

METAPHORS OF AMERICA: LABOR, GLOBAL INTEGRATION, AND TRANSYLVANIAN IDENTITIES

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Deconstructing the diverse meaning behind the common metaphor “Little America”, this paper explores widely disparate ethnic identity conceptions and inter-ethnic relations in two regions of Transylvania, showing them as dependent on the ways in which each region was integrated into changing patterns of global labor. Regional ethnic identity and relations in the Jiu Valley coal producing region and in the mixed agro-industrial Făgăraș zone vary greatly. In the former, ethnic identity was downplayed and inter-ethnic relations always kept on an even keel owing to the particular process of regional settlement and the common integration of the region’s ethnic groups into the hard coal industry that dominated the Valley from the middle of the 18th century. In the latter region, ethnic relations were frequently tense due to a highly discrete ethnic-based division of labor and organization of political hierarchy. Despite these differences, citizens of each region expressed their ethnic dynamic through use of the “Little America” metaphor. However, in the Jiu Valley this referred to alleged ethnic peace of cooperating national groups, while in Făgăraș this notion referred to the dream of struggling for social mobility and differentiation. The paper thus shows how such basic ethnic conceptions, shaped by the treatment of regional labor in successive phases of the global economy, influence a wide range of differing attitudes toward diverse social and political processes, including socialist development policies and the modern global labor market.

Keywords: ethnic Identity; Transylvania; global integration of labor; micro-regional variation

Introduction: New Understandings of Ethnicity and Identity

Social scientific definitions of ethnicity, ethnic identity, and ethnic politics respond to prevailing intellectual fashion. The anthropology of Central and East Europe increasingly accepts models of culture and identity that are processual, interactionist, contestory, and diverse. Culture is no longer defined as a “thing”, a bounded entity comprised of diverse characteristic traits and customs. Instead culture today is seen as a protean phenomenon defined by overlapping boundaries, fluid lives, and relationships used as resources in social interaction (see Appa-

durai 1996). So, too, ethnicity. The recent, important volume by Rogers Brubaker and colleagues (2006) is a classic and comprehensive restatement of the complex, fluid, and over-lapping quality of ethnic lives and identity choices. They ably show how citizens of Cluj enact ethnically different behavior depending on circumstance, the presence of others, and the contexts of interaction. Borrowing much from Katherine Verdery's seminal statement on Transylvanian ethnicity (1983), their approach is blessedly one more weapon to liberate us from the chains of ethnic primordialism.

Though the thesis of protean ethnicity is hopeful and insightful, its concern for process over substance tends to level diverse sources of identity, potentially rendering all contexts of interaction equal and relative in the formation and practice of identity, ethnic or otherwise. Chance meetings on the street and slurs and slights at the dry cleaner or hair dresser are as essential as national politics for motivating ethnic feelings, while conversations in a taxi rise to the level of labor and class relations as sources of sentiment. In contrast, as I argue below, there is still a need for social science to hang on to some of our determinist antecedents and hierarchically arrange the sources and resources mobilized in identity formation and practice, if only to make better comparative sense of them. This essay follows this strategy. In it I argue for the outsized significance of labor, and its integration into global systems of power and production, as key in the formation and the maintenance of ethnic and other forms of identity. This focus, I might add, follows a path blazed by György Ránki (1983) and his colleague Iván Berend (Berend and Ránki 1974), who wrote most convincingly of the significance of the domination of external powers on economic development and the conditions of labor, and hence on human identities and possibilities. Considering a hierarchy of influence in identity formation thus provides us with a tool to predict when and why personal interactions will provoke ethnic responses, and when and why they won't.

Local labor regimes and the global systems of power that shape them operate in "uniformitarian" fashion as far as ethnic identities are concerned. That is, they were as salient in the past for ethnogenesis and identity formation as they are today for ethnic practice and politics. Though labor and power uniformly act on ethnic identity formation and practice, since the origins of the world capitalist economy in the "long sixteenth century" the nature of ownership and related work regimes and the possibilities and obstacles afforded diverse groups within them are especially and increasingly defined in a global context. Stanley Tambiah (1989: 340), for example, shows how the Wallersteinian model of world capitalist integration especially influences the fragmentation of that same world into "nation-states" characterized by crescendos of ethnic violence. In the last decades of intense globalization diminishing states are further complemented by the intensification, if not aggravation, of ethnic identity and anger (Appadurai 2006, Holton 2000).

Thus, to effectively explain changing Transylvanian identities over the last centuries we especially need to include the global context and its structures of labor if we are to better define the interactive qualities of identity and related political practice. The remainder of this paper will thus consider such phenomena in two marginal regions of Transylvania, the Jiu Valley coal mining zone at the intersection of Transylvania with Banat and Oltenia, and the Făgăraș region of south-central Transylvania, between Brașov and Sibiu. I will specifically show how developing regional divisions of labor, set in motion and then cemented by global political economy, contributed to the production of two different senses of identity (one ethnic and one not), two different qualities of political practice (one aggressive and one passive), and different possibilities of local life and culture.

Throughout its modern history the Jiu Valley has mainly been a mono-industrial coal-producing region, first drawing labor from other Central European zones, and then sealing off that labor force to protect its coal-production for use by the Romanian state for purposes of development. The Făgăraș zone, of problematic but mixed agro-industrial economy, has long contributed labor to the international economy through the migration of its citizens. Though there is a certain similarity to the manner by which global forces intersect and influence labor in the two zones today, people in these regions respond to contemporary globalization in highly differentiated ways. Briefly, Jiu Valley miners, unified by their labor and disregarding ethnicity, came largely to fear and suspect influences emanating from the global economy. However, workers and peasants in the Făgăraș region, divided by their labor and intensely ethnic in identity, were forced at an early date to access economic opportunities in other areas of the world. Consequently, they long ago made their peace with the global economy and face outward and seek integration in global processes. As my thesis suggests, these stances emerge from the ways in which the regions were integrated into the global economy in the modern era, how this integration shaped the treatment of each region during the fifty-odd years of socialism, and how the regions have been transformed in the new globalized economy of post-socialism.

Metaphors of “Little America”: The Jiu Valley and Făgăraș Compared

In his now classic article on the practice of multi-sited fieldwork, George Marcus (1995) suggests we can “follow metaphors” to discern global commonalities and ties in widely different areas. This is a particularly effective method for the regions under consideration here. Regional differences are multi-dimensional and include qualities of history, geography, settlement patterns, family structure, inter-ethnic composition and relations, and political orientations, to name a few.

