Biographies of Exclusion
Poverty and Inequalities
in Urban Romania

Aniko Horvath
[2013]

PhD dissertation

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
Central European University (Budapest)

BIOGRAPHIES OF EXCLUSION

POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES IN URBAN ROMANIA

BY

ANIKO HORVATH

SUBMITTED TO

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SUPERVISOR:

PROFESSOR DANIEL MONTERESCU

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

2013

Statement

I hereby state that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Budapest, January 2013.

Abstract

This thesis takes an ethnographic approach to examine the lives of people and families that have, for decades, faced precarious livelihoods and impoverishment in urban Romania. It is an exploration of processes that determined the social (re)production of inequalities and brought about social change under successive government regimes prior to, during, and after Communism. To this end, it is also an historical account of the ways in which successive generations of individual families have been and are being affected by the political and economic changes over the past decades, and the ways in which they mobilized their resources attempting to create more secure lives.

Through the lens of how struggles for housing and land conditioned the lives of families, and brought about or eased poverty over time, the thesis examines the ways in which families have been able to create or seize 'openings' in structures of power and thus shape the 'time-spaces' of their lives. At the same time, by analyzing urban property relations, the research uncovers the ways in which layers of inequalities have, for decades, been produced and superimposed upon local actors in urban Romania, often deterring and limiting their efforts to "get by" in their everyday lives.

The complex methodological approach of the thesis – the use of life and family histories in combination with ethnographic and archival research – made possible the analysis of poverty and inequalities at many different scales, and from many different angles. The findings highlight the relational and interactional aspects of reproduction as it happens both at the very intimate individual and family levels and at the broader socio-structural level. The research shows that considering these approaches together helps to avoid some of the pitfalls seen in broader poverty literature that often emerge from, on the one hand, seeing structural constraints as totally limiting and debilitating human lives, inevitably leading to reproduction, and on the other hand, seeing human agency as over-empowering in relation to structural constraints over the course of a lifetime.

The analysis reveals how life history narratives of the poor engaged in a dialog with broader social discourses on inequalities, and exposes the ways narrators' perceptions influenced their actions in relation to structural contexts. The findings show that in hierarchical and/or unequal structures and relationships, actors occupying different positions in social space often employ similar strategies to hold on to what they have, keep others at bay, and increase their own capital. In this context, the thesis examines at great length how individuals and families – depending on their social, cultural, and economic capital, but also on their social relations and networks – were able to cope with poverty and inequalities over the decades.

Acknowledgments

I owe a great debt to all those individuals and families, who – throughout my fieldwork – invited me into their homes, accepted me in their kin and friendship networks, allowed me to take part in their daily routines within and beyond their homes, and trusted me with their life- and family-histories. While my work would not have been possible without their willing participation and openness, what I owe them goes far beyond the writing of this thesis.

I am very grateful to my supervisors for their continuous support over the years: to Professor Daniel Monterescu, who believed in my work and supported me not only through my academic inquiries but also through the administrative hassles that occurred when my life as a PhD student did not always fit the most desirable and straightforward trajectories that are expected of us within academic settings; to Professor Michael Stewart, who interviewed me for my MA entrance exam when I applied to Central European University in 2004, and who patiently supported and guided my work throughout my MA studies and my PhD; to Professor Frances Pine, who – through our long discussions and joint teaching – was most helpful in developing my approach to ethnographic research and my view and understanding of the processes that influence poverty and inequalities under post-socialism and beyond, and who, over the years – with her sensitivity to complexity and detail, to human creativity and esthetics, delicate sense of humor and multilayered understanding of social scientific inquiry – taught me much more than one could ever learn in even the best academic courses. I will always be indebted to her.

Heartfelt thanks to Professor Júlia Szalai for gently and patiently guiding the way at the beginning of my pursuit of a doctorate, when I was struggling to get a grasp on my broader research interests and turn them into a proper academic and PhD research topic; I am grateful for her keen insights that greatly helped me to see the interplay between the structural and the individual and understand how these constrain and/or enable people to take action. Her on-going commitment – as well as the commitment of Professors Frances Pine and Michael Stewart – to give voice to the plight of those families and individuals who frequently have no possibility to make themselves heard, stood as great examples for me over the years. I offer my thanks to Professor Don Kalb, who urged me from the very beginning of this project to at least consider entertaining a point of view more in keeping with his own. While we never reconciled our differing views, our spirited conversations contributed to my being able to better shape my own line of inquiry and argument – a valuable process when conducting academic research. More generally, my thanks go to Professors András Kovács and Mária Kovács, at CEU's Nationalism Studies Department, who encouraged and believed in me both during my MA studies and when I decided to continue my research at the doctoral

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

Romanian urban poverty and inequalities as an ethnographic problem

Part One consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 is a discussion of Romanian urban poverty and inequalities as an ethnographic problem, highlighting the most important aspects of my approach to the topic. An overview of the remaining chapters closes Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 I situate the ethnographic field site – the Iris district of Cluj Napoca, Romania – in the broader economic, social and political processes that shaped the social and geographical space of the district and the city. In the last section of Chapter 2 I present the type of data used to write the thesis. In Chapter 3 I discuss some of the main theoretical concepts – poverty, inequalities, and social reproduction – that were important from the point of view of this research.

1.1 Romanian urban poverty and inequalities as an ethnographic problem

"Look, the girls are up and making their coffee!" the mysterious man we never saw but heard every morning said joyfully. He was talking about my two friends and me, three 18-year-old university freshmen. The sound of his voice came from the flat above ours, through the eight-inch hole in the ceiling of our kitchen, next to the water pipes that ran un-insulated along the walls of the four-floor, communist-built apartment house in the Iris district of Cluj Napoca, Romania. As his remarks about our pajamas testified, he was able to see us through the hole, although, during the three weeks we lived there, we never saw him, not even once. And, even though we could have perceived him as invading our private sphere, we did not feel uncomfortable or alienated by him, because his comments were always humorous and muted. On the contrary, we found that his approach turned a condition that was a given – the lack of privacy due to the poor building quality of these communist flats – into a situation that was hilarious and made us laugh every morning when he greeted us through the ceiling. It was October 1993. Having recently arrived, we were

about to begin our university studies in Cluj Napoca, a city that had almost three times the population of our hometown, Tirgu Mures[1].

We stayed in Cluj Napoca's Iris district during the university's admission period while waiting to receive student housing from our department. We saw an advertisement for a short-term rental on a wall at the university and rented it until we were accepted in one of the student halls. Our landlady was a pensioner who used to work in one of the Iris district factories. In 1991 – when the factory started to lay off its employees – she chose early retirement over unemployment. From then on she used the opportunity of the September/October beginning of the academic year to rent her flat for one or two months to make some extra money and supplement her small pension, informally and without paying tax. For the weeks when she rented her apartment she stayed with relatives in her native village, not far from Cluj Napoca. With a smile, she told us that these few weeks were her 'summer' holiday. She was very friendly, just as all the other people we met during those few weeks in the Iris district. Besides local people, we liked many other aspects of the district as well: its streets lined with small houses and large gardens – some of them running up the hills – and the presence of the many factories that structured and divided the space of the district. With a much lower number of communist-built blocks of flats, the Iris district looked and felt somewhat different from our own neighborhoods in Tirgu Mures, where there were only communist blocks of flats, with no single family houses or gardens.

