visible, than in the immigration controls passed in the UK (Anderson & Rogaly, 2005; Anderson, 2010, 2013, 2015, O'Connell Davidson, 2013, 2015), and across the developed world (Ruhs 2013) from the beginning of the First World War.

The histories of capital's preference for partially immobile labour, whether restricted by direct immigration controls, or more subtly constrained by regional wealth inequalities, was visible at many levels of the Neighbourhood. The presence of past waves of Irish migrants who had served in construction and nursing, or of migrants from the Caribbean who filled labour shortages in public transport, was inscribed both in the ethnic composition and in the commercial face of the A5. Like the generation of Irish (Ryan 2004, 2007), Commonwealth, and Polish migrants (Anderson et al., 2006; White, 2017; White & Ryan, 2008) before them, Romanians and Bulgarians were simultaneously deplored by a section of the populist press worried with their impact on British

citizens (Vicol & Allen 2014), and commended by businesses-oriented, self-styled liberal publications for their fabled 'good work' (MacKenzie & Forde 2009; Parutis 2011).

In a familiar 'pantomime' (Anderson 2010, p. 311), which pitted the figure of the tireless migrant against the stereotype of the lazy native, their arrival was welcomed to the extent it helped fill the sectors which struggled to attract a local workforce (McKenzie and Forde, 2009; Anderson, Ruhs and Spencer, 2006). 'You're welcome', The Economist (2013) began its 'open letter to the citizens of Bulgaria and Romania' in the winter of 2013, when the prospect of the imminent expiration of transitional controls drove conservative politicians and media outlets into a frantic call for controls upon intra-European migration. 'It is not your fault that most of our countrymen don't want you', the editors continued with caricatural magnanimity. 'Partly the problem is the Poles'. '[A]s well as being workers who cut cabbages and painted walls (displacing some British labourers by the simple expedient of turning up on time), they proved to be human beings who settled down and had children. We weren't fully prepared for that'.

Prepared or not, as The Economist mused, the Polish and Romanian communities grew after accession, from minor presences of several thousands, to being the first and respectively third largest groups of EU nationals represented in the UK (ONS 2018). Every day Romanian migrants streamed out and into the Neighbourhood via the many bus routes that connected it to the northern side of the city, and the Underground line which tunnelled through its vertical axis: men and women, some blending into to general crowds of morning commuters, others equipped with uniforms, or scars, which seemed to have inscribed upon their bodies the gendered trajectories they undertook within the city's labour market: high visibility jackets and steel-toed boots for construction, gel manicures on hands hardened by cleaning.

In line with the immigration controls imposed upon their mobility, they found jobs at both ends of the city's labour markets (Spreckelsen & Seeleib-Kaiser 2016), but were over-represented at the low skilled, low paid point of the spectrum (Drinkwater et al. 2009; Dustmann et al. 2010; Jayaweera & Anderson 2008; Wills et al. 2009). In construction and delivery, for instance, where self-employment is endemic; in the wealth of catering agencies, which place 'independent contractors' in temporary gigs dispersed across the city; or indeed in cleaning, the privatised dirty work which has been historically relegated to migrant women.

Stereotypically depicted as 'good workers' (Anderson, 2010; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009) who fit employers' preferences for raced and gendered subjects (Fox, Moroşanu, & Szilassy, 2012; 2014; McDowell, 2008), and who could be conveniently deployed to patch the systematic underinvestment in the local workforce (Ruhs & Anderson 2010), Romanian migrants were thus absorbed into the city's labour market under the auspices of independent self-employed contracting. A gendered labour market, we must note, characterised by high levels of occupational segregation (Azmat 2015; Bosworth & Kersley 2015; Grimshaw & Rubery 2007), where women earned on average a fifth below what men did, and where early motherhood translated into an immediate pay cut. A labour market where fewer than 10% of engineers but more than 80% of carers were women, and where thanks to the taken-for-granted valorisation of intellectual over embodied labour, such occupational divisions manifest in marked pay disparities and uneven horizons for mobility.

Scholars who championed a politics of 'ecofeminism' (Mellor 1997; Salleh 2017) have gone to great lengths to illustrate how this dualism between humanity and nature which has characterised Western thought since Descartes' famous apposition of mind over matter, has come to not only condone environmental damage, but also to disregard the labour of social reproduction. The jobs that get rewarded, Nancy Hartsock (1998) presciently argued, are those premised on ruling over, not within the natural environment. Due to their proximity to the body, or the organic matter which Enlightenment thinkers wished to transcend, the labour of care, service and manual work were relegated to the bottom of the pay scale. It was interesting, if disheartening, to observe how normalised such gendered mobilities had become for my own informants. 'You know what it's like, men work in construction and women in cleaning', was how social policy graduate Iuliana described her work trajectory the moment she first recounted her experience in the UK; with the resigned dispassion of one who is stating the inevitable.

As if echoing the studies which confirmed their position at the low paid end of the labour market (Drinkwater et al. 2009; Dustmann 1999; Jayaweera & Anderson 2008; Spreckelsen & Seeleib-Kaiser 2016), work in the precarious grooves of the city had acquired a certain predictability for many Romanian migrants. It mattered little that they were not the accountancy savvy entrepreneurs accustomed with the practice of advertising their labour like a business, but rather ordinary men and women from villages, whose previous work had been in factories and farming,

graduates, who had just left higher education, or urban residents with years of experience in desk based jobs, for whom manual labour had only been the distant memory of summers at the countryside. In between the small ethnic supermarkets, pawnbrokers and discount stores, a wealth of 'accountancy' firms had developed in the Neighbourhood along the A5 precisely to assist them in navigating the conventions of working like a business.

It was never clear what training these street-dwelling self-styled 'consultants' possessed, and how many of them were indeed trained accountants. In fact, they hardly had to be, since the people they served were not complex businesses either, and most queries revolved around opening a National Insurance Number, registering for self-assessment, or filling out a tax return. What emerged from looking within the Neighbourhood however, was that no matter how infrequent formal self-employed status had been in Romania, its novelty as a way of working, of doing citizenship, and quite literally of accounting for oneself faded in London, with the realisation that there were few other choices at hand.

A story of migrants, and citizens

In many respects, the channelling of Romanian migrants towards this least protected status was the direct impact of transitional immigration controls, which made self-employment the main avenue into working legally. It is revealing that if 15% of native Britons had this status, the corresponding rate for Romanians and Bulgarians was as high as 59% (Migration Observatory, 2014). In others, however, the conditions of possibility made available to them were as much a reflection of the arrangements designed to regulate migration in particular, as they were symptomatic of a precaritisation of labour (Kalleberg 2009; Rodgers & Rodgers 1989; Standing 2014) and of living (Allison 2013; Lewis et al. 2015; Muehlebach 2013) in general since the 1980s.

To social scientists who minutely traced policy transformations in the UK, changes to the labour (Lewis et al. 2015; McDowell et al. 2009; McDowell & Christopherson 2009; Standing 2014) and housing markets (Hodkinson, 2011; Hodkinson & Robbins, 2013; Jones & Murie, 2008) point to a break with the post-war social democrat consensus, with its commitment to welfare protection 'from cradle to grave', and to the adoption of a neoliberal government (Dardot & Laval, 2014; Harvey, 2007; Jones, 2014), where the welfare wielding left hand of the state loses ground before the punitive right (Wacquant, 2016). This is a government premised on free market mechanisms,

as Harvey (2007) argued, which sanctions those who fail to live by ideals of self-sufficiency as zealously as it makes self-sufficiency mandatory.

There is little scope here to do justice to every angle of this complex political economic nexus. But if we are to challenge the caricature of 'Romanians [who] don't help', it is useful to dedicate a few more pages to understanding how the help of conationals came to be so instrumental in the first place. What, beyond immigration controls, shaped the spaces of precarity that prompted people like Claudiu to draw upon other migrants' assistance, and to refashion his expectations of London from a space where everything was possible, to a space where 'everyone [seemed] poor'. The following section does this by tracing the erosion of security from work and housing.

The rise and fall of employment protection

Historians of labour (Adams & Deakin, 2014; Brown, Deakin, Nash, & Oxenbridge, 2000; Deakin, 2001) have widely regarded the standard employment contract which governs work relations today as 'a remarkable social and economic institution' (Marsden 1999, p. 20). A 'cornerstone' of the modern labour law system, or 'a bridge between the modern business enterprise and the welfare state' (Deakin 2000: 34), which connects the disciplinary end of obedience to managerial prerogative, with the edifice of social legislation that provides the individual with a modicum of security. Many of its current protections, it is argued, are owed to the egalitarian ethos developed after the Second World War, when trade unions' concern for minimising the use of casual work converged, for once, with employers' interest in closer control over workers.

Adam and Deakin (2014) offer a comprehensive overview of the legal evolution of the standard employment contract in the UK. The National Insurance Act of 1946, they note, constituted a landmark moment in the institution of a standard employment contract, by levelling previous status-based distinctions between manual 'workmen', clerical 'employees', and the independent 'self-employed', and proposing instead a simpler distinction between employed earners 'gainfully occupied ... under a contract of service' (class I), and those employed on their own account (class II). [34] Further legislation adopted in the wake of the British civil rights movement then granted

[34] The legislation was admittedly underpinned by a male breadwinner model (Vosko 2000) which despite going far to replace the *'demoralising irregularity of life'* for working families (Walby 1986: 205), did not threaten to disrupt the patriarchal status quo. Female dominated industrial trades were excluded from early accident compensation, while factory legislation barred women from more highly paid positions under the pretext of risks to their reproductive capacities (Deakin 1990). When married women were included in social

workers the right to a minimum notice of termination (Contracts of Employment Act 1963), severance pay (Redundancy Payments Act 1965), compensation for unfair dismissal (Industrial Relations Act 1971) and from racial discrimination (Race Relations Act 1965), as well as the right to be remunerated equally regardless of gender.[35] Later in the late-1990s, with the UK's adoption of the European Social Chapter under the New Labour Government, workers gained the right to receive written terms of agreement (The Contract of Employment Act 1996), earn a minimum wage (National Minimum Wage Act 1998), as well as enjoy statutory annual leave and protection from overwork (Working Time Directive 1998). Overall, the Trade Union Congress (TUC 2016) notes, the European Social Chapter went far to counter British Conservative governments' tendencies to sacrifice workers' security in the name of market freedom.[36]

Traces of this transformation in political attitudes to labour were visibly inscribed in the history of the Neighbourhood. It was significant to note, for instance, how the local hospital, now managed by the NHS, which in itself is regarded as a beacon of social democracy, had been founded upon the remnants of a Victorian work-house. The museum archives of the borough of Brent (BMA 2014) also document strong organised resistance from workers' collectives at the Grunwick Film Laboratories and the Neasden power station, around a time when Thatcherite policies risked 'turning the borough into an industrial graveyard'.

Despite the hard-worn protections added to the standard employment contract, however, since the 1980s new and more precarious forms of work started emerging. Poorly paid, unprotected and insecure (Rodgers & Rodgers 1989), these were positions marked by minimal access to the safety net granted by employment rights, and saturated, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) notes, with uncertainty. These are some of the agency jobs which fill the sprawling service sector where

insurance, they paid higher contributions on account they represented a greater risk, or were included as secondary earners deriving social security rights from their husbands' contributions.

[35] It was only in the 1970s that Parliament legislated for equal pay (Equal Pay Act 1970), outlawed sex discrimination (Sex Discrimination Act 1975), and made it unlawful to dismiss anyone on grounds of pregnancy (Employment Protection Act 1975).

[36] Starting in the 1980s, the waning of the social democrat partnership between government and industry, and the rise of neoliberal supporters of free market economics championed by Margaret Thatcher, marked a dip in employment protection. In addition to Thatcher's well known crackdown on the role of labour unions and strike action, particularly notable was the decision of the Major Conservative government to opt out of the European Social Chapter, which would have granted workers more protection, on account that it would '*adversely affect public finances…., costs of public sector employers, would be increased and the flexibility and competitiveness of British business reduced*' (Eric Forth Minister at the Department for Education and Employment, quoted in Lourise 1997: 15)

individuals are placed in gigs across the city, when and as needed, yet where the sense of managerial responsibility and workplace identity are both eroded; the 6% 'zero hours' staff or casual 'workers'[37] (Monaghan 2017), who lost the right to be granted regular work and redundancy compensation but who, cynically, could be prevented from taking on other engagements until recently[38]; the workers hired part-time by firms which avoid paying employers' National Insurance contributions (Hartley-Brewer 2015); and, like the case of my informants, the swathes of self-employed 'contractors' who fill the city's flexible business cycle, without having any access to employment rights at all.

From 1975 to 2017, the number of self-employed individuals in the UK grew from 1.9million, or 8.7% of the economically active population, to 4.8million. This represents 15% of the labour force, and constitutes one of the largest shares of self-employment in the OECD (2016). Originally designed for independent contractors, and still the status of choice for management consultants and tech specialists (ONS 2014, p. 1), for whom high hourly rates can mitigate the risks, this status devoid of virtually any of the protections inherent in the employment contract has also been increasingly creeping upon positions at the low end of the pay spectrum, which lay far from the fantasy of the self-managing professional. Among them the Office for National Statistics notes the prominence of the building trades, which take up a fifth of the self-employed workforce, the taxi driving and delivery business, or the carpentry sector (ONS 2014, p. 7). These are sectors which routinely draw upon the labour of people whose work bypasses the concessions granted employees, and who are instead governed by civil and commercial law (Buschoff & Schmidt 2009) in ways that strip the role of the state back to being a mere guarantor of private contracts. These are sectors which draw their staff, often without realising, into a recreation of the blunt fantasy of a self-sufficient citizenry, where the freedom to choose one's own clients and decide when and how much to work for, comes at the cost of lower payments, shorter term engagements, and an insidious transfer of responsibility for social security onto the self.

Economists and labour geographers attribute this rise of precarious work in the UK, and across the developed world, to the broad shift in the nature of production, from the stability of manufacturing

[37] '*Worker*' is a legal category introduced in the late 1990s to include the flexible conditions of agency workers, short term casual workers and some freelancers (Kautonen et al. 2010 p. 123).
[38] The exclusivity clause was abolished in 2014.

organised around the assembly line, to the flexible capitalism of knowledge and services, where the relationship between labour and space-time coordinates is significantly less predictable (Harvey 2003; Kalleberg 2009, 2012). As globalisation prompted the emergence of cheap Asian markets, and manufacture was relocated, so it was argued that Western economies embraced more fluid forms of accumulation that required a mobile workforce. The borough of Brent, for its part, witnessed the closure of 15,000 jobs due to industrial decline (BMA 2014), which triggered a spike in unemployment, particularly among black communities and women (BMA 2015), and a gradual fall in the population (BMA 2007) that was only reversed by Eastern European migration.

Just as notable as macroeconomic changes, however, were changes to the nature of government itself. Margaret Thatcher's election in the UK (and Ronald Reagan's in the US) marked a clear downgrade in the consultative role of trade unions, and in the political importance which had been granted full employment after the war. A staunch supporter of Hayekian neoliberal economics, where human welfare is seen as best furthered by creating a free market to support individual creativity, rather than by investing in state-based protections, Thatcher's programme of industry privatisations and anti-union legislation, her role in the political normalisation of unemployment as inevitable ('There is no other way'), and the push for self-reliance under the infamous call to 'get on [one's] bike', have all ushered in a radical reconfiguration of the relation between state, employment, and the individual.

Volumes have been dedicated to unpacking the precarity which ensued under this broad call for 'changing the soul' through the means of free market economics. Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999; Rose et al., 2006) described the resurgence of a form of 'advanced liberalism': a virulent reaffirmation of the fantasy of individual independence which once animated the thought of classic liberal authors, [39] that turned self-actualisation from a privilege, into an obligation. Julia O'Connell Davidson (2013, 2015) traces the proliferation of work exploitation to the liberal fetishisation of the civil contract – the chief artefact of liberal citizenship, as legal historians note (Deakin 2001 p. 2), which can obscure with its narrative of transactional equity

[39] It was this unfettered belief in humans' capacity to consent which famously led Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century to argue that even servitude constitutes freedom, when service is premised on agreement. Or John Locke's immutable belief that every person possesses in his body an inalienable property that was his to transact, which led him to support the enclosure of commons even when doing so was bound to render many hungry.

between rational actors, the fact that choice is always situated in material conditions of possibility. Conceptualising persons as proprietary, transacting actors par excellence, O'Connell Davidson argues, allowed liberalism to turned reciprocity into the basis of all sociality (see also Graeber 2014; Koteff; Makovicky and Henig 2016), making even the most lopsided exchange of individual labour in return for wages, appear like the natural foundation of life.

Looked at from a distance, through the lens of 'neo-subjectivities' (Dardot & Laval 2014), one may understandably wonder, as several scholars have done (S. J. Collier 2011, 2012; Hoffman et al. 2006; Walkerdine & Bansel 2010), whether conceptual distinctions between post war and neoliberal citizenship initially drawn, as Aihwa Ong (2006) notes, to help us fashion a language for the complex political economic transformations we examine, have been exaggerated to portray neoliberalism as an all-explanatory which inadvertently romanticises the security of the past, and exaggerates the distinctiveness of the present. [40] In concluding this section, it is important to note that the precarious conditions encountered by Romanian migrants were not spectres of an ethereal transformation, but were firmly ingrained in 'actually existing' (Wacquant, 2012) changes to employment legislation, and indeed in the active erosion of access to employment justice. [41]

Legal scholars have branded the rules which govern the distinction between work statuses in the UK some of the most convoluted in the liberal world (Boheim & Muehlberger 2006; Deakin et al. 2007; Freedland 2003). Rather than adopting an unequivocal metric, the distinction between a worker and a genuinely self-employed individual is determined through a complex matrix of indicators developed incrementally, through case law (Deakin et al. 2007). 'In order to decide whether a person carries on business on his own account', High Court judge Mummery is quoted in the Government's Employment Status manual (HMRC 2017 p. ESM7160), it is necessary to consider many different aspects of that person's work activity. This is not a mechanical exercise of running through items on a check list….It is a matter of evaluation of the overall effect'. Yet when the law makes it impossible to demonstrate one's status without recourse to an Employment

[40] On this note, it is important to acknowledge that Fordist employment was marked by gender discrimination (Vosko 2006), tedium (Ross 2008), and a well-documented degree of racism. Similarly, flexible employment today can be an actual choice, and a means of allowing women, pensioners, and other groups who otherwise fall through the cracks of full-time employment to gain access to the labour market.

[41] The privatisation of building has also been argued to contribute to the rise in self-employment (Harvey, 2007).

Tribunal, and access to tribunals is limited by paywalls, the result can only be a normalisation of the precarity derived from false self-employment (Lord Bach et al 2017).

Whole classes of law, including welfare, immigration, housing, debt, and indeed employment, were excluded from legal aid under the Coalition Government's Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012). Anecdotal evidence documented the anger of judges who found themselves having to help the growing number of litigants who were forced to self-represent by cross-examining witnesses on their behalf (Bowecott 2017). Nationwide, figures from the Ministry of Justice show, after the cuts to legal aid coupled with the introduction of tribunal fees, the number of Employment Tribunal claims dropped by as much as 70% (Figure 5).[42]

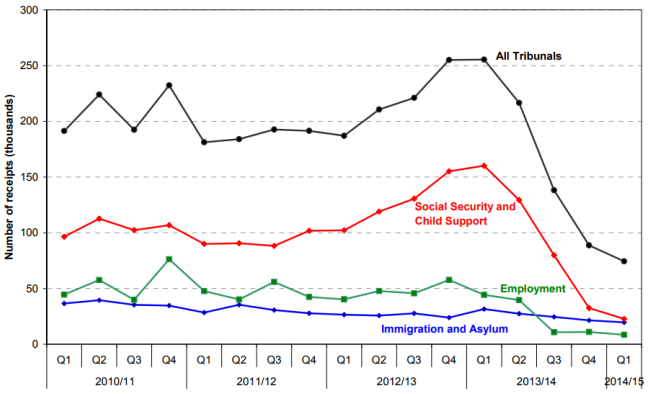


Figure 5 - Tribunal receipts by jurisdiction, 2008/09 to 2014/15. Source: MoJ Statistics Quartery

'If you're a boss who earns a fortune but doesn't look after your staff…', Prime Minister Theresa May noted in her first speech as leader of the Conservative Party in 2016, 'I'm putting you on warning, this can't go on anymore'. Warned as businesses may have been, however, with the exception of political attention dedicated to the spectacularised exploitation of 'Modern Day Slavery' (O'Connell Davidson 2006, 2015), the everyday precarity ingrained in the gig economy remained tolerated. While the government's own consultations (Deane 2016; M. Taylor et al. 2017), showed how companies used meticulously tailored contractual terms to cloak their workforce in the illusion of autonomy, arguing that better enforcement, legal definition, and tax harmonisation were all needed to reduce firms' incentive to falsely rebrand their workforce as self-employed, action has been minimal. [43]

[42] In 2017 under much pressure from trade unions, the Supreme Court declared the introduction of tribunal fees unconstitutional, abolishing all future fees and ordering a refund of past claimants.

[43] Since its foundation in 2014, the Pay and Rights investigative arm of the HMRC found more than 13,000 workers paid below NMW, with areas totalling £3.5m by 700 businesses. Yet less than 0.25% were prosecuted (Booth 2017). Furthermore, even the simple arithmetic of dividing the average yearly arrears by the number of workers affected shows how minor the HMRC's interventions have been compared to the scale of underpayment. It would take fewer than 200 individuals like Cristina and the North London workers I encountered, to make up the figure the HMRC's investigative unit found countrywide.

These were some of the policy reconfigurations which turned precarious work into a normal trajectory for my informants. A trajectory expressly carved for them, through the use of immigration controls which channelled them into self-employment, but one also enabled by general erosions of employment protection. Before we move on to consider just how Romanian migrants navigated this landscape, another set of developments worth considering, for the role they played in instantiating a need for help, are those pertaining to the British housing market. The rise of a gig economy is, after all, not an isolated anomaly limited to changes to the governance of labour, but a facet of a political reorientation towards replacing state provisions of social security with market mechanisms.

'The most expensive city in Europe'

In many respects, the transformations of the housing market mirrored the ones across employment. After an initial rise of small and crammed terraces designed to provide basic shelter for the new generations of industrial workers at the end of the 19th century, the imperatives to improve the wanting sanitation of Victorian stock, and to reward soldiers returning from the First World War resulted in a new approach to home building. If prior to the First World War the vast majority of people lived in the privately rented sector, a 1919 Housing and Town Planning Bill established the provision of working class housing as a statutory duty of local authorities, and guaranteed funding by the state (Robertson 2016). As testament to the welfare element included in the new approach, a design manual accompanying the bill explicitly emphasised the need for 'good houses, adequate in size, equipment and amenity to afford satisfactory dwellings for the working man's family' (Barnet Council 2007 p. 8).

The estate in the Neighbourhood, one of the several built by the London County Council through the 1920s, was to a large extent a reflection of that ethos. By 1930, a total of 4,000 two storey properties equipped with their own gardens, and influenced by the Arts and Craft Movement, turned the rural fields which stretched around the Northern end of the Roman Road into a green annex for residents previously crammed into the inner city. Save for complaints regarding an initially limited range of facilities for entertainment and consumption (Municipal Dreams 2014), the homes were larger than the long terraced stocks first built to house workers in Cricklewood, and

the roads were designed to include open views and rounded corners, giving the area the feeling of a Garden City more than a mere industrial annexe.