However, though strikingly dissimilar, citizens of each zone commonly refer to their home region by the nickname “Little America”. Though one is struck by the common moniker, when this is probed further one sees that though the names are the same, their meanings are greatly disparate. It is in these differences that we can discern regional qualities and how these have been shaped by different patterns of global integration and reflect different qualities of identity.

When Jiu Valley citizens speak of their region as “Little America”, they refer implicitly to the American concept of the “melting pot” prevalent in the United States through the 1960s. The “melting pot” refers idealistically to an ethnically assimilated, happily cooperating population shaped by immigration and a merging of peoples from across the globe. Thus, according to the local master narrative, expressed by virtually all regional groups, no matter when they arrived nor from where,¹ modern Valley society was formed with the opening of the region’s first coal mines in the 1850s (Baron 1998:64–65) and immigration into the Valley by diverse people from throughout the then-Habsburg Empire to work in the mines and ancillary occupations. As people claim, Romanians, Hungarians, Székelys, Germans, Poles, Czechs, a smattering Serbs and Croats, Gypsies and Jews flooded into the region through the latter part of the nineteenth century to form a polyglot, multiethnic, immigrant melting pot (Velica and Schreter 1993). From its inception, then, the modern Valley was organized for primary raw material extraction making use of uprooted workers and caring little about their primordial origins. The motivation for those entering the so-called American “melting pot” was the “American dream” of economic success and political liberty. This was thought to encourage a manufactured consent (see Burawoy 1985 for analogous use of the concept) of people to strive for individualized wealth and success.

However, the Jiu Valley “little America” metaphor is virtually opposite this image and contradictorily refers to a common class experience within a surrounding and oppositional political structure. Rather than individualistic striving for success, the unifying force in the Valley was the subterranean mining of the region’s hard coal (*hUILă*) deposits, and the shared culture of underground mining was catalyst for an organized class-based politics that increased the insularity of the Valley’s mining population, instead of opening them up for further global influence.

Compared to the Jiu Valley, the “Little America” identity formed in the Făgăraș region resulted from an essentially opposite process. In the Jiu Valley global forces (i.e., the expanded need for coal in the Habsburg imperium and in developing European industry generally) forced immigration into the newly developed coal fields. In Făgăraș, however, those same changing mid-nineteenth century global conditions had a centrifugal effect and pushed people out. From its incep-

tion the Făgăraș socio-economic system was one based on feudal rights and obligations. The region was settled by petty Romanian nobility in the 13th and 14th centuries, who were soon eclipsed by and subordinated to dominant Magyar-speaking overlords and Saxon German bankers and traders. As regional population increased after feudalism (Bărbat 1938: 96–97) and land resources were pressured, many Romanian-speaking Făgărașeni had no recourse but to leave their homes to seek economic survival and gain in other areas of the developing global system.² Făgărașeni mainly went to work in the developing industries of the United States. Their presence there produced in their mentalities a classic “imagined community” (Anderson 1993) intensely linking the region with the USA, especially through the medium of immigrant newspapers like *Curierul Româno-American* or *Vremea Nouă* (Nemoianu 1997, 2001, Roceric 1982).

The Făgăraș Romanian migrant community in America had remarkable cache in their natal region. The typical goal of the Făgăraș emigrant was to go to America to make “big pile money”, in the words of one octogenarian reflecting on his New World sojourn. Nearly every regional village household depended on emigrant remitted capital. Regional economic development was also spurred by these monies (Kideckel 1993:40) as was general cultural change, including developing styles of dress, slang, home decoration, literacy, and the like. The telos of regional emigration and the symbolic capital of the emigrant community thus gave rise to the Făgăraș name “Little America”. This identity was further embellished by the importance and visibility of the returning migrants in Făgăraș local communities. Many returned purposefully to purchase land and take up positions as yeoman farmers, but others came back inadvertently having failed to adapt to life in the New World or having been deported for one infraction or another. But whatever the reason, the manifest presence of these “Americans” in Făgăraș communities lent credence to regional myths of upward mobility via hard labor and competition, facilitated by the assistance of one’s co-ethnics.³

History and Identity Practice in the Two Regions

This brief discussion of the origins and meaning of the diverse “Little America” metaphors implies two separate but essential and related dimensions of the 16th–20th century global political economic system. The Jiu Valley reflected the expansionist nature of global capital seeking new mineral and raw material wealth, while Făgăraș was defined by the wholesale export of inexpensive, politically compromised labor to man industries in developing core states. The responses to these two different, but related, aspects of the 19th century global economy, Jiu Valley insularity and Făgăraș openness, were thus themselves necessar-

ily different. However, these different responses also produced and were intensified by different sentiments of identity in the regions. Again, however, the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș regions diverge in this regard. The formation of Jiu Valley mining, as discussed above, brought together a great number of diverse ethnic communities and interspersed them amongst one another in the coal mining towns of the valley. There were no ethnic neighborhoods, *per se*, nor were there distinctly ethnic trades except for agriculture and stock keeping, the near exclusive domain of regional upland peasants, termed “Momârlani”,⁴ who produced cheeses, milk, meats, and vegetables for sale to mining families with whom they developed trading partner relations.

This system, then, along with the unity of labor in underground mining, lent itself to de-emphasis of ethnic identities which were conserved and practiced largely by Valley women in their crafts and cuisine. Miners themselves typically avoided religious practice and older informants spoke of how they only understood there were different types of people during holiday seasons. One German–Hungarian miner who mainly worked at the Vulcan Coal Preparation facility said:

I never knew I was a minority or even that there was such a thing as ethnic minorities until after World War II. Then, because of my German background, I was deported to Ukraine to work in the Dombas coal mines. Before, I walked on Vulcan streets and greeted people in their native languages. Holidays were best, because different people all had their own celebrations with different food, songs, and decorations. Kids played together and we never gave a thought to our differences. All the people on the street looked out for all the kids and sent them home when their parents wanted them.

