

**“SO THAT’S HOW LIFE ABROAD MADE ME
LOOK AT THINGS DIFFERENTLY”**

**TRANSYLVANIAN VILLAGERS AND THE
DOMESTICATION OF EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Since 1989, scholars and politicians have touted so-called East-West migration as a means of “Europeanizing” the former socialist states on the assumption that migrants will become accustomed to “Western” and “liberal” social, political, and economic cultures and transmit that knowledge back to “develop” their native communities. Through multi-sited ethnography following the transnational networks between Bistrița-Năsăud county, Romania, southern Spain, and Vienna, Austria, I test this assumption by investigating how circular and return migrants from rural Transylvania judge the “development” of their communities after three decades of “transition” and migration. I argue that the things they bring back (their “social and economic remittances”; Levitt 1998) paint a mixed picture of “European integration,” as villagers embrace both positive and negative ideas from the “West” while also rejecting or reinterpreting others. Applying Garapich and Grabowska’s (2016) processual typology of remittances (“imitation, resistance, and innovation”), I show how acts of imitating the West (ranging from the adoption of “modern” infrastructure to embracing norms about entrepreneurship, professionalism, and racial hierarchies) are countered by attempts to resist Western values in favor of “traditional Romanian” (or rural, religious, and peasant) lifestyles. I argue that villagers recast this backward-looking romanticization of pre-socialist history into forward-oriented strategies of getting by and finding pride in their peripheralized region by vernacularizing Western concepts to transform ancestral practices (like peasant farming) into modern amenities (like organic agriculture). These findings, which emphasize how “transnationalism and nationalism, or globalizing and localizing processes,...shape one another both simultaneously and sequentially” (Verdery 1998, 292), sometimes contradict earlier studies of middle-class migrants in different Western cities and thus imply the need for

more research into the ways social class, religious socialization, and sending-and-receiving-locality dynamics affect the transfer of ideas back and forth across the continent.

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The dictionary on my computer lists at least eight definitions of “development,” none of which unpacks the term’s weighted connotations or its endlessly variant material incarnations. And so, I am grateful to the individuals from Bistrița-Năsăud county who, by virtue of their patience, curiosity, and hospitality, entertained my questioning presence and offered me their own thoughts on what this prickly idea (and contested material process) might mean. If nothing else, my exploration of their statements and actions confirms that the results of development and developmental discourses—from becoming European to awakening traditions or doing both at once while going green—are manifold and polysemous. Their thoughts also signal that while only my fingers typed the following pages—and only I am to blame for any errors or lapses in judgement they contain—the ideas that fill them have never been mine alone.

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Chapter 1. An Introduction to Lived Experience

*Acasă and Afară (at home and abroad)*¹

“transnationalism and nationalism, or globalizing and localizing processes, [are] mutually constitutive; they shape one another both simultaneously and sequentially.”²

More than a decade after social researchers started to ask about “A Continent Moving West” and to hypothesize “a return to Europe” through the Eastern Enlargement,³ only a few scholars have posed questions about those individuals who come back to “Eastern Europe”—cyclically or after years away. Politicians touted the idea of post-1989 migration as a positive “‘channel’ of East–West exchange,”⁴ taking for granted that living in liberal democracies would instill former-socialist subjects with knowledge about—and belief in—a proper “European” political and social culture that could revitalize their countries of origin. When scholars attempted to measure this welcomed conflux of mobility and “development,”⁵ they turned first, as most other researchers of migration, to the sums workers circulated: their “remittances.”⁶ A contingent of quantitative sociologists later began to inquire whether or not these “new migrants”⁷ remitted democracy along with their Euros, building on anthropologist Peggy Levitt’s earlier proposition that “ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital”—“social remittances”—flowed through the transnational webs between migrants and “homelands” in addition to currency.⁸ In measuring the “Making [of] Democratic Citizens,” these surveyors, like the economic-remittances scholars before them, investigated if the actions of those who

¹ All translations are my own. The title for this thesis comes from a quote by one of my interlocutors in Rebra, whose pseudonym in this work is Liviu: “*Așa străinătatea mi-a dat așa să privesc altfel lucrurile.*” See footnote 14 for more on *acasă* and *afară*.

² (Verdery 1998, 292)

³ (Black, Engbersen, and Okólski 2010);(Szulecki 2020, 19)

⁴ (Szulecki 2020,18).

⁵ The famous phrase is “migration-development nexus” (Sørensen and Van Hear 2003)

⁶ (Agunias and Newland 2012; De Haas 2010; Heleniak 2013; D. Ionescu 2006; King, Frykman, and Vullnetari 2018; Lamba-Nieves 2018; Orozco 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009) (Vullnetari and King 2011)

⁷ Called “new migrations” by scholars who believe globalization and the EU create qualitatively new forms of mobility (Favell 2008), a claim historians dispute (Wyman 1993, 18)

⁸ “democratic remittances” (Careja and Emmenegger 2012); (Levitt 1998, 927)

remained in “the West” furthered “Europeanization” (or “westernization” and “normalization”) which should have “meant the end of a distinct “Eastern” category in Europe, or at least the rapid evaporation of its unpleasant connotations and a gradual ‘reintegration’ of Europe.”⁹

Not until very recently, with the documentation of “Euroscepticism” at the elite level, have scholars begun to wonder if life in “the West” holds up to migrants’ expectations or if their experiences lend themselves to furthering “illiberal” causes over “democratic” ones.¹⁰ Like Benedict Anderson’s musing (concurrent with Levitt’s) on the money trails linking migrant economic transactions to violent social ends—a process he named “long-distance nationalism”—such theories about remittances from people who stay abroad suggest that it is possible to engage in a “politics without responsibility or accountability.”¹¹ However, these investigations overlook the large contingent of “Easterners” in “the West” who make use of the EU’s own flexible border policies and “come home” with some frequency to live with the ramifications of their remittances. Many of these individuals return to rural regions doubly marginalized inside the European peripheries where society-wide disillusionment and institutional mistrust have recently driven urban middle-classes to champion contentious politics¹² but rural populations (long the target of related “civilizing” missions) are still understood as exploited by corrupt politicians.¹³ If, indeed, their ideas, wills, and interests are not properly represented by politicians or scholars, what exactly do those who remain or return

⁹ (Melegh 2006, 1)

¹⁰ “illiberal remittances” (Szulecki 2020); on Euroscepticism see Viktor Orbán’s self-declared “illiberalism” in Hungary, Jarosław Kaczyński’s “Rule and Order” in Poland, Miloš Zeman and Andrej Babiš’s “illiberal innovations” in the Czech Republic (ibid 18); along with Klaus Iohannis’ recent (re)turn to anti-Hungarian propaganda in Romania.

¹¹ (Anderson 1998, 11, 12)

¹² On issues of trust (Dragoman 2006) and disillusionment in Eastern Europe after 1989 (Ost 2005; Greenberg 2014) which some scholars argue has led nostalgia to replace large-scale protest (Kojanic 2015) (see footnote 22). However, mass mobilizations recently reappeared, particularly in Romania: on the Rosia Montană anti-mining movement (Velicu 2015), anti-corruption *Rezist* movement (Adi and Lilleker 2017), and “Diaspora” protests (C. Ciobanu 2018).

¹³ On “civilizing” and “developing” “the rural” (Hann 2015) and the “neo-dependency” of the Romanian rural classes, see (Mungiu-Pippidi 2003, 26): “Scholars working on voting behavior in post-communist Europe have long pointed out that peasants tend, as a general rule, to vote for the wrong people.”

“home” (and therefore take on some responsibility and accountability for the “habitability” of their spaces) believe about the proper order of things and how and where do they express it?

Understanding any sort of aggregate effect of the “social remittances” predicted to “Europeanize” the “Eastern” half of Europe requires a closer look at the particulars, the micro- (and meso-)level changes that have (or have not) occurred in response to the experience of life—as the Romanians in this study say—*afară* (outside, abroad) and *acasă* (at “home”).¹⁴ I have begun to address this issue by mapping the value systems of rural intermittent migrants from a cluster of villages in central Bistrița-Năsăud county, Romania. In using the term intermittent, I mean to include those individuals who are physically present in their “home” country, Romania, for some portion of the year, whether that is as a “circular migrant” on “vacation” between contracts to build a house and visit family, or as a (transnational) returnee after years abroad.¹⁵ I generally refer to these individuals as “villagers” as it is a self-identification they find more meaningful than “migrant”—even if most among them assert that the experience of life elsewhere crucially shapes their worldviews. Through ethnographic fieldwork in the key nodes of villagers’ transnational networks in Rebra, Feldru, Nepos (Romania), Vienna (Austria), and Roquetas de Mar (Spain), I address the research question: How do villagers judge the “development” of their communities after three decades of “transition” and migration?

Working from villagers’ stories of what they learned “over there” and what among those ideas and practices they decided to bring back, I argue that these transfers and their results

¹⁴ On the meso level, see (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019). The opposition of “home” and “elsewhere” is perhaps universal but widely remarked upon in the context of migration (Gardner 1993). However, I refer to “home” in quotation marks in this text to remind readers that we should not take for granted any link between the warm associations of “home” and an individual’s “country of origin.” See (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019, 183; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013) on the normatively laden concepts—like “home,” “sending,” “receiving,” and “host” states.

¹⁵ As it reinforces the idea that migrants should come to work and not stay, the term “circular” is considered part of the “West’s” “migration management regime” (Pemberton and Scullion 2013). “Transnational return” highlights the persistent ties (and movements) between people and places rather than seeing return as a “closure of a migration cycle” (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019, 2).

only partially confirm the predictions of a “liberalization” or “westernization” of social and political values and often prove instead how “transnationalism nationalizes.”¹⁶ I use White, Grabowska, and Garapich’s processual typology, which emphasizes the many opportunities for individuals to assert agency in (and therefore alter or stop) the process of spreading social change, to organize villagers’ remittance strategies into those which “imitate,” “resist,” or reinvent ideas, norms, and practices from the “West.”¹⁷ However, perhaps because I am surveying a different population (with varying religious socializations including Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Seventh-Day Adventist, from smaller, more rural communities where the division between “migrant” and “non-migrant” is less salient as so many have personal experience abroad or are very close to someone who does) and that works in different “destination” settings (both in small cities in “Southern Europe” and large ones in “Western” countries connected through a shared imperial history to the villagers’ region, Transylvania), many of my findings contradict White, Grabowska, and Garapich’s own work among Polish migrants in the UK. In this sense, my ethnographic case reminds us that we have much left to understand about the variation within “East-West migration” and the wide range of social remittances it inspires.

While ideas from the “West” that some villagers embrace as worthwhile and “imitate” back “home” (like expectations of state-sponsored entrepreneurship and professionalism or consumer demands) conform to several earlier scholars’ descriptions of “liberalizing” (or “modernizing”) remittances and can be construed as objective measures of “development” (including the “modernization” of local infrastructure like houses; see chapter 4),¹⁸ other experiences of life *afară* and of the social transformations wrought by labor migrations (and economic “transitions”) have inspired many villagers to revalorize traditional “Romanian” (or

¹⁶ (Verdery 1998, 292)

¹⁷ “Resistance, imitation, innovation” (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2154-5);(White and Grabowska 2019)

¹⁸ (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010; 2011; Vullnetari and King 2011; Boccagni and Decimo 2013) (Garapich 2016)

“Eastern,” rural, peasant, of “backward”) ways. Among these are ideas borrowed from (“imitating”) “Western” colleagues or developed in reaction to experiences of stigmatization that reinforce pre-existing racialized (see chapter 4) and heteronormative hierarchies (see chapter 5),¹⁹ but other notions, like the ethical superiority and healthiness of rural over urban spaces (particularly for child rearing) “resist” (and invert) the traditional normative poles of the “East-West slope” (see chapter 5).²⁰ Such connotations of “traditional Romanianness” draw on a romanticized vision of a peasant (rather than socialist) past to “resist” what they see as an egotistical, capitalist present. This nostalgia does not make them “backward-looking,” or seek to “ossify” their communities and maintain a stagnant space (for a future retreat or to juxtapose with their more “fluid” “Western” settings)²¹ but uses parameters from the past to define migrants’ responsibilities (such as church volunteering, folk custom revitalization, or “diaspora” homecomings) to help maintain social and religious communities into the future (see chapter 5). This is not necessarily a post-communist nostalgia as some have suggested nor an idealization of pre-socialist history as “all they have left;”²² they are aware of “Western” alternatives and also incorporate them into their strategies of “getting by” and finding pride in their (“Romanian”) lifestyles, customs and principles.²³ I argue that such vernacularizing (especially among Evangelical believers and aspiring entrepreneurs for whom toiling in home gardens becomes organic agriculture and living in a “backward,” rustic setting becomes

¹⁹ (Nowicka 2018a; 2018b; Fiałkowska 2019; Krzyzowski and Nowicka 2020; Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Trandafoiu 2013, 74–81; Garapich 2016, 160)

²⁰ The “East-West slope” is Melegh’s turn of phrase (Melegh 2006)

²¹ Which Garapich (building on Levitt) argues is part of the fixed “bi-focality” of “transnational placemaking and identity-making (Garapich 2016)

²² Many scholars identify a post-socialist nostalgia (for socialism) (Boele, Noordenbos, and Robbe 2019; Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2014; Todorova and Gille 2012; Velikonja 2009) but the proliferation of such work has been critiqued as another Orientalizing technique to label the “East” as backward(-looking) (Boyer 2006; 2010). Hann (2015) argues that because Hungarian villagers value private property too much to recognize the material “development” of the state-socialist era (during which time their private property was collectivized), populist-nationalist idealizations of imperial pasts are their only option in a now stagnant periphery.

²³ Scholars of “Eastern Europe” have long analyzed strategies of “getting by” in conditions of economic precarity both during and after state socialism (Brubaker et al. 2006, 191–97);(Hann 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Humphrey 2002). But they rarely discuss how such strategies can become more than just “making do” and act as sources of pride or fulfillment.

peaceful and exotic tourist attraction) maintains the village as a space of potentially meaningful activity (rather than one of emptiness and “vegetating”²⁴) despite its economic peripheralization (see chapter 6).

In categorizing villagers’ judgements of these material and immaterial results of “development,” I have identified three essentializing (and sometimes romanticizing) divisions between the orient and the occident, the city and the countryside, and the peasant past and the capitalist present. Building on theories developed by anthropologists and sociologists studying the everyday polysemy and flexibility of hegemonic discourses, I have treated villagers’ essentializing divisions, or “spatiotemporal imaginaries,” as lenses through which they make sense of the world and the constraints that circumscribe them.²⁵ I find that it is with such “practical essentialisms”²⁶ (defining how states, citizens, and nations should behave, using the binary language of “us” versus “them,” “East” versus “West,” “city” versus “rural,” etc.) that villagers legitimize their beliefs, practices, and identities to reinforce, reverse, and remodel the “social imaginary of development,”²⁷ differentiate themselves from their “Western” neighbors, and help make their peripheralized region habitable.

In order to chip away at the bias in contemporary literature which disconnects post-1989 migration from all its precursors and historical preconditions, I will use the following section to offer a short history of mobility in and out of Romania, then draw this introduction to a close by addressing the construction of (ethno-religious) national belonging in Romania, which serves as the social-historical background for many of my interlocutors’ conceptions. In the second chapter, I elaborate on theories of essentializing discourses and social remittances before presenting my methods in chapter 3 and analysis in chapters four through six. I conclude

²⁴ (Dzenovska 2020; Hann 2015, 900)

²⁵ “spatiotemporal imaginaries of development” (Hann 2015); discourse as lenses: (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, 28; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Brubaker 2004; Herzfeld 2014)

²⁶ (Herzfeld 2014, 30)

²⁷ (Hann 2015, 884); also “cultural hierarchy of value” (Herzfeld 2014, 30)

with thoughts on the generalizability of these findings and avenues of future research, including the impact of the ongoing global public-health emergency on public perceptions of intermittent migrants and how it might reinforce the simultaneous and sequential interweaving of transnationalism and nationalism as mutually constitutive globalizing and localizing (or “Europeanizing” and “Romanianizing”) processes.²⁸

1.1 Historicizing Contemporary “Romanian” Migration

After decades of Ceaușescu’s austerity measures and earlier leaders’ collectivization schemes which diminished personal and family resources, much of Romanian society was hit hard by the decline of domestic industry and the decrease in social services after 1989. Exacerbated by foreign corporations’ and corrupt local officials’ extraction of wealth from the state, this lack of feasible economic opportunities in Romania prompted an expansion of its transnational migratory networks.²⁹ Although some people did move across Romania’s national borders (often clandestinely) during state socialism,³⁰ the scale of post-1989 international migration can only be compared to the extensive movements in and out of the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when steam-powered ships expanded centuries-old continental labor migrations into large-scale transatlantic mobility.³¹ As much as 10% of the Austro-Hungarian Transylvanian peasantry followed economic opportunities to North America (as well as to the territories of the Romania Kingdom south and east of the Carpathian Mountains)

²⁸ (Verdery 1998, 292) I am writing this thesis in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when government shelter-in-place orders have shut down all “non-essential” in-person social and economic activities that would require people to leave their houses (let alone cross borders).

²⁹ (Sandu 2010b)

³⁰ Most of those who left Romania during state socialism were political dissidents or Saxons and Hungarians “fleeing” (sometimes deported) to kin states; however, some ethnic Romanians, including a few in my study, participated in clandestine border crossing so as to work abroad (and return “home”) during that era. These emigration events, however, were dwarfed by the extensive domestic population movements which were fundamental to the demographic and industrialization projects of Romania’s state-socialist leaders and the Greater Romanian state of the interwar period, both of which were keen to “Romanianize” Romania (Verdery 1991; Livezeanu 2000).

³¹ (Wyman 1993)

and two thirds of these sojourners likely returned to their villages with their American wages (and ideas).³² With the regularization of the Romanian presence in western EU countries after Romania joined the Union in 2007, migration became an easily accessible strategy for much of the population and the number of Romanians abroad for both short- and long-term stays has only continued to grow, by some estimates surpassing the 10% emigration of the previous century.

As of 2019, an estimated 3.6 million Romanians (out of a total population of 19.6 million) were living outside the state borders as a part of “the diaspora,”³³ an expression which generally does not include those populations considered to be ethnic kin communities in neighboring territories (like Moldova).³⁴ Italy and Spain, states with large manual-labor markets and familiar Latin languages, are top destination countries, with 1 million and 680,000 officially registered Romanian residents (respectively) as of 2017.³⁵ The next largest populations reside in Germany (500,000), the UK (330,000), France (110,000), and the United States.³⁶ Migrants tend to be young (20-40s) and are slightly more likely to be female than male.³⁷ Although many “highly skilled” individuals also leave Romania,³⁸ most workers are engaged in the care industry, agriculture, or construction work.³⁹

Since 1989 and again after 2007, anti-migration discourses—including both anti-Romanian or anti-Romanian-Roma discourses in Western Europe and anti-emigrant discourses in Romania—have left Romanian migrant workers wary of being targeted by hostile politicians both at “home” and abroad.⁴⁰ This overpoliticization of the idea of lower-class migration and

³² (Verdery 1983, 221);(Wyman 1993, 11)

³³ This number includes some of those who fled during communism; however, many of those individuals lost their citizenship as punishment for defecting and are thus not usually counted in official calculations.

³⁴ (Popescu 2019)

³⁵ (Vintila and Soare 2018, 2)

³⁶ (ibid) These numbers are in constant flux and do not include all those who have not registered.

³⁷ (Garcés-Masareñas and Penninx 2016)

³⁸ Especially medical professionals

³⁹ (Mădroane 2016, 232)

⁴⁰ (López Catalán 2012; Kaneva and Popescu 2013; Ciornei 2012; Falguera, Prieto-Flores, and Gelis 2019; Çağlar 2016; Vrăbiescu 2017; Parker and Catalán 2014; Trandafoiu 2013)

the precarious working conditions such laborers endure have limited Romanian migrants' access to substantive representation or participation in local or "home" politics.⁴¹ Compounded by the low levels of institutional trust prevalent among citizens of post-socialist states,⁴² this avoidance of formal political structures has encouraged a popular and academic presentation of Eastern European migrants as either hapless victims of global capitalist machinations or politically uninterested, economic subjects.⁴³ However, the 2018 and 2019 "Diaspora Protests" and massive diaspora voter-turnout for the 2019 presidential election have begun to change public perceptions of the political power of the "Romanian diaspora"—at least of its middle-class members. Despite these developments and the potential mobilization of other substantial migrant populations (especially Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Turkish) in analogous situations, there are very few studies of post-1989 labor migrants as political actors. Instead, the early literature on Romanian rural migrants and return migration has been focused on discussions of social networks, motivations for leaving and returning, and outcomes of economic remittances.⁴⁴ While none of my rural-return and circular-migrant participants expressed a connection with the protest movements (they usually proclaimed a total disinterest in *politică*), nearly all of them declared that they vote (when in Romania and abroad) and, as I argue in this thesis, they hold strong ideas about how states, citizens, and community members should behave, informed by their migration experiences as well as local, religious, and rural values.