The ethos which placed local authorities at the heart of building continued countrywide into the 20th century. As shown in Figure 6, no Labour or Conservative Prime Minister in power until 1979 allowed local authority construction projects to drop below 100,000 (Castella 2015). In 1979, the average house price stood at just under £22,000, while mortgages were capped at two and a half times a buyer's salary.[44] By the turn of the decade, however, both the Neighbourhood and the country witnessed a veritable onslaught on the social housing stock (Hodkinson & Robbins 2013 p. 7). The scale of council homes sales which followed the passing of the Right to Buy Act under Margaret Thatcher, coupled with restrictions on future building by local authorities (Robertson 2016), the failure of the government to stimulate sufficient private construction, and the finacialisation of mortgages[45] which increased private demand by facilitating loans, started a momentous unravelling of affordable housing.[46]

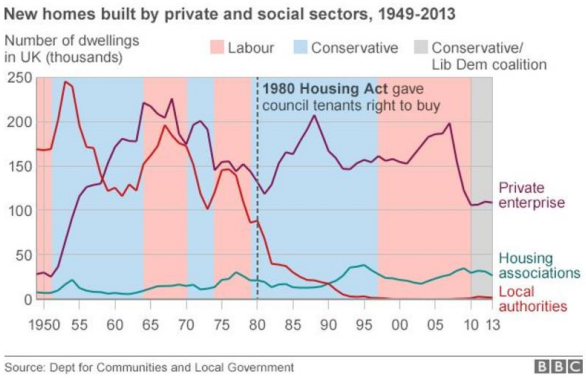


Figure 6 - Home building in the UK. Source: DCLG in BBC (2013)

The adoption of market-based measures continued with a few alterations under the Labour government, in power from 1997. Having moved away from its historic links to tenants' movement, and closer to a politics amenable to business (Jessop 2003), the 'New' Labour Party refashioned under Tony Blair transferred more housing stock from municipal authorities to housing associations, heralding by the mid-2000s what analysts have labelled another 'affordability crisis'

[44] It is worth noting how, due to the loan caps and inequalities in wages, women made unlikely applicants for mortgages, depending thus upon husbands or fathers to qualify.

[45] Mortgage lending was no longer controlled by building societies, but operated by financial institutions. Banks could sell mortgages on to other financial institutions, in a process best known as securitisation. This enabled them not only to make an immediate profit from the sale, but also to write the mortgage debt off their books, to pass the government's capital controls, and thus to continue to make ever more, and ever riskier loans. Between 1995 and 2005 mortgage lending increased more than five times over, as did the loan to value ratios and their duration (Robertson 2016 p. 199).

[46] After 17 years of Conservative rule, public house building was all but eliminated, and a quarter of existing stock sold. Social housing rents shot up by 55%, while the remaining properties were residualised: reduced to being the isolated fate of citizens seen to have failed in climbing the property ladder (Robertson 2016).

(Hodkinson & Robbins 2013 p. 63).[47] Keeping with the neoliberal ethos of achieving social justice by freeing the market, the government proposed that instead of investing in a new generation of council properties, as the party had traditionally advocated, New Labour would incentivise private building. A whole 240,000 properties could be erected every year, a government report boasted, if only planning permissions were relaxed, and public land released to private investment. The global financial crash of 2008, however, painfully illustrated the limitation of such market-based ambitions. As did the coming to power of the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010.

After a promising election rhetoric premised on unity, a 'Big Society' where rich and poor were said to be 'in this together', the programme spearheaded by the Conservatives, with modest opposition from their coalition partners, were largely seen as a return to class war conservatism (Hodkinson & Robbins 2013). The 'Housing Strategy for England', Hodkinson and Robbins (2013 pp. 65–6) argue, portrayed the crisis not as a failure in stock size, but with reference to 'the familiar "bogeymen" of class war conservative politics': the planning system, welfare, social housing and the underclass of citizens who could not afford to pay their way into self-sufficiency. Faithful then to the traditional Conservative support for private property, the coalition focused its efforts on measures designed to incentivise ownership, rather that replenish stock. The Right to Buy was extended, Stamp Duty was sliced, and first-time buyers were helped with government backed equity loans in order to stimulate access to the proverbial property ladder. Yet, the authors conclude, as the demand for homes increased predictably, without an adequate investment in supply, the most significant legacy of the Coalition's record has been another hike in prices. Despite the incentives offered construction developers, the minor spur in private building could not prevent the continued growth in prices, and with it the ever further push of the poor from the fantasy of contract-bound housing security.[48]

Overall, from 1980 to 2015 the number of homes built countrywide dropped 40%, from over 250,000 to just above 150,000 a year (ONS 2016), with average house price rises of 7% a year (ONS

[47] A pathway introduced in 2000 allowed councils to borrow and finance home improvements, but only on condition they set up 'arms-length' companies that would take over their everyday management, and facilitate future privatisations (Hodkinson 2011).

[48] Developers were granted access to a new £400m investment fund to build on stalled sites, tax breaks for speculative investment, and access to enterprise Zones with relaxed regulations.

2016), [49] and net values of 7.6 times the average salary (ONS 2017). [50] In the capital, now deemed the most expensive city in Europe for renters (The Economist 2017), monthly rent for a one bed flat along the Northern underground line can range from over £2,000, in the central Leicester Square area, to a minimum of £876, in its northernmost region surrounding the Neighbourhood (Aron 2015). Even here it is worth noting that rent comes close to the British monthly minimum wage, and exceeds the Romanian equivalent four times over. [51]

It is little wonder, therefore, that alongside successive governments' rhetoric of encouraging private ownership, the number of first time buyers or young people able to afford home ownership, in the Neighbourhood and beyond, dropped. What did accompany the rhetoric in practice, in the 'actually existing' faces of neoliberal housing, was the proportion of individuals who rent in multi-household conditions (HMOs) akin to those which had once made the staple of Victorian living (Robertson 2016). It is significant that the first mention of an HMO, loosely described as a house occupied by persons who do not form a single household, was in a 1985 Housing Act. Since then, in the shadow of marketisation the number of HMOs across the city soared. Shortly before the start of my fieldwork, an estimated 379,000 HMOs were active in the country, with as many as 114,007 in London (Smith, 2012), where multiple occupancy has historically been the living configuration of the poor (Atkinson, 2000).

Walking the residential streets that radiated out of the A5, it was not hard to see how homes which from the outside looked like the 1930 prototype designed for the 'working man's family', now housed men, women and children from several family units. With the exception of Laura and her partner, who had years of work experience in London and could afford to buy a home on the outskirts of the city, everyone I spoke to shared: bathrooms, kitchens and cleaning rotas in the lucky cases, at times in homes whose living-rooms had been converted into bed-rooms, and where every breathable spare space had been taken up by a bed. To my informants, this was but an adaptation - as normal as taking up self-employed status. To the local borough of Brent, by contrast, the rise of HMOs had articulated a veritable crusade.

[49] From £20,000 to a vastly higher country average of £279,000, and more than double that amount in London (Rightmove 2017).
[50] This is up from 3.6 times in 1997.
[51] Based on figures for 2015, the Romanian minimum wage was 1050RON (approx. 200GBP) (Legestart 2015).

Several Government reports (DCLG, 2008, 2010) have positioned HMOs as the quintessential arrangement of mobile populations, such as students, but even more so indicated that they are the destination of the poor, whose concentrated presence was believed to breed a panoply of 'problems and symptoms' (DCLG, 2008 p. 4). In response to the growing angst, a new Housing Act passed in 2004 by the Labour Government required that all HMOs of three storeys or over, which were occupied by five or more people, would require a license from the local authority, granting councils the freedom to impose further licensing where necessary. [52]

In light of these provisions, the North London borough of Brent, where most of my informants were living, started a 'zero tolerance' policy from 2016, requiring a license for all HMOs, regardless of size. 'These tenants are being exploited and forced to live in appalling conditions', the Head of Housing Services remarked, in response to one of the numerous prosecutions showcased on the council's website (Brent Council 2017a). 'They are living in a fire trap that is uninhabitable, grossly overcrowd [sic] and insanitary'.' People renting in the private sector in Brent', the statement added zealously, 'are entitled to live in homes that are safe and well-managed'. What remained unsaid beneath the spectacle of concern for safety, however, was that the picture of squalor was an exception. When complaints over house sharing did arise in my informants' accounts, they were more likely to target excessive, not insufficient, cleaning duties demanded by the head tenants - this will be elaborated in the following chapter.

The housing wishes of poor migrants seemed to fall below the council's radar, much like workers' agency did in Modern Day Slavery initiatives. 'If you are renting out a property to three or more people who are not all related you need a HMO licence', one enforcement officer noted in a story that described the prosecution of a tenant who had rented a 5-bed home to 7 men (not an unreasonable size for a large family), 'It doesn't matter if the property is in good condition'. It did not count, therefore, that informal arrangements were the only option for many. Nor did it matter that, similar to a government report which found that improvements in the physical condition of licensed properties came at the cost of worsened affordability (DCLG 2010 p. 87), the council's own consultation found that the majority of landlords opposed proposals for extending licensing, on account that costs would be passed on (Brent Council 2017b). Under the zealous crusade against

[52] Under the Act landlords had to demonstrate that their properties met certain safety features, that utilities were regularly checked, and that a certain ratio of bathrooms were available for the number of tenants.

'rogue landlords', the housing shortages which had prompted the concentration of HMOs in the borough to begin with faded into the background.

The unaffordability of homes and the precaritisation of work by successive policies of spurring market mechanisms, were thus two of the broad strokes which framed Romanian migrants' encounters with the city; a city imagined by highly educated through tropes of cultural landmarks, civility, and limitless potentially. Constituted by a particular state-business complicity, these were spaces of precarity significant for their ability to imbue the Neighbourhood with unexpected forms of closeness. The next part of this chapter unpacks how Romanianness came to constitute a new axis of commonality when migrants from the urban middle class and poor villagers found themselves relying upon each other's help.

6.2. 'What is the Romanian to do?'

'It's like my life started here'. This is how Liliana described the part of her journey when she realised that for all the expectations she harboured, life in London started 'from below'. We were well into the second hour of our conversation, over coffee in the only big chain coffee shop in the Neighbourhood. As the coffee cups emptied, and the customers around our tables came and went, she gradually narrated her way through the childhood she spent in the mining district of Valea Jiului, the years of self-rediscovery as an intellectual 'of the right', enrolled at university in a large Transylvanian town, and finally the overbearing sense of betrayal she experienced in 2012, when the corruption she had once thought confined to the communists and their social democrat successors led her, as if in a moment of crisis, to go abroad.

'I took a coach because I wanted to see Europe, I was curious', she continued, moving now into another episode of her journey. Like many of the educated Romanians I had interviewed over the months, who described chasing dreams of 'open roads' or 'something more' beyond the grey, Liliana had been quietly confident of her ability to manage upon arrival, despite knowing little about the practicalities of either work or housing. She had brought £1,200 in savings, she spoke good English, and she mastered, so she thought, a capacity to wield the power of a professional camera and laptop. After a couple of days on the coach she arrived at Victoria station, approached the information desk, and asked a member of staff without any earlier preparation, to help her find a

place. It was within that first week, Liliana recounted, that she became aware of just how radically the scale of possibilities she had once thought at her disposal would be reconfigured.

The only hotel she felt comfortable staying at, where she did not fear that her computer might be stolen, and where she did not have to share a mixed dorm at a time when '[her] mentality was not ready for that type of thing', came to £70 a night. 'After three nights of accommodation', she concluded ironically, 'with the traveling around and the food, I spent my money for a month'. Like many graduates who arrived with the hopefulness of open plans, who spoke conversational English and had never imagined that they would arrive in London only to be seeking the company of a Romanian community, Liliana soon learnt that 'the deal at home doesn't match the one at the market'. The first three days were frantically spent connected to the hotel WiFi, trying to find a more affordable location before the nightly rates swallowed up more of her savings. It was then, she realised, that if she were to find something within reach the only accessible options came not from going it alone via formal estate agents who charged as much as four digit figures per month, but from relying on a more informal network; the network constituted by other Romanians who advertised spare rooms in the multitude of migrant groups which had mushroomed on social media, where rents did not come to two thirds of what she had left, and where tenants' suitability was not hinging on a hefty deposit and digital credit checks. 'I went on the Romanian websites in the UK, I called some numbers, many people didn't reply' she explained. 'Eventually, I found this accommodation with a young lady and I went to meet her'.

The arrangement she found then, an arrangement she had still kept at the time of our interview, was a far cry from both what she had experienced at home, or what she imagined she would encounter overseas. At almost fifty years of age, and having worked in journalism for the better part of her adult life, within the first week of her stay in the city she came to share the single room of a twenty-five-year-old woman, in a property which over the course of her stay accommodated anything between ten and thirteen individuals: Romanian men and a few women, of all ages, levels of education, and professional backgrounds, who came and went, sometimes for just a few weeks, and whose names she had stopped trying to keep track off. The notion of privacy had all but gone, when the kitchen and bathroom were shared, and the living-room had been converted, as in so many of my informants' arrangements, into an additional sleeping space. There were times when in order to avoid the vigilant eye of local authority HMO inspections, she and other housemates

who sublet without a contract, were told to leave on a moment's notice, or even hide in a bedroom and lock themselves inside to avoid detection.

'Think of what this meant!'. Liliana paused, leaning on her chair as if to take a step back from a narrative she had recounted up to that point with the detachment of a chronicler who is retelling someone else's life. 'In Romania I had my own flat, I had 40 square meters all to myself' she remarked. 'Here', the reflection continued in English, as I heard many of my informants switch when describing arrangements like 'house-sharing' or 'self-employment', 'I had to share'. 'I shared my room, the kitchen, and living-room with ten people; there were thirteen of us at one time'. 'You have to realise that I was 47 when I came here', she added; 'so it was a shock'.

That 'shock', it soon became apparent, would be just one of many. Within the first month Liliana realised that the laptop and camera she had guarded so carefully would be of little professional use when the only work she found was as a housekeeper. Like the many Romanian women for whom cleaning had become the default trajectory, she came to work within the narrow staff corridors of a hotel. Engaged on a self-employed basis, albeit unaware of it at first, she was subject to an agreement which legally entitled the company to pay her for the number of rooms she completed, and not for the actual hours of cleaning. It took fifteen rooms during an eight hour shift, she explained, to earn National Minimum Wage levels:

> To work as a housekeeper, to finish fifteen rooms in eight hours, when you don't have a leg…That's when I realised what capitalist hell means. I should have been paid 6GBP/hour, but because I couldn't finish the fifteen rooms, I ended up being paid 3GBP/hour. There was a time when I got 18GBP/day for ten hours of work.
>
> But there is a beauty in everything.

Having started our conversation with the vivid account of her transformation into an educated intellectual in Romania, who confessed choosing the UK not only because she spoke English, but because she thought 'it was a liberal economy' where she described arriving 'full of optimism and faith', it was hard to not wonder, two hours into her life story, what it felt like to realise that, for all the hope of mobility she had harboured, pursuing those ambitions really meant starting from scratch. Judging from her living arrangements, it was hard to not think that getting by became a matter of engineering little everyday understandings which straddled into illegality; a matter where living and working were not frictionless individual journeys into 'something more', but highly mediated encounters made possible only with the help of sympathetic conationals and their

artifices; personal arrangements between people brought together by a certain subjection to precarity, which were more akin to the informal economies documented across the post-socialist space, than to the narrative of transparent, merit based mobility of market capitalism.

'Isn't that illegal?', I thus began tentatively, referring to her deal with the tenants who sublet. Liliana briefly shook her head with the hint of supressed irritation of someone who is asked to explicate the obvious. 'It is illegal, I know it is illegal', she responded.

> But what can you do? Tell me now what you can do with no money? Every time the landlord came we locked our rooms or went for walks, so he didn't realise there were more than five of us in the house. And this isn't special, it happens to a lot of people.
>
> The Romanian who comes here has no other option, apart from living under a bridge perhaps like you see in newspapers almost every week…these things are known, they are known. You ask me if I miss my flat, people wonder how a university graduate can be a housekeeper. I can tell them that I have worked with law graduates, with economists from Romania, with civil servants who lost their job… I never thought I wouldn't be able to find a job [in London] with a company.
>
> But 'your need takes you where your will alone won't, and teaches you things you never fathomed'.

Liliana's reference to a Romanian proverb revealed how it was need that took one places. And need, the proverb might have added, that taught one how to compromise, to change the way one thinks about oneself, and to build bridges one never thought would need crossing. The mobilities literature has documented widely the class transformations which accompany migrants' journeys across borders, pointing to the risk of deskilling and loss of professional capital, particularly among women (Currie 2007; McGregor 2007; Nowicka 2014; Ryan et al. 2015), but also increasingly examining the transformations in migrants' sense of self-perception. Looking at highly educated Filipina women, for instance, Parreñas (2015) introduced the term 'contradictory class mobility' to capture the discrepancies between their access to higher incomes abroad, on one hand, and the experience of downwards social mobility inherent in doing manual work, on the other. In her study of European and African migrants to the UK, Cerderberg (2017) identified a sense of irritation with the realisation that, regardless of their education, many women found themselves doing 'migrant jobs'. There is certainly a sense in the literature that class status is not simply a background fixed in objective resources and habits, but also 'a set of performances by which actors signify class belonging' (Bonjour & Chauvin 2018 p. 10).

Liliana's story was reflective of the 'complex ways' (Kelly 2007), and limitations, of narrating changing class status. The interview started with a hopeful intellectual, curious to discover Europe. She recounted her journey with the eloquence of an educated woman who could find 'beauty in everything', rendering palatable the precarity she encountered through a narrative of self-directed adventure. Yet there was a tension between this subject, who emerged at the beginning from a part of the life story which Liliana had literally scripted on a notebook, and the subject that emerged in light of the realisation that her status in London, 'with no money', was all too similar to that of the 'ordinary Romanian': a flattened subject who was always in danger of 'sleeping under a bridge', unless *he* could summon the endurance and creativity to adapt.

It is significant to note that when Liliana spoke of 'the Romanian who comes here', the gender she used was male.[53] Feminist scholarship has reflected widely upon the ways in which women have been historically portrayed, and governed, as passive subjects with a supposedly natural inclination towards care and affectivity, while the domains of politics, productive work, and cunning were relegated to men (Grimshaw & Rubery 2007; McDowell 1997; Pateman 1988). The masculinisation of the Romanian self which Liliana referenced is revealing of the depth of transformation she and others like her incurred, upon the realisation that despite her higher education and professional aspirations, without economic capital she was a Romanian migrant like so many others, bound to stay afloat by adapting.

Defined through a poverty which provided few alternatives, the Romanian was, above all, a subject who was ordinary. Despite her determination to couch her work in tropes of self-discovery, she admitted that:

> The story I am telling you now isn't only my story. […] When I met other Romanians I realised that our stories are so similar, our experiences are so similar…I am not a special case. Maybe the only unusual thing is my physical situation. But there are plenty of irregularities over here too, let us be clear. A lot of people go through this.

'A lot of people' did, of course. When faced with the intersection of a hopefulness that seemed lost at home, and a constellation of state-market relations that bluntly channelled aspiring mobile Romanians in the city's precarious corners, it mattered little whether one had been a graduate, a

[53] The gender deployed in the Romanian language to speak of citizens in general is male (while the nation itself is female), and this in itself is indicative of women's relegation, at the level of discourse policy alike, to a passive position.

public intellectual, or a small property owner. Over the course of fieldwork I encountered women who worked, like Liliana, as self-employed cleaners, or who staffed businesses in the Neighbourhood, like Cristina, where the hourly rate agreed was £4. I met men who conducted backbreaking work in construction and in carwashes, where rates were set per item or 'the light of day' (*zi lumina*), bringing hourly amounts far below employees' legal rate, or graduates who took up the kind of jobs they described only having done on the occasional summer at their parents' country home. Much more could be said about each individual's struggle. About how the inability to meet the bureaucracy of independent contracting, for instance, pushed some from false self-employment into outright black-market work, and how this, in turn, made some Romanians deportable.

What is interesting to remark upon here, is the realisation that the story of one was, as Liliana and others noted, the story of many. And with the understanding that previous class and gender distinctions mattered little, so came the constitution of a new type of subject framed along national lines. This was a subject in the shadow, who lurked beneath the fantasy of the independent agentful self, and who emerged, albeit without anticipation, through exposure to need: the regional inequalities which had rendered Romanian migrants' savings meaningless within days of living in London, the taxing housing market, which made subletting with conationals the main viable option, and indeed the precarious jobs trajectories laid before them.

Several Romanian migrants who used to think of themselves as educated intellectuals, reflected similarly upon how the sudden devaluation of their capitals abroad nudged them to reassess the way they thought of themselves. 'I came here quite snobbishly', museology graduate Claudiu noted, describing his first month in the city. 'I told myself I would never work in construction like every Romanian'. 'I had 1,000 to 1,500 pounds, I thought that was a lot'. 'Of course, I didn't know anything around here', he continued in a tone which, resembling Liliana's, betrayed more than a little note of self-irony. Soon upon arrival, Claudiu too recounted how the sense of entitlement he derived from his cultural capital and intellectual position took a markedly different turn, when the first British man he tried to rent from stood him up by keeping his deposit. Within the first year he moved in with other Romanians. Construction workers with a fraction of his education, children of subsistence farmers, and people he never would have chosen to live with at first, all became a part

of his new entourage. 'All my arrogance about having gone to university and not wishing to do the work below', Claudiu confessed, 'disappeared the moment I ran out of money'.

The Home of Multiple Occupancy was one particularly vivid space for observing new and unexpected spaces of togetherness. Yet work encounters too prompted a reassessment of one's expectations, and with it a reassessment of who one was. 'Here you do things you would never do at home', said Iuliana, the Social Policy MA, recalling a time she had to climb a house in order to satisfy one of her clients, who wished to see her roof light cleaned. Marius, a journalism graduate who left for the first time in his late 40s, evoked discovering how 'on a construction site you don't need two degrees'. In his case too, the narrative oscillated between framing his experience in the comforting lens of self-discovery, where he portrayed hard manual work in construction as a welcome challenge to the 'lazy' stability of his professional life in Romania, to realising that he was, in fact, part of a story of underemployment shared by many:

> That was an interesting experience because there were lots of Romanians in the team, and the majority were intellectuals doing the hardest kind of physical work. It was like in the book, 'The Earth's most beloved son', where intellectuals are sentenced to work in labour camps by the communists. The characters were very interesting, this has to be written down because it was a weird 3 months. So on that site it was me, a journalist, there was a guy, the most interesting of them all, who was a lecturer at Babes Bolyai University[54] – he had told his students that he has coming to see the Olympics, when in fact he was working on a construction site! There was another guy who finished computer science who faked a blue card….Our team manager was also a Romanian with a degree in electronics…then there was a guy from Cluj who was also very intelligent. [55]

6.3. The Romanian way as mode of being

I am certainly not the first to remark upon the discrepancies between migrants' level of training and professional experience, and the professional trajectories they undertook. Several scholars have noted the prevalence of underemployment (Anderson et al., 2006; Jayaweera & Anderson, 2008), particularly when transitional immigration controls limited access to low skilled positions in agriculture, food packaging and self-employed construction (Briggs & Dobre 2014; Ivancheva 2007).

[54] Babes Bolyai is a prestigious Romanian University in the city of Cluj.

[55] Written in 1980 by Marin Preda, and published the same year, the novel caused a sensation among Romanian readers for its ability to draw, subtly, upon humorous terminology and complex plotting, and squeeze a highly critical fresco of Romania's Stalinist decade between the censorship mechanisms in place. Preda's novel is often invoked as a reference point in Romania's narrative of intellectual resistance through culture.

Economists have found vast occupation-skill mismatches (Clark et al. 2014; Drinkwater et al. 2009), where overqualification was seen both as a measure of migrants' own inability to export their skills (Chiswick & Miller 2009), and of employers' reluctance to invest in them (Dustmann 1999). Authors who took the micro approach, furthermore, reflected upon the difficulty of applying skill-based labels to well qualified individuals who come to work in manual labour positions (Parutis 2014). European migrants negotiate (Csedő 2008) the reading of their class, it was argued. Many a time they were shown to adopt strategic cosmopolitanism (Moroşanu, 2013, 2015a) or blunt affirmations of whiteness, in an attempt to lift themselves in a labour market they perceived as underscored by racial hierarchies (Crăciun, 2013; Fox, 2013; McDowell, Dwyer, & Bressey, 2008).