The de-emphasis of ethnicity was paired with the embellishment of class in the Jiu Valley, a function of labor ferment in the raw capitalist early mining industry. The regional workforce regularly expanded and contracted in relation to industrial boom and bust cycles. Mine mechanization, begun in 1924, also caused unemployment of great numbers of miners. Wildcat strikes over pay and working conditions were common (Toth-Gaspar 1964, cited in Friedman 2003), especially as the price of coal plummeted and the world teetered toward depression in 1929. However, even though many non-Romanian ethnics permanently left the region after World War I, when the region became part of “Greater Romania” (Baron 1998: 273), ethnic peace still reigned, even if labor peace did not.

In contrast, in Făgăraș, the particular process of regional settlement and the early regional division of labor resulted in the separation of its few main ethnic communities (Romanian, Magyar, and Saxon German), whose divisions also showed in people’s responses to the late 19th century global economic transformation. The Făgăraș zone is an ecological micro-region separated from the rest of

Transylvania by the Olt River on the north and West and the low-lying Perșani Mountains on the east. As discussed, the region was originally settled and controlled by a class of Romanian-speaking nobility dominating a small-scale Romanian peasantry from the 12th through the 14th centuries. From the 14th century the area came under increased Magyar political domination and by the 17th century was fully encapsulated in that feudal system (Pușcariu 1907). A fairly strict division of labor took impetus through the feudal period, with Romanians restricted to peasant livelihoods and service as priests and teachers. This was eased at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the twentieth as the region developed (albeit small-scale) industry (Bărbat 1938), especially after its post-World War I integration into “greater Romania”. However, this was largely restricted in size as it was submerged and dominated by the larger centers of Brașov and Sibiu to the east and west respectively. Furthermore, Făgăraș industry was also typically ethnic-based, and frequently dispersed in regional villages, where workers had less class than local and/or ethnically defined identities:

At the start of... capitalist industrialization, almost all workers had rural origins, with deep roots in their native villages... Most had few advanced sociocultural aspirations, nor organizational capacity, nor clear conception of the historical necessity to develop their socioeconomic demands in a decisive way for political struggle (Herseni et al 1972: 307).

Thus, politics in Făgăraș, unlike among their working class Jiu Valley cousins, revolved around, the Romanian national struggle, where many Făgărașeni distinguished themselves. But as with ethnic-based politics everywhere, the creation of greater Romania after World War I (not to mention the previous four centuries of feudalism and Magyar political domination) left residues of resentment between the region’s Romanians and Hungarians.⁵ Romanian intellectuals often spoke of the threat that a Hungarian fifth-column potentially represented to their rightful control of Transylvania even as many Hungarians from the region sought to emigrate to post-Trianon Hungary. In the Jiu Valley, however, post-Trianon emigration was largely a function of the capitalist business cycle and undertaken by individuals who defined themselves as workers rather than ethnics. These socio-economic identities, thus formed in the crucible of diverse nodes of the developing capitalist world system, were soon codified in local life and expressed in metaphor, social practice, language, religion, and above all politics. Such were the conditions of regional life and labor that were soon to be immersed in a new red “melting pot”, stirred by the flame of class struggle and socialist development.

Socialism

The post-World War II ascent to and consolidation of power by the Romanian Communist Party was supposed to represent a break with the past insofar as ethnic and other forms of social relations were concerned. Furthermore, the socialist state was decidedly (publicly, at least) oriented to support workers and open their horizons to personal advancement and new forms of knowledge. This would contribute to their fulfilling their historic revolutionary mission. However, reviewing the course of the forty odd years of socialist power in Romania, and in the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș zones in particular, it is apparent that socialism merely deepened regional tendencies that had developed through the previous centuries. Furthermore, despite the formal break with the world capitalist economy that socialism was alleged to represent, it is also clear that vast, if not entirely similar, global forces continued to work on the definition and practice of social relations in the regions during that time, and especially on the diverse identity postures of local peoples.

Briefly, socialist practices further encouraged both the global insularity of Jiu Valley people and the global orientation of Făgărașeni. However, both these stances, in retrospect, appear to have developed due to the competition of Soviet and socialist societies with Western capitalism (Chase-Dunn 1980) waged in the Cold War. In the Jiu Valley, the first decade of the socialist period was characterized by the outsized domination of the Soviet Union whose agents controlled the region through the formation of joint mining enterprises, Sovroms, to intensify coal production and extract Romania's war reparations. Along with mining, the Soviets also controlled government and education, enabled the formation of an extensive secret police presence, and influenced building styles and other cultural practices. The ethnic melting pot image of the region articulated well with the ideology of ascendant socialism to elaborate an internationalist, working-class image of Valley folk. This was especially encouraged by the symbolic manipulation of the region's past labor strife to emphasize its multinational, proletarian characteristics. It was in the early 1950s, for example, that the profuse miner images and symbolism like the caricatured "miner and peasant" sculptor in the town of Uricani appeared in Valley communities, while miner grave decorations began to emphasize "prolecult" sculpture and bas relief like red stars, hammers and sickles, miner lamps, pickaxes, and jack hammers (see also Buchli 1999).

It was also in this period, however, that socialist policy began to turn the "melting pot" quality of Valley life away from the celebration of ethnic unity to emphasize differentiation, privilege certain ethnic groups over others, close off the Valley to foreign influence, and encourage a degree of xenophobia in miner culture. The initial factor promoting this change was the deportation due to their alleged Nazi collaboration of hundreds of German-speaking ethnics for forced labor in the

coal mines of the Ukraine Dombas region. Though this event is little noted or discussed by Valley citizens today, it made German-speakers a suspect group and marked ethnicity as a relationship of significance, at least outside the underground. This also continued after the Sovroms ended in the late 1950s, as Romania's socialist/nationalist governments continued expansion of Valley coal mining for national development purposes.

The region's semi-hard coal was ideal for coke manufacture for steel production and for power generation. To protect this industrial heartland, and taking their cues from the vast Soviet secret police apparatus put in place earlier, the Valley through socialist years became one of the most surveilled and tightly controlled of Romania's regions (Nicolau 1999). Authorities especially sought to control population movement in and out of the Valley even as the region's miners were increasingly favored by the state in terms of salaries, benefits, housing, and other amenities. These forces thus contributed to the deepening of regional isolation and the growth of a degree of Romanian nationalism previously unknown in the region. The miners' slogan, "We give coal for the country", was offered in deed as well as word as miners generally became imbued with nationalist sympathies.