1.2 God, the Nation, and the Peasantry: Constructing Romanian Identities in Transylvania

While there are various semantic strands woven into the most important definitions of

41 (Çaglar and Glick Schiller 2018, 8; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019)

42 (Mishler and Rose 2001; Dragoman 2006)

43 (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010) on most migration studies' singular focus on economics

44 (Roman and Goschin 2012; Marcu 2011; R. O. Ciobanu and Bolzman 2019) Specifically, the effects of return on youths (Horváth 2008) and women (Vlase 2013a), on return migrants' relative happiness (Bartram 2013), and male returnees' entrepreneurship (Shima 2010; Anghel 2016; Domingo and Blanes 2015, 112; Şuiu 2017, 151).

what it means to be “Romanian” today, I will limit this brief overview to those I believe to be most relevant to my discussion of itinerant migrants from rural Bistrița-Năsăud county: religion, ethnicity (and “ethnic others”), and the peasantry. Populations in Romania are now classified by nationality or ethnicity (*etnie*) in official documentation,⁴⁵ but the geographic regions which make up the contemporary nation-state have long histories of religious and cultural diversity. Transylvania, where my interlocutors reside (at least part of the year), offers a telling example of such pluralism out of which nationalist activists would later conceive of a “Romanian” ethno-national identity. A basin in the heart of the Carpathian mountain range, Transylvania became part of the Romanian state after WWI, prior to which it had been controlled by the Kingdom of Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Early in the Protestant Reformation, Transylvania became the first region—at the time an emerging semi-independent Hungarian Principality—in Europe to pass a decree of religious tolerance, the 1568 Edict of Torda, recognizing Unitarianism, Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism as accepted religious denominations.⁴⁶ These denominations were practiced by the three traditional Transylvanian “nations” (*Unio Trium Nationum*), a local historical term used to describe those groups with political rights: the Hungarian nobility, Szeklers (another Hungarian-speaking community in Eastern Transylvania), and the Saxons. Romanian Orthodoxy never became an officially accepted sect; in 1698, as Austria's largely Catholic authorities were expelling the Turks and reestablishing control of the territories of royal Hungary, they subordinated Transylvania's Orthodox population to the Serbian Orthodox church and obliged local Orthodox priests to pledge allegiance to the pope. The result was the Greek Catholic church—a syncretic sect, formally under papal direction, with mostly Orthodox rites. The majority of the priests and parishioners in what is today's Bistrița-Năsăud county

⁴⁵ There remain sixteen recognized minority groups today, totaling around 11% of the population (or about 2.15 million people) (“Recensământul Populației Și Locuințelor” 2011). See footnote 59 for population statistics.

⁴⁶ (Hitchins 1999) This radical doctrine was enshrined in legislation as part of an effort to maintain Christian unity against the Ottoman Muslims who had taken over most of the region by the 16th century.

joined the Greek Catholic Church, which remained the majority religion (over 95%) in official records until after World War I.⁴⁷

Greek Catholic and Orthodox activists (usually intellectuals/lawyers/priests) were the first to plead to Budapest and Vienna for recognition of “Romanians” as a political unit (a “nation” in the local, historical sense) within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As such appeals continued to be deflected by Austro-Hungarian administrators into the early 20th century, the Romanian-speaking⁴⁸ intellectuals of the 19th century generally came to support a union of all “ethnic” Romanians (as an ethno-nation rather than shared spiritual community) on both sides of the Carpathians. Starting in the late 18th century, the intellectuals of the Școală Ardeleană ("Transylvanian School") undertook a project of Latinizing their language's Cyrillic script and modernizing the Romanian vocabulary by importing expressions from French and Italian. Inspired by their connections to Paris and renewed archeological inquiry, they claimed a new standard Romanian dialect by purging Slavic and Turkish words and attempted to make direct descent from the Roman soldiers who made the region that empire's northeastern borderland in 106 CE.⁴⁹ As these activists joined forces with Transcarpathian Romanians to build a national literary canon and history, they spread their desire for an enlarged state uniting those

⁴⁷ (Chira 2018, 146, 290). Many elites and peasants in this region strongly supported the Habsburg Empire (particularly the Austrian side which encouraged Greek Catholicism) as they took pride in their role as a border regiment of the empire, a position delegated to them by Empress Maria Teresa in 1762 (Sandu 2018, 19)

⁴⁸ Although they were generally multilingual, often speaking Serbian, German, Hungarian, and Latin from university and religious training across Central Europe.

⁴⁹ (Boia 2013)

people they saw as their ethnic kin separated by external imperial control in the historic regions of Transylvania, Bessarabia, Bucovina, and the Banat.⁵⁰



Map 1: Historical territories claimed by Romania with contemporary border in red (Horațiu n.d.)

his dream was realized during the post-WWI treaty negotiations which doubled Romania's size and resulted in a massive program of Romanianization across the newly united territories.⁵¹ Over time, this assimilationist program turned towards “the spiritual unity of Romanians,”⁵² privileging the Romanian Orthodox Church—which was the majority religion of the Old Kingdom where Bucharest the capital is located—at the expense of the regional variants in Transylvania, such that the dominant ideology of Romanian nationalism, although

⁵⁰ These regions, along with Wallachia and Moldova, had been defined since the Middle Ages, when stretches of them were also first controlled by some of earliest “Romanian” Princes and Kings; Transylvania was very briefly united with these “Romanian” territories in 1599-1600 by Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave).

⁵¹ See (Livezeanu 2000) for the Romanianization of the educational system and (Săndulescu 2010) for links between Romanianization and fascism in the late interwar period

⁵² (Schifirneț 2001, 483)

still ethnically rooted, took Orthodoxy for granted as the nation's original, "natural," and God-given religion. Although ostensibly an atheist organization, the Romanian Communist Party embraced this framework and collaborated closely with the Romanian Orthodox church after WWII to systematically suppress other religious denominations and solidify the conflation of Romanian ethnicity, nation, and Orthodoxy.⁵³ Although Orthodoxy has not been accepted as the official national religion in the newly democratic Romania—as it essentially was in the interwar period—the religion continues to play an important symbolic role in contemporary politics, as most politicians openly identify with the Church and use its emblems in their campaigns.⁵⁴ With the appointment of a younger Patriarch in 2007 (coincidentally the same year as Romania's ascension to the EU), the Church moved away from its earlier efforts at being recognized as "the national" Church and worked towards more subtle integrative measures, especially bilateral agreements with the state, to solidify their political authority over the "social issues" they deem most important (including ethnic diversity, poverty, and welfare).

Despite these long-term efforts at homogenization, beginning in the early 20th century new protestant groups, especially Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists, took root around Romania—and in Transylvania in particular, with its history of religious pluralism.⁵⁵ Although their growth slowed during state socialism, these groups (along with the Romanian Orthodox Church) are flourishing anew, encouraged by the "revival of religious collective identities" after 1989 and the opening of borders to foreign (usually US) evangelicals.⁵⁶ As of the last census in 2011, there are around 81,000 Seventh-Day Adventists, 113,000 Baptists, and 356,00 Pentecostals, making these groups the largest minority religions

⁵³ (Turcescu and Stan 2014)

⁵⁴ (Turcescu and Stan 2014). The current German-Saxon Lutheran President, Klaus Iohannis is an interesting and notable exception.

⁵⁵ (Pandrea 2001) (Dobrinu and Manastireanu 2019, 5)

⁵⁶ (Coşciug 2018, 89) In order to gain official recognition by the Communist state, the various regional sects were encouraged to unify into one official "Romanian Pentecostal" (or Baptist, etc.) church. The privileges of this provisional recognition included some access to foreign networking, which opened transnational pathways for certain church leaders before 1989 (Pandrea 2001).

among ethnically Romanian populations.⁵⁷ These sects' connections to wider transnational spiritual communities enabled their members to be among the first Romanian citizens to migrate abroad after 1989. In fact, the earliest, and ultimately most successful, migration networks between Romania and Spain (now one of the top destination countries for Romanian citizens working abroad) originated in northern Transylvania where I conducted my research, as a result of the religious ties between evangelical groups in the two countries.⁵⁸

While these small religious groups are slowly growing in number, the more important “minorities” for identity construction in Romania today are defined based on language and ethnicity. Although Romania lost some of its territorial gains in WWII, the contemporary state still covers large geographic regions which have been the home to other ethno-religious and linguistic groups for centuries.⁵⁹ The largest remaining minority ethnic groups are Hungarians and Roma with around 1.27 million self-reported Hungarians and 623,500 people registered as Roma.⁶⁰ The Roma, as a highly disadvantaged group, are likely under-counted and it is unclear whether or not they are also thought of or used in other statistical measurements as Romanians or Hungarians—as all of them speak at least one of these languages and many of them speak both.⁶¹ These populations, who continue to reside in large part in Transylvania (although Roma groups are more spread out), are the main targets of (internal) “othering” by nationalist Romanians. Anti-Szekler/Hungarian discourses was recently reanimated at the national level as President Klaus Iohannis condemned their latest parliamentary motion for autonomy.⁶² The

⁵⁷ (“Culte Religioase” 2019) In comparison with the 16 million orthodox Romanians (about 86.45% of the population), there are 871,000 Catholic, 601,000 Reform, and 58,000 Unitarian believers, most of whom are Hungarian (the largest ethnic minority in Transylvania and Romania). Few people identify as non-believers, although increasing numbers of young people are choosing secular lifestyles and identities.

⁵⁸ (Erick and Ciobanu 2009; R. O. Ciobanu 2010)

⁵⁹ Ethnic groups as percentages of the total minority population; Hungarians, 58.86%; Roma, 29.80%; Ukrainians, 2.44%; Germans, 1.73%; Turks, 1.33%; Russo-Lipovens, 1.13%; Tatars, 0.97%; Serbs, 0.87%; Slovaks, 0.65%; Bulgars, 0.35%; Croats, 0.26% Greeks, 0.18%; Jews, 0.16%; Italians, 0.15%; Poles, 0.12%; Czechs, 0.12%; other groups, 0.89% (Brădăţeanu 2017)

⁶⁰ (ibid)

⁶¹ On the difficulty of measuring “the Roma” as a group, see (Ladányi and Szelényi 2001).

⁶² He was then fined 5,000 lei (about \$1,165) by the National Council Combating Discrimination (*Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării*) (Pricop 2020)

history of Saxon settlers in Transylvania, including Bistrița/Bistritz, is another important element in the imagination of Romania’s “Europeanness” (or lack thereof).⁶³ Studies of ethno-linguistic belonging in Romania, and in urban, multicultural Transylvania in particular, have shown that these ethnic frames are not always important in discussion of “getting by” but become meaningful in other domains.⁶⁴ Migration seems to accentuate these divides, especially between ethnic Romanians and Roma (see 4.2).⁶⁵

Part of the traditional Romanian nationalist discourse on ethnicity is that Romanians have been a peasant people long oppressed by “foreign” rulers, which pitiable situation could only be resolved by unification of the “historical territories,” as took place after WWI. The idealization of peasants in national discourse (as bearers of “unadulterated national identity”) has a long history (before, during, and after state socialism) in Romania ⁶⁶ as well as elsewhere.⁶⁷ As far back as the German philosopher Johann Herder, attempts at finding the true “folk” roots of “the nation” inspired many to turn to peasants as a source of key “living” traditions. Despite the allegedly international character of communist ideology, (ethno-)nationalism burgeoned across the region, particularly in Romania, where, as Verdery delineated in her monograph on the subject,⁶⁸ pride in working for the “nation” became attached to essentially all professions.⁶⁹ Although (as Hann describes of rural, socialist Hungary) peasants became the targets of renewed “developmental” schemes to help transform them into communist workers, they (or their customs, clothes, and arts) remained symbolically important in the national imaginaries of socialist states. Like earlier European folklorist,

⁶³ (Oltean 2019; Cercel 2019).

⁶⁴ (Brubaker et al. 2006, 191–97)

⁶⁵ (Fox 2013)

⁶⁶ For a discussion of nationalists’ idealization of peasantry before WWI see (Hitchins 1999), for similar tendencies among interwar fascists see (Săndulescu 2010), and for communism-era peasant-oriented nationalism see (Verdery 1991)

⁶⁷ (Wilson 1973). See (Brass 2000) on the return of the “agrarian” myth around the world

⁶⁸ (1991): *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*

⁶⁹ Migrating to work abroad decouples people’s labor from the Romanian national economy and thus loses some of its former social capital.

communist parties regulated and encouraged folk orchestras and ensembles as a kind of sterilized national cultural identity, which could be used to show off the state's rich cultural heritage (in comparison with the tradition-poor, capitalist "West").⁷⁰ After '89, many strove to reclaim national identity after socialism as well as to brand regional diversity for the purposes of tourism and the preservation of tradition, which has encouraged a renewed interest in peasant histories and traditions.⁷¹

The idea of the Romanian peasantry is classically tied to Romanian Orthodoxy; however, Evangelical communities' "conservative praxis" has also been criticized for "emphasiz[ing] too much [sic] the modest and humble condition of Romanian peasants."⁷² When the sect first took off in Romania in the 1930s, the Pentecostal insistence on "simplicity and a return to humility and modesty" was understood by some in the 1930s when the sect first took off in Romania as a regressive step away from "social and economic emancipation."⁷³ The stereotype has been challenged again since 1989 as Evangelicals became some of the first to take advantage of the economic advancement available through transnational (circular) migration, yet it continues to be the case that many Evangelical families reside in rural zones, such as much of Bistrița-Năsăud county, and thus likely have ties to agricultural labor. Before detailing the particular religious and socioeconomic makeup of the communities I selected in Bistrița-Năsăud in the methodology section, I will turn to the wider literature on social remittances and essentializing discourses which frames my ethnographic analysis, the latter of

⁷⁰ (Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva 1997)

⁷¹ (Slobin 1996); See also the proliferation of "ethnographic" collections across the countryside, including one in Feldru and up the road in Ilva Mică. One of the most internationally famous folk costume designers in Romania, Virginia Linul, is also a few kilometers away from the villages I studied in a neighboring *comună* named Salva.

⁷² (Pandrea 2001, 119)

⁷³ Ibid; however, even then this stereotype was disavowed by believers since the faith places such emphasis on reading (and thus teaching people to read) biblical texts, which in a predominantly illiterate society was a very modernist position. See **Error! Bookmark not defined.****Error! Bookmark not defined.****Error! Bookmark not defined.****Error! Bookmark not defined.**(Dobrinicu and Manastireanu 2019, 19) on how this makes evangelical faiths decidedly "un-Romanian."

which underscores much of the peasant and ethno-religious national imaginaries I have sketched in this section.

Chapter 2. Theories about Practical Essentialisms and Social Remittances

2.1 “The Development of Underdevelopment:”⁷⁴ Questions of Easts, Wests, and Countrysides

The “Europeanization” project evoked in discussions of post-1989 migration (and “transition”) takes as its aim the “normalization” of one half of a continent based on the model of the other. Although politicians, experts, and lay people cite the previous fifty years of opposing economic systems (state-socialist and capitalist) as the proximal cause of the gap in “development” between the two sides (a gap that according to developmental indexes is relatively small on a global scale, particularly between cities⁷⁵), the material and discursive differentiation between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe has a long history. Before the Enlightenment, Larry Wolf argues, elites imagined a continent divided along a North-South axis. This “developmental scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism” rotated ninety degrees in the 18th century as “the East” took over the role of the undeveloped “North” of the ancients.⁷⁶ Wolf asserts that “Eastern Europe” appeared at this time as a separate social (rather than geographic) category somewhere between the poles of the scale that “Westerners” would use to justify “civilizing” colonial missions across “the rest” of the planet.⁷⁷ Other scholars, including Maria Todorova and Iver Neumann, counter that rather than becoming a separate category “outside” Europe, “Eastern Europe” (or “the Balkans”) acted as the continent’s discursively marginalized, constitutive “internal other;” Wallerstein likewise posits the region’s economic (semi-)peripheralization in his world-systems theory.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ (Hann 2015, 911)

⁷⁵ World Bank 2018 income data cited in (White and Grabowska 2019, 37)

⁷⁶ (Wolff 1994, 13). For a comparative historical view see (Mishkova and Trencsényi 2017)

⁷⁷ On “the West and the Rest” in the postcolonial literature, see (Chakrabarty 2000; Said 1979)

⁷⁸ (Todorova 2009; Neumann 1999) (De Genova 2017) makes a similar argument about the racialization of Roma in his analysis of the (re-)making of “Europe” as a distinct social entity in the contemporary era.

Whether internal or external, the “practices of imagination”⁷⁹ that essentialize “East” and “West” spaces (and the people within them) reinforce what Michael Herzfeld calls “cultural hierarchies of value”⁸⁰ which privilege the practices, identities, and standards of one side over the other. Although the belief in an “East-West slope” may have faded in favor of the idea of competing modernities during the Cold War, Attila Melegh asserts that this civilizational discourse resurfaced in the 1980s as observers declared the failure of state socialism.⁸¹ Having analyzed the speeches of politicians and experts across Europe at the turn of the century, Melegh describes an internalization of the East-West slope among many “elite” Europeans.⁸² Despite the promise of a “reintegration of Europe” as the European Union expanded eastward, Emmanuel Crudu and Maria Eremenko insist that the “internal process of alterity making” persists.⁸³ However, few scholars have stopped to ask what the internalization of the slope might look like among people who are not policy makers, experts, or national politicians, and whether this discourse is, in fact, as hegemonic as predicted.

In his exploratory “ethnography of nation-states,” Michael Herzfeld introduces a framework for addressing the everyday practical essentialisms (including “practical orientalisms” and “occidentalisms”) with which individuals (from bureaucrats to mountain sheep thieves) reify (and resist) the power of the “nation-state” in their lives.⁸⁴ Other scholars interested in the construction of characteristics national collectives deem embarrassing for outsiders to know about them (a shared feeling, often revealed in “disemic” tensions between official and informal self-presentation, that produces the “cultural intimacy” of the imagined

79 (Römhild 2017, 29)

80 (Herzfeld 2014, 66)

81 (Melegh 2006). On the counterefforts to invent a category of “Central Europe,” see (Szulecki 2015)

82 Melegh identifies three types among Hungarian politicians, experts, and elites: those politicians who “other” local society, separating themselves from the mass of insufficiently “European” citizens who require Europe’s reason and tolerance to move upward on the slope; 2) those “modernizationists” who argue that the nation can catch up by working together; 3) and those “nationalists” and “petty imperialists” who believe the country has always been European but has fallen on hard times (114-119).

83 (Crudu and Eremenko 2012, 13)

84 (Herzfeld 2014, 66)

nation-states⁸⁵) have pointed out that these essentializing discourses tend to assign nationalized identities along social class lines. Marek Pawlak explains that in the case of Polish migrants in Norway, the working class typifies the nation (the “ordinary people”) and therefore accrues the negative connotations that go along with that status (“Eastern,” “post-socialist,” “backward”)—at least from the perspective of the “cosmopolitan” middle- and upper-class Poles in “the West” and elites “at home.”⁸⁶

The “myths, symbols, and values,” or the subjective dimension of such essentializations, make up what Chris Hann terms a “social imaginary of development.”⁸⁷ These imaginaries which also rely on quantified material characteristics of spaces (the “objective dimension”⁸⁸) construct ideas over time of who is developed and who is not. Hann formulates his social imaginary to trace the “development of underdevelopment”⁸⁹ along a countryside-city divide, a cleavage which is at least as old as the other regional and national imaginaries and has taken many forms in Europe over the centuries—from the “issue of ‘land’” or the problem of “‘peasant’ society” in the late 19th century to the “the ‘urban-rural divide’ and the ‘agrarian question’ during and after state socialism.”⁹⁰ While often signifying “authentic” national culture, peasants perceived traditionalism also makes them the target of “developmental” schemes,⁹¹ such as the one Hann chronicles in his long-durée analysis of the

⁸⁵ Herzfeld defines “disemia,” a product of the creative “cultural engagement” (or “social poetics”) of citizens with essentialized categories, as “the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection.” (ibid, 13); (Anderson 1983)

⁸⁶ (Pawlak 2015b). Internal stigmatization may be tied to neoliberalizing processes (Pawlak 2015, 253-254): in his work on “stigmatizing a brother,” Buchowski (2006: 466–467) argues that “the strong polarizations in society were rationalized and explained in the line of ‘domestic orientalism’ where the Other was represented by conationals, who ‘failed’ to adapt to the ‘new’ and ‘just’ reality.”