But, over the years, as we started to have local friends who grew up in Cluj Napoca, our indoctrination about the space of the city and the Iris district began: we were constantly told that the Iris district "was not really part of the city" and it was a "polluted, run-down, marginal, and dangerous" neighborhood, whereas district people were "poor and wretched" ("săraci şi amărâţi"). Slowly, our own pleasant memories of the Iris district faded away. The story of the hole in the ceiling and the mystery man's voice – once just an anecdote about a friendly and good-humored neighbor, which reflected ironically on communist living conditions – turned into a symbolic signifier of the destitution and poverty that supposedly characterized the Iris district. Similarly, the story of our landlady – which we previously considered as evidence of her resilience and resourcefulness in coping with her changed situation – started us thinking about the deep

[1] Cluj Napoca is the second most populous city of Romania after the capital city of Bucharest. Its current population is 309,136 people (2011 census) a little lower than it was in 1992, when it was 328,602 (1992 census).

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deprivation in which she likely lived if she found it necessary to periodically rent out her home to people she did not know. The image of the Iris district as 'marginal' was reinforced from so many and varied sources that after a while we just accepted what we heard, without much reflection on the disconnect that existed between our own experiences and the images others projected. At the time we were not even bothered by the fact that many of those who held such strong and negative opinions about the Iris district had never even been to that area. And when one of my friends actually moved to a uniquely named street in the Iris district, it seemed only natural to us that every time she was asked where in Cluj Napoca this street was, she avoided mentioning the district by name, saying instead, "It's a very small street. You wouldn't know it anyway".

No wonder it took me by surprise when in 2005 this same friend, still living in the Iris district, told me that the area was "booming", that international companies had moved their offices and plants there, and that "there were no more wretched people", except those few who "did not want to work at all". When I asked others about what was going on in the Iris district I often heard similar accounts: "A few streets, that's what remains of the old, poverty-stricken areas and pauper families." In addition, people barraged me with information on new housing developments in the district that were already occupied or were to be built in the near future: projects such as the River Tower and the Iris Factory Flats, or "the most ambitious real estate project in the city of Cluj Napoca for 19 years" – 6000 apartments – called "Cartierul Tineretului" (meaning the "district of the youth")[2]. In these narratives all that was "new" was brought into the foreground and everything "old", from the "past", relegated to oblivion. And, however puzzling I found this sudden shift, what people told me about the Iris district seemed to be in line with the widespread media images that portrayed Romania as one of the major East-Central European economic success stories of the period following 2001. We were told that the Romanian economy was booming (6-8% yearly growth), unemployment was at an all time low in larger cities (app. 2,5% in Cluj Napoca in 2005), absolute poverty decreased considerably (from 36% in 2000 to 15% by 2005)[3], many urban neighborhoods had been revitalized, real estate prices were rapidly increasing, and internal investment and consumption were booming. "In two more decades the Romanian

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[2] This development was never built after all. The website with the original plans is to be found here: http://www.cartierultineretului.ro/proiect.php?acordeon=0 (last accessed: January 5, 2013).

[3] Ádám Lénárt, In *The Elderly Poor in the EU's New Member States*, ENEPRI Research Report No. 60 (2008:107-124)

people will catch up with Western living standards." Such was the promise of enthusiastic politicians and economic analysts in newspaper editorials in Romanian and international newspapers[4]. And, according to many people I talked to in Cluj Napoca, the Iris district was clearly profiting from these processes: it was "unmistakably regenerating".

It is stating the obvious to say that none of these two-dimensional and polarized images of the district – a place of exclusion and poverty contrasted with one of development and relative wealth – fully reflected the everyday realities of the lives of the district's inhabitants. It was striking to see that from these representations, reinforced by media coverage, that what was completely missing was the historically embedded portrayal of the highly complex life experiences of individual families. And the Iris district of Cluj Napoca was by no means an isolated case in Romania; most cities had their own 'Iris districts' that were presented as "marginal to the core" and as being populated by "poor and wretched" people that somehow "fell outside the mainstream" of society. But listening to people's accounts and reading through media stories that often produced no more than racialized clichés[5] of those 'undeserving poor', it was difficult to know who the "poor and wretched" actually were. There was little longitudinal data on their family life-trajectories, what led them into the situations in which they found themselves, or how their lives compared to the lives of others in the city and the country. Also, it was not clear what really happened in the 2000s

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[4] A discussion of such promises: http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/business/05/26/12/crisis-dims-dreams-europes-poor-east (last accessed: January 5, 2013)

[5] Throughout the first few years that followed the collapse of communism in Romania poverty was often seen as a widespread problem resulting from structural factors, such as the collapse of economy, privatization, mass unemployment, job insecurity, and withdrawal of the state from social services. Under these circumstances "blaming" arguments were multilayered, ranging from "individual failure" to identifying political elites and the IMF, the World Bank, and other international actors as being responsible for this situation. However, beginning in the early 2000s and growth of the Romanian economy, discourses have shifted and (extreme) poverty has often been presented in Romanian media as an almost exclusively 'Roma problem', resulting from individual failure, and being "undeserving". Placed within the larger context, traces of deserving/undeserving and racial/ethnic representations have always been present in political discourse, during communism as well as throughout the past two decades. Even though statistics highlighted that poverty was a problem for a broad and varied strata of Romania's population – and more non-Roma than Roma were living in poverty – such links were often supported by arguments used in academic discourse. See for example the work of Marian Preda (2002), who claims that a higher percentage of the Roma population was effected by extreme poverty because of their "cultural" characteristics and their attitudes of "self-exclusion" from the labor market and broadly held social and cultural norms (2002:164-179). Even when no such racialized images were used, individual and family failure to manage and make ends meet (being 'undeserving'), was increasingly suggested as one of the main causes of poverty. A more detailed discussion of such issues will follow later in the text.

in the geographical and social space of these "unmistakably regenerating" areas that suddenly caused many of these families to disappear from the public eye. These human lives were most often reduced to statistical entries, static images, and symbolic oppositions – deserving/undeserving, mainstream/excluded, marginal/central, rural/urban – that, it was claimed, explained their positions in social space. In the process, the many ways in which these families dealt with changes over time and their histories prior to, during, and after communism were silenced.