Such tendencies were even furthered after the coal miners' strike of 1977. The strike was for economic purposes and the striking miners were careful to acknowledge their commitment to socialist principles and the Romanian state (Matinal 1997). However, to weaken the politically restive miners⁶ and ensure uninterrupted coal production, the regime flooded the Valley with new workers, especially from poorer, rural areas of Romania, like Moldavia. Military units were also sent to the mines as were some criminals, sentenced there to hard labor. The influx of these new groups, especially the Moldavians, made the regional population even more insular and inward-looking and supportive of the nationalist impulses of the Ceaușesquite state. Still, despite this overt nationalism, and even through the 1980s and the extremes of Ceaușescu's attempts to foment inter-ethnic suspicions, Valley workers refused to give in to ethnic idioms of behavior. This was more a function of the unifying effects of labor in Valley coal mines than the region's multi-ethnic mythology of settlement. Here the danger of their work underground made them dependent on each other expressed in the miners' "code of honor" that averred that "in the underground no one is different, no one is an enemy. This code and the expected solidarity of individual miners with one's work-team mates (*ortaci*) thus enabled the persistence of the "Little America" metaphor even as it allowed for the continued expression of Romanian nationalism.

Socialism in Făgăraș, including the expansion of the region's chemical industry and the movement of thousands from villages to city as factory laborers, produced a near opposite result than that in the Jiu Valley. Such developments, in fact, only served to intensify regional longings for their integration into global re-

lations and intensified ethnic identity. Again, labor and ownership sat at the base of these deepening sentiments. In the first place, the region was a center for a Romanian nationalist, anti-Communist resistance in the decade after the party's capture of power (Ogoreanu 1995). The fervent desire to prevent the socialist capture of power turned people's heads to the West to wait expectantly for the Allies, especially the US, to make good on their (ultimately hollow) promise to keep Eastern Europe out of socialist clutches. Though Făgărașeni longings went unheeded, pro-Western sentiments rarely declined. In fact, emigration from the Făgăraș zone continued at a significant pace even during the years of socialism, facilitated by US "unification of families" immigration policies. Meanwhile Romanian-American immigrant groups in the United States continued to maintain contacts with people in the region. This was facilitated as the dominant Orthodox church was also thickly connected to American, Canadian, and Australian hierarchies, who themselves were replete with those tracing their family origins to the Făgăraș region.

Labor transformations figured largely into these perspectives. Collective farming, never imposed on the Jiu Valley, was resisted at every turn in Făgăraș and surrounding communes. But more than resistance, the rejection of collectivism intensified positive views of the region's past and called up embellished memories of the pre-World War II period and the glories of capitalism. "When we were private farmers..." was an oft-repeated phrase uttered by Făgăraș collectivists. Even the expanded degrees of industrial employment in the region's chemical factories did little to stem the "other directedness" of Făgărașeni. Făgăraș workers prided themselves on their technical competence and often expressed frustration at some of the outmoded practices and technologies with which they worked. They were insatiably curious about Western industrial practices and processes. During fieldwork in the mid-1970s many workers regularly questioned me about Western practices and requested catalogues and other information to attest to Western processes. In other words, unlike the miners who became even more insular with their experience in the mines, the industrial experience of Făgărașeni served to pique their international curiosity to an even greater extent.

At the same time as Făgărașeni still looked westward, the region fell greater prey to Ceaușescu nationalist exhortations. This was fueled by a number of factors. First, the steady "sale" and "repatriation" of Saxon Germans from the region back to Germany proper, left the region divided into two noticeably distinct ethnic groups, Magyar and Romanian. Second, the region's feudal history and the bifurcation of the regional population into dominant and dominated continued to resonate in the rural-urban distribution of population. Făgăraș villages were largely Romanian, though the Făgăraș city population was split between Magyars and Romanians, and over the years of socialism became increasingly Romanian. The

expansion of the regional chemical industry produced an intense rural-urban migration, such that the remnant Magyar population was increasingly differentiated and isolated from the regional mainstream. As Magyars felt overcome by increased Romanian nationalism and looked to Hungary for support Romanian distrust increased and ethnic tensions, though not violent and overt, continued to bubble beneath the surface of regional life throughout Ceaușescu's "golden epoch".

At one level the transformation of Făgăraș regional identities during socialism challenges my thesis of the importance of globally constituted labor in the production of identity. On the surface intensifying Făgărașeni Romanian nationalism seems a classic case of the "fear of small numbers" (Appadurai 2006), where the presence of a numerically limited minority produces a sense of incompleteness and threat to a far numerically superior majority. However, Appadurai's notion depends in great measure on such fears being goaded by overwhelming change in economic conditions, and this too was the case in Făgăraș. To be sure, Romanians did not see the resident Magyar population as occupying any different positions in the local economy and, in fact they typically filled the same jobs as Romanians in factories and offices. Nonetheless, Magyars were still thought to have some economic advantages that produced a certain envy amongst Romanians.

Though all in the region struggled with the difficult conditions of life in late socialism, those "difficult conditions" were often laid at the feet of the Hungarian population. Ceaușescu justified state demands for increased production and decreased, even rationed, consumption in his last years by constant reference to the threat the country faced from foreign agents, a concept that largely glossed the Hungarian minority and their ethnic state on Romania's borders. And Făgărașeni were increasingly susceptible to such propaganda. Additionally there were great and very obvious differences in the presence and roles of the Romanian and Hungarian Diaspora communities at this time. The Romanian community abroad was largely alienated from their homeland, spurred partially by a bitter dispute to the control the Romanian American Episcopate (Lascu 1984, Lascu, Ed. 1995). The "Little Americans" of Făgăraș felt wistful, isolated, and abandoned by their American cousins. As testimony to that, I was frequently sought out by individuals, many of whom I did not even know, to urgently request my help to find a relative, a missing address, or other information. Hungarians, on the other hand, and regardless of whether they personally benefited, were said to have the support of their co-ethnic community, whether in Hungary proper or in the Hungarian diaspora in the United States. Twisted versions of the impassioned speeches of Tom Lantos, Hungarian-American Democratic Congressman from California, in support of the rights of the Hungarian minority and highly critical of the Ceaușescu regime, were also publicized throughout the Romanian community to add to the

sense of differentiation. Thus, the two regions largely remained divergent throughout the years of socialism. The multi-ethnic miners, though supportive of the state, were only moderately nationalist in orientation. Făgăraș workers and collectivists, however, were both more suspect of socialism, but increasingly and intensely receptive to ethnic and nationalist rhetoric.