⁸⁷ (Hann 2015, 884)

⁸⁸ Many have argued that deciding what is objective is a subjective affair, as normative ideas and cultural values permeate definitions of “modernity,” “development,” and even “capitalism” (Casanova 1994; Corbridge 1986; Mezzadra 2011; Weber [1905] 2002).

⁸⁹ (Hann 2015, 911)

⁹⁰ (Mungiu-Pippidi 2003, 24)

⁹¹ Herzfeld explains, “as the state appropriates for its own purposes the local idioms of morality, custom, and the solidarity of kinship, it dismisses the local renditions themselves as conservative survivals, picturesque tradition, and familism, respectively—all serious obstacles to the European nation-state’s rationalist vision of modernity” (Herzfeld 2014, 8)

evolving imperial, socialist, and post-socialist “rural... civilizing process” in a small community in Hungary where politicians and activists aimed to eliminate the settlement’s appalling “Asian conditions.”⁹²

As rural, working class, and “Eastern European,” the villagers in my study represent a set of intersecting subjectivities that have been the object of these varied essentializing discourses and civilizing processes over the centuries. While scholars like Edward Said, Wolf, Todorova, Neumann, and Melegh, among countless others, have dissected the hegemonic imaginaries that sustain marginalizing cultural hierarchies of value, much less attention is given to the actual voices of the men and women these discourses target. This “bottom-up” perspective has long been the purview of anthropology, despite the discipline’s own colonialist roots.⁹³ However, due to the disarticulation of post-socialist and post-colonial studies⁹⁴ and the publicity of the 1990s ethnic wars in the “Balkans,” most qualitatively minded scholars who choose to study alterity-making discourses in “Eastern Europe” have focused on nationalism rather than Herzfeld’s practical orientalisms and occidentalisms. Of these studies Rogers Brubaker and his colleagues’ work on “everyday ethnicity” and their theory of nationalism as a discursive form, idiom, or lens through which to categorize people and explain actions resonates the most with Hann and Herzfeld’s propositions on the linguistic construction of development and state power.⁹⁵ However, because Brubaker and his colleagues are primarily interested in markers of ethno-national belonging in bilingual communities (Hungarian and Romanian speakers in the Transylvanian city of Cluj/Kolozsvár, Romania), they have a decidedly urban and multicultural bias. While Hann and Herzfeld do venture into rural areas, they, like Brubaker, avoid discussion of how migration might affect social imaginaries in the

⁹² “Ázsiai állapotok” (Hann 2015, 890, 899); this expression comes from the writings of a populist reformer in 1912. The phrase is double-edged as it implies backwardness or barbarianism and harkens back to the Hungarian national narrative tying the nation’s origins to Central Asian horse-riding tribes.

⁹³ (Fabian 2014 [1983])

⁹⁴ (Chari and Verdery 2009)

⁹⁵ (Brubaker et al. 2006; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Brubaker 2004)

communities they study in Hungary, Greece, and Romania, even though these countries rely heavily on intra-EU labor mobility. The kind of comparative perspective in which “one place is made meaningful by contrasting it with another,” which migration scholars call “transnational placemaking,”⁹⁶ is at the heart of the imagined geographies governing the idea of an “East-West slope.” Lived experience of “here” and “there” suggests a kind of heightened comparative thinking which makes migrants interesting case studies of the mobilization of the essentializing discourses structuring such imaginaries. The transnational exchange of notions about “hierarchies, identities, and ideas”—and the social transformations they encourage (or discourage)⁹⁷—has been most fruitfully studied using the notion of “social remittances” and so it is to that literature I turn next.

2.2 Social Remittances, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Social Change

As the agents of Han’s “civilizing process” applied their hopes to peasants, many migration scholars project developmental aspirations onto migrants and their economic remittances.⁹⁸ Attempting to look beyond the “*homo economicus*,”⁹⁹ Peggy Levitt describes “social remittances” as the “ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities” and back.¹⁰⁰ While the disciplinary jargon (which perhaps unnecessarily translates polysemous cultural and political values into financial terminology) may be new, the idea behind social remittances of “local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion”¹⁰¹ is quite old and has been written about by social scientists for at

⁹⁶ (Garapich 2016, 164, 158)

⁹⁷ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019)

⁹⁸ (Aguias and Newland 2012; De Haas 2010; Heleniak 2013; D. Ionescu 2006; King, Frykman, and Vullnetari 2018; Lamba-Nieves 2018; Orozco 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009)

⁹⁹ (Römhild 2016, 28)

¹⁰⁰ (Levitt 1998, 927); see (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Careja and Emmenegger 2012) on “democratic remittances”

¹⁰¹ (Levitt 1998 926)

least a century.¹⁰² The social-remittance framework (and its later spinoff, “political remittances”¹⁰³) branched out of transnationalism studies in the 1990s; this perspective highlights the overlapping “social fields” that disturb the “national order of things” by connecting migrants and non-migrants across national boundaries.¹⁰⁴ Although this orientation emphasizes the multi-directionality of transnational flows, much of the traditional social-remittance literature focuses on instances when migrants “imitate” norms, practices, or ideas from “Western” countries and remit them “home.” The emphasis on the transfer of “liberal” values (especially ideas about gender, sexuality, and racial diversity) to “less-developed” countries of origin has opened the field to accusations of a neo-colonial bias where all good things come from the “West.”¹⁰⁵ However, those emphasizing migrants’ “right-wing” or “illiberal” transfers—including Kacper Szulecki (and his team at the DIASPolitic project) who studies Polish migrants “disenchant[ed] with the Dream of the West,” Benedict Anderson who writes about “long-distance nationalists” supporting ethnic violence, and scholars of conservative diaspora lobbies—also run the risk of playing into “moral panics” over the influx of “backward” migrants into “Western” societies.¹⁰⁶

Anne White, Izabela Grabowska, and Michał Garapich, who have conducted a series of investigations of UK-Polish migration,¹⁰⁷ and Remus Gabriel Anghel, Margit Fauser, and Paolo Bocanni, who coordinated an edited volume focusing on return migrants,¹⁰⁸ avoid such

¹⁰² More and more historians are discovering evidence of such cultural exchanges, especially between Europe and the US at the end of the 19th century, including by Polish (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918), German (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2019; Krawatzek and Sasse 2020), and various other European migrants (Wyman 1993).

¹⁰³ (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2019, 2): of “political principles, vocabulary and practices between two or more places, which migrants and their descendants share a connection with.” See also studies of formalized transnational political participation: (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei 2019; Perez-Armendariz and Burgess 2013; Burgess 2014)

¹⁰⁴ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc 1994)

¹⁰⁵ For example, (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010; 2011; Vullnetari and King 2011; Boccagni and Decimo 2013); critique: (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014, 79) cited in (White and Grabowska 2019, 36).

¹⁰⁶ (Szulecki 2020, 22); (Anderson 1998); (Connor 1993; Coufoudakis 1993; Khaching Tölölyan 1994); on moral panics, see (Boccagni 2019, 187) and (Balch and Balabanova 2016; Cheregi 2015)

¹⁰⁷ (Garapich 2016; Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Grabowska et al. 2017; White et al. 2018; White and Grabowska 2019). Part of wider literature on Polish migrants and personal change: (Pawlak 2018; 2015b; 2015a; Pawlak and Goździak 2020; Erdal and Pawlak 2018) and (Szulecki 2020).

¹⁰⁸ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019)

an ideological opposition (between liberal/democratic and illiberal) by highlighting the many opportunities for individuals to assert agency in (and therefore alter or stop) the process of remitting. Their processual definition emphasizes and expands on Francesca Vianello’s earlier assertion that remittances “are developed – and not passively learned – by migrants through their work experiences, their life events and the interaction with different cultures,”¹⁰⁹ and reemphasizes Levitt’s original transnational focus which makes clear that remittances flow in both directions between migrants’ countries of “origin” and “destination.”¹¹⁰ Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni argue that former migrants’ ideas and actions (their remittances or transfers) can inspire new innovations at the meso-level of society, reinforce ongoing social changes, or have no effect (mechanisms they call: innovation, reproduction and inertia).¹¹¹ White, Grabowska, and Garapich describe similar “agency filters,” which include “resistance” (blocking the acquisition or spread of remittances), “imitation” (adopting ideas, practices, and objects from destination countries and remitting them elsewhere), and “innovation” (adapting or “vernacularizing” remittances to local circumstances).¹¹² Although none of these scholars spend much time discussing essentializing discourses like the East-West slope,¹¹³ I have found White, Grabowska, and Garapich’s processual typology the most useful for my own endeavors, because, as Garapich argues, resistance and its correlate—innovation—can serve as “strategies of making sense of the world that contest hegemonic discourses.”¹¹⁴

Regina Römhild, along with Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron, support Garapich’s claim through their studies of migrants’ appropriation of orientalism and long-

¹⁰⁹ (Vianello 2013, 92) in (White and Grabowska 2019, 42). Vianello’s article on Ukrainians and Vlase’s (2013b) on Romanians are the Eastern European contributions in the remittances special issue of *Migration Letters* (Boccagni and Decimo 2013).

¹¹⁰ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2155), see also (Boccagni and Decimo 2013; Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2016)

¹¹¹ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019, 11, 14)

¹¹² (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2154-5);(Levitt and Merry 2009, 441)

¹¹³ Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni come the closest in discussing “social hierarchies, collective identities and cultural capital (especially local cultural norms and knowledge)” (2019, 11). I refer to these findings and the specifics of Garapich’s resistance theories in the coming chapters.

¹¹⁴ (Garapich 2016, 157)

distance nationalism respectively.¹¹⁵ Römhild asserts that labor migration out of (and tourism into) Greece is constrained by—but also remakes—a “European topography of power” in which the “West” is the productive, economic land and “the Orient” and “the Balkans” are only an exotic retreat (see 6.1).¹¹⁶ Likewise, Glick Schiller and Fouron reveal how some Haitian migrants use the flexible and polysemous language of “nations” and “nationalism” to support “the day-to-day efforts of people in the homeland to live lives of dignity and self-respect”¹¹⁷ working to ensure that “one’s homeland stands as an equal in the world of nations.”¹¹⁸ While such claims use nationalism and orientalism as discursive forms for emancipatory aims, there is no shortage of cases when migrants “talk with the nation” (in other words, make sense of the world via a national perspective)¹¹⁹ to reinforce racializing hierarchies in an effort to overcome their own stigmatization (see 4.2).¹²⁰ Milica Bakić-Hayden uses the concept “nesting orientalisms” to describe how those on the negative end of other hierarchies of value, like the former Yugoslav states in “the Balkans,” can recreate Orientalist discourses to stigmatize internal others.¹²¹ All these cases of “appropriating, and queering a powerful ‘geography of imagination’”¹²² prove the merit of investigating migrants as creative mobilizers of essentializing discourses. Conceiving of the East-West slope as one such practical essentialism or flexible idiom allows us to investigate understudied rural communities targeted by “Europeanization” schemes, like the villagers who (circularly) return to central Bistrița-Năsăud county, deploy such frames to justify, suppress, or amend ongoing social change in the era of mass intra-EU migration.

¹¹⁵ (Römhild 2016);(Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001)

¹¹⁶ (Römhild 2016, 29, 30)

¹¹⁷ (ibid 20, 21)

¹¹⁸ (ibid 30, 3)

¹¹⁹ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008)

¹²⁰ On the notion of “European Christianity” versus Muslims, see (Nowicka 2018b; 2018a; Fiałkowska 2019; Krzyzowski and Nowicka 2020) and on anti-Roma, see (Moroșanu and Fox 2013; Trandafoiu 2013).

¹²¹ (Bakić-Hayden 1995)

¹²² (Trouillot 2002) cited in (Römhild 2016, 29)

One of the most important findings of Anghel et al's book on "transnational return" is the interrelation between social change and local social context, which connection reinforces the importance of sustained fieldwork in a given community.¹²³ As Anghel puts it in an earlier work, "migrants' new social statuses and the ideas and values they bring back with them are weighted and negotiated against local values and systems of classification."¹²⁴ Quantitative sociologist Dumitru Sandu similarly emphasizes the importance of the village as a social, economic, and demographic context which "condition[s] the flows of transnational circular migration."¹²⁵ I address some of the regional and village-level particularities of the communities I visited in northern Transylvania in the next chapter which otherwise details the qualitative methods I adopted from the foregoing studies of essentializing discourses so as to apply them to multi-sited fieldwork.

¹²³ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019)

¹²⁴ (Anghel 2016, 356)

¹²⁵ (Sandu 2005, 556) Sandu is also interested in the economic ("stock of capital") and demographic shifts (rates of marriage, child birth, and divorce) at the village and regional levels that rural migration has caused, investigating the supposed modernization of Romania through migration (Sandu 2010a).

Chapter 3. Methodological Notes on Ethnographies in Three Homes

3.1 Multi-sited Qualitative Methods and the Demographics of Rebra and Feldru

Analyzing vernacular understandings of—and contributions to— “development” and how they relate to hegemonic “othering” discourses like the “East-West” slope requires a methodology capable of fitting individual people’s statements into their wider social and historical context. Although the discipline has a long history of contributing to “orientalist” worldviews,¹²⁶ anthropology and its attendant ethnographic methodologies still provide powerful tools for analyzing people’s discourses and practices in the context of their lived experience. I follow the example of anthropologists like Chris Han, Michael Herzfeld, Nina Glick Schiller, and Georges Fouron, as well as sociologists like Rogers Brubaker and Peggy Levitt, who use fieldwork as the primary means to study the flexible and polysemous “social imaginaries” and collectivizing discourses with which people make sense of the world (even as they are constrained by them).¹²⁷ However, as ethnographers of globalization have pointed out, the classic notion of fieldwork as deep engagement with one place, its people, and their way of life no longer allows us (if it ever fully did) to understand the “symbolic webs of meaning”¹²⁸ in which objects, ideas, and actors live out their social lives. As the communities in my study are so deeply intertwined in migratory networks linking the villages of northern Transylvania to towns and cities elsewhere in Europe, I found it prudent to embrace an expanded ethnographic process. Inspired by Marcus’ multi-sited ethnography¹²⁹ and

¹²⁶ (Said 1979; Fabian 2014 [1983])

¹²⁷ (Hann 2015; Herzfeld 2014; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Brubaker et al. 2006; Levitt 1998; Levitt and Merry 2009)

¹²⁸ (Rosaldo 2004, 167) referencing Geertz’ classic definition of culture: “historically created systems of meaning” (Geertz 1973, 5019:13).

¹²⁹ (1995)

Burraway's¹³⁰ extended case method, which encourage social scientists to follow a people, concept, or thing along its trajectory through space, I followed villagers from their homes in Bistrița-Năsăud county, Romania to their other lives in Vienna, Austria and Roquetas de Mar, Spain.

Dumitru Sandu of the faculty of sociology at the University of Bucharest and Mircea Chira, the director of the Bistrița Statistical Center, suggested a pair of *comune* (township-like administrative units of one or more villages) just northeast of Năsăud, the second largest city in Bistrița-Năsăud (BN) county in northern Transylvania. Their recommendations, the comune

of Feldru and Rebra (the former of which also encompasses the village of Nepos)¹³¹ are particularly interesting sites as the county of BN is the region of Romania with the second highest proportion of migrants who leave for Spain and the extensive, early migration networks between these villages and Spain in particular have been studied previously. Oana Ciobanu worked in the early 2000s to map the transnational networks that enabled individuals and

Map 2. Bistrița-Năsăud (BN) county in Romania. Source: ("Date Geografice Și Climă." 2020)



Map 3: Close up of Bistrița-Năsăud (BN) county with Rebra and Feldru marked in red. Rivers blue, train tracks black and white, highways green and grey. Source: (Bulz and Ciornei 2012)

¹³⁰ (2009)

¹³¹ Due to lack of time and social connections, I skipped one community in this same geographic area (Rebrișoara) and worked only briefly in the fourth (Parva).

families from Feldru to move abroad in the early 90s — many of which began as a result of a collaboration between local Romanian and Spanish Pentecostal and Seventh-Day Adventist parishes.¹³² These networks connecting Feldru and Rebra with localities in Spain (as well as in Austria, which became a popular destination after the 2008 financial crisis)¹³³ have expanded such that essentially all the residents of these towns from all three major religions have been abroad or have family members abroad,¹³⁴ making them fruitful places for an investigation of the transmission of social-political remittances. Tracing these networks led me to Roquetas de Mar, a coastal city in southern Spain (Almería county), and to Vienna, in and around which the majority of the migrant villagers from Rebra and Feldru work.¹³⁵

Table 1: Statistical information about the two comune of this study. Source: (Chira 2018)

Locality	Population (2011)	Orthodox	Pentecostal	Seventh-Day Adventist ¹³⁶	Greek Catholic
Rebra	3,163	68.0%	22.0%	<10.0%	0
Feldru ¹³⁷	5,760	77.0%	15.7%	<4.3%	2.9%
Nepos	1,909	56.0%	35.4%	<7.9%	0.5%

¹³² (R. O. Ciobanu 2010). See (Elrick and Ciobanu 2009) on how these networks influenced reactions to EU expansion. There is also an ongoing, yet-unpublished study of the social networks between Bistrița and Roquetas carried out by researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, as Bistrițeni make up a notable majority of Romanian citizens in Roquetas. See (Matzal 2018) for an interview with the director of the project, Dr. José Luis Molina.

¹³³ Some individuals (e.g. Gheorghe) from these villages have been traveling to live and work in Austria since before the end of state socialism, and many (e.g. Petru, Fr. David; see 5.3.2) are aware of the longstanding connection between their region and Vienna, when both were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During this period, villagers addressed their grievances to the imperial court in Vienna and some notables among them (including Vasile Nașcu from Feldru) even traveled there in person to lodge formal complaints on behalf of their town or to pursue studies (Uiuiu 2016).

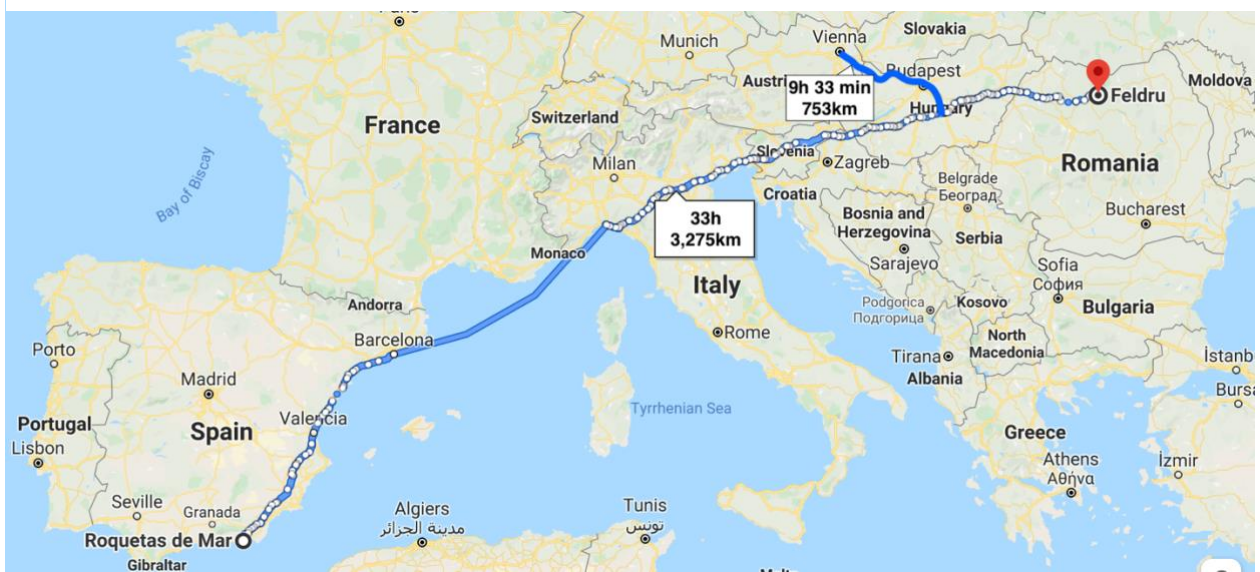
¹³⁴ (Chira 2018)

¹³⁵ There are a few individual outliers who worked in Germany, the US, or Ireland (sometimes having left Romania before 1989). There is no official statistical material on how many individuals from these communities go to which countries abroad; however, it is common knowledge in the village that Roquetas and Vienna are their most common destinations. The village officials and the county statistician assert that over 25% of Feldru (out of a population of 7,500) are seasonal workers and hundreds of other families have left for longer periods, while in Rebra every family has at least one member abroad and 1/3 of the village's houses (population 3,000) are empty at any given time with entire families away.