The conversations I had in the Neighbourhood too included, at times, angry interventions filled with openly racist remarks; when informants who had found themselves having to vacate HMOs blamed their Indian landlords, for being 'too tight' and 'too dirty' to get the house in order; or when those tired of working 10 hour shifts at the Butcher's sneered at passers-by, women of colour, for enjoying what they thought was an unfair privilege of 'churning out children and staying on benefits'. The resemblance with the British tabloid discourse, as well as that with the long running racism against the Roma, have been well documented. What seems to have received less attention, however, in conversations focused on the boundaries Romanian migrants drew between us and them, is the very creation of us: the togetherness organised between those who found themselves dwelling, even temporarily, within the same spaces of precarity.

There was no denying, first of all, the instrumental reason for drawing upon other Romanian migrants: friends, friends of friends, or others who were even called upon at random, as Liliana recounted, by virtue of their accessibility - in speaking the same language, and in harbouring a familiarity of experience which neither British nationals nor other migrants shared. Their house sharing arrangements were just the most obvious examples in this sense. All of my informants recounted drawing upon the help of conationals, similarly, in order to find work for the first time, or navigate the fast paced and short-term cycle of self-employment. One common practice among women who worked in domestic cleaning, for instance, was to pass on their surplus of clients to newcomers who asked for their help - with or without making a request for commission. Another, which was most frequent in the life stories of men who worked in construction, was to engage in a practice I propose to call 'artisan bureaucracies'. It is here that the power of shared precarity to

blend instrumental rationality with an affective form of togetherness became most apparent, so it is worth unpacking it in a bit more detail.

Despite the very public valorisation of freedom, liberal states suffer from a bureaucratic paradox (Graeber, 2015), where every new claim to deregulation is accompanied by a layer of paperwork. Nowhere was this contradiction between a claim to freedom and an everyday bondage by accountancy more visible, than in the fiscal responsibilities transferred onto the self-employed. Anyone who wished to take up this status had to apply first for a National Insurance Number. He or she would then register as a sole-trader with the HM Revenue and Customs, acquire a Unique Tax Reference number, and join the ranks of tax paying citizens who 'self-assess', at the end of the year, and make a direct payment to the state. Yet in an example of Catch 22 bureaucratic circularity, it was at the National Insurance application, before they even had the chance to begin the process of becoming fiscally visible, that several of my informants were first required to provide proof of already existing work: invoices, client reference letters, and other such written artefacts which make up the granulated, everyday bureaucracy of self-employment.

To many of them, this requirement meant rejection. Unable to 'see like a state' (Scott 1998), and translate the casual engagements they undertook in the language of accountancy, many were left bemused (Das 2004) by their encounters with the 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) who ran the interview. This had been precisely the case of twenty-five-year-old Marian, a graduate in International Relations, who had first worked cash in hand as a painter for a Romanian contractor he had met through his housemates, before taking up another brief casual engagement as a labourer's assistant, until he finally found 'a nice English lady' for whom he settled to work as a gardener. To a savvy professional accountant, the work Marian undertook, the money he earned, and the everyday transport costs he incurred could easily have fit the typology of self-employment. There is nothing illegal in earning cash payments, as he did, and the legal validity of verbal arrangements is an indicator of the liberal valorisation of consent. Translating those engagements in the language of accountancy on his own, however, was a much more complex affair. Both Marian and the people he had worked for knew that he was not a labourer looking to make a business of painting, but a young man seeking to earn just enough to cover rent until something better came along. None of his actual work engagements were formalised. On account of 'insufficient evidence' therefore, his application for a NINo was denied, twice in a row. In the end, he recounted,

fabricating the credible paperwork needed to get the Number became a personal 'exercise in creativity'.

> Getting the NINo was like playing the lottery. You would call some friends and ask them to write some references for you. Right, so let's say 'on the 1st of March Marian painted a room, it was great, I paid them this much, in cash'. It had to be cash! Then you'd get another friend to say that 'on March the 10th Marian painted a fence', then the same story, cash payments. The referees chose English names for themselves, because we all thought that a Romanian name would trigger suspicion. Of course they had to speak excellent English in case the NINo people called. It was an elaborate project, people really used their imagination; after the NINo interview we had to tell referees what the story was in case they got the phone call, then we all waited breathlessly for a decision.

The collective rule bending which helped Marian formalise his work was one of a series of arrangements deployed to circumvent the requirements for evidence. It was not uncommon for a Romanian man to start work on a construction site by citing the Unique Tax Reference and National Insurance Number of an acquaintance – a form of fraud, in the eyes of the law, this was how Doru got by at first. Nor was it rare for a new migrant to cite someone else's bank details if the work he or she found only accepted direct debit payments, then call in regularly to ask their acquaintance to pay the money in cash (see also Datta 2012). My colleague at the EEAC and I had devised our own strategy of meeting the sedentism criterion required at the point of registration for self-assessment, by allowing clients without a stable address to receive their mail at the office. Using someone else's address, we later learned, was also a tactic deployed by those who sublet, and who would otherwise not have been entitled to in-work benefits, where applications are only approved for one household per address.

On one level, these were the instrumental everyday arrangements of ordinary people faced with bureaucratic barriers which could only be surpassed with a degree of rule bending. Like artisan bureaucracies, these artifices exposed at once the vacuousness of the 'utopia of rules' (Graeber, 2015), with their modernist claim to transparency over connections, and the dangers of shifting responsibilities for accountancy onto individuals. The documents Marian and his friends fabricated were but the hand crafted, improvised attempts by the educated poor to sound formal. They drew their veracity not from filling a slot in a well-designed system, but from 'English names', as he put it; from creative redeployments of Britain's racialised division of labour, that made Romanians

appear like genuine workers to the extent they laboured for white English patrons – much like The Economist article I referenced earlier did in welcoming migrants and Poles who cut 'our cabbages'.

On a broader level, however, such arrangements spoke also to the power of precarity to constitute a togetherness of a different kind; an ethical togetherness in personhood, and not simply drawn upon for its utility. I found it revealing how, during one interview with Mihail, a young man who described the machinations needed to finally get a Unique Tax Reference number, he summarised the process nonchalantly, as doing it 'in the Romanian style'. Recounting the creativity needed to get a National Insurance Number, Marian too kept nodding, as if to punctuate through gestures rendered barely perceptible in the transcription, that the ensemble of ingenuity, connections and rule bending was part of a distinct sociality 'people like us' should be well acquainted with. He lowered his head and threw a meaningful glance across the table, with every mention of 'friends', 'some references', and 'cash, it had to be cash'.

Like anyone who lived in Romania through the 1990s and 2000s, my informants and I had grown up with an organic, gut level understanding of what doing things in a masculinised 'Romanian way' (or style) meant. I noted in an earlier chapter how, at the level of the public imaginary, 'the Romanian', was the subject defined quintessentially by an ability to get by. *He* was the type who could recycle and keep moving against all odds; the type whom prominent intellectuals like Vinitlă Mihăilescu, examined as object of inquiry, as much as they took for granted as an actually existing sociality. It was not always easy to dislodge this motif from the familiarity of common sense, and unpack just what animated this frequent, but often opaque, claim to a separate mode of being invoked in doing things 'the Romanian way'. Like the *svoi*, *nash* and *savejie*, or the nationalised tropes of Cubans who 'invent', Russians who 'endure', and others who 'get by', its significance was revealed precisely through its ordinariness, and from the ease with which things could be 'Romanianised'.

The Neighbourhood teemed with self-styled accountants, who had made a business out of performing the kinds of 'exercises in creativity' Marian referenced, when Romanian migrants needed to navigate British bureaucracy. Equipped with a good level of English and a modicum of IT literacy, these were the consultants who did not shy away from pushing the boundaries of legality: in their clients' tax returns, where they would understate the incomes earned, in their applications

for student loans, where they backdated their clients' claims to self-employment in order to meet the qualifying residency period for a maintenance grant, or indeed in declaring months of black-market work as form of self-employment, in order to help pregnant women qualify for maternity allowance.

Scholars of migration have recently turned their attention to the development of a 'migration industry', constituted by the numerous 'private lawyers, travel agents, recruiters, organisers, fixers and brokers who sustain links with origin and destination countries' (Cohen 2008 p. 163). While much work focuses on trafficking, citing the high fees and financial indebtedness generate by these intermediaries as examples of immobility (Hernandez-Leon 2005; Salt & Stein 1997), and questioning the ability of such commercial infrastructures to facilitate migrants' independent decision making (Xiang & Lindquist 2014 p. 125), 'it is important to realise', as Garapich notes in his investigation of Polish intermediaries, that 'many of these agents actively ease migrants' incorporation and adaptation' (Garapich 2008 p. 737). The actors comprising the migration industry range widely, from entrepreneurs to criminal organisations (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sorensen 2013), and the relation between commerce and community is often blurred.

Looking at the brokers who specialised in artisan bureaucracies in the case of Romanian migrants, it was not always easy to draw the boundary between interest, utility, and genuine affection for those who would have otherwise been struggling. On one level, the instrumental axis was visible enough. From a simple phone call related to applications for the National Insurance Number, to more complex housing benefit applications, every such service provided by Romanian accountants had a price. Some of the people I interviewed recounted paying £50 to have someone set up a National Insurance Number. Yet to reduce the exchange to mere transactionalism would overlook the fact that, in stretching the boundaries of legality as they did, the accountants themselves took on a risk that was only mitigated by a level of trust in their clients.

A similar ambivalence between care and transactionalism characterised the contraband network in the Neighbourhood – another practice I had often heard included in the motif of Romanianness. I was standing outside Florin's shop, talking to Claudiu. He had taken up the hobby of publishing a satirical Romanian newspaper, and was thus a tireless observer of the area. I shared my surprise at how seamlessly the contraband network ran under the counter of every Romanian business, and

how so many people appeared to know and talk about it, when police officers were regularly patrolling the area. The business was by far the biggest source of revenue at Florin's shop. Yet somehow, I remarked, its existence was disclosed to me, a relative stranger, within the very first week of observation; as it was, in fact, disclosed to many of the new customers who entered the shop every day, and whom Cristina and her colleagues had only an instant to assess.

To Claudiu, this ability to close ranks when needed and stay under the radar appeared only natural. 'They came here and they pulled each other over' he noted simply: 'and they brought their Romanian ways with them'. There was an assumption here that the secret would be well guarded and that, as another client, a young man from a Moldovan village said: 'Romanians don't talk to the police'. As with the practice of street-level accountancy, the level of acquiescence which enabled the contraband business to flourish rested, no doubt, upon an element of interest. The business earned Florin and others like him hefty sums; it paid lorry drivers a commission, and it ensured that Romanian smokers could procure a minimal indulgence for prices which did not exceed their hourly rates. But a narrow focus of interest did not explain why Cristina and the young women who staffed Romanian shops did it without either sharing into the profits, or why they ruled out disclosing it even after she and Florin fell out.

'What would happen to all those poor people who come for their cigarettes', Cristina asked rhetorically, when I enquired whether she ever considered stopping. It appeared, therefore, that just as with the case of artisan bureaucracies, a level of rule-bending 'brought here', as Claudiu said, was just what it took to entertain a minor indulgence for people whom Cristina recognised as deserving, by virtue of striving. Seeing her place her trust in the strangers who crossed the shop floor, any of whom could have been an inspector undercover, reminded me of a remark Liliana made, about her housemates. At first, she recounted being bothered by the way they 'were ready to pop a barbeque every time, play *manele*, and fill the entire house with smoke'. In the end, however, her opinion had changed with the realisation that everyone was just trying to cope:

> 'we all learn here. I appreciated them, even if they were troubled youth, because unlike youth in Romania who still live off their parents' back, they took to the world and they send their parents money. And they do this by living in inhumane conditions, two or three in one room. They struggle, they work hard for very little money, especially last year when they couldn't get the [National Insurance] Number and they had to work illegally, asking for work in the street.

Spaces of precarity thus create moments of strife. And with it, a togetherness in instrumentality and in affect, which many a time took the form of the Romanian sociality of getting by with cunning and connections. This, it must be made clear, was not the romantic solidarity of the poor ready to rebel. We can hardly talk of nationalism either, since such arrangements rested upon a profound critique of the Romanian political class. What emerged around the spaces of precarity constituted at the intersection of immigration controls, work, housing and their particular bureaucracies, was rather a togetherness in need, just as the proverb Liliana reproduced put it. A togetherness where the Romanian subject invoked was neither the dangerous class of the international precariat, nor the organically solidary subject of imagined communities, animated by national zeal. The ethno-national element was mobilised, rather, to give a name to the 'people like us', who are formed through subjection to power. A cunning, not a heroic collective, who had rule bending 'in their blood', as one informant put it when I asked just why she thought it was Romanian accountants in particular who 'spin things': 'If they see a washing machine in the road they will pick it up and sell the parts for scrap iron. If they see a mattress they will open it up and see the fluff inside. That's what they are like, they have this in their blood'.

6.4. Conclusion

I started this thesis with a pledge to explain the breadth of Romanian discontent as an ethnicisation of precarity. This chapter has shown how the systematic erosion of social security prompted an instrumentalisation of Romanianness. As Romanian migrants who self-identified as educated intellectuals found themselves sharing intimacies with peasants they hardly would have socialised with otherwise, so a new collective too was formed: in the conditions of possibility encountered, in the alliances formed strategically, but also in the domain of affect.

It did not take being from the same village to make a claim to the sort of ethic of responsibility that was prevalent in Corbu. The Romanian and the 'Romanian way' of being mobile were manifested, rather, through having to resort to particular ways of living, working, or even entertaining an indulgence which straddled the boundaries of legality. Planned or unexpected, propped by pre-existing networks or arrangements formed in the precarious grooves of the city, the act of getting by was Romanianised, when old tropes of cunning were deployed in new spaces of need, to reaffirm the motif of a distinct Romanian sociality.

As ethnographers who studied the phenomenon have argued, however, these solidarities are neither permanent, nor immutable. In the next chapter I look at the dark side of this ethnicisation of precarity, where reliance on the informal help of personal connections can lead to exploitation, and when disappointment is similarly channelled at Romanians who appear to look the other way when called upon.

CHAPTER 7. THE FRAGILE AMBIVALENCE OF NETWORKED MOBILITY

It was a cold and drizzly January morning when I first met Cristina, at work in Florin Savu's shop. She was hovering by the till in her red vest; her eyes fixed on a small TV that was playing Romanian pop videos, her hand reaching hastily for the crackers tucked in a pack underneath the counter. That, I later learned, was lunch. And since it wouldn't be long before another customer would come in to ask for the regular pack of cigarettes, every moment of respite which arose had to be well spent: grabbing a snack, resting her back before another delivery came in, or just checking in with the parents from back home.

Like many of the women I met over the months I spent in the Neighbourhood, Cristina had found the job with the help of a connection. She had asked Doru, to ask Sorin, to ask his uncle, in turn, to find a place for her at one of his businesses. It was lucky, she thought, that just before she started working for Florin the main cashier who used to do the job had quit without a trace. She knew all too well that every summer in Corbu there were more young men and women waiting to be pulled up than there were positions opening in the city; just as she knew, without having to be reminded, that many favours had been exchanged until she could get this one first foothold in the city. It was thus with a degree of calm acceptance that Cristina and her colleagues followed into every one of Florin's instructions. And it was through their everyday routine that, it soon became apparent, the young women who felt lucky to have been given work came to perform what to any labour activist looked like the textbook image of exploitation.

Every day at the corner shop, Cristina and her colleagues worked in restless nine hour shifts, for as little as £4 per hour – 'a decent amount', she told me, given how some of the supermarkets nearby paid by the week, muddling together as many as sixty hours in deals that came to less than £3 an hour. There were no rest breaks and no food breaks. To speak of formalities such as payslips or employment contracts, just as to mention the prospect of weekends off or maternity pay seemed absurd. Every minute another customer would come in to ask for the regular order: energizer and cigarettes, most of the time. And every minute too, through the simple act of doing the job they had been graced with, the women found themselves drawn into a business which earned their bosses thousands, by pushing them at the forefront of illegality.

Over the months I spent in the Neighbourhood, I watched Cristina and her three colleague provide advice on smuggled antibiotics dosages, open up prospectuses for kidney stones drugs, and sell endless packs of cigarettes to the men and women who came in. Most times, the business proceeded seamlessly: they had gotten used to recognising the 'people from here' who could be trusted, by looks and language, and had even come to anticipate when the regular customers would show up. They would reach inside a nook carved underneath the counter, or cross over to a little room at the back where they pulled the cartons from a loose ceiling panel, while customers waited patiently by the till. It was almost unsettling to observe the ease with which cashiers and clients reproduced a practice that could have shut the entire business down and have them prosecuted.

Other times however, rumours of inspections sent them and their boss into a frenzy. I was in the shop when a visit by an unusually well-dressed native Romanian speaker, whom one of the cashiers suspected of being an undercover inspector, threw her into a small panic attack; just as I was in the area when, fearing that an inspection would expose his involvement in the trade, Florin had asked his staff to hide the goods in their bags, and pretend they were for personal consumption – taking, in effect, responsibility for a trade which shared none of its daily proceeds with them.

To me, and to my colleagues at the EEAC, work in the Neighbourhood read like a familiar image of mistreatment. To officers of the HM Revenue and Customs, the capillary network of suppliers who sustained the smuggling was an 'increasingly challenging' (HAC 2014: para 11) criminal organisation which lost the UK £1.6 billion in unpaid duty, and positioned Romania as fourth largest source country (RUSI 2016). To many of those who found themselves at the forefront of the practice

however, the contraband simply blended into the fabric of the normal, like the hourly rates and the multiple occupancy arrangements. 'It's what it's like around here', Cristina noted calmly after reading the surprise on my face the first time I learnt of the trade. 'We sell normal cigarettes', she said leaning towards the stamped packs displayed on the wall behind her, 'and we sell the contraband'. 'When you work here you have to be a cashier, a pharmacist and a smoker'.

Seeing how the Neighbourhood had normalised so seamlessly a 'work relation where employment security … is lacking' (ILO 2005: 8), poorly paid, unprotected, and characterised by a relationship to the state that was at best ambiguous, it was hard to not notice how the help which men like Florin had offered those he brought over, had become more akin to a relation of patriarchal patronage than one of mutual assistance. With his rags to riches story known to all in the village of Corbu, Florin filled his shop and his nephew's construction site with people who enabled them to build a veritable 'empire', in Claudiu's words. They were young women like Cristina in the largest part, who were too poor, too inexperienced, and too recently acquainted with the thicket of bureaucracy which mediates lawful employment in the UK to demand a formalisation of their work; and they were people who felt, as this chapter will begin to illustrate, too indebted to begin to challenge a relation that was, from the outside, so akin to exploitation.

Like Florin Savu, who would cash as much as £4,000 in one day according to his staff, there were other gold-clad, BMW driving business owners, who stood out in the Neighbourhood like local barons in a sea of precarious workers, the same way in which returning migrants stood out on the hills of Corbu. They were bosses who would park sideways without flinching, walk in the bistro and get served for free, occasionally having their hands shaken by the manager. These were people like 'the Boar from [the county of] Suceava', who owned the butcher's and an exclusive beauty salon, and who was fabled for having built his business with connections in organised crime; or Pentecostal Andrea, who ran a Romanian supermarket and a large warehouse, and who was renowned for recruiting new migrants from one of the Pentecostal Romanian churches to have sprung in North London. Each one was the employer of anything between half a dozen and twenty Romanian workers; young women for the largest part, whom they had graced with the favour of giving them a job. And each one, this chapter shows, was running a small fortune by turning that favour into what, from the outside at least, looked like nothing short of exploitation.

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Earlier in this thesis I have shown how the precarious grooves which opened in the interstices of a neoliberal political economic configuration, created unexpected forms of togetherness across class and gender divisions. Peasants and middle class Romanians, suddenly unable to carry out the fantasy of getting by independently, found themselves navigating their mobility 'the Romanian way': drawing upon favours, toning down their pretences for distinction, and testing the limits of legality, if that was what it took.

Relationships, however, are never fixed. Drawing upon the case of Cristina and her colleagues, this chapter illustrates the ways in which an act that starts with grace, can descend into a form of profit making. When the sociality of help leaves the element of return open to interpretation, and a new migrant turns from 'someone I brought over' to 'my employee', 'my tenant', or any other subject position defined through an explicit hierarchy, the sense of indebtedness that comes with being helped can also slowly morph into an act of patronage. This chapter continues thus the journey into Romanian migrants' exchange of help, by looking more closely at these moments of relational disjunction, where the togetherness conjured between 'people like us' appeared to turn that very same 'us' into the image of exploitation.

Starting with an overview of indebtedness, particularly in its indeterminate form adopted in favour exchanges, I examine the disputes which arose when those who claimed to help ended up abusing, when those who seemed in a position to help appeared to hold back, eliciting allegations of selfishness, and finally when those who offered help found that their gesture was betrayed by insincere acknowledgement. Granted, to scholars of mobility such forms of exploitation between migrants constitute a familiar finding, explored at length within the networks literature. Beyond the sheer realisation that hierarchies of power can ensue within communities imagined as solidary from the outside, what I want to stress here is the interplay between the inherent instability of favours, and the political economic configuration which exacerbates it by transferring social security onto individuals. It is only by grasping this inherent potential of help to slide intro patronage that we can discuss in the next and final chapter, how Romanianness becomes the object of discontent.

7.1. ‘He brought me here’ or the power of indebtedness

It was long past 10PM and the shop had just got a delivery. Twenty-two-year-old Andrea and twenty-three-year-old Corina, who were on duty when Cristina took time off, had been working since the morning, and the only dinner they had grabbed was the savoury cheesecake I offered to buy from the Romanian patisserie that was still open at that hour. ‘I can’t even leave this place’, Corina noted in exasperation, as we were squatting to replenish the 2L Tutti Frutti sodas along the bottom shelves. She was tired and hungry, anxious, and worried that after just a couple of months of work Florin had given her the sizeable responsibility of keeping the contraband business running, quite literally, from the confines of her bedroom. Rumours of possible inspections were running high after a supermarket down the road received an unexpected inspection which turned it upside down. Determined to keep the business going, but also cautious to evade being found out, Florin had gone from simply asking his staff to store a few cartons inside their bags, to demanding that Corina, whom he had also graced with the favour of finding her a room, receives deliveries directly at the apartment. ‘The end of the road is the furthest [I] can go’, she noted with a sense of resignation, the moment I asked whether she had considered searching for something else.

There was no denying the fatigue that had settled in that evening; the anxiety of breaking rules without knowing the consequences, and the pressure to quickly scrutinise every customer who walked in, in an attempt to separate those who could be trusted, from the increasingly sophisticated snoops of tax collectors. I was there when the visit of a native Romanian speaker who wore a bright red tie and smart trousers, in a neighbourhood where most people wore casual work attire, and who then had the uninspired idea to ask whether the shop had ‘any cigarettes’, when every cashier knew that genuine smokers were highly particular about brands, sent Andrea into spiralling doubt. ‘Will I be deported’, ‘can I get a ban forever?’ she asked, fearing that inspectors had begun recruiting Romanians. The questions weighed on her over the course of the week, making visible just how little she knew of her legal status, of her rights and responsibilities as a European migrant in the UK, and above all of the risks couched under the normal of what happens in the Neighbourhood.

And yet, for all the occasional moments of frenzied uncertainty, the vents uttered in the quiet minutes she had between serving customers, or late at night when shelves were being replenished, were as far as the vocal complaints went. After the chilling visit of the undercover inspector, when finally alone with both of the young women I asked whether it might be time to stand up to Florin, and use the recency of the inspection as leverage, Corina placated the allusion noting simply: 'he brought me here'. This was the same way cashiers in every Romanian business I entered would respond when I appeared to question, even just tentatively, the levels of pay, insecurity, and work conditions which had blended into the acceptable of 'what it's like around here'.