What surprised me even more was that a search of existing social science literature revealed that longitudinal qualitative studies about the (re)production over several generations of Romanian urban inequalities and poverty[6], were missing. Although there were many studies discussing Romanian poverty, most of these were built upon statistical analysis and focused primarily on a set of conditions that – it was often suggested – only appeared after 1991[7]. They asked questions such as "Who are Romania's poor?" and their most common approach was to try to define measurements of poverty and deprivation, and categorize groups of people based on these measurements (e.g. consumption, health, education, or employment)[8]. While these were important research inquiries into broadening our understanding of Romanian social and economic conditions, they usually focused on objectified and quantifiable descriptors – e.g. *how much* consumption, employment, education or health characterized the poor – and only rarely dealt with issues that went beyond statistics and occurred prior to the regime change of 1989. Even if one

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[6] Kaneff and Pine argue that although there is an increasing tendency in the social sciences to apply the concepts of "inequalities" and "poverty" as "part of the same production-consumption process", it still makes sense to differentiate between them and use both concepts "in order to emphasize different dimensions of what is one connected process: production and consumption are both sites of unequal power relations but emphasize different dimensions of impoverishment. (…) Thus, considered together they provide useful insights into global processes, to different degrees and from 'opposite' ends of the production/consumption spectrum. Notably, the shift in balance of power away from production towards consumption does not eliminate the importance of the former. While the inequalities concept is useful in capturing European impoverishment rooted in consumption, poverty still captures dimensions of impoverishment based on production that inequality cannot adequately portray." (2011:7) A more detailed discussion of these issues will follow in Chapter 3.

[7] Some of the basic studies of Romanian poverty were those commissioned by the World Bank and the European Union. Others were carried out by Prof. Cătălin Zamfir and his team, or consisted of the periodical data collection of the Romanian Research Institute for Quality of Life. Regional level research, for example (East-Central European) was conducted by a team lead by Prof. Ivan Szelenyi. I will discuss in more detail the existing literature in Chapter 3.

[8] World Bank Report: "Poverty in Romania: Profile and Trends during 1995-2002" (by Emil Tesliuc, Lucian Pop and Filofteia Panduru)

disregarded the academic debates that surrounded poverty measurement methods, based on the data compiled for these studies, it was difficult to know when, why, and for how long poverty was or was not reproduced in successive generations of families. There were no qualitative data that attempted to understand how families coped with hardship and precarious livelihoods over the span of many decades and there were virtually no studies about the ways in which family life trajectories were affected by economic, political and social processes that shaped society over time[9].

At the same time, none the less, many such studies used and reinforced several of the above highlighted symbolic oppositions, reifying certain categories which, in turn, influenced decision making at the political and policy level and through this, influenced social practices. In this sense, people that were seen to fall under such broad categories as 'marginal' or 'excluded', besides struggling economically, bore the additional burden of intrusive criticisms of their lifestyles and experienced stigmatization of their living spaces. One of the concepts that was used as an analytical tool in Romanian social science research and had implications for policy making, was that of the 'culture of poverty'[10], linked at the same time to 'underclass'[11] theories. Although its application introduced and legitimized micro-level research of poverty and the poor, it also had some contradictory effects on the field. Many argue (Péter 2003; Pásztor 2003; Stănculescu 2004; Szelényi 2001) that in Romania, as a result of economic restructuring, 'new poverty'[12] appeared,

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[9] The work of David Kideckel is among those few researches that try to offer an ethnographically grounded longer time perspective on the way of life of Romanian 'working class' families and on the ways in which growing inequalities and poverty affected the life of such families.

[10] The "culture of poverty" theory was developed by Oscar Lewis (1959, 1966, 1968) to identify adaptation mechanisms to poverty at the level of families, and to understand the role of these "surviving strategies" in the reproduction of inequalities from one generation to the next. It was critiqued severely by many anthropologists and sociologists, including Valentine (1968) and Gans (1996) for blaming the victims. A more detailed discussion of these issues will be in Chapter 3.

[11] The term "underclass" was coined by Gunnar Myrdal (1962) who originally used it to describe a stratum of the U.S. population that was affected by structural changes in the economic system of the 1960s. However, as Herbert J. Gans argues (1995), the term quickly became racialized, combined with the theory of the "culture of poverty" developed by Oscar Lewis, and transformed into an "umbrella term". This meant, according to Gans, that the theory was extended without much consideration to the totality of the poor, and with the assumption that poverty has its roots not in the structural changes of the economy, but in the behavior of the "undeserving poor." This theory was soon turned against the poor.

[12] Among others, Iván Szelényi (2001) argues that poverty under communism was a "life-cycle phenomenon" where families with young children, the disabled, and the elderly tended to be poor. In his opinion, today social class, ethnicity, and/or gender play a more significant role in predicting or explaining poverty. I would argue, in contrast,

and with it the formation of an 'underclass'. Stănculescu identifies four types of poverty in Romania[13], and states that cultural characteristics of those living in extreme poverty hinder families from improving their social status (Stănculescu 2004:43). In a somewhat similar vein, László Péter (2003) argues that the majority of the 'new poor' organize their lives according to 'passive' or 'active' coping strategies: Those opting for 'passive' strategies reduce their consumption, while those following 'active' strategies try to increase their income (2003:26). Péter sees a positive correlation between the degree of poverty, the choice of 'passive' strategies, and the family's 'outdated' interpretation of the new, post-socialist, situation. He argues that the poor 'read' their present situation through the mental schemes developed in the former regime and use as reference points the pre-1989 social structures (2003:31).

Stănculescu and Péter, to give a complex picture of the phenomena, use quantitative (survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interview) methods in their research. However, while both researchers do a detailed analysis of the data collected with survey methods, they do not use the interviews to understand the complexities of individual cases, but to support their (preconceived) theoretical points. It is also noteworthy that none of the researchers pays attention to the possible longitudinal aspects of poverty. They never go beyond the individual case study and its particular characteristics, not even by presenting the family background of their interviewees.

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that social class, ethnicity and gender were important factors in predicting poverty prior to and during communism as well. As for postsocialism: many recent sociological studies highlighted that single households, the elderly, and families with young (and/or many) children have had higher incidences of poverty after the collapse of communism (see for example Cristina Raţ's study from 2007). In this context it is important to emphasize that discussing poverty as a 'life-cycle phenomenon' – either prior to, during, or after communism – means that poverty is viewed primarily in economic terms and its social dimensions are not sufficiently taken into account. In this context people are viewed/portrayed as isolated individuals and not as embedded in larger kin and friend networks, where intergenerational transfers and other types of support have been the order of the day. This is not to say that elderly and disabled people or families with young children could not be or have been poor, it is rather putting an emphasis on the fact that networks and practices need also to be considered. A more detailed discussion of these phenomena will follow in Chapter 3.

[13] 1) Situation of critical normality (a family has a home in its possession, but has no household appliances, and their income is not enough to cover basic needs); 2) situation of acute need (a family has no home in its possession); 3) situation of generalized crisis (family income is not enough to cover basic needs, they have no household appliances, but they have a home); and 4) situation of extreme poverty (no home, no household appliances, not enough income to cover basic needs, disorganized lifestyle and strong present orientation) (2004:41-44).