¹³⁶ There is no specified Seventh-Day Adventist section in the statistical atlas of these towns; this percentage includes “other religions and undeclared.” I have therefore assumed that the total number of Seventh-Day Adventists is less than this percentage, as I have indicated above.

¹³⁷ The *comuna* of Feldru includes both Feldru and Nepos.

Map 4: Routes between Feldru, Vienna, and Roquetas. Source: GoogleMaps, with my annotations



Focusing on rural regions such as Bistrița is important for several reasons. First, as implied by the concentration of studies on the “developmental” potential of economic remittances for so-called sending states, the impact of remittances in rural regions is often believed to be relatively more significant than in urban areas.¹³⁸ This belief sets up migrants as important actors in rural communities. Rural regions are also often more conservative voting blocs with higher levels of documented racial prejudice,¹³⁹ making them interesting places to test the relationships between experiences of migration, ideas about “development,” and essentializing discourses.

3.2 Fieldwork and Interviews

When I got to the field in BN, Almería, and Vienna, I used local connections to find accommodations¹⁴⁰ and engaged in participant observation, watching and interacting with community members in public spaces (like cafes, restaurants, and churches) and in private

¹³⁸ (Orozco 2002); (White and Grabowska 2019, 46)

¹³⁹ (Rodriguez et al. 2009)

¹⁴⁰ During my work in Rebra, the only available accommodation were rooms for pilgrims at the Orthodox monastery 5km outside the village. This placement limited my ability to get into town (and the hours/days I could be there) but did facilitate meaningful connections with local bus drivers, social workers, and firefighters who helped organize rides for me. A special thanks are again due to Mircea Chira and Radu Pavela for these connections.

settings when invited into their homes or while driving somewhere in their cars. I wrote daily fieldnotes describing these experiences and my observations about them, including any relevant comments made by community members. Over the course of three trips to Romania, one trip to Spain, and one trip to Austria, I also collected ethnographic and qualitative interviews. I found my interviewees through snowball sampling during my various stays. I first arrived in BN on a scouting trip in 2018, when I made connections with local academics, politicians, and priests and returned for preliminary interviews and introductions in June of 2019. The bulk of my interviews were conducted in BN in August of 2019, though I conducted some in Roquetas de Mar that July and others in Vienna that fall. Because my connections in Vienna and Roquetas were more sparse and pandemic-related travel restrictions prevented me from returning to the field to collect more data this spring, I decided to include only my 16 most in-depth interviews, involving a total of 28 people in Romania to ensure that I sampled individuals who not only have strong connections to their “home” villages but return to them frequently. This decision to focus only on those whom Anghel et al. call “transnational return” migrants (a concept which emphasizes that return does not necessarily mean “the closure of migration cycle” but that many [former] migrants maintain personal and emotional connections elsewhere) is supported by social-remittance scholars’ findings that face-to-face communication is “embodied and relationally thick” and thus increases return migrants’ influence in comparison with other forms of ongoing social change (from both local or global factors).¹⁴¹

Most of my interviews took place in people’s homes or in local cafés. In both cases, interviews very rarely involved a single subject. Although I usually sought out one person in particular, additional speakers (usually friends or family members) frequently felt comfortable chiming in with their perspectives and stories. This created dynamic group interviews,

¹⁴¹ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019); (Boccagni 2019, 184); (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2159)

somewhat directed by me but largely free-flowing and personal. A table describing the demographic information of my 28 participants (organized by the pseudonyms I use in this text) is included in the appendix.

3.3 Grounded Theory and Inductive Analysis

Despite the drawbacks of a short fieldwork experience, I amassed a fairly large quantity of source material (over 27 hours of recordings in Romania alone). To sort through this amount of data, I turned to the methods of qualitative content analysis,¹⁴² organizing quotes from these interviews into thematic clusters based on categories relevant to White, Garapich, and Grabowska's processual typology of social remittances: imitation, resistance, and innovation.¹⁴³ In the chapters that follow, I apply grounded theory to elaborate explanatory and contextual frameworks out of my ethnographic and interview material and attempt to answer my research question: How do villagers judge the "development" of their communities after three decades of "transition" and migration?¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009; Mayring 2004)

¹⁴³ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016 2154-5; White and Grabowska 2019)

¹⁴⁴ (Strauss and Corbin 1994; 1997; Charmaz and Belgrave 2007)

Chapter 4. Imitating “Europe:” Infrastructures, Entrepreneurship, Professionalism, and Racialized Hierarchies

When differentiating life *acasă* and *afară*, most villagers began with salaries. As Cristian and his sister-in-law Elena put it, “the salaries are much larger [in Spain]... you work for a month and it lets you buy all that you want—clothes and food... here there is much to do and little money for doing it.” Sitting in his family’s garden on the other side of Rebra, Liviu elaborated this same idea, questioning why “Europe” had it so much better: “The president [of Romania] says to come home, but I’m sorry, why? To do what? My little girl needs food, clothes...If the salaries were like in Europe....” Although Romania became a member of the European Union while Liviu was working in Spain (before he found a job near Linz, Austria) and is believed to be a “Latin” country,¹⁴⁵ many villagers internalize the notion that Romania is separated from *occidentul* (the occident) on a civilizational slope.¹⁴⁶ Maria, a fellow parishioner at Elena and Cristian’s church in Rebra, compared Romania with her experience working near Vienna: “*La noi* (literally “at us,” here, *chez nous*), well, it’s just not as developed of a country, but little by little....” These judgments of Romania’s relative underdevelopment come from familiarity with “Western” political, social, and economic cultures and often involve embracing elements of those systems—from wage structures to institutional norms and consumer demands—that villagers find worthwhile. Such “imitating,” defined by Garapich, and Grabowska as “duplicating or reproducing objects, ideas or practices” encountered elsewhere, has been

¹⁴⁵ Several villagers brought up this idea, which refers to their Romance language and asserts a civilizational or even genetic tie to the Roman soldiers who claimed the territory of what is now Romania as their Eastern borderland in the early second century. This became a common nationalist claim in the 19th century during a period of intense linguistic revisionism when numerous Slavic words were replaced with French ones (Boia 2013).
¹⁴⁶ (Melegh 2006)

widely documented in the research on social remittances and is at the root of ideas about the “Europeanizing” potential of “East-West” migratory exchanges.¹⁴⁷

In this chapter, I describe four instances of “imitation” I encountered and show how they do not necessarily match politicians’ and policy makers’ normative predictions of beneficial transfers.¹⁴⁸ Desires for certain kinds of infrastructure (some of which materialized as a result of economic remittances), expectations that states sponsor entrepreneurship, and norms about professionalism are variations on common themes in the literature about “westernizing” remittances, the specific iterations of which are influenced by villagers’ personal religious and post-socialist context (where the importance of private property, the necessity of benevolent state intervention, and moral readings of interactions are all emphasized). The final instance of duplicating conventions from afară—embracing racialized hierarchies—falls under what Szulecki has called “illiberal remittances” and also exemplifies Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni’s concept of “inertia” as it feeds into preexisting local worldviews, maintaining (or even entrenching) the status quo rather than changing it.¹⁴⁹ Earlier scholars treat such “anti-diversity” stances as “rejecting” (or “resisting”) “Western” ideas.¹⁵⁰ This may be true for some villagers’ affirmations of heteronormativity (Chapter 5), but I argue that those among my interlocutors who express such views believe their Austrian and Spanish colleagues to support rather than oppose racializing discourses.

¹⁴⁷ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2153); (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010; 2011; Vullnetari and King 2011; Boccagni and Decimo 2013)

¹⁴⁸ Levitt and Lambas-Nieves (2010, 3) call such transfers “negative” (instead of “positive”)

¹⁴⁹ (Szulecki 2020; Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019)

¹⁵⁰ Rejecting/resisting: (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2154). Other scholars emphasize the transfer of pro-diversity (pluralistic) norms. For example, (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011).

4.1 “Europeanized” Development: Social, Political, and Economic Expectations

4.1.1 “Objective” Development: Infrastructure “Modernization” and Consumer Culture

Walking with me past the multi-story, colorful houses which now line the paved streets of Rebra, Feldru, and Nepos, many villagers pointed out how the economic remittances channeled into family homes and local infrastructure (canals, bridges, and roads) have dramatically “modernized” their communities. One man in Rebra claimed that when he left the region in 1981, there were only seven cars in the village while now there are over 900. Investing in houses “back home” is a widely documented strategy among migrants (both from Romania and elsewhere) who aspire to the same *nivelul de trai* (“standard of living,” a piece of developmental jargon my interlocutors have picked up) “at home” as they have experienced in their workplaces.¹⁵¹ Along with other examples of conspicuous consumption, adopting (or “imitating”) “Western” construction styles helps some migrants accrue social capital while also opening them up to criticism from those who find the houses incongruous with local aesthetics or values (chapter 5).¹⁵² The man who described the rapid jump in automobile ownership in Rebra over the last forty years condemned the discordance of what he saw as the “Spanish-style” bright colors of migrants’ large new houses (unlike the regimented suburbs his friend had witnessed in Michigan)—although the practice is so widespread now in these communities that the modest older houses stand out as the outliers.

In homeowners’ minds, there are three main reasons to build homes: to fulfill personal goals of owning property, to leave an inheritance for their children, and to set them up for

¹⁵¹ (Adams 1991; Papademetriou and Martin 1991; Massey et al. 1999; L. Smith and Mazzucato 2009; Garbin 2019) (Anghel 2013; Salih 2013; Osella and Osella 2000; Dumitru 2006; Grigolini 2005; Goldring 2017)

¹⁵² Although these new consumption patterns may improve the living standards of the most vulnerable, they do not necessarily do the same for their social standing; for more on the Roma in Romania, see (Anghel 2016; 2019). See also, *Mândrie și Beton* (Pride and Concrete) a photo-documentary project with examples of remittance-financed houses across the country <http://www.prideandconcrete.com>

retirement when they can finally stay “at home.” State-socialist collectivization increased the already high value attached to private property by agrarian communities across “Eastern Europe,” where “landownership after enserfment defined the ‘free,’ worthy person.”¹⁵³ Aspirations to own property originally motivated many of the villagers to migrate, since they could not earn enough startup money from local wages and did not trust loan-offering institutions (see 4.1.2). Although they recognize that their construction styles and “modern” amenities are attempts to replicate “Western” standards, villagers assert that the emphasis on owning houses is very “Romanian”; the Spanish rent forever, Liviu explained, but “Westerners” do understand the importance of making investments in their future and it is these inheritance practices—which protect (or allow for the improvement of) socio-economic status through the intergenerational accumulation of capital—that villagers hope to emulate by building houses. Liviu brought this notion up as he explained that he would never catch up to his Austrian colleagues in terms of wealth since Austrian parents tended to save up and leave money to their offspring. While they cannot make up for their own parents’ humble origins, many villagers hope that they can provide for their children in a similar fashion by building houses for them “back home” so they do not need to leave Romania.

Sending money “home” for an envisioned retirement (by building a house, investing it, or depositing it in a savings account) is also a strategy to cope with low social and economic status associated with being a migrant abroad. This emotional crutch helps them (in comparison with local working poor in “destination” countries) withstand low wages and poor working conditions, even if they may never end up using this escape as they originally imagined because they (or their children) have become too rooted in life abroad to fully return “home.”¹⁵⁴ Referring to those who can only live in their large houses a few months out of the year, Miriana

¹⁵³ (Verdery 1998, 300)

¹⁵⁴ See Miraftab on “the material power and exchange value” of “a real or imagined ‘elsewhere’” (Miraftab 2014, 12).

explained that “they like to have property in spirit: I have something; I worked for something.” However, houses may no longer be enough for the next generation accustomed to “Western” consumer demands and “standards of living.”¹⁵⁵ Although migrants believe their remittances have improved local infrastructure, they also complain that much is left to be done at the national level (like revamping highways, public transportation, and domestic industry) in order to match their “Western” counterparts. I turn in the next section to other arenas in which the state falls short of villagers’ new expectations.

4.1.2 State-Sponsored Entrepreneurship: A Revisionist Entrepreneurial Returnee

Part of the capitalist dream at the heart of the migration-development nexus is the idea that migrants will return “home” and use their savings to open new businesses.¹⁵⁶ Many villagers embrace a kind of individual responsibility for starting and running businesses which matches this notion of an “entrepreneurial returnee.” One such small-scale business owner, Gheorghe, contends that “there are Romanians all over the world and if they would all come back, they would all bring ideas for businesses and they would develop the country.” Aside from a few comments on states not following through on promises to incentivize the return of enterprising migrants,¹⁵⁷ most scholars treat this process as a kind of privately funded development and do not address its public dimensions. However, several of my interlocutors asserted that they witnessed a type of state-sponsored business culture abroad (especially in southern Spain) and wished it could be duplicated in Romania, where the *alte principii* (other principles) of state

¹⁵⁵ A “culture of migration” is sometimes formed when expectations outstrip local resources (Horváth 2008)

¹⁵⁶ (Murphy 1999; McCormick and Wahba 2001; Nicholson 2001; Piracha and Vadean 2010). (Shima 2010; Anghel 2016; Domingo and Blanes 2015, 112; Şuiu 2017, 151) emphasize the (male) gendering of entrepreneurship

¹⁵⁷ (Cingolani and Vietti 2019, 633)

officials negate the entrepreneurial efforts of returnees: “they kill your ambitions down to the roots,” as Elena put it.

In their preferred model, the state acts as a source of investment and entrepreneurial inspiration. Expressing his preference for local Spanish authorities over Romanian ones, Cristian says of the former, “*They help you.*” Sitting in Cristian’s living room in Rebra (just up the road from his own house), Ștefan expanded on his brother’s claim with an example from his time as a farmer and now a greenhouse owner in Roquetas de Mar:

“Well [here in Romania] they’re not interested in you developing at all. What do they care about that? But the mayor’s office over there, on the other hand, they go out to the fields in the morning, out from the office—one representative from the mayor, one from the bank who helps out, and they walk around your land...[they say] I see you’ve registered 20 hectares of agricultural land. And they propose to the man, why don’t you make yourself a greenhouse, so you make something, so you produce something. We’ll both be happy.”

More than just facilitating individual’ efforts, the state should encourage its constituents’ entrepreneurial potential before they even ask for help, as Ștefan carried on enthusiastically, “*They come with ideas!*” The state makes a calculation of mutual growth and offers to give or lend businesspeople the startup funds they need: “because the state knows something: if the man makes a greenhouse, in three seasons he will pay off the investment...A one-time investment, and once the man makes his greenhouse, two, five, 30 years the man can produce for the state.” This model of a supportive, business-savvy state which acts as a source of capital while citizens remain the owners and workers, appeals to villagers as a result of their memories of socialist government intervention, their experience of post-socialist precarity, their distrust of institutions, and the stories they have heard from Spanish colleagues about post-Franco economic transformation.

Despite the fact that similar communist-era systems frequently proved inefficient as people were not invested in collective farms and resented being forced to give up their own homegrown produce, other people in the village stressed the role the state should play in

helping maximize profits and minimize waste in local agriculture by organizing produce collectives.¹⁵⁸ Villagers including Ștefan had participated in a similar *almacén* system (a state-run repository) in Spain, which, Ștefan explained, fed the profits from greenhouse owners' surplus produce back into the state system and ensured that the farmer had a market for his goods. Having heard stories about its success in Spain, many villagers who continue to farm wished they had such a system in place to earn a profit off their crops.

This is not to say that they support a renewal of state-run employment, but the benevolent influence of the Spanish investor-state compared favorably with their own experiences of government officials' predatory interference. Sofia, the wife of the owner of the village café (opened with money from Spain) explained that: "Everyone who comes back complains about the same thing: they would do something, but they [the powers that be] don't let you." Incessant "inspections" (demands for bribes), Sofia explained, had forced her friend to close the shawarma shop she had opened some months earlier with her savings from Roquetas.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, interest rates are too high and income too unstable to encourage villagers to envision local banks as helpful resources. As Maria spells out, unlike Austrians, people in Romania "have a bit of apprehension, are a bit afraid of going to the bank." Villagers who embrace the Spanish model Ștefan describes believe the state, unlike such private sources of capital, has an interest in—and responsibility to protect—locals' efforts to operate businesses in Romania without having to migrate (again) to afford them.

The hope that their state may come around to embrace these modified capitalist principles also rests in stories from *afară*. Villagers are aware that Spain transformed from a country of emigrants (like Romania now) into an immigration destination after having been

¹⁵⁸ For examples from Romania and Hungary see (Verdery 1983; Lampland 1995)

¹⁵⁹ It also seems possible to me that demand was too low given that almost all the villagers eat every meal at home.

free of their own dictator only fifteen years longer than Romania has been rid of Ceaușescu.¹⁶⁰ Cristian reports that his Spanish coworkers described migrating previously but “things changed and one day came when they did not have to leave anymore.” What made the difference was that “they received help from the state [and] you could make yourself a business so you could produce something.” Experience elsewhere has restored some faith in the state’s potential to do good in ordinary people’s lives, so that despite contemporary demoralizing conditions, people still “expect the state to be ‘responsible’ and take care of the people.”¹⁶¹ In this case, villagers’ ideas about states’ responsibilities rest on their experience with “western” institutional practices and they transfer these “organizational performance” norms back “home.”¹⁶² In the following section, I expand on other institutional performance norms that villagers have remitted based on experiences with Spanish and Austrian healthcare professionals and employers.

4.1.3 Civility and Professionalism: Corruption as Civilizational Decay

“Organizational performance,” one of the “normative structures” Levitt documented in her original presentation of social remittances, denotes the expectations migrants pick up about how institutions, businesses, and other associations should function.¹⁶³ Scholars have emphasized how these performance norms, from beliefs about how churches should be run to workplace etiquette, encourage migrants to question leadership styles, embrace new management techniques, and coordinate new modes of recruitment and fundraising back “home.”¹⁶⁴ However, many of my interlocutors feel that the systems they wish to change are

¹⁶⁰ Franco died in 1975. On Spain’s transition from emigration to immigration see: (Escribano and de Lera 2003; Tezanos and Tezanos 2006; Sandu et al. 2009). This remained true despite the harsh effects of the 2008 financial crisis on the Spanish market (Domingo and Blanes 2015).

¹⁶¹ (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, 34) Glick Schiller and Fouron documented this among Haitian migrants, who have perhaps even more reason to feel critical but yet find hope “despite two centuries of disappointment.”

¹⁶² (Levitt 1998, 933)

¹⁶³ (Levitt 1998, 933) She also points out that these are not “new” transfers, just put into these terms now.

¹⁶⁴ (Wyman 1993; Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010) (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2157) (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011)

outside their control and they do not report success influencing the politicians, administrators, doctors, or employers whose practices contradict the villagers' acquired expectations.¹⁶⁵ Instead, they highlight the importance of the subjective dimensions of interactions with those in positions of power as it is at this personal level where professional norms gained from working abroad overlap with their spiritual beliefs about moral conduct and give them the ground to judge their social superiors' comportment. Their judgements reinforce civilizational divisions as they compare corrupt and inconsistent states (and their representatives) to consistent and amiable ones while also disrupting stereotypes about seasonal migrants, as even those people who are believed to isolate themselves and remain *închiși* (closed) notice and appreciate professional norms.

Like the Spanish mayors who stride out into your fields to help you develop them, other public employees abroad, from doctors to tax collectors, prove their worth by behaving professionally, which villagers define as engaging cordially, consistently, and actively with customers and constituents. While Romanian doctors are impatient and, as Oana remarked, "if they talk to you, they won't look at you while doing it," Austrian ones know how to follow certain "norms of civility" underpinning "conviviality and interactions in highly urbanised diverse societies."¹⁶⁶ Recalling his wife's experience giving birth in a hospital in Linz, Oana's son Liviu explained how they were treated kindly despite not knowing the local language:

"For example, in the hospital where we went, the assistants spoke so beautifully, the doctors so beautifully—whether they were men or women, whoever; they came and spoke with you, and, I don't know, you have the impressions that the world disappears and you're somewhere on the moon—not on this planet. That's how much nicer it is than Romania, even though we were foreigners there!"

¹⁶⁵ Scholars describe successful influence as "scaling up" remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011)(Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019; Grabowska et al. 2017)

¹⁶⁶ (Vertovec 2007) cited in (Garapich 2016, 163). Garapich connects this civility with driving etiquette, which some of my respondents also affirmed was more polite in Austria.