'What exactly did he do', I asked, to make it worth the risk of being found out and charged with smuggling, the pressure of working round the clock for what was barely half minimum wage rates, and from having to virtually engineer their own legality - by signing up for self-employment and paying tax from the puny wages they earned. From the shop floor, flanked by soda bottles under the white neon light, Corina responded simply, with a tone which precluded further questioning: 'he bought my ticket'. Feeling as if the answer needed more conviction, a few moments later she added: 'he gave me a job', then 'he found me a room'.

Through the course of the months I spent visiting the shop I learnt how Corina had paid in fact, in one form of another, for every one of the apparent privileges she enumerated. She had paid close to £100 for the minivan ticket to London (the same minivan transport which carried the contraband). She covered the costs of her accommodation, and she continued to pay still, with her acquiescence and sense of duty, for the risks Florin offloaded onto his staff. Florin had merely shown her how to travel and where to live. As in the case of informants I described in an earlier chapter, who invoked broad cultural signifiers like 'the Beatles' to give voice to the gut-feeling that Europe was the space of infinite mobility, it was not so much what she had been given that she felt indebted for, but rather the organic feeling that Florin's influence had opened doors which would have otherwise stayed shut. It is in this sense that his favour was twice existential: premised on a notion of togetherness and embroiled in a common subjectivity rooted in Corbu, but existential also in the assumption that his help would change her life. After all, this was how work abroad was refracted in the imaginary of many Romanians for whom the country seemed to have little to offer. As Corina invoked the list of things she had been given with every squatting step along the shelves,

tired, doubtful, as if searching for the answer in the bottles we arranged, it was hard to shake the sense that the debt least seen was the debt which weighed the most.

Scholars of migration have long highlighted the role of indebtedness in the perpetuation of precarity. Studies of mobility have shown how migrant networks can engender patronage as much as they can facilitate cross border movements, and how even the most seemingly dramatic cases of exploitation, such as that encountered by women trafficked into years of sex work, can be woven into a sense of normality when destitution at home leaves them little choice (Carling 2005; O'Connell Davidson 2006). Pointing to the cynical complicity between developed countries' need for docile labour, and political regimes that restrict mobility, scholars have unpacked the power of immigration controls to increase dependency upon mediators, articulating along with it a very real risk of exploitation (Anderson & Rogaly 2005; Anderson 2013, 2015; De Genova 2004; 2002; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sorensen 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2015).

In her extensive research of sex workers, for instance, and in her engagement with the Modern Day Slavery debate, Julia O'Connell Davidson (2015, 2013; Martins Jr, 2016) powerfully demonstrates how, from the professional agents (2010, 2012) of the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sorensen, 2013) who charge their clients extortionate fees in order to help them move, to the less formal networks which can engender relations of patronage, migration is a highly mediated process whose layers of indebtedness do much to continue the poor's acceptance of substandard work conditions abroad. The blunt distinctions between freedom and enslavement drawn by the Modern Day Slavery debate reduce workers to passive victimhood, and dangerously simplify the reality of exploitation. Much more is to be said, O'Connell Davidson argues, about the subtle but no less prevalent unfreedoms of voluntary migrants; the au pairs, service staff, and other inconspicuous subjects, whose burden of indebtedness is not so much expressed in acts of physical coercion, but couched rather in the infinitely interpretable return of heart, which comes with asking to be pulled abroad by 'their own'.

Earlier in this thesis I engaged with the recent attempts of economic anthropologists to take seriously the sociality of favours, showing how one rarely lends a hand to a simple stranger, but does so after a moment of recognition. To avoid the language of transactionalism, however, is not the same as to preclude an expectation of return. Ineffable as it may be, floating over and above

what counts, a certain expectation of return in personhood, if not in quantifiable amounts, remains: to acknowledge, to appreciate, and to respond, as David Graeber (2014b) notes, when and however needed. It is here, in this realm of indeterminate indebtedness in subjectivity that favours appeared to slide: across the boundaries of instrumentality and affect, across the boundaries of grace and profit, and indeed, as it was apparent in the relations I observed between the cashiers in the Neighbourhood and the men they credited so implacably with having 'brought them over', across the fine boundaries between the mutual constitution which underlies the act of helping, and the separateness of patronising. It is the language of openness, in other words, that holds the most insidious power to conceal these relational transformations, and to allow a practice of exploitation beneath references to togetherness.

Over the months I spent in the Neighbourhood it became increasingly evident that, however exploitative work conditions appeared, to Cristina and her colleagues at nearby businesses, bosses like Florin, the Boar from Suceava, or Pentecostal Andrea were simply not the ruthless profit makers they appeared to be from the outside. 'I'm not stupid', Andrea noted with directness, in one of the many conversation which circled back and forth around her double-edged fearing, and supporting of, the cigarette trade below the counter. 'I understood from the beginning that what we are doing here is not exactly legal'. Then, followed the invariable disjunction: 'I know it's not right, but he is a good man who helped a lot of people'. 'He loves his children and does what he has to do'. 'Were anything to happen', Andrea continued trustingly, 'he would just pay the fine'.

There always seemed to be a redeeming quality in the way women depicted their bosses, which stopped short of portraying the work relation as injustice. Just as for Andrea and the other young women at the corner shop Florin appeared as a benevolent patriarch, who would protect them when the need arose, for twenty-nine-year-old Clara who worked at the Butcher's and had a degree in Tourism, her boss was not 'the Boar' feared locally for his connections in the mafia, but 'uncle' – a man who made sure that she would not migrate 'risking it' (*la risc*), but come 'in certainty' (*la sigur*). For all his reputation, and frankly intimidating presence, for all the rumours that he had built a fortune in London in the early 2000s by robbing Albanian burglars and getting involved in proxenetism, or that he earned his nickname based on a territoriality he shares with swine who aggressively defend their place at the trough, to Clara and her colleague the boss was a benign figure. 'It's none of my business what he does', was what Lucretia, an employee at his beauty salon

noted, while the floor of the nail bar area was being used by a few of his ominous associates to pop the tags of what looked like a bag full of stolen accessories.

To many of the other residents who lived in the Neighbourhood and walked past his businesses, the group of young associates from the Boar's clique formed a presence that was as unsavoury as it was visible. They flaunted their cars and jewellery, drove and parked aggressively, and earned a reputation for shifting goods around. 'They just don't care about how many parking fines they get, this is their turf' a Romanian cafe owner told me. Or as Vlad, a computer science graduate, portended to explain when I confessed that I found their mannerisms frightening: 'there are three types of criminal: there are those who busy themselves with small time stuff and want to pretend they have made it when it is obvious they have not', he said, gesturing at the youngest group of men. 'There are the mid-range mafiosos who earn good money from what they do, and there are those who don't need to get their hands dirty anymore, they have others doing the work for them'. The Boar, he added, was very much in that top category. Within a couple of months of starting fieldwork at the Butcher's, Claudiu even warned that it might be best to avoid the business and take the conversation about employment rights elsewhere if I wanted to stay, as he said, 'on the safe side'.

And yet, none of these motifs had made it to the conversations we had on the shop floor. Whether it was by invoking shared inexperience, as Cristina did in noting that Florin 'was from there', by building togetherness in family values, as Andrea did when she insisted that Florin was a caring father, or by appreciating their ethics of '[helping] a lot of people' and looking out for the poor, women drew on axes of commonality which continued to keep their bosses within the moral realm of 'people like us': people who had lent a hand, and whom one could hardly begin to challenge.

The acquiescence inherited with the privilege of being pulled up was, of course, one element in a complex relationship. Cristina and her colleagues knew all too well that other layers of authority mediated their relationships too, such as the power that came with their bosses' age, their wealth and experience abroad, and their indisputable influence back home, where they were looked up to as future-makers, and not as bosses cultivating a docile workforce. Then there was the notable authority perpetuated by a networked form of patriarchy. The bosses who directed women's everyday work in the Neighbourhood, the partners who had helped them find the jobs, and the

people who administered the remittances they sent back were all men. When we take into account the fact that rural Romania is a particularly patriarchal space, where the Orthodox church positions men as heads of the family, and the economic configuration makes men the de facto bread winners, it becomes apparent how implausible it was for young women like Corina to challenge the dealings of their boss.

The feeling that one could not confront the person who 'pulled her' did not preclude an interest in quietly finding somewhere better to work. Within just a few meetings the questions women began to ask me swiftly turned to matters of legality. Leaning on the counter, often with a side of coffee to complement the frugal diet they could squeeze in their short breaks at work, we would repurpose the spiral notebook they normally used to place the custom smuggling orders, and draw what employment rights advocates would probably call the basics of workers' entitlements: tables which contrasted the rights of self-employed individuals with those of employees, bullet points with the National Minimum Wage rates, and the telephone number of the HMRC Pay and Rights Helpline who had, in theory, a duty to investigate cases of underpayment. Had Florin paid their share correctly, every member of his staff was due an additional £4,580 a year.

For as long as they were still on the shop floor, however, that was as far as our conversation ever went. In the Neighbourhood, every day without work constituted a day without pay. The cashiers who were mothers found themselves unable to claim any in-work benefits due to the absence of a formal contract. Pregnant women had to pay 'Romanian accountants' to turn their work into self-employment and help them avoid the £3,000 tariff applied by some NHS trusts to EEA nationals without sickness insurance (Maternity Action 2017). And yet, the feeling that one had been given an unprecedented hand up made it hard to openly challenge those who had lent that had to begin with.

7.2. When contestations stop at the door

The work conditions in the Neighbourhood were just one facet of the patronage which could develop when being brought abroad meant entering a relationship underscored by an explicit hierarchy. The observations I conducted while working at the East European Advice Centre, and the interviews collected then with Romanian men and women, also abounded with examples where acquaintances who had once been mobilised to assist transmogrified, or were seen to have done

so, into patrons who used the position of power to negotiate lower payments, deny workers even a modicum of employment rights, or build veritable businesses off their sense of obligation. These were for instance men like Costachi, who pursued friends' recommendations for jobs to find themselves doing twelve hour shifts in car washes for £40 a day, women whose friends gave them cleaning work, but kept so much of the hourly rate as to drive their pay below minimum wage or, conversely, those who had found that the people they had helped ended up taking their clients. At the intersection of the power relation which comes with the expectation that the people one pulls up 'have to do anything', as Gabi put it that rainy afternoon in Corbu, and the power relations which also run along axes of gender, seniority, and affluence, the 'people from here' who appeared to help could become at once benefactors and exploiters.

Work was far from the only site where help turned into tensions. In the few hours I could spend with Cristina, it became apparent how living together in homes sublet without a license could be as much a space where new intimacies were created, as it was a site of daily contestations. Cristina was lucky to have been found a room, by Doru, in a home just off the Neighbourhood's high street. The head tenants were a couple with a young child, people from the county of Buzău just like herself, who had been brought over by Sorin Savu in the past and where the father had, after years of work, managed to accede to a construction job which paid well enough to meet the earnings requirements of housing agencies, and get a contract for the entire property. As new migrants sought a place to live, and older ones looked to save costs, every bedroom had been repurposed. Cristina and Doru had a room downstairs, two other couples lived on the first floor, while the family of three, as head tenants, took the liberty to occupy the larger repurposed living-room. It was only when going through the front door and spotting the dozen pairs of shoes of different wears and sizes, lined tidily along the entrance hall, that one got a glimpse of the many souls who were living within.

For all the apparent cleanliness of the place, however, the immaculate kitchen and bathrooms, and the garden which had been refashioned to accommodate a trampoline, giving the home a familial air that could not be more different from the image of squalor circulated by the local authority in its crusade against unlicensed multiple occupancy, when looked at from within these relations too had a gendered hierarchy of their own. This was visible first in the distribution of cleaning duties and access to facilities. When all the subtenants had a tacit, bills-inclusive agreement with the

family, every couple paid them a monthly lump sum in cash, leaving it then up to them to divide, cover the bills, and likely keep the excess for themselves, as profit. Since no one else got to see the utility rates, however, much animosity was brewing around what Cristina and Doru quietly regarded as the family's unfair use of their power to regulate the younger couples' access to utilities for their own gain. Heating was limited to a few hours a day. The washing machine was strictly limited to one load a week per couple. 'But don't I pay for the bills?', Cristina burst in frustration one afternoon in her room, noting how her work, her home, and the weather outside were all freezing. 'Besides', she continued, 'for her child they use the washing machine every day, for her child she makes this house [as clean as] a laboratory'.

It was easy to see how the disputes in the home took a gendered character, when it went without saying that it was women who would shoulder the domestic work. Among my informants, I had not encountered any couples where men shared in the tasks of cleaning or preparing food. Partly a continuation of Romania's patriarchal relations, partly accentuated in the UK by the lack of childcare, and the large gender disparities in payments and career trajectories, which positioned Romanian men as the earners, and confined women to the home sphere as soon as they became mothers, domestic duties had remained women's tasks. Every day Cristina had to navigate her space in the kitchen, around the three other women in the home, who cooked separately for their families. It was their names only that featured on the hand drawn table pinned on the refrigerator door, next to the regular cleaning duties: the bathroom every four days, the halls every week.

It was thus in gendered terms too that a mulling resentment built. Cristina found it irritating that a stringent rota had been imposed by the head tenant, with no regard for the time she had to spend, as an active worker, in Florin's shop. Like in many of her colleagues' cases, the time we had to socialise was limited; squeezed between the long shifts at the till, her domestic chores, but also her need to find the slot when she could socialise outside the four walls that enclosed her and Doru's bedroom. For visiting, I learnt, was always dependent on who else was at home, and whether they were likely to be cooking in the kitchen - the only space that had not been sublet. During the few times I was invited over, where my stay ended up overlapping with the time when housemates returned from work, it became apparent that using the kitchen as a space to socialise was the privilege of the head tenants, and the men. If Doru felt confident in sharing meals at the dining table, without him Cristina had her food inside, sitting on their queen bed, where plates were

carefully balanced on knees, or placed on the lid of a laundry basket she would wheel out in lieu of a table.

A sense of necessary self-containment seemed thus to have developed, much like the sense of quiet resignation I encountered among the cashiers who, after voicing their frustration and the tiredness of day-long shifts, would return to the resignation that 'this is what it's like'. 'Back home I had a whole house all to myself', Cristina put it in one of the few times I was allowed to visit. 'Here, my privacy stops at that door'. That was the door to their bedroom, which remained shut at all times. It was the door that separated the small space where she could articulate her discontent, from the rest of the home where she knew too well that, however irritating the head tenants' policing of utilities or their non-transparent division of rent money was, for the relationships they had with the Savus, and for the role they continued to play in her existence in London, there was little room for contestation.

In describing this, I must stress that I do not wish to conjure the image of total submission. Just like most conversations in the shop revolved around women's own questions about the possibility of acceding to other forms of employment, Cristina also knew that, compared to other living arrangements, theirs was relatively privileged. When Doru first arrived, with the help of Sorin, he had lived in a home whose state he described as too decrepit 'for a woman to see'. Other Romanian migrants recounted stories of homes converted into informal hostels, with bunk beds in every bedroom and insalubrious facilities, or sheds cropped up as an extension to a carwash – after all, the borough of Brent made a virtue of displaying them. 'The thing with justice', a law graduate told me in an interview, referring to a time when a friend he had made on a construction site helped him leave his menial labourer position for a position as an ironmonger, paid better but still below the market rate, 'is that it's relative'. 'Why does it matter if I am paid a little below the normal rate, if I am happy with what I get'.

The relations that formed between bosses and staff, contractors and subcontractors, or tenants and sub-tenants were more akin to a slippery field of shifting meanings; where what looked like exploitation from the outside could be regarded as a genuine step up by those on the inside, who still invoked the imagery of being helped at times; or where even contestations from the inside were riddled with disjunctions between what could be thought, voiced, and acted upon. We could

attempt to package this ambiguity under the idiom of an ineffable 'reciprocity of the heart' (Makovicky 2016b p. 203), which remains open to reinterpretation. We could maybe even find some comfort, as David Graeber (2004) does in his praise of anarchism, in the thought that a level of perpetual contestation invariably shadows exchanges in every society where power is not concentrated in insurmountable structures of state and economic inequality.

But while it is important to acknowledge this potential for a certain generative instability, it is equally important, I would argue, to acknowledge the likelihood that instability in meaning does not prevent a certain perpetuation of power relations in practice. That when the help one seems to get is de facto constrained by a legislative framework which restricts access to employment justice, by a housing market which removes single-occupancy from the conditions of possibility of the poor, and indeed by patriarchy, neither appeals to the language of togetherness, nor private attempts at contestation behind closed doors do much to alter ensuing hierarchies.

This is exacerbated when the macro political economic conditions of possibility which instantiate the need for drawing on the help from connections, are paralleled by a certain malicious intentionality on the part of individuals. Helpers-turned-bosses, like Florin and the Boar, did not shy away from breaking every rule in the employment rights book to further their own gain. There was little that mitigated the fact that, for all the general normalisation of contraband as a minor indulgence afforded to the poor, the trade enabled only some to make great profits, while others to take on nerve wrenching risks.

However, with the exception of such cases when bosses made a premeditated business model of underpaying new migrants, there were many more instances when tension arose from a sense of insecurity experienced by both parties, regardless of the differences in their experience abroad. There were cases where the seed of discord lay with old and new migrants' continued subjection to a political economic landscape which instantiated, but also undermined appeals to informal collectives. Nowhere was this more visible than in the conundrum many of my informants encountered when it became apparent that the Romanian men or women they sublet from refused to acknowledge their presence by helping them obtain a proof of address, pushing them in effect towards black market work.

Every application for a bank account, like every application for a National Insurance number, required migrants to evidence that they were practicing a sanctioned form of sedentism. In the absence of tenancy agreements, 'Romanian accountants' had discovered that one could meet this criterion by bringing a letter, written and signed by the head tenant, where he or she confirmed the applicant's presence as a friend who lived at the property, free of charge. As in a virtual transfer of credibility through the medium of paying tax, the letter accompanied by a utility bill, a bank statement, or any other form of official communication addressed to the signatory, could help the newly arrived migrant navigate the requirement for sedentism, and prove the bank that she too was deserving of inclusion into the bureaucratic web that mediates citizenship.

In some respects, the arrangement was remarkably ingenuous. Private 'accountants' and 'solicitors' charged as much as £80 for a bank appointment that was otherwise free, only to pass this information on. Just as in the case of access to the National Insurance number, where reference letters signed with 'English names' were written to conjure the illusion of 'genuine' self-employment, a well-crafted letter accompanied by a bill issued by a British utility company could surpass the barriers placed before the mobility of the poor. That, however, required head tenants' agreement. Many a time, people like the family who sublet to Cristina feared that lending this kind of bureaucratic help to their unbanked housemates would constitute a dangerous exposure to 'the authorities'. It mattered little that no one knew exactly whether and how the information disclosed at an interview with the bank clerk would be passed on. As Veena Das (2004, p. 225) remarked, when the workings of bureaucracy are opaque, interactions with the state can feel more like powerful, indecipherable magic, than like tick boxing exercises. Weary of being found out, many simply refused to help, for fear of disclosing their own illegality. At times what was concealed was merely subletting – an offense which, despite the council's 'zero tolerance' policy, only led to fines if they refused to comply. At other times, the subletting took place in properties for which head tenants were receiving housing benefit, carrying graver risk of criminal prosecution. These were some of the everyday tensions and moments of insecurity which developed when mobility became a matter of drawing on the informal help of friends; when the open-ended indebtedness accrued with being 'brought here' gave rise to relations which slid gradually, and at times even without migrants' realisation, away from the imaginary of togetherness mobilised in the claim of helping, and ever closer to the subject positions of hierarchical patronage.

7.3. Conclusion

It would be naïve to imagine that the spaces of togetherness I described in earlier chapters would last forever, and even more unlikely that they would constitute a permanent cross-class solidarity of a precariat ready to rally around the conditions of exploitation. In-depth observation over time showed just how much tension and de facto manipulation can build between claims of solidarity. As we have seen in the case of bosses in the Neighbourhood, the 'good men' who 'helped a lot of people', simultaneously built profitable smuggling networks at the expense of the young women they portended to have helped. At times, these forms of exploitation were deliberate. In other instances, such as when new migrants found themselves unable to open bank accounts due to their head-tenants' reticence to assist them in crafting a form of proof of address, it was not so much the latter's will to profit, but their own fear of being intercepted that perpetuated precarity.

There was much that separated the will to help from the possibility of doing so. Just as there was much that distinguished the language of togetherness, from the practice of patronage. This chapter has explored one facet of this tension, by looking at the practical forms of insecurity my informants encountered when the togetherness upon which their help had been premised was disrupted. I mentioned the precarious work, the risk of being found to participate in an illegal business, or indeed the everyday disputes which arose in the private sphere of multiple occupancy homes. What remains still to be unpacked, is that in time the type of resentment Cristina built around being under the surveillance of a controlling woman, also pushed the sense of duty she first felt into the background. Her control over facilities felt stingy. The rationing of heating time without an account of just how much they cost felt like an unfair appropriation of the money everyone contributed to the rent agreed informally. Having looked at the conditions which instantiated appeals to help in the name of Romanianness, and having examined the ruptures which emerged, the next and final ethnographic chapter closes the explanation of the paradox that drove this thesis, by showing how the resentment which built quietly behind closed doors became a resentment against Romanianness.

CHAPTER 8. THE DANGEROUS ETHNICISATION OF BROKEN NETWORKS

The weather outside was mild, and the streets of the Neighbourhood seemed more spacious in the summer sun. It was nearing the end of July, and many of the Romanian residents of North London had already gone back for holidays. 'You can finally catch your breath', said Andrea, who was still serving at the till in the corner shop; only with fewer customers, with less demand for contraband for the time being, and two completely different colleagues.

I found Cristina sitting on her own, sipping a large cup of hot chocolate at the chain coffee shop on the high street. Over the past three months we had made a habit out of meeting there in the corporate branded space - one of the few where she could rest assured that she would not run into Doru, Florin, or any curious associates she would likely encounter at the Romanian cafe in the Neighbourhood.

Seeing how the streets were getting emptier the atmosphere felt sombre, like it was time for a reflection. It would not be long before she and Doru would go back to Romania either; so there we were, nearing the end of my fieldwork and almost a year of her stay in London, thinking back on her journey and the many relationships that had changed over the months.

'What can one say, you live and you learn', she commenced. Cristina had quit working for Florin at the beginning of May, after she overheard him tell an associate that, if an investigation ever found

the contraband, he should just blame it on his staff. ‘You just don’t do something that’, she had noted gravely at the time. ‘That’s not a man, who says he helps, then undermines you from behind’.

After months of accepting his conditions, where she and her colleagues had risked their own safety to guard a business that earned him a fortune without ever receiving a penny more, hearing Florin reveal just how little he cared for their security was too much to justify the danger. Emboldened, and more than a little disappointed, she decided to look for something else. It was at the same table that we sat the week after she quit, to lay a plan out for her departure. Much like charities did in their employability programs, we drafted her first CV, figured out how to turn the smartphone she had only ever used for calls and social media into a mini personal computer, and learnt how to navigate the myriad job providers online.

The search, however, proved slower and costlier than expected. The jobs that paid well she did not hear back from; those she could accede to in the Neighbourhood, were just as precarious as her position at the shop - she had managed to get work at a Romanian warehouse, but after a few days’ unpaid trial she was told that other people would do the job better, leaving her to hop from one short engagement to another at a Turkish supermarket, an Afghan restaurant, and more recently an Iranian kebab joint, which seemed as ready to take up new cash-in-hand workers as they were to fire the old.