Further, Stănculescu's and Péter's analysis produces shortcomings that are similar to some of those found in Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty' theory: Both researchers assume that there is a homogeneous and agreed-upon mainstream value system which is the 'norm' in Romanian society, and that poor families cannot escape poverty because they deviate from this norm. Their categorizations simplify and homogenize poverty-related phenomena, reify certain categories, present them as having fixed boundaries, and treat ruptures in political systems (1989) as full turnarounds, without accounting for the existing continuities in administrative and economic processes, as well as social practices. They partly reproduce the 'deserving/undeserving poor' explanatory schemes, rely on symbolic oppositions such as passive/active strategies, rural/urban or traditional/new poverty to explain the position of families and individuals in social space, and imply that overcoming poverty and marginalization is primarily a matter of mentality and attitude. Thus, while at the discursive level these and similar theories point to post-socialist restructuring as the main cause of Romanian poverty, on the analytical level they identify family conduct as being responsible for poverty.

Given these shortcomings in the literature, this thesis – viewed broadly – is an ethnography of the lives of individuals and families that have faced precarious livelihoods and impoverishment over the decades, and the ways in which they have dealt with the daily insecurities of their lives. It is – first and foremost – an intimate and detailed picture of the many families I spent time with during fifteen months of fieldwork in Cluj Napoca's Iris district, interwoven with an exploration of processes that determined the social (re)production of inequalities and brought about social change under the varying regimes of power. To this end, the thesis is also an historical account of the ways in which successive generations of individual families had been and were being affected by the political and economic changes of the past decades, and the ways in which, over time, they mobilized their resources in order to deal with precarious livelihoods.

To address these issues and understand the processes that produced and reproduced inequalities and poverty over many decades, my work was guided by the following three broad research questions:

1. What has been the impact of the political and economic changes of the past century on social reproduction of inequalities and precarious livelihoods across generations in urban Romania?

2. How do members of successive generations mobilize economic, social and cultural resources in the context of the historical continuities and ruptures experienced in the past century in Romania?

3. How do the urban poor make sense of their past and present life and of their family life-trajectories and, how, in turn, do these understandings and interpretations impact on their coping strategies?

Both my research questions and all the above are meant to make clear that I do not see the processes that shaped the life and social practices of families as atemporal, as one-time and isolated events in the lives of multiple generations of these families. However, as already implied above, I am not only interested in phenomena that manifest themselves at the level of the family and household[14], but also in the interconnections between family histories and the broader structural processes that shaped the 'space-times' families inhabit.

This brings me to another important point that I have not yet emphasized: I see all these processes as inherently spatial, where inequalities are played out in space, and where space is not just a 'flat surface' on which events tend to advance in linear and one-directional time. In this sense space is

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[14] Narotzky argues that, "The 'family' concept, then, is less useful as a descriptive term than that of 'household', because the links that bind people into families – those of alliance and consanguinity – are highly problematic cultural constructs that depend on social and political relations in every society. Moreover, reproduction, which is the defining function of 'families', is a complex concept covering at least three distinct meanings: biological reproduction; reproduction of the labor force; and social reproduction of the entire social and economic system." (1997:119) It springs from this perception that meanings attached to 'family' are further extended and "[T]here arises a tendency to *homogenize* the household because it is considered as a *unit* of consumption, not as a bundle of relationships between people brought together in a complex *process* of consumption." (1997:120) For the purposes of this research – in order to highlight that 'families' have never been homogeneous bounded units – it is important to draw attention to the fact that the concept of 'family' is also an ideologically loaded 'cultural construct' and that power relations, even among members of the same household/family have been unequal and constantly (re)negotiated. Exploitation within households on such grounds – and often in line with broader social exploitative structures – has been common over the decades. However, with these clarifications in mind, throughout this thesis – because of the timeframe I attempt to cover – I still frequently use the term 'family' when I am referring to kin-based relationships that bind people into extended networks that attempt to reproduce livelihoods over generations (as well as the household/family as a biological unit). In the process of analysis, by noting and often analyzing such relationships within families, I try to show that it would be an analytical mistake to overlook or ignore unequal relationships that develop among family/household members.

rather a constituent part to the production and reproduction of social relations and inequalities. Or, as Massey puts it "The dynamic of social reproduction varies geographically and so do its effects on social composition." (1984:299) In this context I understand space as "constituted through interrelations", as a "sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist", and as "always under construction", as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005:9). This understanding implies, as Massey argues, that the relations that produce space are not relations of a "coherent, closed system within which, as they say, everything is (already) related to everything else. Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else. (…) This is a space of loose ends and missing links. For the future to be open, space must be open too." (2005:11-12).

For Massey the importance of bringing space into social sciences is basically to open up and free both time and space from the discursive colonization that monopolized their meanings over the decades and suggested that there can only be one possible way and future for all societies: that which is based on the Euro-Western capitalist development model where countries and regions categorized as 'developing' and 'underdeveloped' aim to attain 'developed' status. Massey claims that, "The lack of openness of the future for those 'behind' in the queue is a function of the singularity of the trajectory. Ironically, not only is this temporal convening of the geography of modernity a repression of the spatial, it is also the repression of the possibility of other temporalities." (2005:70) Massey's focus in this case is on the broader political, economic and social structures, and for her the final irony of this global geography of power is not only that migration led to the "arrival of the margins to the center" but it also brought to the "center" the people who are rendered by this terminology as being "people from the past": "Distance was suddenly eradicated both spatially *and* temporally." (2005:70). Massey's approach to the spatial – as can be seen above as well – is useful not only for understanding global geographies of power, but also for observing human agency and explaining the ways people try to negotiate other (outside the mainstream) temporalities and trajectories for themselves and their families (migration being only one such trajectory).

Emirbayer, out of similar concerns, argues that in order to better understand "the variable orientations of agency toward its structural contexts (…) a more adequate theorization of the

temporal nature of human experience" is needed. According to him "actors are always living simultaneously in the past, future, and present, and adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical existence to one another (and to their empirical circumstances) in more or less imaginative or reflective ways. They continuously engage patterns and repertoires from the past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations" (1998:1012). In Emirbayer's view, such an understanding of the temporal dimensions of human agency leads to a "more dynamic understanding of the capacity that actors have to mediate the structuring contexts within which action unfolds" (1998:1012).

Thus, 'bringing space in' the way Massey suggests and "temporality" in the way proposed by Emirbayer has important and manifold implications for my work. Most importantly, it allows for a much broader and open examination of the role of human agency throughout my research. I see this as particularly important, because the "poor and wretched" are often portrayed both in research and public discourse as not only dispossessed by assets and power, but also by their agency. Erik Harms, in his research about the role human agency plays in the reproduction and maintenance of spatial binary oppositions such as "rural versus urban, inner-city versus outer-city" in Saigon, Vietnam, examined why is it that people who live on the fringes of the city often hold on to spatial-ideal categories that "would appear to exclude them", categories that seem to contradict their own experiences of the surrounding spatial landscapes (2011:4). As Harms argues, one of the reasons for this is that "these binary categories enable people to craft spaces of the meaningful social action within which they can carve out opportunities in their lives. (…) [P]eople on the edge are surprisingly active in the production of the risk-taking social edginess. Edginess often puts these same residents on the cutting edge of opportunity as well. They are not wholly disenfranchised but often find meaningful potential in the spaces that lie between official categories. Life outside the gaze of the state power can be refreshingly liberating. Yet there can be no liberating "space between" on the outside or on the edge if there is no normative space to give these liminal positions meaning in the first place." (2011:223-224) Harms' approach to human agency and the inclusion of space in his ethnography brings to light not only the mechanisms that produce such "lives on the edge", but also the empowerment people can achieve by negotiating their way between and within exclusionary spatial categories. In significant ways, Harms' work is similar to my own approach and also to the way in which Narotzky and Smith (2006) use space in