This cordiality has made an impression even on those who generally prefer Romania and are disposed to criticize “the West.” Like Liviu, his fellow Rebrean Cristian frequently declared that “home is better” and hoped he could stop soon working as a truck driver between Romania and Spain, but he also admitted that, “in a way, it’s been good that I emigrated because I had things to learn.” In particular, Cristian admired “the way they respect you” (*stilul de a te respecta*), like when doctors’ offices give you an appointment and stick with it: “over there if they say, tomorrow you have an appointment...the hour they told you, you’re received. Whereas here, yeah, tomorrow. Tomorrow you go and find nothing, no one is there.” This experience of consistency is echoed in the descriptions of other Austrian and Spanish state officials and private employers. Liviu’s cousin Simona explains that “the Germans are very organized and correct. If the state owes you something, it gives it to you and if you owe them, they take it... The law is the law over there.” In comments reminiscent of the online complaints of the Polish migrants Haynes and Galasinksa studied in the UK, Irina describes how this fairness extends to Spanish employers: “here, you work for a patron who promises you one thing and gives you something else... there, what they promise, they give you, not one cent less.”¹⁶⁷

Irina made this connection during her time *la struguri* (“picking grapes,” literally “at the grapes”), the most cited seasonal employment among the communities I visited. Although it involves similar agricultural labor, the term does not yet have the baggage of *căpșunari* (strawberry-pickers), a demeaning appellation for Romanian working-class or circular migrants in Spain and Italy common in Romanian political and media discourses before the country joined the EU in 2007. Only one person, Gheorghe (who saw Spain—and the people who go there—as much less “advanced” than Austria), ever used this specific insult in my presence, but other villagers agreed with some of its connotations. People who only socialize

¹⁶⁷ (Haynes and Galasinska 2016)

with other Romanians and stay in the fields (or construction sites) rather than interacting with neighbors and coworkers from other cultures were believed to maintain their old, “closed” (*închișe*) mentalities. This idea of “ossified” (or imagined-as-immutable) workers is similar to the sentiment Garapich and Levitt documented among Polish migrants who believe their entire “hometown” is incapable of adapting to the times.¹⁶⁸ While it is certainly possible that people working the fields do not learn about other domains of life while abroad, interactions with employers and public-service providers offer plentiful opportunities for observant farmhands to notice and come to appreciate other “organizational performance” norms. Commenting on her time picking grapes in Spain, Irina elaborated on the “efficient-work culture”¹⁶⁹ and active management styles she witnessed abroad: “The differences over there [are that] they work on a schedule, eight hours, but you actually work those eight hours... In Romania the bosses don’t work, but over there they work side by side with you....The eight years I was there picking grapes, the boss worked. He never sat down.”

Villagers use these norms of professionalism to critique their own surroundings and reinforce the perception that Romania is less “civilized” than the “West.” Oana asserted that lazy, inconsistent, and predatory officials, like the doctors who “won’t even look at you... if we don’t reach for our wallets” mean that “we aren’t so much of a democracy.”¹⁷⁰ By emphasizing the personal comportment of state actors, they also translate the secular institutions into individual moral persons responsible for their own behavior—as Ana insisted when discussing bureaucrats and politicians’ embezzling or extorting money: “stealing is a sin... and God’s angels are keeping records.” Corruption on the part of those in power, like greedy politicians, doctors, or “inspectors” (4.1.2) is recognized as self-enrichment at the

¹⁶⁸ (Garapich 2016, 159)

¹⁶⁹ (Abainza and Calfat 2018, 366) on Ecuadorian returnees

¹⁷⁰ Pulay finds this trope repeated among Roma in Bucharest: “Hospitals and doctors also served as one of the main pretexts whenever my acquaintances wished to prove that theirs is a country which is lacking some of the most elementary forms of ‘civilization’ (*civilizație*).” (Pulay 2017, 111)

expense of others (rather than personal efforts to get by).¹⁷¹ Looking to the human relationships that connect states and citizens allows villagers to combine their beliefs about professional and ethical comportment and place the onus for further “development” both on the state as a conglomerate entity and on its individual representatives. Whether from experience of pluralistic “Western” societies or socialist and post-socialist separation of church and state, villagers did not extend their religious judgements to aspirations for non-secular state institutions but used this ethical stance (combined with “European” experience) to legitimize their critiques of those more powerful than themselves. While notions of “Western” professionalism act as a versatile lens through which to evaluate the character of officials, other lessons reinforced by colleagues abroad provide more negative frameworks for judging local populations. I turn to such racializing discourses in the following section.

4.2 Exclusionary Europeanness: Racializing Discourses as “Illiberal” Social Remittances

Along with organizational performance norms and consumer demands, scholars documenting “westernizing” remittances foreground cases in which migrants encourage their communities to accept other religions, races, gender roles, and sexual identities.¹⁷² Some villagers expressed such pluralistic views, particularly a few who migrated to Spanish towns that have grown into small cities (like Motril, a city near Roquetas) after thirty years of expansion with Romanians’ construction and agricultural labor. Some of these individuals (and their children) noticed and embraced the shift among locals from a small-town mentality to a more urban and cosmopolitan view (attending universities and accepting foreigners).¹⁷³ Although (as happened

¹⁷¹ On the evaluation of what is and what is not corrupt see (Kojanić 2017, 47, 49). Kojanić also elaborates on how corrupt practices negotiate “changing patterns of state provision” in post-socialism (in Serbia in particular).

¹⁷² (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010)

¹⁷³ Antonia describes the change thus: “Over there in the region where we live...it used to be a fishing village, fishing and growing sugar. You know? So, very simple people...They worked in agriculture starting from when

the state-socialist era) both men and women work while abroad (especially before women have children and after those children are old enough to stay at school all day), no one reported a change in traditional gender roles; women still tend to the children, the cooking, and the cleaning. The idea of women pursuing higher education is now widely accepted and common, but villagers cite this change as one of a difference in the times and not something learned from elsewhere. Whether because they have no issues with these ideas or because they were hesitant to voice a dissenting opinion in front of a new (“Western”) acquaintance, the majority of villagers were silent on the other “social” issues frequently remitted to “home” countries. They sometimes noted the presence of other ethnicities and religions abroad (in their children’s schools, in their workplaces, etc.) but gave no indication of their feelings about the situation. The exception to this rule was a contingent of largely middle-aged men who were quite vocal on their feelings about race and sexuality. Although they saw their support of “traditional” (heteronormative) families as rejecting “Western” “openness” to diversity (Chapter 5), they believed that their racializing discourses about Roma and other “non-white” people were shared by their Austrian and Spanish colleagues. These villagers used their foreign colleagues’ definitions of honor and trust to legitimize preexisting prejudices towards the Roma¹⁷⁴ and to express new prejudices towards African immigrants.

As other scholars working with “Eastern European” migrants who remain in the “West” have also documented, several of the people I interviewed (back “home” in Romania) used racializing logics as a strategy to overcome their own stigmatization abroad.¹⁷⁵ As Liviu explained, when Roma “migrate, they make many Romanians ashamed” (*când merg, ei fac foarte mulți români de rușine*) because, as Ionuț elaborated, “they [foreigners] say that Roma

they were small, and many of them didn’t go to school.... This generation is much more open than their parents, you know? Because they already go to universities in Granada, in Malaga. They leave more and it’s different. You can really see that there are more young people in the city now....in the last decades, things have changed radically from how they were before when we arrived.”

¹⁷⁴ (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019) categorize such remittances which maintain the status quo as “inertia”

¹⁷⁵ (Moroșanu and Fox 2013; Fox 2013;Trandafoiu 2013)

means Romanian.” Due to the phonetic similarities between the two words and the fact that most incidents with migrants are reported in the media by citizenship (not ethnicity), Roma and Romanian are sometimes treated as the same, a sore spot for many including some Romanian embassy employees who have organized campaigns to “educate” the “European” public about the difference between the two words (and “groups”).¹⁷⁶ Some of my interlocutors (like Liviu quoted below) experienced the results of this conflation first hand and described the incidents as validating their negative views of the Roma: “I work with Germans and if the police catch a Romanian stealing something, they come up and tell you the next day to your face that a Romanian [gypsy] was caught stealing something... Many people say, ah you’re Romanian, you’re just like the others.”

My interlocutors traced the logic of this “Western” prejudice to its roots in definitions of hard work and trustworthiness which overlapped with (and thus reinforced) their own ideas about what Roma lack. Ionuț, like many other villagers, was quite proud of the respect Romanians had garnered from other countries because of how hard they work,¹⁷⁷ so when he criticized Roma for supposedly being lazy, he implied they lacked this “Western” respect: “Austria, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, all the countries want Romanians to come to their country to work because Romanians work, they’re hardworking... but gypsies don’t even want to work.” Liviu (a construction worker) also used his Austrian customers’ trust in Romanians as a sign that Roma, who he claims are raised with different values, are less deserving: “wherever we go, Romanians, we work in houses, and I am not exaggerating here, they leave their houses in our hands. We are really good people, we work hard, we come home... We never take anything from their houses... That’s how we have been raised, but not the gypsies.”

¹⁷⁶ (Kaneva and Popescu 2013). On “groups” as constructed: (Brubaker 2004)

¹⁷⁷ The common Romanian word for “hard-working” is *harnic*. Villagers usually layer working-class or peasant connotations onto their definitions of hard work, referring mostly to manual labor—sometimes agrarian (see 5.1 and 6.2) or *munca de jos* (dirty work)—in comparison with “Westerners’” office jobs.

While Ionuț and Liviu (among others) used what they experienced as “Western” logic to support their previously held prejudices, other villagers picked up racial (and religious) definitions of “Europeanness” that excluded populations they had not been in contact with before migrating. The most extreme example of this was Petru, a man from Feldru who works as a bus driver in Dublin. In describing his pride for his town and region (Transylvania), he asserted that “we have no foreigners. We have no Blacks, no Chinese. None. We are Europeans.” Any prejudice against Hungarians (a common Romanian nationalist tendency, as Hungarians are the largest ethnic minority in Romania and mostly reside in the parts of the country that used to belong to the Kingdom of Hungary, like Transylvania) comes from Bucharest, Petru believes, given that Hungarians and Romanians are both “Christian Europeans.” It was rare for other villagers to express the idea that Romanians were “Europeans,” but Petru’s emphasis on this point falls in line with findings from scholars working with migrants in the UK who pick up discourses conflating race (whiteness) and religion (Christianity) in their definitions of Europe.¹⁷⁸ After describing his love of all Christian religions, Petru continued by saying that his Irish colleagues agreed (they were “shoulder to shoulder” with the Romanians on this issue) that “Eastern Europe” was lucky not to have any African people yet: “We are a little bit Nazi. We don’t like foreigners, especially blacks... Our country [is] for white people. This is East Europe actually. All East Europe. All Russia, Ukraine, all, we are the same.... Thank God! We [do] not have blacks yet, we are happy.” Petru had had issues with customers of African descent not wanting to pay their fares when riding his bus route, which in addition to his Irish colleagues’ statements had led him to believe that “blacks hate whites, very much.” While consumer demands or norms about entrepreneurship

¹⁷⁸ (Fiałkowska 2019; Krzyzowski and Nowicka 2020; Nowicka 2018b). One other person, a young woman who had worked in Spain, expressed negative views about Islam, which she saw as an “aggressive religion.” Otherwise, most villagers made no other comments on other religions. Because they already live in multi-denominational communities (Evangelical and Orthodox), they may be more disposed to openness toward other faiths or they were simply not comfortable expressing other views with me. There are some tensions between sects in the villages (see Fr. David chapter 5 footnote 219) but they largely seem to live together amicably.

and professionalism may have “Europeanized” villagers’ values in a “positive” way, such racializing discourses—what Szulecki would call “illiberal remittances”¹⁷⁹—allow villagers to “imitate” the “West” in what could be considered a more negative manner. However, some villagers offer alternative views of what is valuable, and even the benefits of “objective” measures of development like houses can be questioned. In the next chapter, I move on to address the elements of the “West” (including some of the aforementioned transfers) that many villagers reject in favor of “traditional” peasant or rural practices.

¹⁷⁹ (Szulecki 2020)

Chapter 5. Rejecting “Europe:” Traditional Families, Countryside Childhoods, and Peasant Pasts

One faction of my interlocutors—primarily young men (“patriots,” in their wives’ description)¹⁸⁰ who are intent on living in Romania rather than establishing roots abroad—find the migrant-driven “modernization” of village material life a sign of progress. As Andrei, a single man in his early thirties who recently launched a side business detailing cars, put it, “They [migrants] have invested in Rebra.” Another swath of villagers look at the houses (often including their own) and declare them a “dead investment... that just [brings] your own comfort.”¹⁸¹ These villagers believe that their neighbors’ motivations—their “thoughts in relation to capitalism,” as an official in Feldru described it—have been negatively influenced by aspiring to live like those in the “West.” Houses, which deteriorate over the course of the year between summer vacations, signify a culture of one-upmanship and vanity—where, as Irina elaborates, “I make a big, big house for myself. When you, who has a smaller house in the valley, see it, then you tear down your old one and make yourself a new one even bigger than mine.” Rather than seeking to “imitate” “Europe” further, these villagers’ “resist” elements of what they see as “Western” individualist life in favor of “traditional Romanian” values.

In his study of Polish migrants, Garapich defines three types of “resistance” to social remittances: rejecting them ideologically, accepting them while abroad but not conveying them “home,” and failing to convince the “home” community of their merit (so that the community prevents transfers).¹⁸² Such banal acts of resistance, he claims, help small communities remain

¹⁸⁰ On “patriotic” husbands and the effects of return on female Romanian migrants, see (Vlase 2013a): “My Husband is a Patriot!”

¹⁸¹ This exact wording is from Irina.

¹⁸² (Garapich 2016)

“insulated from some of the influence of migrants” and maintain what many perceive to be an “ossified” local identity in spite of “the increasing influence of the globalisation processes of which European integration is one part.”¹⁸³ Garapich uses this framework to trace cases in which returnees reject “Western” ideas because they believe their communities cannot change or should remain “stagnant” and “conservative.” However, most of my interlocutors do not wish to freeze their communities in time (see Chapter 4) but rather to construct their own models in place of those they perceive to be “Western.” I argue that in these communities where there are many more migrants than non-migrants (unlike those Garapich visited who can “insulate” themselves from migrant remittances), village traditionalists—who idealize religious, rural, or peasant practices—look backward in historical time (imagined or experienced) as a way of encouraging future-oriented and dynamic strategies of engaging with their present situations. I show how these varying modalities of “resistance”—through opposing “liberal” attitudes towards homosexuality, denouncing urban parenting styles, and building up new “peasant-like” community spirit in the face of migration-inspired individualism—attempt to instill pride in national, village, and spiritual identities.

5.1 Heteronormativity and “Traditional” Families: Rejections of the “West” as Illiberal Remittances

Commenting on the difference between her mentality after having attended school in Spain, where she befriended all sorts of people, and that of other Rebrei, Sofia challenged me to “ask a Romanian what he thinks about gays. Here in Romania (*aici la noi în țara*). Ask, and you’ll see.” I did not have to ask, as other villagers, like Sofia, would announce their views when discussing the differences between the “West” and Romania. Frequently included in the “culture wars” of the contemporary era, an acceptance of gay marriage or support for non-binary partners’ adoption rights is considered a hallmark of “liberal” social values and has

¹⁸³ (Garapich 2016, 164); “ossification effect” (Levitt 2009: 1237) cited in (Garapich 2016, 159)

become a polarizing issue across the globe. Such debates recently unfolded at the national level in Romania as Orthodox leaders (along with much-less-publicized Evangelical ones) lobbied for an amendment to the constitution in 2018 which would have defined marriage as solely between a man and a woman. Some US anti-LGBTQ organizations supported the platform, like they have similar projects around the world.¹⁸⁴ Although this amendment did not pass, as not enough people came out to vote in the referendum, the topic and its most famous supporter—the Coalition for Families—remained an important topic of conversation when I arrived in Bistrița-Năsăud county a few months later.

Like Garapich, I identified two types of reactions to homosexuality: some individuals, such as Sofia, claim to have no problem with gay partnerships but believe their hometown could never embrace it, while others ideologically reject the idea.¹⁸⁵ Among the Polish migrants to the UK that Garapich interviewed, most fell into the former group. In my smaller, more rural and religious communities— as among the Catholic Poles in the UK to whom Fiałkowska spoke—the inverse holds.¹⁸⁶ While Fiałkowska stressed the connections her male interviewees drew between their anti-LGBTQ views and Catholic doctrine, I found that my interlocutors identify “proper” spousal and intergenerational relationships as national, “Romanian” values— whether they identified as Orthodox or Evangelical. In the middle of a long conversation about migration's negative effects on local communities, Father David (an Orthodox priest) asserted that although “the EU comes and tries to provoke things,” Romania does not yet have “real communities of gays. We are a bit further from that than the West. Here the family is sacred.” Despite the ubiquity of ideas about “traditional” families in conservative communities across the continent and beyond, these villagers treated their national-spiritual support of “sacred” families as a kind of Romanian exceptionalism. As his wife and cousin commented on the

¹⁸⁴ (Barthélemy 2018) Namely: “ADF International, Liberty Counsel, the World Congress of Families (WCF) and the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ),” all American anti-LGBTQ groups.”

¹⁸⁵ (Garapich 2016, 159-160)

¹⁸⁶ (Fiałkowska 2019, 13-14)

ethnic and racial diversity in Austria, Liviu (a Pentecostal) interjected, “Here in Romania, it is a country of strong believers. I think Romania is the most religious country...so it’s a problem that they [gays] want freedom so men can marry. It just won’t happen.” Equating religious values with democracy, Liviu went so far as to assert that Romanians would take to the streets to defend them if necessary:

“If it does happen, well then, it’ll start a second revolution, I think...if men are marrying men and they have kids [shakes his head] it’s just not allowed. He’s a sick man, he’s confused. The kids won’t know who the mom is and who is the dad. People are peaceful but if this came to pass there would be violence in the streets.”

As a marker of “Romanianness,” the rejection of “Western” principles concerning “non-traditional” families is a kind of “illiberal” remittance that these villagers use to prove the moral superiority of Romania over the socially liberal societies of otherwise “advanced” nations. A similar process of rejecting the “West” and taking pride in their national and religious identities unfolds in discussions of the benefits of a rural childhood, which I address in the following section.

5.2 Urban Dangers and The Ethics of Rearing Children in Rural Spaces: “Here in the village, it’s still not like that. It’s happier.”¹⁸⁷

Sitting together in their mother’s garden in Rebra, Simona and Luminița took turns describing their experiences working in Vienna. Glancing at the young children running back and forth in front of us, Luminița commented “after you have kids over there, everything changes.” Although she found Austrians’ childcare entitlements (*alocație*) appealing, Simona explained that she had enrolled her children in school in the village; she rationalized that “they [the kids] like life at home; over there they are very strict with them.” Kids “don’t have liberty” admitted Luminița, who decided to leave her kids enrolled abroad despite “all the different kinds of *controale* (inspections/tests)” and hoops she had to jump through so they could attend

¹⁸⁷ Simona

kindergarten and middle school. When the only place for children to play in cities is out in the park or in school under the supervision of strict teachers, Luminița's cousin, Liviu, added that he was sure "children are freer in the village." With gardens and yards, hills and rivers, "they can live more simply," reports Simona.

While rejecting homosexuality may be a type of "illiberal" remittance, in other instances in which villagers express suspicions of "Western" systems, such as in these conversations about childrearing, they rely less on abstractions and use more personal parameters to make their critiques. They may be migrants moving from the "East" to the "West," but they are also individuals moving from the countryside into cities and when it comes to raising children, they find this rural-urban divide particularly meaningful. Villagers believe urban settings where parents have to work and children must go to school all day threaten kids' development, as they are separated from family (and their ethical influences) for much of their key socialization periods. As Simona puts it: "It seems like too much time for kids to be only *la ei* [with them, at school]. They make it home for an hour or two and it's already evening and they are tired and just want to sleep." In the village, where there is more freedom and life is safer and healthier (spiritually, emotionally, and physically), they report that parents can spend time with their children instead of working "from the morning to the evening" to stay on top of their many bills abroad (rent, food, school expenses, etc.).¹⁸⁸

In his analysis of Polish migrants' references to rural-urban divides, Garapich ties this lens to a non-national, local-level sense of belonging.¹⁸⁹ Feeling lost in the bustle of the city is not characteristic of a "Pole in Britain," but of a rural person experiencing discomfort with urban life. While some of the villagers' rural-urban comparisons do function below the national level, I found at least two important contradictions to this tendency: when villagers connect

¹⁸⁸ This critique of capitalist temporality is quite old. For "Leaving the land of bosses and clocks," as articulated by European returnees from North America in the 19th century, see (Wyman 1993)

¹⁸⁹ (Garapich 2016); the article is entitled "I don't want this town to change"

rural values and ethics to a “Romanian” identity, it is usually because they feel foreign authorities have targeted them (and their parenting styles) based on their nationality, or because they want to assert the superiority of their “Romanian,” rural parenting ethics over “Western” ones. In these conversations, villagers unite across denominational lines (Evangelical and Orthodox) in “resisting” what they perceive to be urban (“Austrian,” “Spanish,” “Western”) mores, i.e. hypervigilant states which intrude into their childrearing and under-vigilant parents who allow their kids too much freedom and thus opportunities to fall into morally questionable and physically dangerous circumstances.