These patterns continued to play out in the 1989 Revolution. Space for a review of revolutionary events in both regions is too brief here to do justice to their complexity. Suffice it to say, however, that the miners reacted *en masse* and without regard to ethnic identity in their knee-jerk political reactions at the end of socialism. At that time they were called to Bucharest by Ion Iliescu, head of the revolutionary National Salvation Front and soon to be Romania's first post-socialist president, to beat up protestors in June 1990 and to bring down the government of centrist Petre Roman in September 1991. In Făgăraș, responses to the Revolution took on a religious character (Kideckel 1993: 214), even as the local Magyar population used their new-found freedom to arrange for trips (and sometimes emigration) to Hungary. Though both groups respected the catalyzing activities of László Tókéş, by Easter 1990 some Romanian intellectuals in Făgăraş were already highly critical of his outspoken program for Hungarian rights in Transylvania. Whatever the differences between the separate regional communities however, they did not endure. The end of socialism induced major change in the statist, mono-industrial economies on which both regions depended. These brought new labor regimes into the regions and forced a convergence of life and identity in them away from miner solidarity and Făgăraş ethno-nationalism to adapt to the commonalities of unemployment, decline, and depletion of the regions' populations.

Regional Responses to Post-Socialist Transformation

Since the end of socialism, the Jiu Valley and Făgăraş zones have suffered remarkably in Romania's developing and increasingly dependent market economy. Given their past concentration on single spectrum, large-scale, state-supported industry (coal mining and chemical production), the two zones have been particularly affected by post-socialist privatization and industrial restructuring. Massive unemployment in both regions and the closing of mines and factories has had particularly disastrous effects on the solidarity of labor and have played a singular role in the changing identity and political practice of both the Jiu Valley miners and Făgăraş workers.⁷ However, again we see that such identities were defined variously and to different effect especially insofar as inter-ethnic relations were concerned.

The Jiu Valley coal mining industry had a particularly steep downward slide considering the heights to which the miners had risen during socialism. Since the mid 1990s the coal mines have begun to close and/or be cut back in size, production, and labor force in a large way. This was prompted first by the general inefficiency of the mining industry,⁸ but was also encouraged by demands from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and European Union for Romanian industrial restructuring, as well as Romania's increased integration into global exchange networks.⁹ In the latter case, the declines in Romanian industrial production and access to cheaper coal on the international market meant considerably less of a need for home-grown production. Not incidentally, analogous to the state's importing so many different types of workers after the 1977 strike to neuter the politically restive miners, the large-scale cut-back in mining in the 1990s also came on the heels of the so-called *mineriade* of 1990 and 1991. Those miner invasions of Bucharest prompted widespread fear and indignation throughout the country (see, for example, Cesereanu 2003) and calls for dismantling the mining system that provoked such violence (Perjovschi 1999). To that end, starting in 1997 and continuing in a slow but steady pace, employment in the mines has been cut back by the state policy of labor contract buy-outs, or *disponibilizare*. This program enticed miner participation by offering them large severance packages along with regular unemployment benefits (Romania Government 1997). As a consequence over the last few years employment in mining declined from roughly 42,000 in 1997 to about 15,000 by late 2000 as three of thirteen mines closed and talk was of closure of another five to eight mines.

Global factors are clearly greatly responsible for these changes. However, the response by most of the Jiu Valley redundant miners was a curious and contradictory mixture of both fear of global integration of their production system and wholesale enthusiasm for the blessings of globalized culture (Friedman 2003). In the initial years of the post-socialist buy-outs the redundant mining population, taking its cue from the insular, semi-xenophobic qualities of regional life in socialism's last years and responding to the role of the international community in the decline of Romanian coal mining, evinced suspicion, reservation, if not outright disgust about the developing global production system. They were also extensively critical about the international institutions that allegedly catalyzed the taking apart of the mining industry, and even cast aspersions about other nations' roles in this process. In their response to the loss of their jobs, some unemployed miners sought to return to their regions of origin (chiefly Moldavia). Some tried to move, with little success, to still other areas of Romania where jobs were allegedly available. Some used their severance pay to try to establish small businesses in the Jiu Valley itself. However, in the first decade of post-socialism few redundant miners saw emigration to other European countries as an option.

At this same time Hungary and Hungarians began to be discussed with negative connotations, though this was again more an economic than an ethnic discourse. Thus in the late 1990s miners justified their fear of emigration by repeating rumors of how those who emigrated to work in Hungarian mines were given the worst and most dangerous jobs there at the lowest pay. Similarly antipathy toward Hungary was prompted by some EU and World Bank policies which seemed to favor that country at Romania's expense. One celebrated case was the EU demand that Romania's COMTIM pig-raising complex outside Timișoara be closed so that another could be built literally down the road in Kecskemét, Hungary. The urban-dwelling miners, who were largely without the possibilities of gardening or raising a pig, said their diets depended on that complex, which they also claimed to be one of the most productive and modern facilities in Europe. In other instances miners constantly cited Hungary as the referent for conditions and events in the Valley. They spoke of how women's wages in Hungary far exceed that of men's in Romania and how Hungary supports small business development for redundant workers while Romania does not. Hunger strikers in the Valley town of Lupeni, many of whom had lost jobs in the buyouts, also blamed their plight on the indifference of the European community to the plight of Romanians and the desire for Europeans to exploit Romanian resources. They spoke of shaming Romania by speaking to the international press, if they could only get across the border to Hungary to do so.