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their ethnography. In their book about rural Spain they set out to "problematize the issue of place in the context of contemporary capitalism" and explore the "way space is being reconstituted across the continent". They study the relations between the regional and the global, "seeking to discover the dialectical constitution of one by the other: a history in which people [re-]produce concrete and abstract artifacts for life, these concrete abstractions then providing the landscape that conditions subsequent generations' reproduction and transformation." (2006:4)

Narotzky's and Smith's concern with place-space brings me to the question of how place – a longstanding concern of ethnography – relates to space in my own work. Massey argues that in the place-space relation "space [should] be thought of as an emergent product of relations, including those relations which establish boundaries, and where 'place' in consequence is necessarily *meeting* place, where the 'difference' of a place must be conceptualized more in the ineffable sense of the constant emergence of *uniqueness* out of (and within) the specific constellations of interrelations within which that place is set (…) and of what is made of that constellation." (2005:68) Applying this to my own work, the uniqueness of the place where I conducted my research – the Iris district – emerges from the specific constellations of interrelations of simultaneous trajectories that coexisted in the district over time, shaping and conditioning the lives of subsequent generations, while at the same time being shaped and conditioned by the actions of these very same people. Or, to translate this into more banal terms: living on the 'edge' in Cluj Napoca – both in spatial and social terms – is a different experience from, for example, living on the 'edge' in London. However, the uniqueness of these two places and experiences emerges not necessarily from the uniqueness of the currents of force at work, but rather from the specific constellations that came into being in the power relations that shaped these two places – Cluj Napoca and London – throughout their history. In the thesis I aimed to uncover and understand both the common processes that shape societies and the particular conditions that emerge in singular places. Or, as Massey very eloquently argues: "Spatial differentiation, geographical variety, is not just an outcome: it is integral to the reproduction of society and its dominant social relations. The challenge is to hold the two sides together; to understand the general underlying causes while at the same time recognizing and appreciating the importance of the specific and the unique." (1984:300)

With the above clarifications in mind, it is also important to emphasize that I see the position of actors in space as determined both by their individual experiences, the choices they make over time, and by the forces that operate from beyond the local stages of their lives and thus are not easily visible either to them or to the researcher. Exposing such complex relationships while they are constituted in this one place – the Iris district of Cluj Napoca – makes it possible to understand processes that are not readily apparent. On the one hand, 'spatializing' relations helps uncover the ways in which families have been able to create or seize 'openings' in structures of power and thus shape the 'time-spaces' of their lives. On the other hand, it deepens our understanding of the ways in which layers of inequalities have been produced and superimposed upon this one place and the local actors over the decades, possibly deterring and limiting their efforts to "get by" in their everyday lives. All these things simultaneously shape the present social and physical worlds of my informants.

Analyzing social relations as they have been constituted in space raised further questions for my approach. If I wanted to reflect on the ways in which inequalities played out in this particular place and at the family level – in a time span that included pre-communist, communist and post-communist relations of power – then I had to consider what was the best way to capture the production and reproduction of these unequal relations. And while the processes that produced inequalities and poverty were multiple, complex and interconnected, it became clear early in my research that shifting my focus towards relationships that formed around land and housing would enable me to uncover 'topographies of power' that often remained hidden in other studies that focused on the more traditional fields of poverty research[15]. Focusing on how struggles for housing and land conditioned the life of families and brought about or eased poverty over time helped me to understand not only the embeddedness of families in structures of power, but also the operation of more diffuse forces that structured property relations and (re)produced inequalities during communism and after its collapse. This focus seemed even more valid in a context where restricting and abolishing 'private property' was a core component of the discourse of the communist state while the restitution of 'private property rights' and the reshaping of property relations was central to the policies of the (neo-liberal) post-communist state.

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[15] Such as education, consumption, health, state social services, or employment.

Focusing on relations around land and housing was timely and justified for other reasons as well. As I started my research in October 2007 a global financial crisis – in part a result of turning land and housing into a 'fictitious' commodity that was to be exchanged freely and disconnected from its local users – was just about to unfold. And, as previously pointed out in this chapter, the Iris district was not unaffected by these processes: land and real estate prices were increasing quickly throughout the 2000s, with many new housing developments and corporate investments being made there. This clearly and greatly influenced the possibilities Iris district families had and the coping strategies they developed. And although there was a lapse in time before the crisis hit hard in Romania and Cluj, by the time I was nearing the end of my research in January 2009, many effects of the global crisis started to become evident in the space and the lives of the families I knew well. Massey writes the following about the global context of this crisis: "[T]he commodity 'land' (and property) was crucial in this dynamic too, and in its collapse. The sub-prime saga is iconic evidence of that, but so is the fact that in the UK, the US, Ireland and Spain homes became houses became real-estate became buy-to-let (and the inequality increased yet further), and so too the spectacle of postmodern urban regeneration (city centers only) around the world, to house and celebrate the newly rich. Land and property, and the derivatives that were calculated out of them, were assets everyone wanted. Multinational corporations, and states too, bought up land in continents they barely knew. It was a spiraling out of control of that first move to make land a (fictitious) commodity."[16] (2011) In localized and particular ways, these processes played out and (re)produced inequalities in the space of the Iris district and the life of district inhabitants as well. Thus, when focusing on relationships that formed around land and housing, I also attempted to expose some of these processes. Nevertheless, this is in no way to suggest that throughout my thesis I will treat as less relevant other factors that might condition impoverishment. To the contrary, throughout the text I attempt to expose the ways in which inequalities and poverty are a bundle of issues that need to be problematized in their interconnectedness and complexity. In Chapter 3 I will discuss these issues in more detail.

In closing, it is important to emphasize how this thesis is different from other accounts of the reproduction of poverty and inequalities. The life history method, which I decided to use in conjunction with ethnographic and archival research and extend it to incorporate detailed family

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[16] http://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/#_ftn8%29 (Last accessed: 01/03/2013)

and household histories, made possible the analysis of poverty and inequalities at many different scales, and from many different angles. Thus, my findings highlight the relational and interactional aspects of reproduction as it happens both at the very intimate individual and family levels and at the broader socio-structural level.