In addition to their concerns about children going to foreign school for too many hours a day and having to do too many bureaucratic and medical checkups, Simona and Luminița also worried about the biases of the Austrian state’s child-protective services. Simona reports that “the state has taken really a lot of kids, but what’s interesting is that it is only from the Romanians. They don’t take their own.” Simona and Luminița find it particularly frustrating that the Austrians only charge Romanian parents (and not even other immigrant groups) with ill-treating their kids, because they largely disagree with Austrian parenting styles. While Grabowska and Garapich found many Polish migrants embraced British parents’ relaxed attitude and reported giving their children more space (less helicopter parenting),¹⁹⁰ many of my interlocutors are critical of what they perceive to be Austrian and Spanish loose parenting and negligence, which leaves kids susceptible to the hazards of urban life. Simona explains that with parents away at work, children “see more things in the city” and are left vulnerable to “those who would influence them negatively,” as Mihai described the *șmecher* (crafty) strangers in Roquetas who led his friends astray. Mihai reports that “the Spanish are more open to everything”; likewise, Viennese parents let their children roam free after school, which Simona and her sister Luminița believe puts children at risk of being followed by other

¹⁹⁰ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2158)

immigrants (especially Turks) and tempted into drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Comparing this behavior with rural life, Simona continued that “us being from here, from the village, these things don’t seem ok... but that’s what they believe over there, that you have to let them [the kids] try things if they want to,” and they insist that you treat your children the same way: “you are not allowed to stop them.” Simona reports that this kind of loose parenting results in “many sick children because their parents smoke, they do drugs while pregnant... and kids come out malformed.”

As a Pentecostal who believes in the strict avoidance of all intoxicants, including caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco, Simona claims that these “Western” parents could learn from the “Romanian” *cultură de treabă* (culture of duty and honor): “They have their strict laws, their system doesn’t change, but they could learn from the Romanians to not let their kids be as free as they leave them.” Although she herself is a religious minority whose community adheres to stricter substance-avoidance policies than their Orthodox counterparts, she locates her general parenting ethic in a national frame,¹⁹¹ attributing it to the entire imagined body of ethnic Romanians (and their *cultură de treabă*).¹⁹² Simona’s categorization of people into distinct cultural groups with different levels of moral character reverses the poles of the East-West slope along an ethical axis; Austrian parents and their urban homes are less “civilized” than her rural Romanian practices. Similar ideas about the interconnection between religious and rural values pervade the local imaginary in the communities I visited, uniting people across different faiths (Pentecostal, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Orthodox). These community discourses may have encouraged Simona to project her ideas about ethical parenting into a nationalized framework rather than limiting them to one faith group or to her family.

¹⁹¹ (Brubaker 2004; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004)

¹⁹² Ethnic, because in her family, Roma are not included as “Romanians” (other than in citizenship) and are understood as less honorable than ethnic Romanians on the whole. See 4.2

While “Romanianness,” like rurality, falls in and out of relevance in villagers’ discussions, when they draw the two identities together, they conjure a strong resistance to the norms and practices surrounding them *acasă* and *afară* which they perceive to be “foreign” or immoral. Although they attempt to learn from what they deem to be the useful principles of their “host” states and societies (Chapter 4), they still hope to instill their own cultural value system in their children. In a discussion about Austrians and Roma (the latter of whom her family perceives to be immigrants to Romania), Simona’s mother Teodora explains: “That’s why I do not like the idea of children raised like the foreigners want them to be. They [children] should know that you are not allowed to steal from anyone, you can only have what is yours, [and] you should respect people, greet them, [and] help them.” Teodora succinctly summarizes what villagers perceive to be the main tenets of rural, Romanian, and peasant life: being trustworthy and respectful (see 4.3), greeting people (a rural practice, whereas in cities people “walk around like animals not saying ‘good day’”¹⁹³) and helping them. I turn now to the last tenet, the responsibility one has to aid his or her community, and elaborate on how some villagers define these responsibilities in line with an imagined peasant past in order to reject what they see as an atomized capitalist present.

5.3 A Peasant Past and an Individualist Present: The Future of *Communitas* and *Clacă*

As Simona, Miriana, and Irina maintain, in the era of visas (from 1989-2007, or up to 2014 in the case of the UK), “when people left and worked, they came back and bought land up in the hills so they could farm it,” but now people “work over there for the house in Romania”—“big, big houses”— instead of trying “to produce some, to bring something back, something good.”¹⁹⁴ Many villagers, like Simona, Miriana, and Irina, believe the fruit of contemporary

¹⁹³ This exact quote came from Teodora’s nephew, Liviu, but similar sentiments were expressed by other villagers.

¹⁹⁴ Quotes from Simona, Miriana, Simona, then Irina

material transformation (in this case, houses resulting from “Western” social and economic remittances) is increased individualism. At the root of these arguments is an implicit comparison between lived experience in capitalist post-1989 Romania and life abroad, or between life under state socialism and an idealized peasant past. Some villagers blame communism and its practices of surveillance and reporting for contemporary atomization,¹⁹⁵ while another set bemoan the lack of centralized authority since 1989, which has led people to believe that their interests and “rights” are more important than their obligations to their state, communities, and families.¹⁹⁶ The third contingent, including Simona, Miriana, and Irina, see the turn “for the worse” as having started with migration, particularly after 2007 when Romania joined the EU and, as Miriana put it, “the mass exodus from our country” intensified. They have experienced this rise of egotism as a decline in rural “Romanian” values.¹⁹⁷ As Fr. David explains, “We’ve lost them, we’re lose them, the peasant, country (*țărănesc*) ways. Abroad, people become egotistical. They lose their Romanian soul, warm, full of *communitas*.” The Latin noun *communitas* denotes a spirit of community, kinship, or fellowship,¹⁹⁸ and while only Fr. David cited this piece of religious jargon directly, many laypeople expressed its core sentiments in conversations about their peasant past.

¹⁹⁵ For more on atomization and the “Solitude of Collectivism,” see (Kideckel 1993). Blaming communism is particularly common among those, like Fr. David, with relatives who were killed in the late 1940s for their participation in the resistance staged by the Christian League against the Communist Party’s rise. A cross marking the spot of Fr. David’s grandfather’s murder stands on a hill overlooking the center of Rebra.

¹⁹⁶ “Rights” were mentioned by the official from Feldru. Using me (an American) as a reference point of “western” culture, Liviu expressed a similar sentiment: “Everybody does what they want, how they want, because nobody has control over anyone else, and this really is a defect in comparison with you all.”

¹⁹⁷ Although they experience it as “Romanian,” ideas about migration-driven individualism are not unique to my interlocutors. Levitt (1998, 934) quotes a non-migrant man in the Dominican Republic with a very similar view: “People come back more individualistic, more materialistic. They are more committed to themselves than they are to the community. They just don’t want to be active in trying to make the community better any more. Some learned to make it the easy way and they are destroying our traditional values of hard work and respect for the family”

¹⁹⁸ (“*Communitas, Communitatis*” 1982) I do not believe Fr. David intended to refer to the sociological term coined by the anthropologist of religion and ritual Victor Turner (1969). Turner uses *communitas* to refer to the liminal state of total equality between all members in a group or community; moments in which groups transcend hierarchy may include coming-of-age rituals, for instance. For the villagers in this study, hierarchy certainly remains embedded in community. In this sense, Fr. David’s use of the term is closer to Roberto Esposito’s etymological definition: “*communitas* is the totality of persons united not by a ‘property’ but precisely by an obligation or a debt” to one another (Esposito 2010 [1998], 6).

Although some villagers continue to engage in subsistence agriculture (often with stints as wage-laborers in foreign fields) and most retain some livestock or small-plot gardens (Chapter 6), most people I interviewed have only experienced true peasant life through stories from their parents and grandparents or memories from childhood up in the hills around the village.¹⁹⁹ They imagine peasant life as residing and working together with neighbors in an emotionally close-knit community united by bonds of kinship, obligation, and (hopefully) affection. These villagers long for the sense of unity and mutual responsibility (*communitas*) which supposedly led people to help each other in earlier times. As Simona explains, “here, too many people have left for abroad...We are still united, like us in a family, but...in villages, they [other villagers, used to] help you...if you needed something done, the whole town came together, for free, not for money.” Fr. David describes the communal activities of earlier times: “Before, we sat together and helped each other and cried together. We came together to sing, make clothes, and perform other *clacă* tasks.” *Clacă*, a term to which I was first introduced by a history professor from Feldru, sometimes refers to the unpaid labor demanded by feudal lords or masters instead of taxes (usually translated in English with the French borrowing *corvée*), but the word can also imply community or group work followed by a party and/or compensation with food and drink. Similar to a barn raising in American Amish culture, this second definition is what Simona harkened back to when she imagined peasant neighbors gathering to aid one another. Now that locals have embraced the commodification of labor and demand payment for *clacă*-like services, villagers believe neighbors are no longer held together by mutual obligation as they were in the peasant era.

¹⁹⁹ For instance, Cristian’s mother Ioana told a long story about being widowed, a single mother to nine children up in the mountains, when her husband died suddenly in his 40s. She struggled to make do farming and tending animals before her children grew up and immigrated to Spain. Most families I spoke with, especially the more conservative Evangelical ones, still have an “old house” up in the hills around town where they also have extra pastureland or fields. It was unclear when the majority of the village moved down from the hills—sometime during communism or even after its end. Many of the villagers who keep up their mountain residences (if only symbolically or as an occasional retreat from busier village life) are worried that traditional knowledge is fading and that many of the houses will be left to rot.

Herzfeld describes this kind of “pervasive nostalgia for ‘real’ social relations...[and] an age when money had not yet corrupted pure reciprocity” as a “yearning for a time of pure structure.”²⁰⁰ Like other nostalgias, structural nostalgia is in the broadest sense “a discursive practice stemming from a (shared) feeling of loss,” which can potentially serve “any political agenda.”²⁰¹ Many scholars of Eastern Europe have become interested in nostalgia since 1989, as they witnessed a “longing for security, stability, and prosperity [and] a particular sociability and dignity vis-à-vis the life since socialism.”²⁰² They called this longing post-communist (or Soviet) nostalgia²⁰³ but their theories about romanticizing state-socialist regimes have also been widely criticized as “symptomatic of a more general ‘manic’ determination on the part of the West to maintain Eastern Europe as the backward, past-fixated reference point for its own palpably failing global hegemony.”²⁰⁴ I am not convinced that nostalgia (for communism or what came before) need be a construct projected onto “Eastern Europeans” by “elites” elsewhere.²⁰⁵ Such claims are reminiscent of earlier eras when nostalgia was considered the sole purview of elites and “urban intellectuals” with time on their hands to consider the past (unlike the un-reflexive peasants or working class). While villagers’ musings on a peasant past may at times be provoked by “Western” influences (including their own remittances), they do not perceive their thoughts about that past to be *of* the “West.” Nostalgia for peasant life as a rejection of domesticated “Western” individualism may perpetuate an “East-West” divide, but it does not imply that my interlocutors, like those rural Hungarians with whom Hann works, yearning for a pre-Trianon imperial history, “actually [want] a reversal of time nor do they

²⁰⁰ (Herzfeld 2014, 7, 8) Here Herzfeld is commenting on Mauss’ structurally nostalgic interpretation of gift economies (Mauss 2010 [1950]), but generally Herzfeld is interested in how the (nation-)state uses structural nostalgia to build up its own power and how citizens rely on it to resist that power (22, 147-182).

²⁰¹ (Boele, Noordenbos, and Robbe 2019, 6), see also (Boym 2001).

²⁰² (Maria Todorova 2010, 7) cited in (Buzalka 2018, 1002). See also (Todorova and Gille 2012)

²⁰³ Nostalgia for communism: (Todorova and Gille 2012; Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2014; Velikonja 2009; Boele, Noordenbos, and Robbe 2019) or nostalgia for the “people’s economy” socialism created (Buzalka 2018)

²⁰⁴ (Hann 2015, 883) describing Dominic Boyers’ (2006; 2010) critique of *Ostalgie* (Nostalgia for East Germany)

²⁰⁵ On the “autochthonous origin of nostalgia” in Slovakia see (Buzalka 2018, 1001).

believe it is possible.”²⁰⁶ While nostalgia is a “backward-oriented imaginary,” it does not preclude “future-oriented strategies.”²⁰⁷

Too attached to private property (and silenced by 1956 violence),²⁰⁸ the villagers whose history Hann recounts do not (or cannot) idealize socialism like earlier scholars of post-communist nostalgia have theorized. Instead, Hann argues that the era of “transition” and “Europeanization,” with its “renewed political and economic vulnerability,” has left them with stagnant local conditions and too much time on their hands, making “the post-imperial social imaginary [encouraged by “past-fixated, populist rhetoric”] all they have left.”²⁰⁹ Although rural Bistrița-Năsăud county is certainly characterized by economic vulnerability, the communities I visited are not sitting idly by, dreaming of bygone days because they have nothing better to do, nor do they have a dominant political leader like Viktor Orbán to orchestrate such reminiscences. My interlocutors are very busy, doing exactly what Hann said kept his communities too distracted during state socialism to think of the past: “To build, furnish, and improve their houses most people work incredibly hard, often combining family farming with wage labor employment.”²¹⁰ The chief difference is that today wage labor is elsewhere. Migrating for work means that the past and the “Romanian” ways associated with it are not “all villagers have left;” they have “Western” alternatives, which they sometimes embrace (see Chapter 4) or build upon (see Chapter 6), but also choose to reject. In addition to the earlier stories about homosexuality and child rearing, Irina, Miriana, and Simona’s statements about the “dead investments” of “big, big houses” exemplify such moments of rejection. I continue

²⁰⁶ (Hann 2015, 905), responding to Fabian’s claims (2014 [1983]) about “How anthropology makes its object” by constructing it as from another time (not “coeval”).

²⁰⁷ (Hann 2015, 906, 905)

²⁰⁸ (ibid 903, 907)

²⁰⁹ (ibid 2015, 908). He believes Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (and his party, Fidesz) provokes this imaginary. There is not an equivalent successful “populist” party in Romania and less of a sense of imperial injustice. Some Romanians feel the loss of Moldova in WWII in a similar way to how some Hungarians view the loss of territory in the Treaty of Trianon, but almost no villagers mentioned this and without these explicit “elite” influences (see 1.2 on peasant tropes in Romanian nationalist rhetoric), their peasant nostalgia is perhaps more “bottom up.”

²¹⁰ (Hann 2015, 907)

now with three examples of how other villagers apply the peasant imaginary (of *communitas* and *clacã*) to reject the current direction of “Western” capitalist “transition” (or “Europeanization”) and redirect it towards a “traditional Romanian” future.

5.3.1 A Traditional Future: Constructing (Symbolic) Identities through Returnee Community Service

Looking at the large (and sometimes empty) houses around them, many of the villagers judge the imagined *communitas* (spirit of community) of their ancestors to be superior to the perceived immorality of their “Westernized” capitalist present. Pulling from this imaginary of “Romanian” (rural, religious, peasant) traditionalism, some individuals return to the village with the aim of restoring neighborly fellowship. I argue that by preserving folk customs, staging “hometown” festivals, and engaging in spiritual activism, these villagers “resist” “Westernizing” social change (either from their own social and economic remittances or tied to other “modernization” and “normalization” processes during and after socialism) by attempting to revive, reinvent, and sustain “traditional” (peasant, religious, or rural) communities into the future. These efforts do not always succeed at fostering lasting social redirection but set the ground for possible new symbolic (ethnic or local) identities.²¹¹

Among those individuals attempting to revive folk customs, Fr. David and Matei stand out as the most dedicated activists. In his role as village priest, Fr. David exhorts his parishioners to wear traditional clothes to his services on major holidays like Christmas and Easter, orchestrates a tournament of peasant games accompanied by live music in the local cultural building once a year, and he has begun digitizing each household’s oldest photographs to preserve “all that was lost from the village.”²¹² Like Fr. David, who is proud to have “brought one custom back to life,” Matei, a young man from Rebra who details cars with Andrei and

²¹¹ (Gans 1979)

²¹² He was particularly proud of a portrait from the 1870s showing a resident in his Austro-Hungarian military uniform. He, like many of his neighbors, is aware and proud of his region’s connections to that former empire, which history sets Transylvania apart from other regions of the contemporary state.

works seasonally on farms in Spain and Austria, choreographs sets for the local folk-dance troop. The troop of about 10 teenagers and young adults performs in national and international folk competitions, at traditional village weddings, and on important regional holidays (like the town's name day or a garlic festival at a local castle once purportedly inhabited by Vlad Țepeș', aka Dracula). Though Matei is more pleased with the perceived "development" of his village than Fr. David, who reads the changes in local sociality as a fall from traditional morality and spirituality, both men embrace material folk customs as important markers of collective belonging—local, regional, and national. "Saving" customs gives villagers a chance to perform a certain kind of symbolic peasant identity when they so choose. As Gans has suggested of late-twentieth-century US middle-class culture, such sporadic practices allow for a mediated engagement with past lifeways and a kind of "symbolic ethnicity."²¹³ Matei and Fr. David's "(re)invention"²¹⁴ or revival of folk music, dance, and costumes crystallizes these previously "living practices" into certain forms (whichever were last remembered), but does not reinstate the social and economic relations in which they had been embedded. A peasant community of neighborly cooperation is not likely to survive in villagers' daily lives because they watch a dance performance one afternoon or wore an *ie* (a traditional female blouse) to church twice a year. However, such activities do reinforce village discourses about peasantry and help some locals feel connected to (and proud of) their "roots" through occasional embodied performance.²¹⁵

Other villagers strove to reinforce social networks and local or national belonging by founding their own organizations. Petru's *Ziua Diasporei* (Day of the Diaspora) is the result of one such effort to unite Feldru's far-flung citizens. Petru, a Pentecostal man with Romanian

²¹³ Although I find his emphasis on optionality and tokenization useful, I question Ganz' underlying essentialization of "ethnicity" (as only possible in working-class or peasant cultures) which leads him to assume that the middle-class individuals he describes are not shaped by any "ethnicity" (or culture, American or otherwise) when they do not choose to put on the symbolic markers of their ancestors.

²¹⁴ (Hobsbawm 1992) on "Inventing Traditions." (Cohen 2013 [1985]) on symbolic construction of communities

²¹⁵ On dance, nationality, and embodiment see (Buckland 2007; Desmond 1993)

and Saxon ancestry, has worked as a bus driver in Dublin for the last twenty years. The night before his event in 2019, Petru explained how he had been inspired “to do something for [his] village” by a fellow migrant from his community’s past: “Vasile Nascu [went] four times from Feldru to Vienna.²¹⁶ He walked 600km, four times... to fight for the mountains, to have pastures for the sheep. And he got it after the 6th time [sic]. Then he had done something for the village, you know?... And I said to myself, what can do I for my village?” Unlike traditional migrant associations or hometown organizations which organize events abroad (to support migrant integration or home development),²¹⁷ Petru’s Day of the Diaspora encourages Feldrihani to return to the village and celebrate their accomplishments together with a day of “non-political, non-alcohol[ic]” fellowship.²¹⁸ Using his connections with local political, religious, and business leaders, Petru organizes races, soccer tournaments, and folk music and dance performances for children and adults, which activities would support local businesses, foster pride in a village identity (or roots), and lay the groundwork for a future tourism industry (Chapter 6) based on the return of village descendants. However, due to clashes of interests and personalities,²¹⁹ Petru’s Day of the Diaspora no longer coincides with Feldru’s annual town celebrations, so its 6th edition in 2019 garnered no more than 40 participants. Much like the Roquetas Migrant Association, which Ştefan reports “took all the money and did nothing,” Petru’s Feldrihan Diaspora association suffers from locals’ lack of interpersonal (and

²¹⁶ Like many of the other villagers, Petru is conscious and proud of the specificity of Transylvania’s (his region’s) history, particularly that they were part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which heritage connects them to “the West.”