Above all, it felt as if the loss of income and infuriating sense of redundancy that started building, had eroded her faith in everyone she had once hoped would support her. The housemates were the first target of a mounting sense of disappointment. Being at home for longer, the uncomfortable encounters with her ever vigilant companions grew more frequent. ‘Every time they ask me where I am going and what I’m doing’, she described. ‘They pretend like they care, but they would never put in a good word for me, they’re miserly people who only care about themselves’. The ‘good word’, she revealed, was the possibility to find something at one of the big chain supermarkets down the road, where one of her housemates worked as a customer assistant. At a time when she had gone from one unpaid trial to another, the National Minimum Wage it paid felt like a real step up.

The relationship with her partner too grew tenser and more shrouded in suspicion, now that he was the only earner for the two of them, in addition to being the main source of income for his own

family who were relying on a modest but much anticipated trickle of remittances. There had been squabbles over money he had transferred home without telling her, and endless disputes over the people he kept bringing over. 'Who are they to me at the end of the day?', I remember her exclaiming with frustration one day, on our way to ask a bank whether new accounts could be opened for Doru's newly arrived protégés. She knew too well that without some proof of address, of the genuine or fabricated kind, the trip was futile. The young men, for their part, would never even offer to pay for her transport - she had learnt this from past experiences where she found herself spending more than what she earned in one hour on trips around North London which led nowhere. Yet in his determination to help, Doru had come to increasingly overrule her scepticism, sending her in journeys she could not afford, for people she had stopped caring about.

Throughout our meeting, it was hard to miss how a sense of disillusionment had set in; how she started feeling like the calls for help she was being asked to tend to, were little more than self-interested exchanges. Having seen how material interest came to increasingly encroach upon the protection she had expected from those who had brought her to the Neighbourhood, the errands she was asked to run began to feel less like expressions of care between 'people from here', and more like thinly veiled compromises; concessions she would have to make, rather than offer to make, in order to recognise that for all the recent tensions in their couple life, Doru's earnings were still supporting her stay in London.

There was an uncharacteristic bitterness in her voice, that sounded starkly different from the serenity with which she described 'how things [were] like around here' when we first met. It was painful to accept that, just after she left the patronage of a boss who did not shy away from taking advantage of her loyalty, she felt taken for granted by the man she loved. It was uncomfortable to know that while her future in the city was far from clear, she was being called upon, as Doru promised others he would build their futures. Nor was it easy to think that within a month, when they would come back from their trip to Corbu, she would have to start all over again.

As we finished our drinks and prepared to say goodbye, the conversation drifted into the realm of what could be. Ever the optimist, Cristina found comfort in her plans of going back to Romania for a few weeks, 'with Doru for now' she confessed, for a much-needed break from the pressure of keeping track of pennies, and of facing up to inquisitive acquaintances. I, in turn, thanked her for

being so generous with her time, and for providing more ethnographic material than I had even hoped for. Many threads had been uncovered, I admitted, and just as many needed reflecting upon - alluding to the likelihood that, after the trip we planned in Corbu, our encounters would likely become less frequent, as I focused on finishing the project.

It was perhaps the reference to an ending that prompted Cristina to make an intervention, which summarised in a few words a narrative I had been chasing for well over a year: 'what's another slap in the face?' she said. 'You start once, you start again'. I smiled upon hearing her reproduce at just nineteen, the narrative of endurance I had previously heard from informants who were many years her seniors. There was no small comfort in learning that Cristina would continue with her journey, even when disappointment had crept up from so many directions. But the year in London, she revealed, was not without its bitter lessons. For the next time she would start, Cristina added, 'it's better to not expect anything from anyone, because in this country nobody helps'.

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Throughout this thesis I have traced how newly arrived Romanian migrants called upon the help of personal connections to turn hope into mobility, and to leave the sense of being stuck. Once a phenomenon attributed restrictively to the chronic shortages of socialism, moral economies of help constituted at the intersection of interest and affect, were instrumental in circumventing the novelty of the journey, and the neoliberal polity's own security deficiencies. So instrumental, in fact, that friends could turn into outright patrons, and indebtedness into a means of normalising exploitation.

In this chapter I conclude the journey into Romanian migrants' discontent, by looking more closely at what was left of the togetherness once conjured in order to get by, when those who claimed to help ended up abusing, and when those who could do so appeared to hold back. What I find is that the transfer of existential security onto personal connections prompts a dangerous and insidious shifting of blame. This was visible in migrants' discourses on broken friendship, and the entrenched belief that one must manage on one's own, as Cristina put it. But in the case of those who had accumulated more experience, it was also expressed more generally, as an avoidance of Romanians at large.

Every nation rests on a fantasy of camaraderie. When that camaraderie was at once rendered necessary by shared precarity, and undermined by individuals' need to look after themselves, when the duty to look after another clashed with the imperative to look after oneself, so Romanianness too emerged as the idiom for voicing discontent. It is with this discussion of duty which slides into disappointment, that the paradox of mutual avoidance I set out to explore concludes.

8.1. Moving on, helping oneself

Scholars of mobility have long warned against portraying migrants as passive victims of precarious work conditions (Paspalanova, 2006; Van Nieuwenhuyze, 2009; Anderson et al 2006). As early as 1979, reflecting on Latin American workers who filled America's secondary labour market, the MIT economist Michael Piore portrayed the migrant as *homo economicus*: a calculative agentful subject, who can trade off the tedium of dull and dirty jobs experienced abroad for status gains at home, or for imagined accumulations in the future. A wealth of empirically grounded studies of Eastern Europeans (Anderson et al. 2006; Cook et al. 2011b; Parutis 2011) and other migrant groups have since expertly shown how even the most insecure positions where the fragility of work coincides with the burden of illegal status, do not preclude aspirations of settlement, investments in the country of origin, higher earnings, or simply the acquisition of different types of experience (Meeteren et al 2009; Hagan, 1998; Massey, Kouaouci, and Arango, 2005; Paspalanova, 2006). If cultural capital, expressed in the form of language and education (Parutis, 2011; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2005; Dwyer et al, 2008), and social capital, expressed in connections (Adam et al, 2002; Chavez, 1998; Engbersen, 1996, 2001; Engbersen, Van San, and Leerkes, 2006; Hagan, 1998; Massey, Goldring, and Durand, 1994), have been amply unpacked as factors that differentiate their abilities to put such ambitions into practice, the scholarship developed towards the end of the millennium highlights the figure of the migrant as agentful subject - whether by actual accumulations in practice, or mobilities projected in the future. 'Consciously, if reluctantly', Anderson et al note (2006 p. 103), migrants 'made trade-offs'.

By the time I had finished fieldwork, all but one of the women I met in the Neighbourhood had gestured at these trade-offs by moving on, in one way or the other. At the Butcher's, with every month Clara had grown more disillusioned. For all the help the Boar had provided, and the delicate task of having her fiancé tell their 'uncle' that the job he had offered was becoming an everyday

drain upon her romantic life, as Easter approached and shifts got longer, quitting too became inevitable. 'I'm not going to abandon him now when he is in the greatest need', she noted in the brief exchange we could snatch before the Orthodox celebration, when her work seemed to have become one restless delivery. 'But', she continued, 'this year I barely even had a chance to do the cleaning…I didn't even get to make one pot of *sarmale*, we only have what my mother sent. This isn't a life'. The first week after Easter therefore, Clara quit. As did a couple of weeks later her colleague Ana, who had come to resent the new young woman the boss brought over, for what she suspected was an insincere and overzealous effort to enter his graces.

Similarly in Florin's shop, after Cristina left in May, Corina could no longer bear her involvement in the contraband business. Once she cashed her final wage, just £500 for a month's work since Florin claimed to have already paid for her rent, she moved in with a Romanian woman she encountered among the customers. New ties appeared to have replaced the old, as Romanian strangers who found each other bound by similar experience, became more trustworthy than the people from home, whose actions betrayed their familiarity.

It seemed thus that even the most understanding of staff, who had for months couched their lopsided work relations in the language of a duty to care for those who offered them a hand, reached a point where they had to care for themselves first. This picture of short termism, with jobs which at times lasted no more than weeks, and horizons of expectation that always seemed to remain open, was something that was striking in the Neighbourhood, where new faces immediately stood out from the general familiarity of businesses nested around the main junction. But it was also a feature of every interview I had conducted when working with the East European Advice Centre, where men and women who came in recounted hyper-mobile life stories. It is revealing in this sense, that a seemingly simple open-ended question, such as 'tell me about what it was like to work here [in London]', was often met with half smiles and apprehensive sighs; the kind that would precede a lengthy tale my informants were not always sure we would even have time for. I heard of men like Costachi, who scrubbed away in no fewer than three London car washes in one year, or graduates like Marian, who after finishing international relations in Romania, switched between several low skilled engagements. In the case of those who had arrived before 2014, when self-employment was the only way into legality, switching between short-lived gigs was the norm. Work, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001 p. 24) put it, seemed 'saturated with uncertainty'.

It is only fair to acknowledge, as studies have done before, that what seemed like a hyper-precarious existence at first glance, also led to paid positions and living arrangements many of my informants were content with. To those from rural areas, whose families could not afford the transition to a university education in Romania, after three years of residence the student loan and maintenance grant they could gain access to in England provided a closer chance of higher education than Romania ever had, even when those fees were a fraction of the cost abroad. Several colleges had learnt that European students financed by the British loans system provided a stable source of revenue, and had taken to advertising intensely on Romanian social media and other online forums. This is how Marian, for instance, left a two year cycle of short term jobs in construction by enrolling in an air traffic control course. Others joined business and dental nursing degrees (see Appendix 1 for details).

The work in London too, for all its gendered nature and quotidian insecurities, was not a negligible source of income. If women earned considerably less than men, and experienced a significant career gap when the costs of childcare made it impossible to continue working, everyone I spoke to had nonetheless managed to purchase the kind of consumer luxuries which had previously remained out of reach, to save, and to invest in property in Romania.

In addition to any substantial material gains, interviews abounded of references to the life lessons Romanian men and women believed they had acquired through the experience of working abroad. It was more than once that listening to their narrations felt like being drawn into a living Bildungsroman; a modern epopee of personal growth, where they transmogrified precarity into a formative experience, and where every exposure to insecurity was appropriated as a test of one's power to adapt. 'Not every unsuccess is a failure, true work starts below', said Mihail, a young man in his 20s, sounding almost as if quoting a liberal work ethic manual from the business degree he had recently enrolled in.

> At first they paid me 50 GBP a day, yes. It was heavy work, I wasn't used to manual labour, I had never picked up a wheelbarrow in my life before... But what can you do? I knew I had to accept that true work starts below, life starts from below, and you have to face the difficult stuff.

To start from below was thus not framed as humiliation but as endurance, when one left a life which seemed to offer little prospect for mobility. In the case of migrants who had completed their

graduate studies in Romania, and for whom the take-up of manual labour appeared like a step down from the dream of returning to Europe they had once framed in broad tropes of civilisation, this endurance even took romanticised valences of self-rediscovery through trials by fire. I noted earlier how Liliana described her transition from a stable desk job in journalism in Romania, to working as a self-employed housekeeper in a London hotel as 'where life started'; or as she put it later: 'this is how I learnt what life really means'.

Like the Victorian proto-ethnographer who in the 19th century searched for new truths by glimpsing into the lives of the homeless and the outcast on the fringes of modernity (Duneier, Kasinitz, & Murphy, 2014), educated Romanians who found themselves doing the dirty jobs too framed their work as an incursion into a distinct mode of being which felt as formative as it was raw; a mode of being they portrayed as being as foundational in time, as it had been testing for the moment. Marius, a man who recounted how, after spending the better part of two decades working in Romanian media production, he came to do a construction job in London where he felt so physically exhausted he was 'jealous of [the comfort of] a street sweeper', noted this later:

> I discovered that on a construction site you don't need two degrees, you learn it by doing. And what you learn most is the attitude, the way you have to behave, the flexibility… if I stayed in the [television] industry, yes, I would have been comfortable. But you get lazy, you get slow. Here things are more dynamic and you learn to adapt, you discover yourself and you overcome those limits you thought you had.

The memory of exhaustion seemed to fade, therefore, before the imagery of personal adaptation that turned pain into the catalyst of perseverance, prompting him to grow, almost literally, by pushing against his physical limits. It was interesting to remark how in conversations with men in particular, physical hardship was seen as being twice formative: in the traditional heteronormative sense that associates masculinity with strength, but also in the sense that physical hardship articulated a test of mental endurance. Other informants spoke with similar appreciation of the 'mentality', 'self-confidence' and resilience they had developed in doing the work 'from below', as if subjection to the hardness of construction work was what it took to instantiate a triumph of the mind over the body. 'If you want to risk your skin, you do actually risk your skin' said Victor, one of the three young men who recounted emigrating without knowing anyone, sleeping rough and subsisting by doing odd manual labour for months. 'But I have left once, I am not going back. That is just me, I never go back, I only look ahead…'.

Over the course of fieldwork it became apparent that Victor's unfettered belief in his unique ability to forge ahead, by turning risks into lessons, and kicks from behind into leaps forward, was in fact shared by the majority. I have heard Romanians who were working for a fraction of the Minimum Wage, describe feeling as if they could 'go anywhere in the world and manage'; or how they were 'the kind of person who [would] always be ok somehow'. 'What's another slap in the face?', as Cristina phrased it so succinctly. 'What is starting again for someone who is used to it', Costachi noted. 'It is important in this life to not despair. Never despair, make the sign of the cross and you move on', I heard Ion, a man in his 60s recount during my time at the charity. Or, as Marius continued to recall while reflecting upon an experience where he worked for a Romanian contractor whose job he described as being 'to exploit other Romanians':

> I did learn something from him too, technical things I can still apply, but also this advice: never need any help. Make sure you can do everything on your own so you don't have to whine and ask others […] It was a very good lesson that I applied and taught others too: how long are you going to complain for? think about how you are going to look after yourself!

It is interesting to consider here how this discourse on self-reliance developed as a lesson, learnt in sink-or-swim fashion through encounters which had made adapting inevitable, came to sound like the fantasy of self-mastery professed in liberal political thought as an ideal type of personhood. Hearing my informants invoke their abilities to always look forward and learn more made me think of the vast and trenchant literature on neoliberal subjectivities (Chandler & Reid 2016; Makovicky 2016a), where scholars documented how a 'velvet vocabulary' (Dardot & Laval 2014) of personal growth, and an aggressive valorisation of entrepreneurship across discourses of work ethic (Chelcea, 2015; Larson, 2008; Miller & Rose, 1990; Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010), citizenship (Ong 2006; Rose 1999; Tyler 2013), and even mental health (Martin, 2000; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013), can normalise the erosions of social security under the guise of individual empowerment.

Real or imagined, measurable in material acquisitions or framed in the language of personal development, such trade-offs seemed to conjure a picture of equity which rendered even the most unsavoury conditions palatable. Cloaked in the guise of personal formation, precarious work was seen like a trial in adaptability, and the insecurity it engendered like an exercise in entrepreneurship. 'This was but a temporary phase', I was reminded by my interlocutors; a temporary phase in the journey of an ever-evolving self who could tame the insecurities of the

present with the conviction that she could go 'much further' in the future. Even in the cold of the Butcher's, surrounded by the piles of meat for instance, tourism-graduate Clara did not cease to think of herself as an educated woman who would one day find a job commensurate with her training. Even after not working in any job that required a degree for five years, social policy graduate Iuliana nurtured the ambition that with the help of her partner, who had half her years of education but was the family's only earner, she would one day open a business which would enable her to recapture the intellectual self she had nourished at university, and temporarily placed on hold. After all, for all the unexpected encounters with the dull and dirty jobs, England had not lost the power to inspire my informants to imagine that there was room for mobility - whether this meant staying in the country and accumulating experience, or saving for long-term investment in Romania.

Inspiring as such narratives may be, however, and significant in light of 1970s Marxist scholarship which tended to view migrants as passive subjects who merely survive world systems of dispossession (D. S. Massey et al. 1993), they did not come without a certain cost. It seems important therefore, that while we acknowledge the agentful potential of this form of identity bricolage and self-reinterpretation, we temper the temptation of romanticising the arsenal of the weak, and look closer into the present that is traded off with appeals to better future-selves. The first and perhaps most obvious mention in this sense, was that an ability to imagine oneself as infinitely mobile, rarely guaranteed mobility on the scale of life chances. The determination of women like the staff at the Butcher's, to narrate themselves as upwardly mobile, did little to challenge the wage disparities they experienced, or the career gaps they accumulated in a neoliberal regime that penalises care (Dyer et al. 2011; McDowell 2004; Salleh 2017). Of all the women I interviewed, the only one who acceded to a position of material security independent of the income of a partner was Laura, who arrived in 2004, was married but had no children, and had managed to build a vast cleaning network by subcontracting her clients to other Romanians in exchange for a commission. In every other instance, women's narratives of personal development coexisted, as they did in Cristina's case, with precarious self-employment, with positions without a clear legal status, and most of all with a definitive dependency upon partners' incomes during the years of childcare. When the cost of private childcare far exceeded the wages they could earn, all the mothers I interviewed had taken indefinite time off work. Graduate women in particular, who

had been twice prevented from accessing employment - by immigration controls and by a sense of family obligation-, expressed a fear of acquiring a so-called 'baby brain': an infantilised, depoliticised subjectivity, constituted only through the nurturing of young children. I found it significant to observe how social policy graduate Iuliana, the same person who dreamt of starting a business back home, reflected at length upon the frustration of running out of people to talk to 'on her level'. 'Back when we started going out I was the one to correct his grammar', she recalled of her relationship with her husband. 'Now he is the one telling me that I've forgotten how to speak'. Similarly, biology graduate Doina, who spent most of her time alone with her young daughters, while her husband was away working as a truck driver, noted this:

> I think that by now I have taught my girls all the names of plants in the park, how to tell the difference between an oak leaf and a mulberry leaf, all of that. But what can a six year old make of biology? […] I can tell that I am losing it, I need to read something, I need company. At night the girls fall asleep and I have nothing do to, I want to write something, to do something more intellectual.

When the only job she had found in her rural county of Rădăuți upon graduating was working as a cashier, and the only job she had taken up in London had been cleaning, the closest thirty-year-old Doina had come to engaging with Biology professionally, was when she overheard the son of one of the families she was working for struggle with a Biology problem. For several months, before she and her partner moved too far to warrant the travel time, she acted as the family's cleaner and tutor – paid at the same rate, she added, but offering her the satisfaction of practising what she had learnt. That, however, was the last time it happened.

The gendered nature of migrants' and citizens' social mobility has been well-documented in the feminist scholarship. From the systematic relegation of women to the domestic sphere in the male breadwinner model of liberal citizenship (Dixon 1992; Young 1997), to the current 'adult worker' model, which constructs paid employment as a moral obligation for all (Freud, 2007; MacLeavy, 2007; McDowell 2007) while doing little to shoulder the costs of care (Dyer et al. 2011; McDowell 2004), scholars have drawn attention to the political-economic barriers placed before the de facto social mobility of women; the barriers which result in a double-shift, for some (Crompton, Lewis and Lyonette, 2007; Hochschild 2003), or which create an imperfect choice between waged labour and care for others (Lewis and Giullari, 2005); the barriers that are most often circumvented by guilt-ridden outsourcings of care, to other women, whose continued confinement to domesticity is

amplified by intersections of race, class, and immigration status (Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2015; Rodríguez 2007).

There is thus much diversity of outcomes that lurks beneath the narratives of lessons-learnt and futures-open. De facto mobilities vary widely along gender lines, as they do along language abilities, previous training, or seniority. It is revealing in this sense that the impassionate call to 'make the sign of the cross' and 'never despair' had come from a man who, at almost 60 years of age and having worked in no fewer than four countries before coming to London, was still working as a self-employed carpenter in positions that provided only a modicum of stability. The very reason we met in the corridors of the East European Advice Centre, was because his normal could have well led another into feeling miserable: two weeks of unpaid work, a confrontation with the boss which culminated in him being taken off site by an ambulance, and a complete lack of pension plans. Intersections of social location, therefore, physical fitness and acquired abilities of language and training, which scholars have nested under the rubric of cultural capital, all played a part in migrants' abilities to live their aspirations of upward mobility.

What I would like to draw attention to now, is that in addition to the well-charted material inequalities which punctured the *homo economicus* fantasy of equity, the resilience Romanian migrants professed also lay atop a less visible but, I would argue, no less significant social cost. A cost in friendship, camaraderie, and a certain security of relationality which seemed to lurk close to the surface and reveal itself in bursts of judgement, like disruptive interludes in the comforting narrative of self-resilience.

Marxist scholars have dedicated volumes to unpacking this breakdown in solidarity within the gig-based 'new world of work' (Beck 2014). In one of the first accounts in this sense, Richard Sennett (1998) argued that the 'we' of contemporary capitalism has become merely an abstraction when short termism, flexible contracts, and tertiarisation have rendered labour fungible. Drawing on the writings of Paul Ricoeur (quoted on p. 145), who roots solidarity in a dialectic of mutual responsibility, Sennett deplores a work milieu where everyone seems replaceable. Bonds of trust and individual characters are both corroded, he argues, in an age of 'ironic', 'pliant' selfhood, whose apparent capacity to constantly aspire merely hides the inability to ever find one's place.

There is no shortage of metaphors to capture this rupture of the self from co-constitutive others. Frederic Jameson (1983, p. 119) compares the fast pace of 'late capitalism' to a pastiche-like scenario inhabited by a 'schizophrenic subject' ensnared in a continuous present of individual distractedness. Zygmunt Bauman decries the general disembededness in his signature metaphors of liquefaction (Bauman 2000) and lightness (Atkinson, 2008). Faced with a decoupling of labour and capital where looking after oneself has become a fate and not a choice, Bauman posits that 'the time has arrived to announce the end of the human being as social being' (2000, p. 22).

To critical scholars of labour and mobility, such arguments which point to ruptures in relationality, provide a powerful arsenal against the orthodoxy of an eminently calculating modern subjectivity. But we could dig a little deeper still, within the narrative of individualisation itself. Could co-dependency truly have gone extinct in the crepuscule of Fordist industrial organisation, as Sennett and Bauman posited? Throughout this thesis, I have shown that it was not so much a deficit of being needed, but rather an excess of it which corroded relations between Romanian migrants; a fragmented, but no less existentially significant landscape of mutual responsibility, constituted like a jigsaw puzzle through the everyday instances where arrangements between acquaintances were necessary; in the benign encounters where it took a Romanian connection to help a new migrant cross language barriers, but also in the more insidious spaces of precarity created by an undersupplied British housing market, which made informal subletting the only way of securing accommodation; or by the spread of self-employment, which turned acquaintances into instrumental pieces in finding a job, getting paid, and even acquiring legal status.

To draw attention to the reconfiguration of need is thus not to peddle a pedantic point about just what led to a phenomenon of individualisation I otherwise commend the Marxist school for highlighting. To contest its disappearance by pointing to its reorganisation, is rather to shed light into the bitter feeling of abandonment which sits between industrial class solidarities, and the individualisation of the gig economy. It seems hardly plausible, if we think of the worker as a multi-faceted subject endowed with aspiration and affect, that she simply switches, frictionlessly, between rallying with collectives, and celebrating her power to 'not need anyone'. What I want to examine in this last part of the thesis is thus the sociality that precedes the professing of self-reliance; the call for recognition, and the feeling of betrayal which ensues the moment one finds oneself without the help expected.

8.2. ‘Nobody helps’

These were the words with which Cristina concluded her disenchanted assessment of her first year in the city; the words I had heard so many Romanian migrants invoke when our conversations drifted from their factual encounters with work, housing, or the National Insurance bureaucrat, and moving slowly into the realm of friendship. Similar to Ryan and her colleagues, who remarked how ‘Poles who relied most on their coethnics were most critical of their fellow Poles’ (Ryan et al. 2008 p. 680), or to Moroşanu (2013), who observed that Romanian migrants struggled to replace the ‘soul friendships’ from home with the acquaintances they encountered abroad, I found it revealing that many of the men and women I spoke to thought it necessary to draw a distinction between people whom they regarded as ‘casual friends’, those whom they could socialise with on a superficial level, and those very few, or in some cases even non-existent, ‘real friends’ whose genuineness, it was stressed, was reflected in knowing that they would be there ‘in times of need’.