Hungary is not the only source of Jiu Valley concern. Other suspicions of global forces in the region derived from the out-sized presence of international NGOs and related organizations. The Valley has been a felicitous place for these organizations to set up shop, attracted as they are by the extremes of unemployment and social problems in the region, by Romanian state policies that formally or informally direct external organizations to the Valley, and probably by the notoriety of the Jiu Valley miners due to their recent past history of political violence. In the last years, then, a great number of internationally-based organizations, from the World Bank to a number of private, religious-based charities have established offices and programs in the Valley to "assist" local citizens in all manner of initiatives; establishing businesses, retraining workers, advising on and developing programs related to alcoholism and domestic abuse, etc. The extent of assistance "projects" and foreign-supported NGOs duplicates the profusion of such institutions found in war-torn Bosnia, and their problems and tensions between donors and locals are just as obvious (Sampson 2002). However, an overall review shows many of the programs to have been mostly ineffective. Many NGOs pass through the region quickly. Others establish programs for which there is little use. Still others are compromised by the didactic, non-responsive style they establish in their practices (see Kideckel 2005, Nesperova 2000). The World Bank loan scheme has had some positive results of late in seeding a developing group of

small entrepreneurs and attracting a few businesses to its “incubator” located in the east Valley town of Petrila. However, even these programs have been greeted by derision and accusations of favoritism by most miners (Carmen Tarnovschi, personal communication).

At the same time that global forces are derided for their affects on local employment, reemployment, and the mitigation of social problems, the atomization of Jiu Valley labor has been furthered by miners’ overbearing concern for consumption as a marker of status, itself intensified by Romania’s increased integration into the global production system. Miner culture had always been oriented towards consumption as a means of self-actualization. This was particularly supported by high salaries in the past, urban lifestyles, and their self-identification as modern and sophisticated. Thus many miners took their severance pay from the labor contract buy-outs and used it to purchase large numbers of household items, including furniture, rugs, and especially household electronic appliances and computers. The competition for these items was furious in the late 1990s and fed the development of a retail sector and ancillary services and also supported the extraordinary growth in local use of the Internet, web-searching, chatting, and the pirating and trading of videos (Rus 2004).

As in other Romanian locales, there are a great number of public Internet cafes and other outlets in Valley towns. However, Jiu Valley miners have also taken to purchasing computers, cable connections, and internet services for their apartments. Now, in place of spending time with colleagues at local bars after their shift, miners run home, log-on, and chat with their colleagues from the confines of their apartments, in a pattern reminiscent of the geekiest of Internet geeks in the West. To an extent, the miners’ penchant for the internet represents the intersection of earlier consumption patterns with changing labor conditions. In particular, it also reflects the increased insularity of workers that has developed in the wake of recent changes the Jiu Valley production regime. Thus, in the years since the buy-outs began typical group sociability of miners has declined precipitously as labor has become increasingly tendentious and insecure and the cost of living skyrocketed. This social breakdown has also been intensified by accusations and counter-accusations set in motion by the failed *mineriade* of the 1990s and the opprobrium this brought to the miners as a group. The decline in their social life even prompted one sub-engineer with whom I was speaking during a visit to the Valley in Summer 2006 to suggest that miners no longer even evince any concern or affinity for their “*ortaci*” (workmates) that was previously the essential social relationship in the Valley.

Increased consumption, unemployment, and social atomization together finally broke down miner resistance to international emigration and, in the last five years, the floodgates have opened. However, most of those leaving the Valley for work in Italy and Spain and even Hungary, tend to be younger workers, often un-

married, whose capital remittances has continued to fuel an intense culture of consumption in the region, despite the overwhelming extent of unemployment. Thus, people in the Jiu Valley today have highly ambiguous and emotionally-charged attitudes to global forces. Though Jiu Valley miners clearly recognize and decry the role of global economic forces in limiting local occupational possibilities, they also see those same global forces, often unrealistically, as a potential panacea to what ails the region. Aside from tourism, which many unrealistically see as the region's savior, people hope for a "white knight" foreign investor, to rescue the region's coal industry. Most of the mines, people say, still have large quality deposits of coal and all that remains is the wisdom and the wealth to exploit them effectively.

The ethnic identity of their potential saviors, of course, is not an issue for the Valley population. Tourism development and growth of the land market can only be fueled by large sums of capital coming from abroad. Thus, when people speak of the possibilities of attracting such investment, many again refer to the "Little American" quality of their population. They refer to how they parried Ceaușescu's attempts at provoking ethnic antagonism and point to the traditional harmony of the region's diverse peoples as reason for trusting the Valley as a site for wise investment. Such claims are rendered as a clear counterpoint to the disregard by which the Valley is seen throughout Romania owing to the violence of the past *mineriade*, the last occurring in January 1999. However, they have more than a kernel of truth to them. Ethnic politics has always been weak in the region, being replaced by an active and vibrant working-class culture. However, with mines closure, unemployment, the growth of consumption and a class of entrepreneurs who vertically integrate wholesale and retail, even this working-class solidarity has been eclipsed by social atomization. Even so, Valley folk have not fallen prey to ethnic recrimination. For example, though some Valley intellectuals are knowledgeable about the so-called Hungarian Status Law, and Romanians generally either found the multiple jurisdictions of the law objectionable (Deets 2004) or hoped the Law would be reformed to aid Romanians working in Hungary (Rompres 2001), few miners were cognizant of the law and none were particularly incensed nor motivated for work in Hungary.

Like their miner cousins, Făgăraș citizens, too, have experienced massive economic transformation and dislocation in the last years. However, differences in their history, in their current position in the global and national economy, and in the structure of the region's ethnic population produced widely different social conditions and identity postures and practices. From the very outset of post-socialism the region's factory mainstays, the UPRUC chemical fittings plant and the Nitramonia chemical production combine, now considered outmoded "mammoths", began to experience a slow, steady bleed of labor (Kideckel 2007). After a long and contentious process that pit workers against management, UPRUC's

last six sections (out of thirteen that operated during socialism) have been privatized, though two of these are also rumored to be close to bankruptcy. Nitramonia's circumstances during socialism were some of the best available in Romanian factories owing to the patronage of Elena Ceaușescu, who "earned" her PhD in Polymer Chemistry there. However, since the end of socialism the factory has been on a steadily downward path, losing markets, production sections, and workers. In the last years it was duped out of resources by foreign patrons feigning privatization assistance (Șelaru 2004) and has just recently been closed entirely, allegedly to be conserved for future sale (Anonymous 2007).

Unlike the miners, however, Făgărașeni did not wait for unemployment to swamp them before opening themselves up to global possibilities. Ceaușescu was not cold in his grave before Romanians in the region began to leave in large numbers, both legally and illegally, largely for positions of unskilled labor in Italy.¹⁰ From the outset, this migration, like chain migrations elsewhere (see Yan 2003) not coincidentally reproduced values, structures, and relationships. Făgărașeni often moved in groups, established communities and common residences where they migrated, divided up their labor on community bases (i.e., migrants from different villages concentrated in different occupations),¹¹ and even traveled together *en masse* to and from Italy and other Western outposts.¹² In contrast to Romanian emigration patterns, the remnant regional Hungarian population either took temporary jobs in Hungary or sought to permanently move there. Cyclical migration to Western Europe and then a return to Romania was not so much an option for the remaining regional Magyar population.