The ethnographic material included in this thesis operates on several different levels. First, by including and analyzing the transcript of a life history narrative I expose the mechanisms that facilitated and constrained the social reproduction of one typical Iris district family over time. This section reveals how life history narratives engage in a dialog with broader social discourses, and exposes the ways in which narrators' perceptions influence their actions in relation to structural contexts. Second, using the extended case method I demonstrate that if we examine the complex constellation of social interactions in a single courtyard, we can observe how local and global processes simultaneously intersect in space and over time to reproduce poverty and inequalities. Based on my findings, I argue that in hierarchical and/or unequal structures and relationships, individuals positioned differently in social space often employ similar strategies to hold on to what they have, keep others at bay, and increase their own capital. Finally, in the multigenerational and multifamily layers of this analysis, I combine the dimensions of time, scale, and space in order to examine the 'social space' called by Bourdieu "the space of points of view" where parallel life histories that never actually intersect, 'come together' to complement each other and, highlight the complexity of the processes that shaped lives and led to the reproduction of poverty, inequalities, and precarious livelihoods in communist and post-communist urban settings. Considering these approaches together helps to avoid some of the pitfalls of the broader poverty literature that often emerge from, on the one hand, seeing structural constraints as totally limiting and debilitating human lives and inevitably resulting in reproduction, and on the other hand, seeing human agency as over-empowering in relation to structural constraints over the course of a lifetime.

Finally, there are a few points I wish to emphasize regarding the structure and writing of this thesis. While many theoretical issues are raised throughout, the structure itself becomes an integral part of the analysis, by viewing the same topic(s) from different points of view, in different 'space' and on different 'scales.' This structure allowed me to construct and deconstruct the complex of behaviors, processes, and policies that help to explain the conditions that exist in the observable

world at a particular point in time as well as over the course of decades. This structure is a very conscious and reasoned attempt to avoid at least some of the analytical and methodological pitfalls into which social scientists have fallen when researching 'poverty', 'inequalities', and 'social reproduction'.

What I am highlighting here is that how one writes and what one includes in one's writing can and ought to be equal aspects of the analytical process. We tend to think of preparation, fieldwork, and writing as separate: The process of writing is viewed as the time we emerge from the field, and get some distance. In this context, writing is just the 'final act' of putting ethnographic data and crystallized arguments on paper. However, I understand the choices we make when we write to be one element of an integrated process. Writing is an act of engaging not only with our 'data', but an opportunity to re-engage with the lives of our informants, as human beings, recreating a universe of which we become part for many months, even years. This is when we can make the 'thing' we call the 'process of writing and analysis' into either an opportunity to 'get closer' to the deeper meaning of our data, or become distant and analytical; either providing an opportunity and a reason for the reader to care, to further engage, in the field and topic, or allowing one to maintain a distance from which it might be more difficult to challenge one's assumptions and/or preconceptions. While I have a point of view about this, I do not claim to have all the answers. However, I do claim that I was faced with these choices, and at some point I had to make my decisions as to how to present my findings. These are also important aspects of the process of ethnographic enquiry. One ought to begin with the assumption that the choices researchers make concerning how and on what basis they present their findings can be an important component in informing their audience(s), some of whom make or influence policy. To assume otherwise is to risk underestimating and undervaluing the potential impact of the social sciences as a force within the public discourse.

While in studies written for academic journals there is less and less space for such 'experimental' writing approaches, a thesis – in my understanding – can and should be a place where we can more freely experiment with how we present what we present. Although we in the field of anthropology rarely talk about it, almost everyone who writes ethnography – especially more 'traditional' ethnography – knows that literature and ethnographic writing are not all that different.

In this thesis, I do write critically of Oscar Lewis' work, but the merits of his writings are indisputable: I still vividly remember the emotional journey on which he took me when I first read his books on the Sanchez family, and the completely different levels of understandings of the lives of these families and the difficult choices they faced, as compared to that of the works that came from reading more analytically focused books. I could cite many other more recently read anthropological texts as well that greatly influenced my understanding of our world, not only through their theoretical approaches, but through the recollecting of the human condition. I make no claim that my writing comes close to these great ethnographic accounts. However, I am saying that my aim is similar: to try to maintain some spark of these compelling dimensions of human interaction that keeps us, as anthropologists, going back into the field over and over again, some for years, some for a lifetime.

We go out in the field not only as anthropologists and researchers but as human beings, with all our own problems, thoughts, insecurities, questions, professional concerns, and we draw on our own and our families' internal resources in order to be able to keep going in the field, but at the same time we also re-charge ourselves with the energy and resources that come from the interactions and encounters with our informants. This should be mirrored, at least occasionally, in our writing as well.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of four parts. **Part One**, in three chapters, situates the research topic and field site within the broader historical-geographical context of a city, Cluj Napoca, and a country, Romania and discusses the main theoretical concepts used in my research. **Part Two** and **Part Three,** in four chapters, are devoted to ethnographic data and analysis. **Part Four**, in one chapter, contains concluding remarks that reflect upon my research questions and the theoretical considerations raised in Part One.

Chapter 2, following this introductory chapter, reflects upon the politico-economic and social changes of the past century – the early years of urban industrialization and capitalism, the four

decades of socialism, and the following two decades of post-socialism – that shaped the social and geographical spaces in which families have been embedded.

In **Chapter 3** the theoretical concepts of 'poverty', 'inequality', 'social reproduction', and 'social class' are discussed in the framework of my own research and in relation to work of other social scientists writing about the same region.

Chapter 4, the first chapter to include ethnographic material, begins by discussing some of the methodological issues that emerge from using life histories and narratives, and continues with the transcript of the first two dialogs with one of my informants, Anca. We, as anthropologists, in one way or another, 'appropriate' the lives of the people we research in order to subject them to analysis that we hope is in the interest of a greater good. Often, the lives of these human beings lose form and shape throughout these analyses, and become 'sound bites' in texts that are more a reflection of who we are and of our own agendas. While I too, in the process of this writing, have 'appropriated' the lives of my informants, at the beginning of the ethnography, it seemed important to give at least one of my informants the opportunity to tell her own story, in detail. Thus, while the research approach in Part One is situated within the broader academic field, explaining my professional reasons for structuring the research as I have, Chapter 4 of Part Two, is a space in which I 'pull back' to enable the 'subjects' to have an essentially 'unfiltered' voice.

Chapter 5 is also a narration of Anca's family history, but this time a narration that is much more contextualized, integrated with the other types of data collected, which complement and situate Anca's story in larger structures. The aim of the chapter is twofold: on the one hand, through one family history, it attempts to uncover and explain how interrelated the processes that (re)produce poverty and inequalities are. On the other hand it reveals how, in the process of writing, the data collected using the biographical/family history method was integrated with my other findings from archival and participant observation enquiries.

Chapter 6 begins with a specific 'social situation' which had the effect of significantly disrupting a delicate balance that had guided people's interaction and behavior for decades. This 'situation' – changes in the monthly payment of a shared bill for water – developed into a complex set of

issues. The resultant debates and disputes graphically illustrate a point at the center of this thesis: the inter-relatedness of all aspects of the lives of individuals, their families, their neighbors, the role of local and state actors, the legal system, political changes, and the impact of individual, local and state actors responsible for making and administering policy.