In his ‘Theory of Moral Sentiments’ Adam Smith (2010) drew a sharp distinction between the sociality of the market, constituted through the amalgamation of private interests, and friendship. If the market valorises the pursuit of personal advantage, Smith argued, writing that ‘it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from regard to their own interest’ (quoted in Carey 2018 p. 47), he viewed friendship as precisely the opposite of that logic. Carey (2018) summarises this apposition which recurs in Enlightenment thought as one between interest and ‘sympathy’, which is defined as an ability to identify with another’s inner world. Looking at the case of Romanians and other migrants however, it was apparent that, when disinterestedness was the privilege of the materially comfortable, and when so many men and women had to call upon ‘the benevolence’ of connections to engineer their mobility, this distinction was impossible to maintain.

‘There is no clean friendship anymore, it’s like everyone is competing, everyone has an interest’, Andrea noted in the corner shop. ‘Everything here is business [and] you are on your own all the time’ were Victor’s assessments, as if illustrating in one statement the artificiality between Smith’s hard border between the moral and transactional. Family did not seem to have remained uncorrupted either. ‘We’re only brothers until we have to split the cheese’, was the Romanian expression I heard Ioana, a woman in her late 20s, deploy to characterise the instance where her

sister in law charged her a hefty commission over sharing clients for domestic cleaning. 'I would rather work for strangers than work for my brothers', was George's assessment. Or as Vasile, a sexagenarian man from a Moldavian village, described the nephews who refused to host him: 'when you give them, it's like their cow gives birth; when you ask, it's like both cow and calf are dead'.

To ethnographers who unpacked the many faces of informal economies (Caldwell 2004; Henig & Makovicky 2016a; Ledeneva 1998; Pardon Hernandez 2016), this level of tension arising from disagreements over one's obligation to help will be familiar. If we recall that favours are always open to re-interpretation and bound by conditions of material possibility, it is not hard to see how in every such exchange there lurks the potential that togetherness fades before individualism, and the help premised on a recognition of communion recedes into self-interested action. Impassionate expressions of discontent did not arise *ex nihilo*. Looked at closely, and situated in the speakers' lived histories, depictions of selfish acquaintances and relatives who had betrayed always appeared to spawn from a moment where one's expectations to be recognised as being 'in need', and helped as such, had been frustrated: when people who lent a hand ended up abusing; when those who had been helped appeared ungrateful; or indeed when those who were seen as being in a position to help appeared to deliberately choose to withhold it.

Relations did not even have to amount to zero-sum games where one person's profit stemmed from another person's loss, for disagreements to arise and for the feeling that togetherness had descended into competition to emerge. When the appeal to help rests upon subjective notions of communion, Makovicky (2016b p. 222) notes, the meaning of an act too emerges from the momentary entanglement of words and deeds, and not from any unequivocal reality of conflicting interest. What to one person looks like a deserved appeal to being cared for, Reeves (2016 p. 86) adds, to another may look like an unwarranted demand. Nowhere was the tension deriving from distinct interpretation more visible than in the relationship between Doru and Cristina's father.

Several months after Cristina went to work in London, Petre began to ask with increased persistence that he is also brought over. He wasn't picky, he repeated, anything would do. After all, he had a lifetime of experience of manual jobs, from pulling the oxen plough to skilled carpentry, and he would have happily taken up any of the positions he saw Doru extend to other neighbours.

When the boy refused to lend a hand, his rejection bit hard. ‘Doesn’t he keep pulling everyone who asks?’ the older man mused behind closed doors. ‘He brings them and they take him for a fool’. ‘When he needs anything you’ll see how they make like they don’t know him’. Convinced that he would be a much more loyal colleague than the young men looking to get ahead at his expense, that he had long proven his care for the boy and was now more than deserving of his assistance, Petre saw the rejection as a disappointing renunciation of a moral duty. He let ‘the money go to his head’, I was reminded, by acting as if he were not the boy raised by the Iancus but a stranger - whose pretence of independence betrayed a disheartening desire of being someone else.

For Doru, by contrast, the refusal to help Petre had a much simpler and radically different explanation. He had already tried to give the man a foothold in the city. Only a few weeks after Cristina first arrived, Doru found him work on Sorin Savu’s construction site, and arranged for him to get a room in the house they shared in the Neighbourhood. He had done at least as much as he did for everyone else, he explained, until it became apparent just how much heavier the duty to carry Petre weighed. The man’s age, his apparent inability to improve his English enough to start making contacts independently, his injured leg, and his claim to seniority made him a poor fit for the job. ‘It’s not easy to have him crack jokes that annoy everyone on site’, Doru confessed with frustration. Self-employed and knowing that he was still disposable, Doru was not going to bring his father in law again and risk damaging his relations with the other labourers. It was thus for his own security that Doru appeared to look the other way, and not for wanting to ‘forget where he left from’. After all, he reminded me, did he not continue to support Cristina? And did he not bring others over?

The months of access I had to Cristina’s family and the numerous disjunctions between what was being said in public and behind closed doors, afforded an insight into the formation of a sentiment I had encountered elsewhere, in bursts of discontent targeted at other conationals who appeared to look the other way when they were called upon. Yet there was nothing inexplicably prone to betrayal in the friends or families deplored for not lending a hand. If anything was likely to strain the friendships formed between Romanian migrants, it was the fact that friendship became impossible to dissociate it from competing interests.

It is significant, in this sense, that the argument which deplored the corruption of personal relations by interest, was paralleled by another, in which migrants were not sceptical of how much their friends seemed to want from them underneath the performance of neutrality, but on the contrary, by how little they had to offer. This account from Mihail, the driven young man who had grown up in a Moldavian village, who first started working for very little upon his arrival in London, but who was proud to have enrolled in a business degree, was illustrative in this sense:

> I have always had friends, but not very close. Even today I have friends, but being in a country where time is so precious, for me at least, I don't want to enter certain groups that prefer to spend a lot time out, you know how it is, waste time. I tried that for a bit, but it was dragging me down. Too many outings, late nights and so on. We still keep in touch, but they're not that close.

Other Romanians with his class background, who left from precarious positions and were explicit in their ambition to keep accumulating, whether it was a better job, information, or just language skills, reflected similarly upon the wish to only find friends who had something to teach them, and who could contribute, in one way or the other, to the mobilities they were still hoping to accede to. For Victor, who recounted how he left on his own by 'risking it', it was important to acquire friends who could improve his English. For Iuliana, Doina, Clara and other women like them, who feared that too many years spent out of professional employment eroded their intellectual abilities, it was important to find someone to speak to, as they put it, 'on their level'.

In contrast to the ideal of selfless sympathy proposed by Smith, it appeared thus that friendship had become not the antithesis, but the very terrain upon which Romanian migrants negotiated their mobility in the market. Responses varied with regards to whether friends offered too much, or too little of interest. Statements such as 'nobody helps' and 'you are on your own', were also counterbalanced by others such as 'you have to stop asking for help' or, as Mihail inferred, you are hardly helpful enough to make it worth my time. For the remainder of this chapter I turn to how expressions of disappointment with people who 'backstab' and 'want to pull you down' are directed at the broader subject of Romanians - who were called upon, much like the friends and family referenced here, to help new migrants' ambitions of mobility. This is how the paradox this thesis set out to uncover unfolds: of a people whose disenchantment with conationals did not happen in spite, but because of the way they drew upon them.

8.3. ‘Romanians get on like dogs’

> Romanians are like dogs with each other – they never help each other, they are competitive, they are afraid that if they give you a hand you will take their job – even if you’re both employed by the same employer. No one ever helps you with anything unless you give them something.

This was the intervention of Radu, a young labourer in his 20s I encountered at one of the Romanian Orthodox churches in London, where my colleague at the Eastern European Advice Centre and I had come to hold information sessions for Romanian migrants. We had arranged a series of events ‘at the heart of the community’, in the hope that in reaching out to migrants who were unlikely to have the time, resources or trust to access the support of solicitors, we would bring access to employment justice a little closer to those who needed it the most. Every Sunday for the duration of several weeks we would attend the service, then join the priest at the front of the congregation and preach like ad hoc evangelists, patiently promulgating the importance of formal work from the gospel of employment rights, then directing attendees to the support offered free of charge at the charity. Every week the talk broke up into smaller, intimate conversations in the church yard, where we heard grievances of wages unpaid, employment statuses that remained unclear, and other breaches of labour law. And every week the angst voiced against companies, bosses, and other figures from the universal imaginary of work, would descend into more personal grievances directed not at the system, nor at any particular company, but at conationals who had not paid, who had betrayed, or misinformed.

From the conversations in church yards at the beginning of fieldwork, to the life stories shared in interviews and the months spent in the Neighbourhood, there was no shortage of accounts where informants recounted their unsavoury encounters with conationals. A similar point was expressed by George, the man who had worked in construction in Spain before going back to the Romanian village-life he romanticised, realising that he and his wife could not afford the cost of living, then asking a friend to bring him to London:

> We tried to avoid Romanians and make friends with the Spanish. Romanians, you know what they’re like. Wherever you go, the Romanian will try to hurt you. So I avoided them.
>
> I don’t know, I think it’s in their blood. Instead of helping you they’ll hurt you even more. They won’t help at all. If he [the Romanian] can take your job, he will. If he can harm you in some way, he will. But I have never received any help from Romanians. Here in London I haven’t met anyone like that yet, but we’ll see.

Examined in more detail, the life histories the two men recounted revealed how both of them had, in fact, found their first jobs, their homes, and their social circles, however 'superficial' and devoid of 'real friends' they were portrayed to be, with the help of other Romanians. It was ironic too that these conversations took place in Romanian, and only after Romanians had tried to make a mission out of helping. My colleague at the EEAC had spent a good couple of months tracking down church contact details, trying to convince priests and pastors that we were not selling anything or campaigning for any of the presidential candidates, before finally holding the information sessions. Whenever outreach did result in casework, it was not uncommon to dedicate hours to pinning clients' verbal work arrangements down to names which could be tracked, evidence which could be used in court, and to other such forms of interpretive labour required to translate lived experience in the formal codes of legal bureaucracy.

That particular form of assistance, offered by two educated women in the professionalised context of a charity, never went unacknowledged. But particular and confined to the distant realm of charity outreach was also how our interventions remained. In her work with Poles, Ryan and her colleagues (Ryan et al. 2008) remarked how interviewees drew hard boundaries between a close circle of friends, whom they cherished, and other conationals whom they cast in an imaginary of perpetual rivalry. It was often striking to remark how selectively informants labelled people and behaviours as Romanian. For many of the men and women I interviewed, the assistance we offered at the charity, like the space of the church itself, seemed more like an exception which evaded ethnicisation. Instead, a Romanian reading was reserved to those negative instances of betrayal, back-stabbing, or selfishness; where something was imagined as being so broken and so devoid of morality, that portrayals of Romanianness seemed to acquire the total separateness of racial discourses. As George put it when he decried Romanians' inability to ever get on: 'I think it's in their blood'.

It often felt that 'the Romanian' of which my informants spoke was no longer a living and breathing subject grounded in history, and shaped by particular power relations, but a timeless, masculinised type predisposed to self-interest. *He* was a type who took different expressions in different lived encounters, but rather than being seen to be shaped by them he merely appeared to be inhabiting them, and displaying a facet of what was otherwise presumed to be the same moral predisposition. The figure of the Romanian boss, for instance, was just one such facet, where egotism took the

form of revelling in profit making at the expense of others. 'The Romanian boss works you until she sees you drenched in sweat, and then she works you some more'. These were the words of Raluca, a young management graduate from Buzău, who was working in a chain discount store in the Neighbourhood at the time of our interview – a position which, she made clear, constituted a marked improvement from her previous cash-in-hand job at a Romanian supermarket.

The Romanian colleague, similarly, emerged as another manifestation of this self-interested conational, where selfishness was expressed in backstabbing. Costachi, the man who started by working in carwashes, noted this:

> Romanians are nasty with each other... Maybe this is just me, but I think Romanians amongst themselves are very mean. I don't know why, because I never asked for anything from anyone. They undermined me so much, they caused so much trouble to get me fired, but every day I continued to do my work. On the construction site Romanians make especially a lot of mess. But I cleaned as many times as they dirtied and I didn't complain to anyone.

Miron, one of the two orphans who recounted arriving in London by 'risking it', reflected bitterly on the absence of collegiality:

> I did help other Romanians find work through me, I put in a good word for them and they, instead of helping me out in turn, did nothing. I have noticed they are cold, they don't want to help you, or communicate, or talk about help. A person needs help. Whether it is a kind word, or whatever it is. Nowadays I would love to communicate with people, but who with? Those around me aren't people. You're better off taking a dog for company.

Similar to the friends who always seemed to have an interest, and the families who acted like strangers when it came to 'splitting the cheese', when looked at in detail most of these invocations of a timeless subject preoccupied only by his own wellbeing rested upon perfectly traceable moments of disagreement, where self-interest appeared to clash with the call for assisting another. As Victor noted when I asked why, despite holding such negative conceptions of our conationals, he was still living and socialising with them, tensions started precisely at the moments of existential co-dependency: 'I didn't see Romanians getting on well on the construction site'. 'Outside of the construction site', he clarified:

> I live with Romanians but we mind our own business. At home everything is different from the outside. We see each other, we say hi, and that's it, no one has a problem.

The ‘problem’ thus started with the moment of shared business and unstable co-dependency: when workmates who were expected to offer support appeared to sabotage newer team members, when bosses who offered jobs made a profit model out of overworking staff, when colleagues appeared ‘to be cold’ and refuse ‘to communicate’, or indeed when those helped trustingly, ‘bit the hand’ that fed them. Betrayal, after all, was a flipside of trust which could emerge when one needed help and felt abandoned, and equally when one offered help and felt backstabbed. Laura, the woman who came to London in 2004 on a fake Czech passport and built a cleaning network, exemplified this form of disappointment best. Laura took pride in her ability to have started ‘from scratch’, but to also have found work for twenty-two other Romanian women. ‘Her girls’, as she called them, were women for whom she found clients in exchange for a commission retained from the rates she had come to charge, after years of building a reputation. There was a time, Laura recounted, when she felt like she should go beyond a mere professional exchange of clients for commission, and recognise that the women who came to work for her were at the beginning of a difficult journey she had made herself only a few years back:

> ‘…I made a mistake. Out of my kindness, also known as foolishness, I said to myself: these girls are alone in this world where it’s so hard to make it on your own. Let’s unite them, let’s have them meet up, go to a bar, have a chat…so they don’t suffer from loneliness, so they don’t miss home, so they don’t lack friends, family!

To expect that the relationships were anything other than self-interested business, however, became something she later regretted:

> Well, when the ladies got together, they started with their little groups: to take digs at each other. And when they stopped taking digs at each other, they came after me. Little by little, they stole some of my clients.
>
> What was the most, most painful for me, was that after the [medical treatment] I undertook I went in a coma. I was in a hospital unconscious. And when I awoke, twenty-five percent of my clients were stolen by my girls, who told me: you know, we don’t want to work for you any longer.
>
> ‘Ok, I agree’ I said, it’s fair enough. ‘But you? Today you come and drink tea with me and I give you work, and tomorrow you steal my bread?’

There was little that mitigated the fact that Laura lost some of her business while she was at her most vulnerable; that Costachi’s workmates tried to get him fired, or that, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the heavy debt of being helped could be invoked to normalise a reality of exploitation. Yet it seems equally important to acknowledge that with the exception of businesses

such as those in the Neighbourhood, which had made a deliberate model of funnelling new migrants into precarious positions and exploiting their layers of indebtedness, many a time accusations of selfishness stemmed from situations where the balance of power was less clear. Rather than being the expressions of cold-hearted premeditated exploitation, disputes seemed to stem from complex negotiations over the duty to respond to the insecurity of another, and the need to address the insecurity of oneself.

Betrayal, therefore, was the product of acts which had as much to do with intentionality, as they did with the unexpected conditions of possibility which framed everyone's ability to 'mind their own business' by keeping self-interest separate from personal relations. It was not hard to see why Laura's 'girls' would try to bypass her intermediation fees. After all, when they all worked as self-employed contractors without any employment protections, hourly rates constituted one of only two ways through which they could earn more - the other was simply trying to clean faster, but there was only so far one could 'push one's limits'. Similarly, workers might be less than inclined to 'communicate' with new Romanian colleagues, as Miron and Costachi complained, when no one had protection from redundancy, and every new man on site raised the possibility that at the end of the contract workers would be triaged.

Apparent as these political economic constellations were from the outside, the insidious transfer of risk and blame onto conationals seemed to acquire natural connotations in the imaginary of many Romanian migrants. 'I don't think we, Romanians, will ever get on with each other', George continued:

> I don't see this happening. Even if you run into them on the street and ask them a question, like it recently happened to me. I got lost, in London, and asked someone for directions… It was a Saturday night, I was just living there temporarily so I didn't know my way around very well, and I finished work at 3 AM. I got off the bus at Kingsbury instead of Queensbury without realising, and spent about an hour walking around this roundabout that looked similar to the one I knew.
>
> Eventually I found this English man, who was also a bit drunk, so imagine with my broken English it took us a while, but eventually I realised where I was and how to get back. So I got back to Queensbury but I was still a few streets away, when I ran into two guys. I asked them in English, again, how to get back, but at some point one of them starts speaking Romanian and says to me: 'if you bow to me three times, I'll tell you how to get back'.
>
> The other guy told me not to think about that, and gave me directions in the end. But imagine this, after almost 3 hours of trying to get back, bowing was the last

> thing on my mind. Just think about it, instead of helping me he felt like taking the piss. You can only get stuff like this from our people.

Like George, who did not compare the man who asked him mockingly to bow with the other Romanian who offered directions that evening, but with the English man from earlier, many of my informants contrasted their negative experiences with conationals with the imaginary of a much fairer, kinder English type. 'With the English [boss] you don't have any money issues', Costachi believed. As for the English counterpart of the Romanian colleague, while few were the informants who had English colleagues at work (and those too were all men), the ones who did praised the fact that despite their own minimal language skills they felt accepted on site. This distinction between Romanians (and other subjects who were seen to resemble them) was most evident at a job-fair organised by a Romanian association, where the co-ordinators found it important to ask every participant who passed the registration desk whether they had ever been discriminated against. I was volunteering for the day, and as I was assigned to register attendees, I had a chance to pose the question to several dozen people. Over the course of a few hours the answer was invariably 'no', followed by the reminder that Romanians are in fact appreciated for being good-workers, or 'yes', with the firm mention: 'by other Romanians'.

Stories of people who say they help, then make a profit off your back, who have the privilege of getting a council house, but rent it out to the poor for what seemed like unfair rates, or other such configurations where expectations of care had descended into the realisation of profit making abounded. I tried to enquire at times, whether there wasn't perhaps a chance that every nation had its people who built a business out of gatekeeping the mobility of others. I posed the question to George, who had described just an hour before he mentioned the unsavoury encounter in Queensbury, how back when he was working in Valencia two Spanish partners defrauded the company he and a Romanian friend had set up. 'That's right, maybe some of them do stuff like that' he began. Ultimately however, he was unshaken: 'in our case it is the majority'.

When the experience of betrayal was still recent, and migrants were still grappling with the pressure of finding something secure, political economic mechanisms which seemed transparent from the outside, appeared to fade before accounts which turned discontent with personal immobility, into a critique of Romanian moral bankruptcy. For the man who advised me to 'never

despair in this life' and who had come at the East European Advice Centre after an altercation with a Lithuanian manager, Romanians' predisposition to self-interest seemed irreparable:

> like a Romanian he started intimidating me. He told me 'come on and fight me if you like'… I want you to believe me that the thing that happened with Nunas only happened to me before when I worked with Romanians…It was with Romanians in Ireland, in London, for the past 3 years.

In response to my mention that the HR manager in the contracting company who had refused to look into his issue was British, he added again: 'I guess they've taken the example of Romanians'.

'We embarrass ourselves'

It did not help that the sense of dissatisfaction situated in Romanian migrants' attempts to engineer their mobility, was paralleled by a much vaster repertoire of negative representation, targeted at the immobility of Romania as a whole. Historical depictions of the East as Europe's uncivilised other (Buchowski 2006; Todorova 2009; Wolff 1994), technocratic assessments of Romania's shortcomings in European development rankings (Gallagher 2005, 2009; Papadimitriou & Phinnemore 2008; Papadimitriou & Gateva 2009), as well as the lamentations of Romanian politicians and public intellectuals disenchanted with the country's 'mentality', its 'Balkan neurosis', or other such expressions of essentialised brokenness, perpetuated in polyphonic fashion a narrative of laggardness. The readers of this thesis will hardly need reminding of Romania's portrayal as Europe's pre-modern neighbour, cast between the dangerous exoticism of Count Dracula, and the institutional failure captured by the 1990s orphan crisis – these were two motifs the BBC unpacked in a piece bluntly titled 'why does Romania have such a bad public image' (BBC News 2013). Many more vocal reservations have since been expressed with regards to its accession, then membership, in the European Union.

Parallel to the critique of Romanian individualism therefore, many of my informants engaged in deeply classed, gendered, and raced evaluations of conationals who appeared to frustrate their ambitions of European citizenship. In line with the scholarship which examines critically the hierarchies that lie beneath narratives of equality (Anderson 2013, 2015; Anthias & Yuval-Davis 2005), Romanians' assessments were articulated in ways which distinguished between conationals who were deserving and undeserving, worthy of promotion or, respectively, admonishment for

constituting an embarrassment before the eyes of the British and other Western European onlookers.

Class was one the key axes along which this critique was formulated. Critical studies of citizenship note how every polity is animated by an ideal of middle class citizenry distinguished through self-sufficiency, education, mannerisms, as well as a certain political capital which set it apart from the dependent, uneducated poor. In the capitalist West, studies of Britain (Anderson 2013; Tyler 2013), Australia (Hage 1998) and Europe (Anderson 2015; D. T. Goldberg 2002) converge in illustrating how the ideal middle class citizen has, at least since the formation of the (nation)-state, been a propertied, educated, white male subject – though the explicitness of the way in which race and gender have been grafted onto the 'good citizen' has been reconfigured over the years (Darder & Torres 2004; Stolcke 1995; Stoler 2010). By contrast, the fashioning of a middle class citizenry has been a particularly contested phenomenon in the post-socialist space where, ethnographers demonstrate, aspirations of returning to Europe and its implicitly classed notion of citizenship, had to be reconciled with the realisation that, not only did there not exist a middle class with the joint ownership of property and cultural capital typical of the West (Eglitis 2011), but also that changing property landscapes and political dynamics gave rise to a whole new range of claims to status (Buchowski 2009; Humphrey 1999; Humphrey & Mandel 2002; A. Mungiu 2010). In other words, if there is wide agreement around the fact that a backlash against the socialist glorification of the worker, the reorganisation of politics around concepts such as national culture, and the preoccupation with catching up with the West contributed to the demise and devaluation of the industrial working class (Morris 2017; Stemming 2005), the question of what exactly the post-socialist middle class consists of, is significantly more contested.

Jansen (2005) illustrates this tension in his ethnography on late 1990s Belgrade, where he documents the animosity between city-born educated liberals, and recent migrants from Serbia's villages, who were regarded as tasteless, incorrigibly conservative, and responsible for the rise of nationalist populist parties. Like in the case of *chavs* in the UK (O. Jones 2012; Tyler 2013) and the Polish *dresiarze* (Stemming, 2005), who have come to be interpellated through their choice of clothing, the clashing 'white socks' of the peasants in Belgrade too were extrapolated as markers of a deeper, insurmountable incompatibility with the civilizational ideal of European modernity. In Russia, Patico (2008) illustrates the attempts of teachers to draw upon their culture, to distinguish

themselves from 'New Russians', who assert their middle classness through economic capital and conspicuous displays of consumption. A similar struggle over middle class status, waged as a battle between capitals, was observable in my informants' case.