The massive and steady emigration of members of all ethnic groups from the region was due to the vast redundancies of labor in the chemical plants, now even less relevant than the remaining coal mines for the national economy. Furthermore the economic downturn and resulting labor migration influenced different responses than those seen in the Jiu Valley. Instead of the class-based, ethnic-neutral mass orientation of Jiu Valley miners, Făgăraș workers after socialism began to fragment in a number of ways. Though local labor unions mounted some action, the dwindling numbers of union members and new regulations allowing formation of unions across factory and even sectoral borders, set in motion inter-union competition for members and resources (Kideckel 2001, Ockenga 1997). Workers soon tuned this out for their own individualist strategies. Most strikingly, as far as unemployment was concerned, the response of Făgăraș workers was diametrically opposite to that of the miners. First the factories were riven with all kinds of conflicts between different social categories of workers in the attempt to avoid unemployment. Men and women were jealous of each other. City workers and rural workers competed for their jobs. And ethnic identities also figured when some workers seemed to have gained favor with administrators. Then, by the time

of the labor contract buy-outs (1997), instead of attempting to keep their jobs, Făgăraș workers continued their competition for the ability to get out of their labor contracts, since many had new possibilities in Italy (Romanians) and Hungary (Magyars).

Still despite the wholesale elimination of most of their economic possibilities, and the recognition of the global forces that underlay this, people in Făgăraș are still much more oriented to and positive about these same forces than their Jiu Valley counterparts. The massive depletion of the region's economy and population, along with the refusal of the state to grant the region's application for special treatment as "Disfavored" leave locals no option but to see the necessity for their region of global factors like external investment, tourism, and greater Romanian integration into international structures. Of course many decry some corrupt practices of foreign patrons, and recognize how foreign ownership has been disastrous for salaries, benefits, union membership, and occasionally even responsible for the destruction of local firms (such as was the case with the UPRUC enameling section). Nonetheless, Făgărașeni of all ethnic persuasions continue to face outward in their approach to the world, though they often do so with an ethnic tinge to their behavior.

Variation in emigration strategies is not the only way that the relevance of ethnicity is observed in the region today. The region's ethnic communities also serve as strategic actors in development planning or in employment strategizing. For example, one leading local cultural institution, itself named after Negru Voda, one of the first nobles to settle the region and an identity that smacks of Romanian national sentiment, has begun to plan to develop a Museum of the Romanian Diaspora, dedicated to celebrating Romania's (and Romanians') global relationships, with hopes to draw significant amounts of foreign visitors and capital, Romanian-Americans in particular, to the region. At the same time, both Magyar and Romanian communities in the region were animated during the rise and then reform of the Hungarian Status Law. Some Romanian friends spoke of the great offense to national pride and integrity the Law represented while Magyars were enthused about the possibilities for greater and more effective contact with Hungary proper.

Thus as post-socialism produces a convergence of life circumstances in the two regions, the "Little America" metaphor also converges on a similar plaintive quality. Again, however, emphases differ. In the Jiu Valley, on one hand, miners still speak of "Little America" to define a glorified past, based on a waning solidarity amongst the now fragmented and diminished working class. On the other hand, Făgărașeni speak of "Little America" when discussing an unlikely future; citing the idea as justification for potential investors' interest in their region. Both these usages, however, have more in common than their phrasing and their plaintive-

ness. In fact they most importantly define the true commonality of the present period by their implicit recognition that “America” and the capitalist West have now come to both regions in the form of neo-liberal economic practice and its effects.

American (and European) Dreaming in the 21st Century

The circumstances and relationships that defined the regions’ differential integration into past global systems continue today though regional change has transformed the meaning of the “Little America” metaphors in deed, if not in word. As suggested, many still mention their region’s nicknames when they talk of the past and dream of the future. This is still the case even though the collectivity of miner lives is barely evident and broken by a decade of mine closures and downsizing. Similarly those foreign investors with ties to the Făgăraș region have yet to materialize in any number. Despite these lacks, in both regions “America” still figures metaphorically in identity formation and change. However, this is not in the self-ascriptive identities of melting pots or “big pile money”, but in the significance of economic policies that fall under the rubric of the so-called “Washington Consensus” and its edgy neo-liberalism.

Taken to extremes the Washington Consensus consists of aggressive free trade regimes (and a deluge of foreign products on national markets), the protection of capital and downward pressure on worker salaries and benefits, and encouraging and facilitating the migration of surplus labor for minimal wages and benefits to other global areas of high labor costs (Vaughan-Whitehead 2003). As Stephen Crowley (2004) suggests, post-socialist East Central Europe, and Romania in particular, more closely hews to this model compared to their West European cousins who preceded them into the European Union. Thus, in Romania, the neo-liberal policies and practices of the reformist Popescu-Tăriceanu government has further pressured the previously protected labor movement (cf. Rubin Meyer Doru and Trandafir 2003) and loosened the state’s grip over business by taxation reform. Markets of every sort are booming, especially housing and land, and larger Romanian cities have been over-taken by phalanxes of luxury vehicles, fashionable restaurants, and electronics stores of every kind. Cities are also again home to expanding groups of global expatriates of every sort, who move into the country for commerce (Arabs and Chinese), political asylum (Kurds), real estate speculation (Italians and Dutch), and as victim, purveyor, and/ or supervisor of the burgeoning international sex trade (Moldovans, Ukrainians, Albanians).

Thus where the two regions previously diverged in the selection of different aspects of the American myth and its ethnic identity implications, the rough manner by which Romania, and within Romania, its diverse regions, are integrated into new global and European configurations forces their convergence on a single

model. Thus in the Jiu Valley over the last few years economic necessity exploded the cultural dam holding back emigration and Valley folk, taking a lesson from Făgărașeni, have moved with a fury to join them in the legions of migrant workers in western Europe. One critical difference between the two regions is the visibility of migrant capital and how it is employed. In Valley towns, still shaped by miner consumer culture, capital remittances of labor emigrants have fueled a vibrant urban life and culture of consumption. In Petroșani, for example, the numerous restaurants and terraces fill up and remain busy throughout the day. However, the “café culture” is not tantamount to serious investment in productive enterprise and when you talk to people over a beer, they still bemoan the lack of jobs and futures in the region.