²¹⁷ (Çağlar 2006; Lamba-Nieves 2018)

²¹⁸ The avoidance of alcohol is an element of Petru’s Pentecostal faith, although he claims to embrace all “European Christian” religions. The only parallel return-oriented organizations I identified in the literature are those related to raising national consciousness among diasporas, the most famous being Birthright Israel (Kelner 2003) or migrant-organized religious pilgrimages at “home.” See Olena Fedyuk’s documentary film, *Road of a Migrant*, on a Ukrainian Greek Catholic pilgrimage.

²¹⁹ Including a vague incident with the mayor. A local news article suggests that an orthodox priest (Fr. David) accused the mayor of favoring Pentecostalism by allowing an evangelical band to play at Feldru’s Saint’s Day festivities. Since this confrontation, Feldru’s commemorative day has not coincided with Petru’s event (Sabău 2014); Petru himself is a Pentecostal musician.

institutional) trust—the same social ties Petru hopes to restore.²²⁰ Although Petru’s project to mobilize village identity has had limited success, it is possible that other organizations, such as those initiatives related to religion or peasant traditions, will achieve Petru’s objective, producing feelings of fellowship, mutual responsibility, and pride in village history and membership.

The last set of individuals who resist individualism and atomization attempt to rebuild community ties through church activities so as to “project a moral community into a social future.”²²¹ Rather than focus on periodic symbolic markers of folk identity, such individuals endeavor to create the circumstances for their communities’ full and sustained enactment of “proper” Romanian identity and moral comportment. For Daniela, an Orthodox woman in her late 50s who lives in Rebra and Roquetas, being a “good” Romanian (and citizen of her local communities) implies membership and participation in the Orthodox church.²²² Daniela feels a sense of personal responsibility to help her fellow Romanians access church programming both in Romania and in Spain. To this end, she helped establish the Romanian Orthodox church in Roquetas and has since begun mobilizing and fundraising for a second church in a nearby suburb. In between these efforts, Daniela returns to Rebra to serve as a community sponsor for the local monastery (a position which rotates between villagers every year and mostly consists of orchestrating donations of food and funds) and to make sure the elderly and infirm can access proper spiritual treatments at other monasteries around the region. Other villagers support the Orthodox church financially through economic remittances and tithes,²²³ which more passive

²²⁰ Ciornei (2012) reports a similar lack of trust among Romanian migrants in diaspora politicians and political parties, unlike Churches which seem to have more influence in Spain and Italy.

²²¹ (Garbin 2019, 2054)

²²² Proselytization is a key element of local evangelical faiths as well; however, I have not yet established the connections necessary to comment on the particularity of Pentecostal or Seventh-Day Adventist villagers’ recruitment activities in or from this region. The anecdote I can offer is Cristian’s conversion to Seventh-Day Adventism in southern Spain and his marriage to a fellow Romanian parishioner. From his story, it is clear that evangelical outreach programs are influential in maintaining national identity among migrants and fostering community by providing spaces for social networking and the transmission of cultural values, very similar to their Orthodox counterparts described above.

²²³ Garbin (2019) calls these “sacred remittances”

form of engagement was fundamental to the post-1989 construction of the monastery between Parva and Rebra, a notable a source of local pride and religious tourism (pilgrimages). In addition to the personal fulfilment Daniela and others experience through their religious volunteer work, the infrastructure they build and the services they provide ensure that their fellow citizens have access to religious rituals and communities, which as Coşciug has noted among Romanian returnees elsewhere in the country, feeds into the ongoing revival of religious identities after 1989 by “strengthening local religiosity.”²²⁴ As repositories of social and financial resources for integrating into “host” societies and as structures through which “homeland” culture (especially language) can be maintained and passed on to the following generations, churches can act as important institutions in the migratory context as well as at “home.”²²⁵ Daniela’s efforts at Romanian Orthodox church development are not consciously about peasantry but they are designed to build and maintain caring communities organized around shared belief and shared national and local identities.

Looking to “traditional” values, be they rural, religious, or national, these villagers hope to resist and reverse some of the changes they understand to have been wrought by “Western” influences. Some of these efforts are reminiscent of Garapich’s descriptions of Polish migrants’ resistance to merging the practices they see in London (as an “emblem of urbanism”) with their rural “hometowns.” He explains these acts of imagination as attempts to keep their town static as a potential peaceful retreat for retirement (or as the measure of the superiority of their London life): “the two localities occupy extreme positions and should not be fused or mixed; the way of life in one place – with all the negative and positive consequences – should not

²²⁴ (Coşciug 2019, 94). Like (Wyman 1993), Coşciug also notes that returnees’ involvement can shape the doctrine of the church itself (making it more open to other religions or to the idea of migration). As I have not yet interviewed enough religious leaders nor asked other interviewees enough questions about religious doctrines and church relations, I do not have the material to comment on these sorts of changes in the communities I visited.

²²⁵ On religion in the migratory context, see (Fiałkowska 2019, 14); (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Cadge and Howard Ecklund 2007; Hepner 2003; Duderija 2007); on the Armenian Orthodox Church’s role in perpetuating the Armenian Diaspora throughout time, see (Pattie 1997; Khachig Tölölyan 2000; Panossian 2002); on the role of cultural capital (like trustworthiness) that returnees acquire through church involvement, see (Coşciug 2019)

interfere with the other.”²²⁶ He claims that “ossifying” their settings in this act of “bi-focal” place-making maintains the town-city dyad as the fixed poles of their “transnational identity.”²²⁷ By making distinctions between here and there, rural and urban (capitalist and peasant), my interlocutors do not always set out to freeze their village into a stagnant, abstract stanchion of their trans-local identity. They believe both sides should and often do learn from each other. I move on in the next chapter to discuss instances of such “innovation,”²²⁸ when villagers take up and reinvent “Western” practices or notions, vernacularizing them to build value into their (peripheralized) place and way of life.

²²⁶ (Garapich 2016, 161)

²²⁷ (ibid 159, 160) My interlocutors’ conversations are more nuanced than “bi”-focal, as they themselves or their close friends and neighbors have personal experience working in more than one “Western” country which they make use of to compare multiple spaces; as Simona puts it, Austrians “are very strict in contrast with Spain. In Spain, there’s freedom.”

²²⁸ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016)

Chapter 6. Vernacularizing “Europe:” Rustic Tourism and Homegrown Organics

Listening to his brother and his wife’s sister expound on the comforts of life in Roquetas—where you can afford all you need and the state respects and looks out for you—Cristian eventually interjected that there are “many things that if we move abroad, we lose.” He continued, “you’ll make a buck more easily, but you won’t have other things, like for example, the food [*alimentația*] that you have here... very good food, organic [*bio*]!” Several villagers, especially other Seventh-Day Adventist (and Pentecostal) families like Cristian’s, expounded on the high quality and health benefits of their homegrown produce. Having worked on certified organic farms abroad, many of these villagers are aware that their farming practices—often passed down through generations²²⁹—accord with (or they believe are even superior to) the principles of “Western” commercial environmentalism and the international classification of agricultural produce as “organic” when grown without fertilizers or pesticides. What had been a marker of backwardness—lack of technology and access to industrial methods—becomes the epitome of healthy “modern” agriculture, as Cristian explains:

“Our food is really good in comparison with the rest of the countries. This is a big advantage, because today you have lots of things that happen because of [bad] food, lots of illnesses. Like in the last years, they have been finding that a lot of cancers in particular are caused by food, you know? [But] we don’t use any [chemical] solutions or that kind of thing.”

In this revaluation of their and their ancestors’ farming techniques, villagers perform what Levitt describes as vernacularizing, “the process of appropriation and local adoption of globally generated ideas and strategies.”²³⁰ This instance of social remittance “innovation,” as

²²⁹ It is certainly possible that some villagers began using chemical supplements in farming during communism (although the “underdevelopment” of even Communist-era farming in Romania has been commented on by many observers, including Verdery [1983]), but they erase that part of their history when they think about their longstanding “organic” practices.

²³⁰ (Levitt and Merry 2009, 411)

Grabowska and Garapich would label it,²³¹ takes the value associated with a “Western” concept and reattaches it to “Romanian” (peasant, local) practices. Whether with home gardens or “rustic” landscapes where “you can still see a horse and buggy”—which “Austrians would love!”—these villagers produce a kind of hybrid traditionalism, blending ideas and “regimes of value”²³² from “East” and “West” to “get by” and find pride in a “rural economy [which] has once again become thoroughly peripheral to Western capitalism.”²³³

Scholars of “Eastern Europe” have long analyzed quotidian strategies of “getting by” in conditions of economic precarity both during and after state socialism.²³⁴ “Brain drain” and demographic decline renewed this interest in how people make sense of their circumstances as rural spaces become saturated in a feeling of “emptiness,” which—as Dzenovska argues of the Latvian countryside—is “symptomatic of post–Cold War spatiotemporal arrangements of power wherein capital and the state increasingly abandon people and places.”²³⁵ I contend that villagers’ vernacularizing strategies help make their peripheralized place habitable and lively and, as is rarely discussed in the literature on “making do,” also provide sources of fulfillment by helping them envision a healthy, moral, financially viable, and socially meaningful future *acasă* (at “home”). This is not to say that a sense of pride in the local (or the “Romanian”) fully eliminates the conditions which give rise to the peripheralization of rural spaces and the labor of those who reside in them, and as I analyze the ways Evangelical families (who entangle notions of heritage, progress, and health with spiritual guidelines) and young male entrepreneurs (who dream of developing local tourism) make living in the village possible and meaningful, I will also point out when their strategies reinforce essentializing imaginaries or enable continued economic marginalization.

²³¹ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016, 2154)

²³² (Appadurai 1988)

²³³ (Hann 2015, 900)

²³⁴ (Brubaker et al. 2006, 191–97);(Hann 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Humphrey 2002).

²³⁵ (Dzenovska 2020, 1)

6.1 “Backwardness” Exotified: Dreams of Countryside Tourism

When his wife rephrased one of my questions and asked Gabriel how he might be able to improve the village, he declared that he had already opened the town’s only café but he could also make a guesthouse, “so you could have tourism; I could make the village a tourist attraction...take people to the mountains and the river.” Admiration of the Romanian countryside’s beauty connects people on both sides of the village divide, those who prefer Romania (*foarte patrioți*, the “very patriotic” ones like Gabriel) and those who would rather stay elsewhere (like Gabriel’s wife, Sofia, and their neighbor Elena). “We sure do have a beautiful country,” Sofia admitted. “We have it all! Beaches, mountains, forests,” declared Elena. For many, their childhoods in the foothills of the Rodnei mountains provide memories which, as Sofia explained, “pull their souls” back “home,” but those on both sides of the divide experience the rural spaces *acasă* as qualitatively different from the “West.” Commenting on the “developmental” disparities between Romania and Austria, Maria exemplifies most villagers’ feelings about local aesthetics: “There’s something rustic about this place. You can see things you didn’t imagine were still around. Like horse-drawn carriages. From the civilization that you have over there you pass directly into another world, right?” Her father huffed, worried she was belittling Romania as backward, but Maria assured him, “No, no, it’s not bad, it’s just different...even though it’s pretty over there, when I come here in summers like this, with the mountains around, I just feel different (*mă simt altfel*). Inner peace, it’s different. I can’t let it go.” For Maria, rusticity becomes peaceful and exotic, inverting the values attached to each end of the “East” versus “West” developmental scale.

For Gabriel and Liviu (quoted here), the “something more rustic” of Romania and Bistrița-Năsăud county’s environment represents a raw natural resource that if publicized correctly would draw in flocks of tourists, “to bring money to Romania, to the state’s accounts so that we could develop [because] the beauty that is Romania, the stories and history that you

find in Romania, you just don't find that in other countries." The conclusions of scholars studying (Euro-)globalization, which emphasize how transnational flows (perhaps unintentionally) heighten the branding power of "the local" and of ties to the past,²³⁶ support Gabriel and Liviu's claims about the commercial potential of "rustic" experiences. As Römhild writes about hippie tourism to Greece in the second half of the 20th century, "What is, from one point of view, understood as a pre-modern lag becomes a counter-modern approach to reworking the disadvantages of Western modernity, from another."²³⁷

While local entrepreneurs mold the essentializing and Orientalizing discourses which sustain tourism for their own purposes, they can also feed into and further entrench "the status quo of power relations" those narratives legitimize.²³⁸ As the "imaginaries of the Mediterranean" already place Greece on the symbolic map of "Europe" as a pre-modern oasis, Römhild points out that businesspeople who commodify that image in new ways (and thus shift the content of assumptions about oases but maintain the paradise trope) perpetuate their country's image as a place of repose rather than industry.²³⁹ "Eastern Europe," however, suffers from a different kind of imposed imaginary, tinted with what Galint calls, a "presumed Soviet 'greyness.'" The establishment of the sort of rustic eco-tourism to which my interlocutors aspire could help shift that perception to "green instead of grey."²⁴⁰ This sort of reversal, much like teaching "Western" friends and colleagues (or customers) to appreciate the flavors of "Eastern European" cuisine, can act as a kind of social remittance going the other direction, "to counter assumptions that the migrant and his or her country of origin are culturally inferior."²⁴¹ Gabriel and others' entrepreneurial dreams—encouraged in part by the EU's own tourist-based

²³⁶ (Gille 2009; Pratt 2007); see also "tradition" and "authenticity" (Hobsbawm 1992; Glassie 1995; Bendix 2009; 2018); in relation to food: (Bordi 2006; Aistara 2014)

²³⁷ (Römhild 2016, 36)

²³⁸ (Römhild 2016, 31)

²³⁹ (ibid, 40)

²⁴⁰ Galent M., Goddeeris I., Niedźwiedzki D. (2009, 130) on *Migration and Europeanisation* cited in (White and Grabowska 2019, 43)

²⁴¹ (White and Grabowska 2019, 44)

initiatives, which offer funding for the construction of guesthouses—appropriate and adapt “Western” notions about exoticism and rusticity to re-envision their country (and its more rural spaces) as sources of profit and pride. While villagers believe the enactment of such dreams is limited by the predatory and inept Romanian state, which Gheorghe, the proprietor of a small events center in Feldru built on money from construction work in Austria (that he wishes to expand into a larger inn), says “does not make it easy to develop,” other smaller-scale acts of reimagining require less capital to materialize. I turn now to one such site of innovation right in villager’s backyards: the home garden.

6.2 “One day we’ll make organic tomatoes for America!”: Home Gardens Reinterpreted

Cristian, quoted at the start of this chapter expounding on the value of Romanian organic produce,²⁴² works as a truck driver along a route from Transylvania to Spain while his wife—whom he met at a Romanian Seventh-Day Adventist church in southern Spain—and their children live in Rebra. Although he’s grateful for the lessons on professionalism and consistency he’s learned from his time *afară*, he’s sure *e mai frumos acasă* (“it’s more beautiful at home”), especially because this is where his garden is: “It’s my yearly pleasure to set up the house (*să mă fac casă*) in the period when I have everything in the garden. Tomatoes, cucumbers...corn, milk, fruit.” A Pentecostal neighbor down the street, Liviu, who now works construction in Austria (and worked in Spain before that), similarly says he “finds himself” (*mă regăsesc*)²⁴³ while doing agricultural labor. Although he’s too busy and lives in too small of an apartment abroad to garden much now, his experiences *afară* have reinforced his belief

²⁴² Organic in the official-environmentalist-agricultural-production sense, not “organic living” like Caldwell (2011) describes in Russian dachas (summer homes), although the many romanticizing overtones and lifegiving associations of the latter hold true here as toiling in home gardens is likewise treated as a restorative retreat from urban, capitalist life. Two key differences are that in this case these villagers are working class, rather than the middle-class intellectuals Caldwell mostly surveys and their urban life is abroad—where familiar foods have been documented to take on an added importance as a marker of “home” and national pride (Ore 2018; Jazeel 2006).

²⁴³ This phrase literally means to re-find yourself but has the connotation of regaining your spiritual equilibrium, a bit like the American connotations of “finding yourself.”

in the merit of his ancestors' practices: "I've learned a lot from the Germans, their lifestyle (*trăi lor*), because they pay a lot of attention to these things, like food (*alimentația*), for example, that it's as natural as possible." With forefathers and mothers, who, as Miriana says, "labored from the heart [and] were sustained off the earth and worked for this land," Ana, an Adventist and grandmother of four, was sure that Romanians are particularly good farmers—even if it is hard to be an agriculturalist everywhere—because Romanians are "hardworking, faithful, and clean" (*harnici, credincioși, și curați*). This is why, according to Ana, the Spanish were so happy to see them when they arrived to work the fields, like Ana did in the 1990s.

All these villagers who embrace "Western" ideas about organic methods and reapply them to their own customs ("vernacularizing" them²⁴⁴) are very proud that they excel at something they know the "West" values. With a kind of bottom-up sense of *terroir*—an appreciation of how taste "links to place" (which has evolved into an officially regulated "authentication regime" through branding and copywriting in France and elsewhere)²⁴⁵—villagers believe that Romanian soil (which Ana says is great, "unlike Spain's rocky terrain") and their local practices produce superior flavors and nutrients that make village crops healthier than store-bought produce. Ionuț, an Adventist widower, claimed that his grandkids and animals will only eat corn, potatoes, and other vegetables grown from their heirloom seeds:²⁴⁶ "we have a few chickens whose eggs we use and they don't like store-bought corn flour, because it's genetically modified, so we give them our own, our old corn, the original stuff." Pointing to one of the many jars his oldest daughter, Maria, laid out for me to take home, Ionuț continued, "My younger daughter had two jars of this stuff [homemade vegetable sauce] and she made food out of it. When she ran out, she bought stuff from the store. The kids didn't

²⁴⁴ (Levitt and Merry 2009)

²⁴⁵ (Trubek, Guy, and Bowen 2010, 139, 140)

²⁴⁶ On the memories and social meanings people tie to (heirloom) seeds, see (Jordan 2015)

want the food anymore. I was there; I saw it. They didn't like it. It had a different flavor. I mean, how could they? It's not good."

Experience working on large certified-organic farms abroad confirms these villagers' belief in the superiority of their own methods. Simona described how frustrated she gets when she has to linger in Austria because, "if you are staying in an apartment then you have nothing in the garden—[no] eggs, cucumbers; you have to buy everything. And on top of that, none of [the products in the store] are natural, they are not organic. You can't afford to buy all organic." Her sister Luminița jumped in to add, "even the organic is not organic [over there]!" She claimed that she had witnessed too much fraud at her time bagging berries, herbs, and lettuce greens to trust "Western" labels:

"Where I worked, they put organic on the tag, but my husband was one of the employees who was supposed to spray them with some kind of solution. And so, several times the quality control people at the store would run a test and send them back because they had found some substance on them. They sent them back and I was supposed to unpackage them and repackage them and then they'd just send them out again back to the store. So they're not at all organic!"

They believe it is better to have access to your own garden at "home," where, as Maria explains, "I still buy plenty from the store, and I don't know what they do to that stuff, but what I make I know that it's natural." Maria, who returns from cleaning houses in Austria to tend the gardens and prepare for winter, uses heirloom seeds, avoids spraying them with any chemicals, and when it comes to processing and preserving them, "I don't add any preservatives, nothing! No additives."

Not everyone in the village prioritizes natural farming as these Evangelical families do. Miriana (an Orthodox woman) admits that "A lot of people don't understand that it's better to get it from your own garden." They get more comfortable shopping in the store abroad and "it seems like a much bigger burden to live in the country and to work in the garden when you can just go buy it, you know?" This attitude marks a socio-economic divide in the village, where some families (especially older people with children away, like Ana) still very much rely on

small-scale farming for their subsistence. However, even most of the people who return with money from working abroad find farming necessary to supplement the supplies they purchase. Because the prices are so high in Romanian grocery stores—“The prices are the same as in Austria,” affirms Maria, even though the local salaries are so low—growing, drying, preserving, canning, and cooking food help them save money, says Cristian’s wife, Andreea.