Romanians with various levels of education formulated a critique targeted broadly at a category of conationals defined through an intersection of economic dependency, and stereotypes of masculinity. The first day my colleagues at the EEAC and I set out to conduct outreach in Cricklewood, approaching a local Romanian shop with an offer to leave a range of booklets for their Romanian clients, the cashier told us bluntly: 'be careful for these are not people, they are animals'. The people in question, dehumanised for their poverty, were none other than Romanian men who could be seen gathering off the high street at the crack of dawn, waiting for an informal job offer from one of the numerous construction subcontractors who recruited labourers from the area on a casual basis. Known to local authorities, who targeted them with notices of dispersal under the guise of a 'public space protection order' (PSPO), and depicted in the British tabloid press as groups of shabbily dressed and unshaven men, these were some of the Romanian migrants whose visibility was most at odds with the Romanian ambition of returning to Europe.

It was unclear what, if any, the anti-social character of homelessness was. In an interview with the sergeant who coordinated the PSPO operation in the Borough of Brent, I was told that the crimes in question were, in fact, an affront to space more than a danger to public safety. Littering, loitering and public exposure by those who washed in lakes, were the most frequent sources of complaints the police registered against them. That, however, did little to efface the council's interest in controlling this population, or indeed Romanian migrants' attempts to dissociate themselves from people who lived in the bushes (*boschetari).* Ana, the same cashier who, during the daytime at the Butcher's, recounted preparing a sandwich for a homeless man who seemed 'desperate', cautioned against getting too close to the park where 'desperate men' returned at night. The same journalist who reflected upon how construction work levelled his pretence of intellectual distinction, made it clear that living in the Neighbourhood, where many of these men were visible, was not a choice, but a consequence of his new found position at a Romanian publication. Fleeting solidarities created around a moment of interdependency, it seemed, did not preclude a sense of irritation with conationals who appeared to recreate a spectacle of primitivism.

> the Romanians who come here, who do you think they are, wealthy people? Of course not. It's peasants, people with two years or four years of schooling, from the countryside, people who herded sheep, and came here to work in construction. If they come here and don't find work what do you think they do, they are not too clever so the next option is: bang, a blow to the head. They do here what they would have done at home. Despite all the legislation here, these guys will just come here, beat their wives bloody and get arrested. But they do it knowing that they will be arrested. I know these cases personally, as does [friend], this is real stuff.

In addition to tropes of economic dependency and violent masculinity, other Romanians, like the Poles documented elsewhere (Garapich 2016; Pawlak 2015; White 2017), distanced themselves from the visibility of a Romanian 'underclass' (Morris 2017) through assessments of mannerisms and apparent tastelessness. It is worth pausing for a moment and reflecting upon this classed and gendered reading of migrants' bodies.

Michael Foucault's work on disciplinarity made a paradigm-shifting contribution to understanding how seemingly mundane questions of personal conduct, such as speech and bodily aesthetic, can be drawn into exercises of normativity (Rose et al. 2006). Power, Foucault famously posited, does not reside in the obvious spectacle of coercion, but flows through the work of institutions, such as education, religion, or bureaucratic administration, and through the imposition of standards of propriety in speech, comportment, and self-presentation. If Foucault reconfigured our understanding of power – decentralising it, as critics have argued, to the point where it may be impossible to localise its perpetrators and opponents (Cronin 1996), it was Pierre Bourdieu who drew attention to the ways in which bodily markers could constitute a form of cultural capital which could reproduce, and naturalise, the boundaries between ordinary workers and a middle class, with pretences of distinction. Admittedly, Bourdieu's notion of the 'middle class' assumed a level of homogeneity (Lamont 1992). The focus on bodily markers provides, nonetheless, a useful lens through which to examine the contestations over Romania's desired middle class, and its possible displacement by new mobile subjects.

Similar to the cases of Poland, Russia or Serbia, the Romanian public discourse has been the site of a very public clash between defenders of intellectualism, and a conspicuously visible category of citizens who claimed their status through wealth – be it real, or just aspired to. A look at the sheer number of words introduced in the Romanian language since the 1990s to describe the various strata of nouveau riche citizens is evocative in this sense. If 'peasants' remained a term for rural

residents, with connotations of minimal education and a certain bluntness in mannerisms, new terms came to describe a class of politically connected vast property owners (*baroni)*, a class of minimally educated urban dwellers with a penchant for strident consumption (*cocalari*), as well as a general category of Romanians who simply appeared to enact a status they did not deserve (*parveniti).* Most obvious of all is public intellectuals opprobrium of *manele* – a fast paced musical genre with Balkan, Turkish, and electronic influences, which generated a veritable moral panic (Georgiev 2012). Once played to a restricted audience by the Romanian Roma, whose freedoms of ethnic association had been curtailed by Ceaușescu (Achim, 2004), from the mid-1990s *manele* became the genre associated with undeserving, overnight rich: the Roma, peasants who moved into cities, small businessmen who lacked the cultural capital of the traditional middle class. With lyrics which praise material success, power, and a certain patriarchal influence, they became the metonym for a society whose moral values are eroded by rampant commercialisation. The Romanian media (Juncan, 2016), society (Caragea 2013), and a country as a whole (Mihăilescu 2012), public intellectuals noted, were being *manelized.*

There were few Romanians who would unequivocally claim the status of intellectual in the Neighbourhood, when all the graduates I spoke to had taken up positions and forged relations which, however temporarily, were below their original expectations. Yet alongside interventions which reflected upon the personal loss of snobbery, and the creation of new solidarities around shared precarity, there were also numerous Romanians who were critical of 'peasants' the moment they became too visible. Street drinking and listening to *manele*, loitering, cursing and, in several instances, the sexual harassment of women were some of the embodied practices my informants were most critical of. Doina provided an evocative example in this sense when, in response to my question about friendship, she shared her view of the Romanians who went to her church:

> This year I went to church in Forest Gate. There we share the church with the Greek community and I have to say that we embarrass ourselves before the Greeks. At resurrection service the Greeks were there in the church, and our Romanians went outside and did what they know best. They gathered in groups on the side of the road and started drinking, started talking loudly, to the point where our priest had to go outside and separate the groups. It was 2 AM and we couldn't let them cause that disturbance. The church is in a residential area among houses. We embarrass ourselves.

Similarly Violeta, a woman in her early 30s who left from a village in Moldova, who was working as a housekeeper in a small hotel run by a Pakistani family, and who had entered a romantic relationship with one of her manager's friends, recounted being embarrassed by the sexist and racist comments she could overhear from male conationals.

> You can hear them in the tube cursing, saying all kinds of filth, they're everywhere in Wimbledon and they're loud and rude, acting as if they were in some village. It's the greatest embarrassment, once I was with my boyfriend in the tube and a couple of Romanian men were sat across us. They saw me eating a pack of biscuits and said: "look at her swallowing biscuits. He'll take her home, give her a glass of milk and that's it, she's in the sack". I didn't want to tell them I understood them, I was too embarrassed. I didn't tell my boyfriend either.

In some cases, it did not even take violations of public order to have one labelled as a peasant. Some educated Romanians with urban upbringings had also taken to identifying conationals of lower class status simply through accent or attire. Similar to the ways in which other ethnographers captured the power of white socks, track suits, hoop earrings and other such embodied markers to establish symbolic boundaries around the underclass, in the Neighbourhood I observed Romanians of various levels of education and professional standing label, and judge, conationals through their choice of clothes.

At times, the source of irritation was in the apparent lack of sophistication. Claudiu, the same graduate who recounted checking his pretence of intellectualism when he realised that starting off in London meant working in construction, was nonetheless vexed by Romanians who looked too poor. 'You can recognise them from the boots and the plaster-stained trousers. We're the only people who wear their work clothes out'. Together with the Bucharest-born staff at one of the local businesses, Claudiu had fashioned a range of tragicomic terms for the Romanians he identified through clothes and accent, and pinned to Romania's poor rural space (*parlani, marlani, pietre* – a literal translation of the word 'rocks'*)*.

Conversely, other informants were irritated by the pretence of sophistication. Camelia, a woman in her 40s who was born in a small town in Moldova, and who had always worked in manual occupations abroad, was nonetheless adamant to distinguish herself from Romanians who strived to illustrate their mobility through riches, despite sharing a socioeconomic background similar to her own.

> I told you, we want to go back. When and how, we don't know it, but I believe that the majority are thinking about returning. That's what I believe, I don't know for sure. Maybe some of them [Romanians] have a situation here, so they have a reason to stay. But others, I think are staying only because they are arrogant about the fact that they live in London. I heard there are people who are with their families here and live in conditions you can't even describe, but they don't want to leave because they want to show off about living in London. Every time they come back it's with cars, gold, as if they're doing who knows what around here. Honestly, it doesn't keep me from cold, or from warm, or from starving.

The choice of clothes which were either too much or too little, the moments of hyper-visibility constructed by public drinking, the loitering, the accents, and even the volume at which some Romanians spoke, were thus deployed in critiques which distinguished an underclass of hyper-masculine peasants, from a self-sufficient and educated Romanian subject, who could blend into the British fabric and avoid the 'embarrassment' of standing out. Though standing out, it must be noted, was also highly gendered. If men featured in accounts of an underclass made of rough-sleepers, loiterers, and violent subjects, women featured in accounts of sex work. The Neighbourhood had a reputation locally for containing brothels (I was told of three), as well as at least one character, the Boar, who was thought by some (though never by his employees) to be involved in running a prostitution network. While the substance behind the rumours is harder to ascertain, it did not take long to notice how, once evening fell and the main businesses pulled their shutters, a night-time economy of sex work was set in motion. In the close vicinity of one local bank, visible enough from the high street, but edging towards one of the residential roads, summarily dressed young women could be seen pacing, likely waiting for clients in search for paid sex.

The presence of Romanian women in sex work constituted another source of irritation. Simona, an expectant mother from Bucharest in her late 20s, who lived above the corner shop and whom I had come to talk to regularly, was critical of both the sense of entitlement of men, who used women as objects for sex, and of the noticeable presence of Romanian women in that line of work.

> I was waiting for my husband just by [the bank] when this Moldovan, I want you to write that he was Moldovan, came up to me and said: 'sex?' [in Moldovan accent]. I want to tell you that I was so afraid, I called my husband and I don't know how, out of nowhere, he came and he chased that guy away, I thought he was going to beat him up but I told him we're not in Romania, and you don't solve things that way. But you get people like that because that is what Romanian [women] do, they bring each other and they do it in a way that everybody knows.

It was not the act of selling sex, Simona stressed, that was infuriating. It was, as she put it, 'the reputation it gives us'. It was sex workers' visibility, and the fact that they attracted regular police raids, media attention, and the attention of a masculine underclass who were themselves a hyper-visible type of subject. Together, they appeared to reproduce a discourse of Romanian negative extraordinariness. As did the presence of peddlers, who illustrated another critique constituted through an intersection of economic marginality, modest education, but also race.

The peddlers who could be seen during the day in the Neighbourhood, selling an array of cheap goods which ranged from tissues to second-hand mobile phones, were a frequent cause of irritation. Standing outside Florin's shop, Simona continued:

> This area is full of Romanians, everywhere you look. And they have come to do what they did back in the country, selling perfumes, phones, cards and so on. You see them on the street corners, you see them in the tube, it's like we're back in Ferentari again.

Ferentari was a one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Bucharest, known across the city for harbouring a large Roma population, along with the poor migrants from the country. With blocks of flats known for substandard living conditions, situated off the metro grid, and including streets which even in the 2000s lacked access to utilities, Ferentari was the image of urban destitution - depicted from the outside as an example of Romania's underdevelopment (Gad 2015), and portrayed by Romanians as an exceptional Roma enclave (Raduta 2015).

Several scholars have unpacked the intersections of race and class in the constitution of Western citizenship, and the paradoxical ways in which, not having learnt the lesson of muted racism concealed beneath the cloak of multiculturalism, the East entrenched its own marginality as Europe's intolerant other (Dzenovska, 2018). The intervention of Simona was just one example of the racism which flourishes in immobility. As a young woman from Bucharest, who never went to university, whose parents and partner were also in London working in modestly paid manual positions, Simona sought to distinguish herself from the peddlers, the rule benders, and the migrants of colour who fell short of the European ideal of citizenship.

Similar critiques which indirectly elevated the position of the speaker, were laid against racialised others who extended beyond the Roma, and tapped into the imaginary of the Global South. Andrei, the law graduate who had set up a bookshop after first working as an ironmonger, compared the

bustling part of the Neighbourhood where Romanian shops were nested in between a cacophony of Turkish, Afghan, and Afro-European businesses, to 'something like Vietnam'. His own presence in the Neighbourhood, he noted, was incidental and motivated mostly by the flat's value for money. He was happy to be living in a gated community and to be operating his book business online, from an office nested in a new-development. The only times he ventured to the part of the Neighbourhood which held the mix of Romanian and other migrants businesses, was when he needed a new supply of cheap cigarettes. Raluca, the management graduate employed at a local discount store, displayed a similar story. She complained regularly about the demands of her Indian line-manager, and recounted how her neighbours, also Indian, had told the council about the unlicensed HMO she was sharing, forcing her and her fiancé to find another place just months before their wedding. 'Coming here', she concluded, 'has made more of a racist, if I am honest'. As if recreating every intersection of race, class, and gender which informs the ideal of European citizenship, she expressed her disdain of Indian and Romanian bosses, such as those she had worked with, of refugees and welfare seekers of all nationalities, and of mothers, Afghan but also Romanian Pentecostals who, she thought, had children so that they could be given a home - the type of home she had just lost.

8.4. Alternatives

Each one of these representations has a particular genealogy. If the narrative of selfishness was rooted in particular moments when 'people needed help', as Miron put it, and if it was those migrants who relied the most upon conationals who were also most critical of their self-interest, as other scholars observed (Eade et al. 2006; Garapich 2012; Ryan et al. 2008), the critiques of Romanians who were too visible were nested in a broader discursive framework, which created a sense of hyper-awareness. After all, the interventions of Romanians who reflected upon the behaviours, tastes and mannerisms of conationals who embarrassed them did not emerge ex nihilo, but rested upon years during which Romania's return to Europe was an object of national and international scrutiny. Previous research with Romanians and other migrants (Craciun 2013; Guarnizo et al. 1999; Macri 2011; Moroşanu & Fox 2013), noted how exposure to stereotypical representations can prompt the internalisation of categories of deservingness, and the creation of boundaries around those who fall short of the classed, gendered, and raced standard of propriety.

Bringing these sources of discontent together, this chapter nuances the debate by showing that migrants engage with representations of conationals in different ways, and for different reasons. Reflections upon Romanian selfishness were primarily the pursuit of migrants like Cristina and her network, of women who worked as cashiers in the Neighbourhood, and people like Victor, Radu, George, Miron, and even Laura, who were still living and working with other Romanians, in situations which made it impossible to dissociate business from affect. In all cases they had left from villages and small towns, with minimal savings and levels of education, but a high reliance upon interpersonal connections. We could view them as a class of workers with aspirations of upwards mobility, who sought in the UK the sense of security Romania no longer seemed able to afford, and who instrumentalised the help of conationals in this pursuit.

By contrast, the interventions which were critical of the visibility of rough sleepers, peasants, sex workers and other subjects who appeared to reproduce the discourse of Romanian negative exceptionalism, were generally the pursuit of urban dwellers like Simona, or graduates like Diana, Marius, Andrei and Raluca, who were both more exposed to the politics of representation, and better able, by virtue of the time and education they possessed, to express it. As a heuristic device, we could call them part of Romania's uncomfortable middle class; a class whose potential to capitalise on culture was frustrated by daily reminders of Romanians' representation as other.

Finally, I do not wish to conjure the impression that all Romanian migrants were perpetually engaged in a cycle of mutual avoidance. I also met Romanian migrants who were pleased with their position and network of friends. Marian, the IR graduate who recounted the 'exercise in creativity' it took to get his National Insurance Number, was one of them. After a rough start in construction he was happy to have enrolled in a second degree in the UK, and to have joined a society for highly skilled Romanian students and professionals whom he saw regularly, socialised with in the context of central London bars, then left with little at stake. This was echoed by Florentina, a hairdresser in her 30s who migrated after a tragedy depleted her family's savings, but was pleased to have found a contract with a high-street hair salon. She had a stable position, and a room she leased from an English landlady. She had brought her two sons, who loved their new school, and was making preparations for her partner to join. For Florentina therefore, Romanians were her family, and the acquaintances she socialised with at the Adventist church. She was adamant that she recognised, but did not share, the allegations of selfishness I had uncovered – although, revealingly, she laid

the same critique against her English landlady and past Turkish employer. Another couple of Romanians in their late 50s, had a similar view. With a home in East London which they did not share, with a pension, in her case, and a stimulating truck driving job in his, the Dumitrus were content with their lives in the UK. Their Romanian connections were their grown children and their families, who were also working in the UK and visited regularly, and the people they met at an English course – a course I taught, during fieldwork.

It is revealing, in light of the argument which situates Romanian migrants' allegations of self-interest in the pressure of getting by with connections, that in all these cases the openness to Romanian friendship coincided with informants' sense of material stability. I asked Florentina, during one of several encounters, what could lie behind our conationals' allegations of competitiveness and self-interest. Her reply speaks volumes about the role of precariousness in cultivating the stereotypes this thesis has been seeking to unpack:

> People here, they don't know what it's like to not have stuff, to not be able to make ends meet from one month to the other. Whereas in Romania people were brought up in poverty, the majority. Even if some have money, at some point they get stuck. And that's where they get it from, for fear that they'll go back to it. It's self-destructive […] it's the stress that makes you restless. If I have the bare minimum, if everyone has their own room and we can live decently, I don't need a fortune, believe me.

From the moment I started fieldwork and until this thesis was written, London became home to a film festival, a music festival, a radio station as well as several newspapers, restaurants, and a Sunday school which all celebrated Romanianness – one group had the ambition to 'bring the community together' as its motto.[56] Among my informants, there were also those who wanted to go back, even when horizons of return remained open, those who felt hardly affected by the narrative of brokenness, and those who had made it a mission to reclaim ideas of Romanianness from the popular prophecy of self-interest, by deliberately engaging in disinterested acts which broke the cycle of accumulation, and purposely carved a space for leisure.

Claudiu was perhaps the most active in this sense. He had put his own capital and endless hours of voluntary work into running a satirical gazette, and organising a series of concerts where he invited Romanian bands to perform at landmark London venues - by the end of my fieldwork he was

[56] Anonymity concerns prevented me from engaging more with this group. It is nonetheless significant that the group disbanded.

supporting a nascent Romanian theatre festival too. Community events, as he called them broadly, these were all initiatives which sought to capture, in one way or another, a space of deliberate purposelessness. We spent many an hour discussing his choice of artists, as well ruminating over just how much capital he was likely to lose at every edition. Was it worth it, I asked at one point when it became apparent that the loss would reach well into four-digit figures? 'A lot of people don't even realise where they are', Claudiu responded. 'All they know is home, work, and home again' he noted disappointedly. 'But you're in London, man', he added in English, 'open your mind!'.

There seemed to be something redeeming in the way Claudiu used the satirical tone of his media to turn Romanian stereotypes on their head. His newspaper felt less like a platform for news, and more akin to a collection of comical and clever musings; a collection designed in Bakhtinian fashion to bring uncomfortable representations of Romanianness to the fore and 'unforrow our brows', as he put it.[57] 'Is he Romanian?', ran the title of a front-page article, where a picture of a track suit-donning man was portrayed balancing, incredibly, a double mattress on the handlebars of a rickety bicycle. 'You can bet he's Romanian!', Claudiu beamed holding the edition in his hands.

Claudiu's able use of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984) was unique. But several other Romanian migrants stressed, at times in much harsher terms, the importance of breaking the register where everything is 'business', stepping outside of the sphere of calculation, and letting one's mind wander. 'Here all people ever talk about is how much is your rent and how much you make'. This was the admonishing assessment of Andrei, the law graduate in his 30s who had started, with money earned after years of working in construction as an ironmonger, an online bookshop. 'It's important to cultivate yourself, to go somewhere else, to meet somewhere new', he added. The staff at a tattoo studio in the Neighbourhood explained similarly, how they occasionally came out on the pavement with trays of candy for passers-by. It was a simple gesture, and school age children or their mothers hardly constituted the would-be clients of the studio. And yet, one of them clarified, it mattered: it was an attempt to 'get people out of that mole-like life where all you know is what you earn'.

Admittedly, to call for 'opening one's mind' and break the cycle of accumulation by taking the time to visit or pick up a book, was the privilege of migrants who had accumulated enough in the first

[57] The Romanian expression would be literally translated as: de-wrinkle one's brow: *sa ne descretim fruntile*.

place – this was a group we could call a comfortable middle class. Neither Claudiu, nor the bookshop owner, nor the two Romanian men at the tattoo shop were subletting illegally or working precariously on construction sites anymore. They were educated men who enjoyed the privilege of running their own businesses, or of working in a profession they had trained for, as artists. Yet it is interesting to remark how just as expressions of disappointment with Romanians were phrased in terms of bearing an interest in private accumulation, so initiatives of building a Romanian community were formulated as deliberate acts of material disinterestedness. Or perhaps more accurately put, as acts which operated in a different register of experience altogether, where 'business' was neither monetised, nor intersected with care, but drowned out through the tactical pointlessness of aestheticism.

8.5. Conclusion

In her 1998 study of favours, Alena Ledeneva reflected on the multiple ambivalences which characterised Russia's economy of favours. The language of friendship, she argued, concealed the fact that one person's getting ahead meant another person's lagging behind. It concealed the systemic brokenness in Russia's centralised economy, by channelling critical attention to a practice seen as morally perverted, yet conveniently divorced from the political economic constellation which instantiated it. Over the course of this thesis we have seen that the help Romanian migrants extended was hardly a clear zero-sum game, as both conditions of possibility and their interpretation remained open to change. If we cannot argue that interest was always disguised as an appeal to care, a level of disguise happened nonetheless: in the personalisation of disappointment; in the bitterness my informants expressed with regards to their friends, family, and above all with regards to Romanian connections who appeared too interested in their own gain.

Having started with the admission that many of my informants were pleased with their mobility, that precarity was not a permanent state of existential insecurity, and even the most deplorable conditions did not preclude the formulation of narratives of individual learning and personal development, this chapter has then turned to digging beneath the promise of trade-offs. I have shown how at the intersection of a political economic configuration which instantiates co-dependency, and a sociality of help which remains fundamentally unstable, there remain spaces

for contestation: over help that was offered and unacknowledged, over a neediness that was seen and ignored, or indeed over forms of assistance granted only to further private interest.

To draw attention to the bitterness which hides behind the claim that 'nobody helps', is not to deny the fact that 'slaps in the face', as Cristina put it, can still cultivate a sense of personal ability and strength. What this chapter sought, rather, was to draw attention to the perverse dissolution of political economic configurations into the visibility of Romanianness. A visibility that was reaffirmed abroad in the precarious spaces which instantiated and simultaneously undermined mutual assistance, but that has been well contoured over years of political discourse.

Discourse works in fluid ways. Brought together in the borderless realm of perception, the discontent with the sense of immobility I unpacked at the beginning of this thesis, where informants recounted the frustration of living in communities where there was nothing to do, can hardly be kept separate from the disappointment with conationals who did not help abroad; or from those who reaffirmed, with their classed, raced, and gendered visibility, Romania's position as Europe's other. In investigating the ethnicisation of precarity, it has been this author's hope that, we may also fashion tools for a different political critique, which shifts the focus from the familiar grooves of what neoliberal capitalism does, to how it makes itself seen.