Meanwhile, given the extent of emigration from the Făgăraș region, that city these days seems like a ghost town. Streets are empty and driving through town at nine o’clock one night in summer 2006, a rough count showed about one in four apartments with visible light. Făgăraș migrant remittances are instead employed in the purchase of land and the refurbishing of houses in some regional villages (though some communities more farther afield have also been depopulated). A multi-dimensional pall hangs over the city and region, with empty factories, empty apartments, empty stores, empty churches. The Făgăraș Hungarian Unitarian Minister, for example, bemoaned the decline of the region’s Magyar population. He is forced to divide his time between parishes in Făgăraș and Sibiu and says that neither location has sufficient parishioners to support his activities. And though the parish house in Făgăraș was recently refurbished, money for the project was donated by private funds from Hungary.

Thus, this turn of events is the exclamation point on the nature and possibilities of identity in these two Romanian regions under the impact of globally-inspired change. Now, however, in response to such overwhelming changes people in both regions have begun to deemphasize American images and look to their new European compatriots for assistance and support. In the Jiu Valley, in particular, potential tourist areas, like land around the Părâng Mountain chair lift or the Buții Canyon Restaurant and Resort Complex, have been purchased by West Europeans, Italians in the case of the former and Germans in the case of the latter. Major road repairs designed to further the accessibility of the Valley for the hordes of tourists yet to arrive have been contracted out to a Greek firm. In Făgăraș, too, the European presence is more noticeable. A new heating complex for many of the town’s apartments has been built and the magnificent 13th century fortress (*Cetate*) that dominates the center of town is also being refurbished with EU funds. Despite these salutary developments, regional citizens are of two minds about their new European relations. Though they see hope in these material changes, their biggest concerns – developing each region’s productive capacities to enable an expansion

of jobs for people and above all youth so they need not leave their homes and families – are as yet unmet. Thus in both regions today ethnic identity has largely paled as an important source of behavior. People are not terribly concerned about this evanescent phenomenon. Instead, as my thesis suggests and the work of György Ránki also attests, it is labor, its possibilities, and how those are shaped by locations in prevailing systems of global political economy that create primary structures of meaning and agency. In the end, people of both regions who remain at home now experience much the same type of influence emanating from globalization processes and in the end, regardless of ethnic or other qualities of background, both must draw upon their own resources and capacities to craft their own lives.

Notes

- ¹ As discussed here the multi-ethnic origins of the original Jiu Valley mainstay mining population was followed by a large influx of others mainly from Romanian Moldavia in the late 1970s. Despite this latter group's outsider status, they too echo this Little America myth about the Valley.
- ² Magyars also left in the period, though more to Hungary proper than to the New World.
- ³ My own fieldwork in the 1970s in Făgăraș villages was also assisted by the region's first-hand knowledge of America and Americans. The nickname that many assigned me, "Americanul" was the same as others in the villages, simultaneously making me slightly more intelligible to locals as well as providing me with a network of co-villagers whose name and/or background I allegedly shared.
- ⁴ The term *Momârlani* is derived from Hungarian for "those left behind", (*maradvány*, residue or remnant), in reference to their autochthonous status. *Momârlani* are conceptually distinguished from *Barabe*, roughly meaning "outsider". According to Mircea Baron (1998:41) the terms came into use when workers in the late 19th century built the railroad linking Simeria and Petroșani, the main Jiu Valley town. The workers coined the term *Momârlani* for the peasants and the peasants bastardized the term "bahn arbeiter" (road worker) into *Barabe* when speaking of outsiders to the Valley. However, some *Barabe* families have lived there for over 100 years and worked in the mines for generations. *Momârlani* is not a precise regional term. Though it refers to rural provenience, according to Vasile Șoflău, the term is not exclusively restricted to the Jiu Valley but also used by and about other mainly rural populations in the larger southwest Transylvania region. *Momârlani* have also worked in the mines since the late 1970s. However, they are said to bribe mine officials with gifts of local produce to secure auxiliary posts and avoid work on the coal face teams.
- ⁵ This was not, however, the case with the Saxons, whom Romanians typically admired for their probity, business acumen, modern outlooks, and the fair treatment they received at their hands when serving them as domestics or agricultural day laborers.
- ⁶ After the strike fervor cooled down, strike leaders were removed from their work, with many taken away by the Securitate (Matinal 1997:8). A few months after the strike its main leader, Lupeni mine engineer Gheorghe Dobre, was forcibly exiled from the Valley. Rumors even persist to this day that he was run-over by a car whose driver was never identified, though this is not the case.

- ⁷ Political administrations in both regions applied to be included in the Law of Disfavored Zones passed by the Romanian Parliament in the late 1990s that allowed reduced duties on investment capital brought from abroad, reduced taxes on profits from investments, and special treatment of the regional unemployed (Romania. Government 1998). However, only the Jiu Valley was qualified for inclusion. Many people throughout the country, in fact, claim that the Law was passed solely for the Jiu Valley to help dampen the political restiveness of the increasingly disenfranchised miners.
- ⁸ It has been estimated that for every dollar worth of coal produced, the National Coal Company (CNH) invests \$16.00 (World Bank Group 2004: 6).
- ⁹ Thus the rumor in the late 1990s that the coal used in the Jiu Valley Paroșeni “Termocentral” electricity generating and heating complex, built right next to the mine of the same name, was actually being provided at a lower price (including the cost of transportation) by the southeast African nation of Mozambique!
- ¹⁰ A common joke in the region has it that there are so many Făgărașeni in Rome that Romans assume that Făgăraș is an independent country.
- ¹¹ In Hârseni, the Brașov County township (comună) where I worked in the 1970s, men from the four constituent villages concentrated on parking cars, driving taxis, and manual construction work. In contrast, women migrants from all Făgăraș communities mainly did domestic service work.
- ¹² Typically, every August throughout the 1990s the region would overflow with cars sporting Italian license plates as young migrated for vacation, to find spouses, and maintain their social positions within their households.

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