Small-scale agriculture in home gardens and extra fields on the outskirts of the village or up in the hills are subsistence strategies not frequently discussed in the literature on “East-West” migration²⁴⁷ and usually disparaged in the texts on peasants’ “getting by” after state socialism as a reaction to renewed peripheralization which does little to improve the national economy or to stem immigration (especially among the young). Mungiu-Pippidi writes that a “peasantization” of much of the populace took place with de-collectivization after 1989 as rural and urban people alike, unemployed as a result of the de-industrialization and privatization of the Romanian market, “return[ed] to family plots and subsistence farming.”²⁴⁸ According to the International Labor Organization’s statistics, employment in agriculture in Romania rose from 30% in 1991 to 45% by 2000; although the numbers have since fallen to around 22% in 2019 (with a blip back to 31% after the 2008 financial crisis), this remains the highest number in the EU.²⁴⁹ Returning to full-time subsistence farming creates what Mungiu-Pippidi calls a “neo-dependency,” as peasants are kept down and exploited by local elites entrenched since the communist-era. It is true that if, as Lampland argues, home gardens during state socialism trained villagers to commodify their labor,²⁵⁰ these same gardens operate today parallel to the capitalist market and facilitate the peripheralization of rural spaces: growing their own food

²⁴⁷ I have been told that Vintilă Mihăilescu, the renown anthropologist of rural Romania, has written about the alternative temporalities of farmers from Maramureş (a county neighboring Bistriţa-Năsăud to the northwest famous for preserving traditions) who come back from working abroad at harvest time to thresh hay; however, I could not find his piece before finishing this thesis.

²⁴⁸ (Mungiu-Pippidi 2003, 23)

²⁴⁹ Across the continent, only Albania at 36% is higher. (“Employment in Agriculture (% of Total Employment) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Romania” 2020)

²⁵⁰ (Lampland 1995)

means that villagers can “make do” with lower wages and still stay fit for work abroad. However, small-plot farming also gives some families more flexibility as not every member must work abroad when there will be food on the table no matter what (assuming the harvest is plentiful enough). This enables many elders and wives to stay in the village and offers others the chance to return (after saving some money or building their house) if they need a break, as Cristian explained, since there are fewer expenses (rent, food, etc.) *acasă*. Likewise, as is seldom discussed in the literature on “getting by,” vernacularizing the language of “organic” and the (social, cultural) values that are associated with it helps villagers gain a sense of pride and fulfillment from their once-traditional, now-modern practices.

When villagers reevaluate their ancestors’ farming methods (with no industrial chemicals or mass production) as organic, they imbue the very drawbacks Verdery—in her incisive analyses of the economic and political transformations of peasant labor in Transylvania over the last three centuries—bemoaned as excluding households from more lucrative markets with “modern,” higher-class, and “Western” connotations.²⁵¹ Just as the Soviets and their satellite states envisioned foodways (and their technological and scientific reconfiguring) as a means of “implementing the idea of a utopian future in the here and now,”²⁵² villagers understand their organic produce as helping them (and they hope future generations as well) live viable, healthy lives *acasă*. This “innovation,” as Grabowska and Garapich call these vernacularizing social-remittance practices, makes “the old peasant rhythms” seem much more valuable than the unremunerated toil Mungiu-Pippidi and Verdery described, or the “vegetating” Hann chronicles.²⁵³

²⁵¹ (Verdery 1983; 2003)

²⁵² (Neuburger and Livers 2017, 1). Although communist parties lauded industrial labor the most, they also emphasized the mechanization and modernization of agriculture as a way to make their countries self-sufficient and as proof of their superior scientific skills— sometimes resulting in outlandish hubris, the epitome of which being Lysenko’s reimagining of genetics. A scene celebrating the “Hungarian Orange” in the classic Hungarian communist-era satire *A Tanú* (The Witness, 1969) humorously illustrates the trend.

²⁵³ (Grabowska and Garapich 2016); Hann (2015, 900) reports that the young people in the Hungarian village he studies find farm labor to be an unappealing use of time —“vegetating.”

Although some other villagers in the communities I visited also picked up on this organic language, I found its most fervent supports to be among the Evangelical community. These individuals do not merely copy “Western” environmentalist logic, rather they interweave their notions about healthy and responsible foodways into religious discourses about the relationship between God and “Creation” and mandates to care for one’s family and one’s physical health.²⁵⁴ Plying me with soup and stuffed cabbage rolls, Maria declared, “we want what we put in our own garden at least to be as organic as possible... to avoid spraying it with any chemicals.” Her father explained that she does this “so we, her family, can eat [the produce].” He also brings their homegrown produce—like “lip-staining mountain blueberry” jam and “our potatoes,” which he says a German friend of his daughter’s reports have their own particular “flavor and sweetness”—to his older daughter and her family in Austria, whose small apartment does not offer them space for their own garden. As Cristian implied in commenting on the cancerous side effects of non-organic food at the start of this chapter, villagers like Maria and her father also understand their practices and their produce as part of properly caring for their families and their health. While offering me refreshments and snacks (along with plenty of jars of jam, sauce, and pickles, as well as fresh tomatoes to take with me), several Evangelical villagers told me about the dietary restrictions their faith prescribes: avoiding pork, caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco. This attention to physical health is understood as respect for the body God has given you. In this sense, organic agriculture and the supposedly superior flavors, textures, and nutrients that come from Romania’s soil are an extension of these villagers’ quest to adhere to a moral lifestyle and prioritize their families’ well-being and physical (and spiritual) condition.

These villagers’ discourses about health and nutrition resonate with public worries across the former socialist states, where the deregulation and outsourcing of agricultural

²⁵⁴ For a sampling of the varied ties between religion and food see: (Finch 2014; Douglas 1972; Wellman 2020)

industries both after 1989 and again when these states joined the EU have spurred food crises as hazardous toxins and diseases have tainted market and grocery-store goods.²⁵⁵ Such unintended consequences of globalizing processes inspire many people to revalue “the local”—whether that is the village or the nation-state. When Andreea told me about saving money and protecting her family’s health, her mother-in-law chimed in, “it’s better to have Romanian food.” This idea resonated across the religious spectrum: Fr. David, the Orthodox priest, explained that the Romanian state does not protect local “healthier and organic” produce, since “you don’t get rich off [it] like giant farms” and “it hurts to read the label” on the Polish milk in the local Lidl (a German grocery chain). Brodi describes a similar backlash against “globalization materialized in non-local fast food” in “the expansion of local ‘typical’ or ‘authentic’ food markets.”²⁵⁶ This demand provides indigenous Mexican women the opportunity to sustain themselves (by selling tacos and other street food made from local corn varieties) while also producing a “nationalist nostalgia.” In this sense, the “Europeanization” (or “Westernization”) of village foodways and their efforts to “get by” (brought about by corporate and state interests as well as their own adaptation of Western “regimes of value”²⁵⁷) is another case in which, as Verdery says of property and citizenship laws in Eastern Europe after 1989, “transnationalism nationalizes.”²⁵⁸ Verdery extrapolates further, claiming that such ideas “constitute resistance to transnational forces, [and are] efforts by particular national(ist) groups to prevent ‘their’ nation from slipping in the hierarchy of nations in a period of global uncertainty.”²⁵⁹ While the material results of villagers’ discourses may be small on a grand scale, their reimagined organic traditionalism encourages them to have hope for the future. When Cristian’s brother lamented the corruption keeping entrepreneurship (and

²⁵⁵ (Ries 2009; Caldwell 2007; Gille 2009)

²⁵⁶ (Bordi 2006, 99)

²⁵⁷ (Appadurai 1988)

²⁵⁸ (Verdery 1998, 292)

²⁵⁹ (ibid, 300)

“development”) limited in Romania—“Let’s hope that another leadership will come, another mentality, with other principles, so that we can rise too, so that...we’re a bit left behind in comparison...”—Cristian cheerfully cut in, “so that we can produce organic tomatoes for America!”

The very volatility of such globalizing (Europeanizing, Westernizing, etc.) processes and their mutually dependent counterparts, localizing (Romanianizing, Easternizing, etc.) trends, leaves the future opaque. Not everyone in town is as optimistic as these villagers, because as Miriana declares, “it is more comfortable to go abroad” or go to the store:

“[W]ho is going to come here and put the onions in the ground, to do all that work when maybe in the fall they won’t come up?...No one is going to come home willingly. They’ll only come back out of need, because they have to. Maybe some time they [the EU, the state] won’t let them; something will happen.”

In the winter of 2020, one such world-altering event (again spurred by globalizing forces) did halt transnational flows and force villagers *acasă*—at least for a few months of quarantine. I conclude my discussion of villagers’ thoughts on the “development” of their communities and how they themselves have aided, rejected, or redirected that change through their social and economic remittances with a few words on what researchers of other cases might learn from these ethnographic details and how their outcomes will likely shift once again as a result of this unprecedented localizing event, the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Chapter 7. Conclusions and New Beginnings: Social Remittances During a Pandemic

“An important political task for anthropology, I believe, is to call attention to the fixing, racializing, and hierarchizing that seem everywhere to accompany global transformation, even as we explore the emergent networks of quickened flow that are its sign.”²⁶⁰

Returning to what Chris Hann calls “the shatter zone of Eastern Europe,”²⁶¹ the countryside marginalized inside an already (re-)peripheralized region, I have attempted to shed light on how intermittent migrants from rural Bistrița-Năsăud county, Romania understand and contribute to the “development” their communities (and others) expected to result from “East-West” migration (and “transition”). This promise is laden with “Europeanizing” (or “Westernizing” and “liberalizing”) assumptions, but by thinking about “the complex connections between subjective imaginings and [social and] material transformations,”²⁶² I question (and ultimately undermine) those expectations. Following the work of other scholars tracing the results of migrations between Poland and the UK, I contend that when individuals “return” from Spain or Austria to their villages in Transylvania they bring with them reflections on experiences and encounters they can use to define what sorts of “Western” ideas, practices, and norms should be embraced and imitated, but also those which should be resisted or reinvented for their own purposes.²⁶³ I argue that these “social remittances” (and their economic counterparts) help steer the course of local development, sometimes in directions closer to “Europe” (such as when they embrace “modern” infrastructure and expectations for civil and professional governments and employers), and sometimes away from it (such as when they revalorize “traditional Romanian,” rural, and religious lifeways. As such, they reveal the

²⁶⁰ (Verdery 1998, 301)

²⁶¹ (Hann 2015, 906)

²⁶² (ibid)

²⁶³ (Garapich 2016; Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Grabowska et al. 2017)

“fixing” and “localizing” which, Katherine Verdery asserts, always accompany transnationalizing and globalizing processes.²⁶⁴

By tracing how individuals assert agency in the remittance process—deciding when to accept, reject, or adapt lessons from elsewhere—I also uncover how “illiberal remittances”²⁶⁵ can come both from efforts to “Europeanize” (or transnationalize) and from efforts to “Romanianize” (or localize). While some villagers may spurn “Western” notions about sexuality in favor of “traditional Romanian” families, they also attempt to become more “European” by taking up the exclusionary discourses (directed at Roma or African immigrants) they hear around them in “the West,” thus reinforcing racializing hierarchies both “at home” and abroad. Just as these examples suggest that becoming “European” is not always as positive as its proponents imagine, I find that acts of stressing the local or the national by vernacularizing “Western” ideas—such as valorizations of “Romanian” organic produce and dreams about rustic tourism—create opportunities for repurposing “backwardness” and imagining a meaningful and sustainable future, and are not simply regressive steps into the past. These innovations, along with other affirmations of local traditions (be they rural, religious, or peasant) over “European” practices, contest the “social imaginary of development” in which the “East” is understood as less “civilized” than the “West.” Given these varied outcomes and implications, I maintain that social remittances—and locals’ thoughts about them—offer practical methods of making sense of social and material transformations, represent viable strategies for getting by despite the disadvantages those changes sometimes cause, and provide ways of finding fulfillment and pride while doing so.

These conclusions, stemming from a small ethnographic case, remind us of the wide diversity of experiences and consequences which result from “East-West” migrations. My

²⁶⁴ (Verdery 1998, 301)

²⁶⁵ (Szulecki 2020)

findings support Grabowska and Garapich's processual typology or "agency filters" (imitation, resistance, and innovation) while at the same time contradicting their contents. The rural, working-class, and actively religious (Orthodox or Evangelical) migrants with whom I spoke have sometimes quite different notions about what is valuable compared to the more middle-class Poles from towns or cities whom Grabowska and Garapich surveyed. These points of departure remind us that religious socialization and socio-economic class are important elements of social remitting which need to be further addressed in the literature on both "East-West" and "North-South" migrations by focusing on rural workers (as both Levitt, who first defined social remittances, and I have done), middle-class individuals (such as those Grabowska and Garapich have studied), and urban elites, all of whom migrate for various reasons and in various directions. Likewise, the differences between my work and Grabowska and Garapich's (and Levitt's) depend in part on the large variety of "receiving" localities inside the "West" (north and south, urban and rural, etc.) which shape migrant remittances. Large urban settings like London are very different from Spanish coastal towns such as Roquetas de Mar or agricultural fields in Austria. The striking differences in opportunities as well as cultures inside "origin" and "destination" countries mean that it may be useful to think about migrations between or from peripheralized regions rather than from "underdeveloped" to "developed" countries when attempting to typify the sorts of social remittances that flow between varied localities.

The flows of people, things, and ideas across uneven regions of the planet have perhaps never been more visible or more contested than during the last few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This awareness has brought with it renewed distrust of the "foreign." Studying social remittances as ways people mediate and make sense of globalizing processes (and their localizing counterparts) offers valuable insight into the ways people react to things they perceive to come from "outside," from elsewhere. The present crisis has forced many people

to return “home”; whether they are ethnic others or citizens of our own nationality, migrants have (once again) become threatening outsiders and potential carriers of disease, ostracized and excluded as borders are closed and co-nationals are encouraged to stay away.²⁶⁶ One could conceive of such reactions as acts of resisting (human and pathogenic) remittances. My findings make clear that acts of resistance to remittances often go hand in hand with localizing discourses and thus I am not surprised (though still disheartened) that many states and people responded to the new “outside” influence with “nationalizing” (or as Pasiëka puts it, “nation-first”) countermeasures.²⁶⁷

These reactions highlight the social cleavages and power imbalances both inside countries (such as migrants versus non-migrants) and between countries. “Western” states and companies (like most of their counterparts around the world) have deemed seasonal agricultural work, the kind of *munca de jos* (dirty work/manual labor) many of my interlocutors perform, “essential,” allowing them to fly in migrants to harvest crops despite the poor working conditions and limited access to healthcare which make them more vulnerable to infection and illness.²⁶⁸ The Romanian state cannot afford the welfare necessary to pay for hundreds of thousands of people left unemployed by closed borders (which, along with the lack of domestic jobs, is of course part of why people leave for work in the first place) and thus lets its citizens take these risks.²⁶⁹ Quoting Max Weber, Boatca describes this behavior as a “renewed ‘struggle between nationalities,’” during which “the protection and rights of Eastern European workers

²⁶⁶ After he canceled all the flights into Romania before Orthodox Easter, the president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis said, “My beloved, do not come home for the holidays this year” (Paun 2020). Most other commentators were less friendly in their rejection of “diasporans” returning “home.”

²⁶⁷ (Pasiëka 2020)

²⁶⁸ Nursing and caregiving, both professions predominately staffed by “Eastern Europeans” have likewise been deemed essential (Pasiëka 2020). “Pick for Britain” or similar “agricultural patriotism” initiatives attempting to recruit local workers have proved ineffective (Barbulescu and Vargas-Silva 2020).

²⁶⁹ (Paun 2020; King, Frykman, and Vullnetari 2013, 134) on migration as a (precarious) “safety valve” for the post-socialist Romanian state.

are pitted against the safe-guarding of the consumption habits of Western European populations.”²⁷⁰

Commenting on the massive backlash against migrants returning to Romania from “highly affected” countries in the “West” (of which border officials documented 1.3 million, over half of the total number reported to have left since 2008),²⁷¹ Ulceluse claims that “the knee-jerk reactions” in Romania “reflect broader processes of social distancing, set in motion long before the virus appeared on the scene.”²⁷² When many of my interlocutors identified fraying community cohesion and heightened individualism, they responded by rejecting what they saw as internalized “Western” corruption and reinvesting in “traditional” ways. For them, this meant reviving folklore, religion, and village pride in an attempt to restore some feeling of community spirit. It is unclear how that community spirit will weather socially distanced relations, just as it is unclear how rejecting return migrants could spell something good for Romanian society in the future. If my own study about the reactions to “quickened flow[s]” portends anything about the deadening of such flows, it is that no response goes un-counteracted by another and while there is certainly “fixing, racializing, and hierarchizing” attendant to both processes,²⁷³ there is also often innovation, aspiration, and emancipation. Acts of fusing ancestral practice with “modern” values (or local with global) may have already brought us one helpful (and healthy) innovation to sustain us in this period of illness; perhaps it’s time to hope we find more chances to celebrate what grows in our own backyards.

²⁷⁰ (Boatca 2020). Thinking with Mbembe’s necropolitics, Laterza and Römer (2020) see the situation similarly, if more morbidly: “The hierarchy of disposability is of course not equalised by the virus”

²⁷¹ (V. Ionescu 2020); 2.4 million are said to have left between 2008 and 2018 (Ulceluse 2020), but it is unclear if this figure measures those who stayed away for the duration of that time or also includes the many seasonal and contract workers who return frequently.

²⁷² (Ulceluse 2020)

²⁷³ (Verdery 1998, 301)

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Appendix

A. Interviewee Demographics

Interviewee Pseudonym	Town of origin	Time and Place Abroad	Age ²⁷⁴	Religion	Employment
Maria	Rebra	6 years off and on in Austria	44	Seventh-Day Adventist	House cleaner
Ionuț	Rebra	visiting children in Vienna, Austria	65	Seventh-Day Adventist	Retired factory worker
Cristian	Rebra	20 years off and on in Motril, Spain	43	Seventh-Day Adventist	Truck driver
Ștefan	Rebra	20 years off and on in Roquetas, Spain	45	Orthodox	Seasonal farm worker and construction
Elena	Rebra	20 years Roquetas, Spain	38	Seventh-Day Adventist	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother
Andreea	Rebra	9 years off and on in Motril, Spain (in the 2000s)	40	Seventh-Day Adventist	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother
Ioana	Rebra	Children in Roquetas, Spain for 20 years	67	Seventh-Day Adventist	Agriculturist, stay-at-home mother
Ana	Rebra	10 years off and on in Roquetas, Spain	60	Seventh-Day Adventist	Seasonal farm worker
Fr. David	Nepos	His parishioners are in Spain and Austria	40	Orthodox	Priest, historian
Andrei	Rebra	17 years in Spain from 2000-2017; his parents have worked in Roquetas most of his life	34	Orthodox (non-observant)	Seasonal farm worker, construction worker
Matei	Rebra	10 years off and on in Spain and Austria	27	Orthodox	Seasonal farm worker
Mihai	Rebra	5 Years off and on in working in	24	Orthodox	Seasonal farm worker

²⁷⁴ These are ages at the time of the interview (summer 2019). Most are approximate as several people did not tell always tell me exactly how old they were.

		Roquetas and elsewhere in Spain; parents have worked in Roquetas most of his life			
Sofia	Rebra	18 years Motril, Spain	27	Orthodox (raised Pentecostal)	Bar tender, Care giver
Antonia	Bistrița (Rebra)	20 years Motril, Spain	50	Pentecostal	Seasonal farm worker, service industry worker, Care giver
Gabriel	Rebra	5 years off and on in Motril, Spain	30	Orthodox	DJ, Seasonal farm worker
Miriana	Rebra	5 years off and on in Spain	48	Orthodox	Seasonal farm worker
Daniela	Rebra	13 years Roquetas, Spain	50	Orthodox	Grocery store clerk
Florin	Feldru	1 month every year for 6 years, Spain. (Wife in Austria 4 years)	57	Orthodox	Elected official, Seasonal farm worker
Catalina	Feldru	Husband in Spain and Ireland for 15 years (1 month to 6 weeks at a time doing construction work)	35	Orthodox	City hall employee
Răzvan	Feldru	Visits his children in Spain	65	Orthodox	History professor
Gheorghe	Feldru	Austria off and on in 30 years	48	Orthodox	Construction worker, entrepreneur
Irina	Rebra	1 month each year for 8 years in Spain	60	Orthodox	Seasonal farm worker (Spain), shop owner (Rebra)
Teodora	Rebra	Children in Spain and Austria for 15 years	60	Pentecostal	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother
Simona	Rebra	10 years Vienna, Austria	33	Pentecostal	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother

Luminița	Rebra	10 years off and on in Vienna, Austria	35	Pentecostal	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother
Oana	Rebra	10 years off and on in Roquetas, Spain in the 1990s	60	Pentecostal	Seasonal farm worker, stay-at-home mother
Liviu	Rebra	10 years Spain, 5 years Linz, Austria	35	Pentecostal	Construction worker
Petru	Feldru	20 years Dublin, Ireland, brief time in Germany before 1989 (one side of the family are Saxons)	58	Pentecostal	Bus Driver