Chapter 7 presents the histories of two families from two different parts of the Iris district. Members of one family were long-time residents, living on the same land for more than a century. The other family moved to the city and the district in the early 1970s, during the accelerated industrialization and urbanization project of the communist state. The chapter attempts to illustrate how the trajectories of these two families, although they never directly intersected, were both shaped/influenced by state policies of three different political and economic regimes. The positions of both families in geographical and social space were further shaped/influenced by the different coping strategies and the instituted social practices of their respective environments. Chapters 6 and **7**, taken together, highlight the ways in which interventions from regional, national and global actors created conditions in the Iris district to regulate processes of production and consumption, movement (or fixity) of the labor force, and domestic labor relations. These processes, in turn, led to particular ways in which poverty, inequalities, and precarious livelihoods were produced and/or reproduced in this one place, the Iris district, and beyond.

In **Chapter 8** I revisit and discuss my findings in the light of the research questions and the theoretical concepts and analytical frameworks developed in Part One.

Chapter 2

Cluj Napoca and the Iris district as ethnographic field sites

2.1 Cluj Napoca: a brief history[17]

Cluj Napoca has always been regarded as one of the most important cultural and economic centers of Transylvania[18]. Already at the turn of the century, in the early 1900s, the city had over sixty thousand inhabitants, flourishing industrial units (tobacco, paper, brick, iron, furniture and leather industry, distilleries, pharmaceutical companies), a strong banking sector (21 banks in 1914), artisan workshops, and an extended agricultural hinterland to produce food for the city. Because of the huge incoming migration, the population of the city was booming. Between 1880 and 1910 there was a 95,43% increase in the number of inhabitants, only part of whom were migrants from nearby villages. A significant part of the skilled workforce arrived from distant parts of the country (Hungary, at that time) or from abroad (mainly Czechs, Poles, Germans, Ukrainians,

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[17] In this section I only offer a general overview of some of the key economic and social processes of the past decades. The relevant historical background for individual chapters is always included in the text of the chapter.

[18] As mentioned in Chapter 1, Cluj Napoca is the second largest city in Romania. However, the historical region where the city is located – Transylvania – was not always part of Romania; for centuries it was either an administratively more or less autonomous region (under Hungarian rule), or part of the historic Kingdom of Hungary. As Brubaker and his colleagues argue in their book about nationalism and everyday ethnicity, Transylvania "has always been a borderland. During the second and third centuries C.E., as the northern part of the exposed trans-Danubian Roman province of Dacia, it was on the margins of the Roman Empire. During the High Middle Ages, as the eastern region of the kingdom of Hungary, it was on the frontier of European Christendom. During the early modern period, Transylvania was situated on the periphery of two great empires, Habsburg and Ottoman, playing them off against one another. And in the modern era, Transylvania has been on the geographic margins of two nations, yet imagined as central to each, and caught between rival Hungarian and Romanian nationalizing projects." (2006:56) From 1867 to 1918 Transylvania "was an integral part of the nationalizing Hungarian state" and "enjoyed nearly complete independence in domestic matters during the last half-century of Habsburg rule." (2006:1) After the First World War Transylvania became part of Romania and has remained part of it until the present day, except for a period of a few years during the Second World War – between 1940 and 1945 – when the northern and eastern parts of Transylvania (Cluj Napoca included) once again became part of Hungary. While I consider these historical aspects of the region important to the understanding of many social and economic processes, in this thesis it is not my aim to focus on problems of nation state building and ethnicity. Thus, although I will briefly discuss issues of ethnicity and race later in the chapter, and I will return to this question in the Conclusions chapter, those interested in how such issues played out in Cluj (and more broadly) should turn to a detailed analysis in the book called *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* written by Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox and Grancea (2006).

Slovaks, and Italians). With the rapid industrial development of the early 1900s the occupational structure of the city started to change. In 1910, already more than 40% of Cluj Napoca's population was working in the industrial sector (Asztalos 2004).

Overview of the city of Cluj: The old city center is in the foreground, newer Communist-built housing blocks in the background

Although from 1890 on a social democratic and trade union movement developed in Cluj Napoca and workers' mobilization was successful in achieving some of their social goals, deprivation and low standards of living remained very common among agricultural and industrial workers. A significant part of the city's population, most of them 'working poor', was struggling with extreme poverty in slum-like[19] and overcrowded neighborhoods, where mortality rates at a young age were

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[19] I refer to these areas as 'slum-like' because according to contemporary historical records and the life histories I collected, while absolute poverty was common in these areas the tenement conditions for housing were clarified: these small and dilapidated houses most often were owned by a few big landlords who rented the houses/rooms to skilled and unskilled workers' families. Also, most residents of these areas had jobs and were working in the mainstream economy. My grandmother, whose mother was a skilled worker in one of Cluj's factories, grew up in one such slum-like neighborhood during the 1920s and early 1930s.

very high[20]. However, this was also the period when some of the more well-to-do 'working-class' districts of Cluj Napoca were built[21] (e.g. "Rácz-telep", "Kőváry-telep", Dâmbul Rotund).

The First and Second World Wars slowed down the economic development of the region, but even so, in the period between the wars (1920-1938) the economic growth in Transylvania was close to 60%. The banking sector, commerce and industry of Transylvania throughout this period were highly dependent on international capital, the share of French, Belgian, German and English companies in the economy was 67.5% in 1921, and 63.8% in 1938 (Köpeczi et all, 1986).

After the introduction of socialist rule in 1945 the demographic expansion and rapid industrialization of Cluj Napoca continued. Besides nationalizing and expanding most of the existing industrial sectors (pharmaceuticals, building materials, etc.) new industrial sectors were moved to Cluj Napoca (light industry, heavy machinery production, and food processing). In the early 1970s, a national-level urbanization and systematization project began[22], and that greatly influenced the spatial structure of most Romanian cities while changing the lifestyle and demographic composition of their populations. As a result of these systematization policies, in Cluj Napoca many of the slums/poor neighborhoods were demolished and the inhabitants were dispersed to newly-built apartment blocks in different districts of the city[23]. However, demolition

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[20] E.g. the area called "Sáncalja" on the Cetatuia Hill, close to the city center. The first volume of the autobiography of writer Istvan Nagy, with this same title (*Sáncalja*), described in detail their everyday life in this very poor neighborhood. Work of local historian Lajos Asztalos also dealt with such issues; he wrote extensively about the deprived neighborhoods that existed in the city throughout the 19th and early 20th century. Asztalos also had a local history page in the daily newspaper Szabadság. He published many of his findings there.

[21] Throughout the thesis I use the official Romanian language names for geographical places, except for the cases where there are historical Hungarian names that do not have an equal Romanian counterpart/translation.

[22] Law 58/1974 on the systematization of the country's surfaces and of rural and urban territories: "Systematization is conceived in order to: secure the harmonious organization of the country's [land] surfaces, and of all the administrative-territorial units; to contribute to the rational and balanced distribution of the forces of production, combining in an organic way the criteria for economic and social efficiency; to secure the organization and running according to the plan of cities and villages, in accordance with the general economic and social progress, and by restricting the perimeters used for building in urban areas to the absolute necessary, while at the same time optimizing the use of these surfaces; the transformation into urban centers of certain rural areas that have the economic and social potential for such a transformation; increasing the overall economic, social and cultural activity of the villages, and the catching up of rural living conditions with that of the urban areas."