CHAPTER 9. **CONCLUSION**

If there was one central ambition that guided this thesis from the onset, it was to render visible the strings which give life to the caricature of a Romanian subject presumed always, already at war with itself. There is nothing natural to this sense of discontent. For all the popular currency of expressions such as 'Romanians get on like dogs', and despite the institution of a veritable literary genre dedicated to unpacking the Balkanic (Ormsby 2015), abnormal (Nemerovschi 2013), or even neurotic phenomenon (Zamfirescu 2012) of Romanian disunity, we have seen through the course of this thesis how this disunity is very much constructed: at home and abroad, at the intersection of a transition which seemed to have imploded the future in Romania, and a political economic configuration which left the future up for grabs in the UK.

These are, admittedly, two different phenomena rooted in their own geneses. The first was fashioned in the midst of Romania's convoluted return to Europe, where the great expectations (Hartman 2007; Phinnemore 2006b) of breaking with a socialist past met the underwhelming reality of rising inequality, continued corruption, and mass emigration. I have reviewed in chapter two the urban-rural discrepancies which ensued under the guises of this transformation, and discussed in depth in chapter three how the sense of immobility experienced by villagers, and the disenchantment of the urban liberal classes frustrated by corruption, crystallised into an almost chronic sense that there was no future left in the country. This was one strand of the fabled discontent.

The other, and perhaps more dangerous, was that expressed not so much in reference to macro objects such as the country or its corrupted political elites, as it was targeted at people themselves, the timeless Romanian subject who was seen as an epitome of self-interest and untrustworthiness. The second part of this thesis was thus dedicated to unpacking how, for all the ambitions of

breaking with Romania my informants harboured, when it became apparent that one could hardly move on one's own, mobility was still a matter of garnering help; drawing upon personal connections in ways once thought confined to the imaginary of dysfunctional socialism. Having unpacked this sociality of favours in chapter five, with reference to Romania's long history of informal economies, I have shown at length in chapter six how the UK's own political economic constellation carved precarious grooves which instantiated this sort of informal assistance between friends. When work rested on a fast pace of self-employed gigs, and formal letting was the privilege of high earners, class ambitions too could be muted, and new solidarities could form.

Everybody needs a little help, was the realisation that struck my informants upon arrival. Or as Liliana put it so clearly, when one has little choice but to adapt and draw upon resources in friendship, what is the Romanian to do? At this intersection of instrumentality and affect new moments of togetherness could ensue. When the radius of precarity expanded, so did the radius of commonality between 'people from here', Romanians who experienced the same conditions even if just for a moment. Only this form of togetherness was hardly permanent. I have shown in chapter seven how relations could slip from mutual assistance into patronage, and discussed at length in chapter eight how slippages experienced de facto, or even merely imagined, could give rise to the disheartening sense that 'nobody helps', or the feeling that conationals constituted an impediment in Romanians' acceptance as European citizens.

On this level, therefore, one hope this thesis has harboured has been to expose the dangerous amplification of discourses on brokenness into a narrative of Romanian disunity which seems to have acquired by now worryingly wide acceptance. Leaving from the familiar paradox that Romanians claim to avoid each other, when they seem in fact to be drawing upon conationals' help at every key juncture of their journeys, this project has sought in the first instance to dispel the narrative of a competitiveness that is inherent. It challenged the myths of unshakeable disunity presumed ingrained in the Balkanic composition of the people, or in the toxic legacy of socialism, drawing attention instead to a competitiveness that was cultivated by a neoliberal political economic configuration which loads relations with 'interest', as my informants put it. It was in the gradual erosion of social security that, I have shown through the course of this thesis, neoliberalism simultaneously instantiated and undermined spaces of togetherness, and with them simultaneously conjured and challenged appeals to Romanian solidarity.

9.1 Thinking beyond the Romanian case

In addition to this level of political engagement however, I have also hoped to make three contributions which go beyond the particularities of any one migrant group, and speak more broadly: to where we locate the seeds of discontent, to how we view the figure of the migrant, and finally to where we may begin to locate solidarities at a time of seeming anomie populated by 'pliant' selves.

Recognising discontent

I am certainly not the first to remark how migrant communities, shrouded as they are in an imaginary of cohesion, are in fact replete with discord. I have mentioned in the introductory part of this thesis the contributions of authors who examined the case of Romanians, Poles, and other migrants who expressed a level of distrust of their conationals. Drawing on the early work of Erving Goffman (1968), Moroşanu and Fox (2013), Ryan (2010) and Pawlak (2016) argued that migrants' attempts to distance themselves can be interpreted as a means of avoiding their negative stereotyping in the country of destination. Resisting ethnic interpellation by stressing individual strengths, or renegotiating 'ethnic boundaries' (Wimmer 2008) by associating oneself with the host population, rather than one's own ethnic group, were both noted as expressions of self-defence formulated in a raced and classed milieu, where certain nationalities have come to conjure connotations of inferiority.

On one level, this is something this thesis supports. The lens of stigmatisation helpfully draws our attention to the fact that attitudes towards conationals are not formed in a political vacuum, but are situated in a discursive landscape charged with power relations. We have seen in the first chapters how from the time preceding its European negotiations, when it was marked as a laggard (Noutcheva & Bechev 2008), to well after joining the European Union, when it continued to be singled out for 'democratic backsliding' (Papadimitriou & Gateva 2009; Sedelmeier 2014; Tănăsoiu 2012), political scientists and European officials alike have portrayed Romania as a peripheral member state whose acceptance in the European club was more a matter of luck and good public relations, than merit (Gallagher, 2009; Papadimitriou & Phinnemore, 2008; Phinnemore & Phinnemore, 2006). This was certainly a contributing factor in the phenomenon I outlined in the first part of this thesis, where informants recounted living in a country which seemed devoid of a

future. It was also key in explaining the classed, gendered, and raced interventions discussed in the final chapter, through which some Romanians frustrated with their relegation to the bottom of European hierarchies, sought to distinguish themselves from those who, they believed, tarnished their reputation.

When I started fieldwork, countless articles expressed worries over just how many more Romanian migrants would cross British shores, how many 'British jobs' would be lost as result, and how many undeserving foreign children would have access to the UK's generous welfare system. In addition to the tabloid crusade (Brown & Little, 2013), the year of 2014 was also one of profoundly shifting political stances. Few readers will need reminding how, on the backdrop of heightened anxiety about the mobility of the poor, in 2015 Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron called a referendum on EU membership that would radically reconfigure the UK's relation to the continent. And yet, once fieldwork began it was apparent that the heightened visibility of Romanian migration in the British press which would have fit the narrative of stigmatisation so well, did not mean as much to all Romanians. While a certain segment of the middle class were indeed preoccupied with who was interpellated as Romanian, the lamentations of right-leaning British commentators meant little for informants like Doru and Cristina, who lived and worked only with other conationals, and had limited time or interest for musing over their representation. For the cleaners and construction workers, the cashiers and warehouse operators who were, in fact, the central subject of speculation, these indignations were a distant thought. I noted how, the moment when asked whether they had ever felt discriminated against, the answer of so many Romanian migrants was often: 'Yes, by Romanians'. Rather than invoking broken reputations and frustrated claims to Europeanness, the chief motif that seemed to inform their attitudes towards conationals was, as Cristina put it simply in this introductory vignette, that 'nobody helps'. Nobody lends a hand at times of need. Nobody helps when, it is implied, they had an obligation to do so.

Rather than viewing migrants' negative portrayals of their conationals as a reaction to individuals and structures who ostensibly discriminate from the outside then, what I have shown is that trust is most insidiously eroded from within, when the surrounding political economic context remains invisible. In drawing on a multi-sited perspective, and foregrounding the parallels between the sense of brokenness fashioned at home, and reaffirmed over the course of migrants' journeys, I hope to have shown how mutual avoidance is more than a momentary adaptation to stigmatisation

by host populations or political moments of discrimination. This is the contribution this thesis has made to the study of ethnic disassociation.

Imbuing networks with affect

Another area where this thesis may have something to offer, is in the study of migrant networks. By pointing to the everyday moments where ethnic relations are mobilised, this scholarship has posed a welcome challenge to the discourse-centred lens of othering and stigmatisation. I have joined the existing literature on Romanian migration (Bleahu 2004, 2007; Elrick & Ciobanu 2009; Sandu 2005b; Şerban & Voicu 2010) and beyond, in showing how connections with conationals forged at home, or drawn upon abroad in times of need, could lower the risks for new migrants, and cultivate the aspirations of mobility for those who stayed behind (D. S. Massey 1990). I have also contributed to the more recent work where scholars pointed to the power of networks to entrap, and not just enable (Bakewell et al. 2011, 2016; Haas 2010; Menjívar 2000; Ryan et al. 2015; White 2017; White & Ryan 2008), by guiding new entrants into accessible but poor positions (Gurak & Caces 1992; Woolcock 1998), by building segregated ethnic enclaves (Portes 1999; Portes & Zhou 1993), or even by subjecting new entrants to exploitation from those who initially brought them over (Menjívar 2000; Palomera 2014).

The lens of migrant networks provided a fruitful second line of inquiry, which drew attention to the relational character of mobility. Where I sought to add something, however, was to the general focus of this body of literature upon resources; to its tendency to explain ruptures in friendship, family, and indeed in ethnic communities as a function of scarcity: jobs which cannot accommodate every new entrant, or incomes which cannot stretch far enough for their needs. Eade and his colleagues adopt this lens, arguing that the strongest mistrust of fellow Poles was 'unsurprisingly […] shared by migrants occupying the same labour market niches'. 'Direct competition', the authors note, 'seems to result in deep suspicion and can lead to inequality and exploitation' (Eade et al. 2006 p. 37). Ryan et al. (2008) echo this view by noting that the motif 'Poles do not help each other' was situated in moments of competition. 'Clearly', it is argued, 'relying on other Poles for employment, accommodation, communication and information can lead to unrealistic expectations as well as competition and rivalry' (2008 p. 680). A similar line of argument is apparent

in the works of Bleahu (2007) and Şerban & Voicu (2010), who posit that competition leads to the kind of individualistic, free-for-all behaviour which Romanian migrants deplore.

An inability to afford the cost of lending a hand to everyone who asked certainly played a part in my informants' own disputes, and I have tried to outline in depth just how the political economic configuration my informants encountered in London instantiated such moments where one had to choose between looking after oneself, and responding to the call for help of another. But it is only by understanding the moral constitution of the expectation to be helped, that we can grasp the intensity of disappointment which ensued when help seemed withdrawn. Romanian migrants did not simply move in and out of networks, as if they were navigating impersonal transactions at the counter. Every such move was also accompanied by a profound sense of disappointment expressed in personalised terms, as a failure in morality. This is a line of enquiry this thesis has pursued. Mindful of the danger of culturalising mistrust by narrating it as something that is simply inherent in the trajectories of Poles or Romanians, it nuanced the argument around competitiveness by tracing, in ethnographic fashion, just how the moral economy of help came into being to begin with.

It may seem trite to note that we are social creatures constituted relationally, and deriving our sense of propriety from how we act upon each other. In anthropology, as early as 1989 Marilyn Strathern and her colleagues (Strathern et al. 1990 p. 10) powerfully argued that the life of persons should be apprehended 'as containing the potential for relationships and always embedded in a matrix of relationships with others' , and the concept of sociality has enjoyed renewed attention in recent years (Dzenovska 2014; Long & Moore 2012; Rozakou 2016). Yet in much of the work on migration, while the socioeconomic outcomes of journeys across borders have been extensively researched, migrants' subjectivity has remained under-explored. With the notable exceptions of studies of families (Landolt & Wei Da 2005; McGuire & Martin 2007; White 2017; Ying 1999) and intimacy (McKay 2007; Parreñas 2005; Rodríguez 2007; Wong-Villacres & Bardzell 2011), the figure of the migrant emerged as homo economicus par excellence (Piore 1979); an almost ahistorical, calculating individual in search for better, who seems to trade off hardships for imagined gains (Waldinger & Lichter 2003) almost frictionlessly, and whose relationality cast in the metaphor of networks, seems to be but a means to an economic end.

In merging the literature on migrant networks with the work of economic anthropologists (Hart et al. 2010; Henig & Makovicky 2016b; Humphrey & Mandel 2002; Gail Kligman & Verdery 2011), who highlight the moral dimension inherent in any exchange, this thesis has hoped to recapture the migrant as subject endowed at once with economic interest and with affect; where self-interest is not seen as the primal condition that is occasionally interrupted by a duty to care, and neither is affect relegated to the apolitical realm of family relations. But rather, where affect and calculative interest are intertwined; simultaneously shaped from outside and negotiated within, in a perpetual interplay of political economic structures and human agency. We have seen here how Romanian mobility in its cross-border and social variants is situated in a neoliberal configuration which instantiates at once a desire to escape the sense of involuntary entrapment, and a need to draw upon the favours of others; how it formulates a personal ambition to accumulate, and an obligation to share even when it is apparent that the effort will not be reciprocated. To imbue the study of mobility with affect has been therefore another theoretical aim of this thesis.

Solidarity in the everyday

This brings me to the final contribution I hope to make – one that will, admittedly, require further research work, and is thus better read as a long-term goal to be fulfilled in new lines of inquiry. I have referred at various points in this thesis to Marxist critiques of individualisation, noting their calls for the constitution of a whole new dangerous class (Hardt & Negri 2005; Standing 2014) where the precarious multitude 'rise up' (Nangwaya & Truscello 2017; Ross 2008). Their gesturing towards the formation of a vast collective subject organised in and for itself, is in many respects echoed by the calls, rhetorical by now, of Romanian public intellectuals to refashion Romanian mentalities, and constitute a new mode of being altogether, in the image of Western civilisation altogether; a totalising type of shift epitomised in titles such as: 'What do we do about Romania?' (Nemerovschi 2013).

We have seen through this thesis, when looking at the never-ending period of transition, how disenchanting expectations of sweeping new organisation can be, and how predictably demoralising is the realisation that attempts at formal organisation do not go far enough. But rather than taking the absence of formal organisation as an indication of implacable individualism, we might seek to identify and foreground solidarity in the many moments of micro co-dependency we

have seen Romanian migrants acknowledge and navigate: when the help of conationals was needed to gain access to a home, for instance, when it was required to penetrate the layer of bureaucracy that guarded access to the National Insurance Number, or when it was necessary to keep a level of indulgence accessible via the network of contraband.

I am not suggesting here that we abandon the structural critique of neoliberal capitalism in seeking comfort in the small deployments of togetherness encountered between my informants. I would certainly not read the artisan bureaucracies they deployed to get a National Insurance number or to circumvent the housing market as acts of everyday resistance (Scott 1985), since the connotations of the concept, of challenging an established order, hardly match their rather more restricted preoccupations with putting one foot before the other. But nor would I discount them as mere acts of survival, since that too would be a huge simplification of the aspirations Romanian migrants harboured.

A shift of focus away from broad organisation, and into the realm of everyday mutual assistance, however tainted it may be by its mixing of affect with instrumentality, could enable us to recapture possibilities for solidarity at a time when, as we have seen, Romanianness so frequently conjures motifs of self-interest and competitiveness. To gesture thus towards the re-signification of everyday help as a form of micro-solidarity, as well as a site of discord, is in itself a political act. The development and Putnam inspired literature has reflected amply on the risk that negative narratives of untrustworthiness turn into self-fulfilling prophecies (Collier, 2008). One needn't adopt the paradigm of 'diminished investor confidence', to see how the perpetuation of a mythology of brokenness in the public imaginary, can lead to a veritable emptying of the public. From 1989 and to the moment this thesis was written, the population of Romania dropped by 3.4 million – much of it due to lower birth rates typical of developing economies, but also to the levels of emigration it sustained. Keen as President Klaus Iohannis may have been in stimulating investment from the diaspora, when Romania appears as a space where one goes 'to bury one's money', as an informant put it, and Romanian migrants are shrouded in the imaginary of mistrust, one must wonder just how far such attempts at garnering support from the diaspora can go.

There is of course the potential that, as the phenomenon of Britain's leaving the European Union unfurls and European migrants of all nationalities find their mobility suddenly curtailed by the

Home Office, new political frontlines will be created around this very visible power of the state, which will obviate the need for such a bottom-up recapturing of togetherness. Solidarity is after all most apparent in times of crisis. Drawing a parallel between the crisis of refugees who crossed the Mediterranean, and the crisis Greeks experienced under the auspices of years of austerity, Rakopoulos (2016) makes a fascinating case for how crises can render visible, by virtue of their extraordinariness, the threads of reciprocation, and how they paint acts which would otherwise remain unobserved with political, collective understandings. Yet one can hardly wish for a crisis, however able it may be to crystallise collectives. Judging by the current pace of their unfolding, Brexit negotiations have the potential of turning into a slow motion crash witnessed in private anxiety, as much as they have the potential of making migrants link arms. Indeed, while since the 2016 referendum the overall pace of migration from the European Union registered the sharpest fall since records began, Romanian migration increased by 80% (Travis 2017).

One final contribution this thesis hopes to make then, if one may imagine the utility of academic research beyond the academy, is to foreground the micro political possibilities inherent in Romanians', and other migrants' everyday acts of getting by with the help of connections. After all, to speak of Romanian discontent is not to take the motif that nobody helps for granted, but to reveal the numerous ways in which help is offered and negotiated. Closer attention to the interplay of interest and affect which run through mobility, attention to the dynamics of negotiating joint duties to oneself, and to one's own, might allow us to reconsider the way we frame our critiques of neoliberal capitalism, and the solidarities we seek to cultivate.

APPENDIX

Table 1 Romanian migrants interviewed while volunteering with the EEAC

EEAC						
Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Year of arrival in the UK**	**Education before arriving in the UK**	**Occupation in the UK**	**Further education in the UK**
Andrei	32	Male	2007	University (Law)	entrepreneur	
Camelia	43	Female	2012	Secondary	cleaner	College course (Social work)
Costachi	47	Male	2012	Secondary	construction (cleaner)	
Doina	32	Female	2008	University (Biology)	stay at home mom	
Dorin	30	Male	2013	Highschool	construction (business owner)	
Dumitru Mr.	55	Male	2010	Highschool	lorry driver	
Dumitru Ms.	55	Female	2010	Highschool	domestic care (retired)	
Florentina	37	Female	2014	Highschool (Music)	hairdresser	
George	35	Male	2014	Secondary	construction (general)	
Ioana	29	Female	2011	University	marketing	University MA (Marketing)
Ion	60	Male	2012	Secondary	construction (carpenter)	
Irina	33	Female	2007	University (Psychology)	unemployed (administrator)	
Iuliana	29	Female	2010	University (Social Policy)	stay at home mom	
Laura	36	Female	2004	Highschool	cleaner (owner of own company)	
Liliana	50	Female	2012	University (Journalism)	cleaner	
Marian	26	Male	2011	University (International Relations)	airport staff	College course (Airport management)
Marius	43	Male	2012	University (Journalism)	journalist	

Mihail	24	Male	2010	Highschool	construction (supervisor)	College course (Business)
Miron	36	Male	2008	Secondary	construction (painter)	
Radu	29	Male	2010	Secondary	construction (plumber)	
Sorin	29	Male	2006	University (Psychology)	charity worker	
Vasile	62	Male	1999	Secondary	construction (retired)	
Victor	23	Male	2012	Secondary	construction (supervisor)	
Violeta	34	Female	2013	Highschool	cleaner	
Interviewee 25[58]	40	Male	2013	Secondary	construction (general)	
Interviewee 26	28	Male	2013	Secondary	construction (general)	
Interviewee 27	41	Female	2006	University (Social Work)	social worker	College course (English)
Interviewee 28	30	Male	2008	Highschool	construction (excavator)	
Interviewee 29	28	Female	2015	Highschool	cleaner	
Interviewee 30	52	Female	2013	Highschool	beautician	College course (Beautician)
Interviewee 31	35	Male	2012	University (Pedagogy)	teacher	
Interviewee 32	32	Male	2008	University (Journalism)	marketing	University MA (Business)
Interviewee 33	35	Male	2009	University (Management)	construction (supervisor)	College course (Business)
Interviewee 34	28	Female	2011	University	unemployed	
Interviewee 35	28	Male	2011	University	security	

[58] These are informants who were not individually referred to in the thesis.

Table 2 Romanian migrants interviewed in the North London Neighbourhood

The Neighbourhood						
Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Year of arrival in the UK**	**Education before arriving in the UK**	**Occupation in the UK**	**Further education in the UK**
Ana	42	Female	2012	Highschool	shop assistant (butcher's)	
Andrea	22	Female	2015	University	shop assistant (cornershop)	
Clara	30	Female	2014	University	shop assistant (butcher's)	
Claudiu	37	Male	2007	University (Museology)	entrepreneur, journalist	
Corina	23	Female	2015	Highschool	shop assistant (cornershop)	
Cristina Iancu	19	Female	2015	Highschool	shop assistant (cornershop)	
Doru	25	Male	2012	Secondary	construction (general)	
Lucretia	27	Female	2008	Highschool	hair stylist	
Raluca	27	Female	2011	University (Management)	shop assistant (99p store)	
Simona	29	Female	2012	Highschool	stay at home mom	
Vlad	24	Male	2005	Secondary	recent graduate	University degree (IT)
Barrista, chain coffee shop	25	Male	2015	University (Urban planning)	barrista	
Beautician	27	Female	2015	Highschool	nail artist	
Bucharest born business owner	70	Male	1980	Highschool (Hospitality)	entrepreneur	
Cashier at the Butcher's	40	Female	2014	Highschool	shop assistant (butcher's)	
Cashier at the corner shop	26	Female	2015	Highschool	shop assistant (cornershop)	
Community organiser	33	Male	2009	Highschool	entrepreneur	College course (vocational)
Associate of the Boar	24	Male	2005	University (IT)	casual consultancy	
Fitness Instructor	26	Male	2008	University (IT)	fitness instructor	
Stay at home mum	45	Female	2013	Highschool	stay at home mom	
Stay at home mum	34	Female	2010	University (Economics)	stay at home mom	
Stay at home mum	26	Female	2011	Highschool	stay at home mom	College course (Dental nurse)
Tattoo artist	32	Male	-	University (Sculpture)	tattoo artist	
Waitress	30	Female	2015	Highschool	bar maid	

Table 3 Romanian migrants interviewed in Buzau County, Romania

Corbu village					
Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Level of Education**	**Occupation in Corbu**	**Relation to migration**
Petre Iancu	40s	Female	Secondary	Casual work, subistence farming	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Mari Iancu	40s	Female	Highschool	Subistence farming	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Constantina Iancu	18	Female	Highschool	Student	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Iuliana Iancu	11	Female	Secondary	Student	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Stelian (Iancus' family friend)	40s	Male	Secondary	Construction	Resident
Nae (Petre's brother)	40s	Male	Secondary	Casual work, subistence farming	Resident
Angela (Nae's wife)	40s	Female	Secondary	Subistence farming	Resident
Nea Marin	40s	Male	Secondary	Farmer	Resident
Gabi	30s	Male	Highschool		Emigrant on holiday back home
Nicolae	30s	Male	Secondary		Emigrant on holiday back home
Shop owner whose daughter was abroad	50s	Female	Highschool	Shop owner	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Resident with a family member at work abroad	50s	Female	Highschool	Subistence farming	Resident with a family member at work abroad
Resident with a family member at work abroad	60s	Female	Secondary	Subistence farming, pension	Resident interested in working abroad
Resident interested in working abroad	40s	Male	Secondary	Construction	Resident interested in working abroad
Resident interested in working abroad	18	Female	Highschool	Student	Emigrant on holiday back home
Savu entourage on holiday back home	20s	Male	Secondary		Emigrant on holiday back home
Savu family on holiday back home	20s	Male	University (Business)		Emigrant on holiday back home
Savu family on holiday back home	20s	Female	Highschool		Emigrant on holiday back home

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