[23] One such slum-like neighborhood was called the "Bufnita-settlement" at the outskirts of the Iris district. It had a high percentage of Roma families who, over the decades, moved to Cluj from nearby villages. While poverty and insecure tenement conditions characterized the place, in terms of employment and working arrangements it was not "cut off" mainstream society. Further, in administrative terms, the state was present as well; in the late 1950s a state

was not confined solely to poor neighborhoods. Many areas comprised of the old, private, single-family homes, both inside the city and at its borders, were also demolished and the residents compensated with small flats in apartment blocks[24]. Residents of some villages beyond the city's borders were also moved to flats in high-rise apartment blocks after their lands were linked administratively to the city, their houses demolished, and new high-rise apartment blocks built on the land[25].
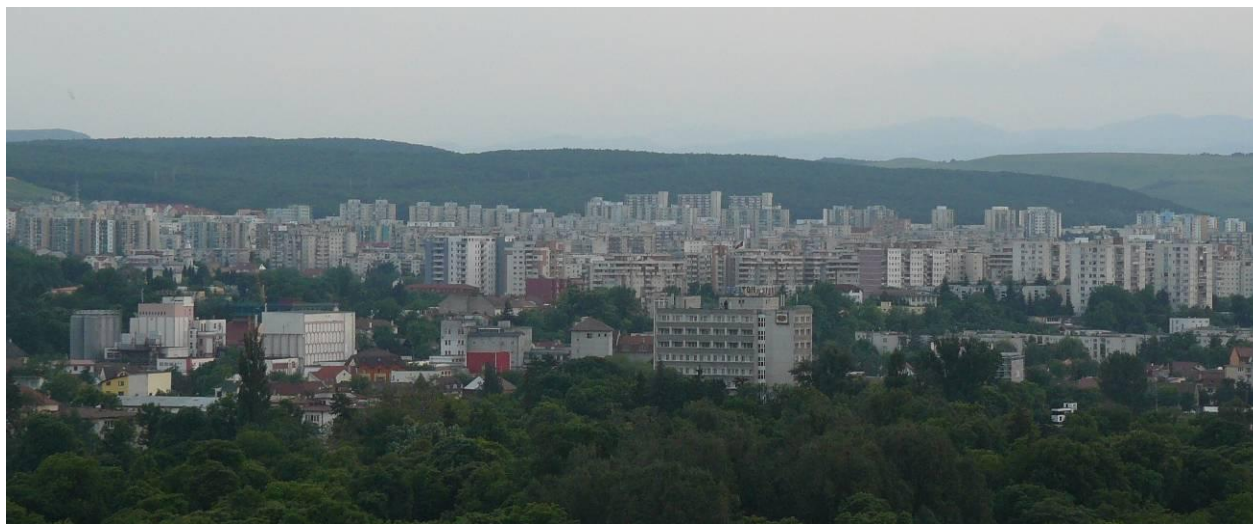
One of the many Communist-built districts: the Mănăştur district was built in the place of the demolished village of Mănăştur.

Migration from other regions of Romania to Cluj Napoca was needed to sustain the rate of industrialization, and thus it was strongly encouraged and often financially supported (over the decades workplaces and apartments were secured for many new migrants). As a result, the decade

school was established within the settlement and other state services (e.g. healthcare) were also provided for residents. Bufnita was mentioned in many of the life histories I collected; apparently it was established sometimes in the early 20th century and the communist authorities demolished it in 1963. Its residents were evicted forcibly and moved to other areas of the city, while those without Cluj residency permits were ordered to return to their villages of origin. The place is also referenced in works of Csilla Konczey (2002) and Reka Geambasu (2003). Part of this latter study focuses on a group of Roma intellectuals who came from this settlement and became part of the new Roma political elite after 1989 (2003:74-78).

[24] Law 58/1974 on systematization said: "Citizens, whose houses were demolished in accordance with the law, will receive land and other material support for moving their households, within the regulations set out by the law." However, as I learned from my informants, implementation did not work as outlined in the law. The compensation and support families received were minimal.

[25] E.g. part of Manastur village was demolished and villagers were moved to blocks of flats. Similarly, in the Gheorgheni district there were many families that used to own houses in the small village of Gheorgeni, but these houses were demolished and the area turned into the Gheorgheni district, an area with blocks of flats. Many Iris district families – most of them urban farmers – were also displaced because of the systematization project. On the land on which their houses used to stand new factories and blocks of flats were built.

between 1966 and 1977 brought about a 41% increase in the population of Cluj Napoca (Troc 2003; Ruszuly 2004). However, after 1976 new measures were introduced to slow down the rate of urbanization: Cluj Napoca was administratively declared a closed city and it became almost impossible to obtain residency permits needed to move into the city[26]. As an effect of these measures the scale of migration was considerably lower as compared to the previous period: between 1977 and 1992 there was only a 25% population increase.

In the 1990s, after regime change, deindustrialization and restructuring of the national economy affected Cluj Napoca's industry and population as well. Most state companies were either closed, or privatized and restructured. This led to a change of percentages among the different sectors of the economy. A significant part of the former industrial sector disappeared (especially heavy industry), and the service sector (including education), commerce, and information technologies were strengthened. International companies such as Bechtel, Nokia, Siemens, Emerson, Trelleborg, Carrefour, Auchan and others opened offices in Cluj Napoca, retraining and employing some of the workers who lost their jobs during deindustrialization (Pásztor and Péter, 2007). Statistical analysis and comparison of census data from 1992 and 2002 revealed that the occupational structure of Cluj Napoca changed significantly during these ten years. In 1992 46.39% of the population worked in industry. By 2002 this number shrank to 28.3%. Similarly, in 1992 only 40.56% of the population worked in the service sector. By 2002 this number was more than 60%. The profile of the workforce also changed: Cluj Napoca lost almost ten thousand inhabitants between 1992 and 2002, most of whom were industrial workers who moved away owing to lack of employment opportunities (Pásztor and Péter 2007).

The research conducted by Pásztor and Péter on the restructuring and reorganizing of the urban space in Cluj Napoca showed that residential segregation was already on its way in the late 1990s and early 2000s: Several 'elite' districts appeared in the older parts of the city (e.g. Grigorescu street; parts of the Gherogheni district), and new 'gated' housing districts were built in the suburbs (e.g. Europe, Borhanci, Bună Ziua). The researchers also pointed to the fact that concentration of

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[26] Decree 68/1976. Residency Transfers to Areas Classified as Large Cities: "Article 4. Employing persons who need a change of residency in order to be able to move to the cities classified as 'large cities' is accepted only in cases where that position could not be filled by people who were already residents in that city, or with people who lived within a 30 km area of the given city, a distance which would allow for a daily commuting."

poverty/deprivation in smaller homogenous urban areas – consisting mainly of a few streets in larger neighborhoods – was not uncommon either (e.g. parts of the Plopilor street area, some streets of Mănăştur and Mărăşti districts, or the Între Lacuri area).

The persistent marginal position of a stratum of the city's population, however, was rarely visible in public space[27] and speech. The Mayor's office in Cluj Napoca in its 2005 Annual Strategic Planning Report presented, in a celebratory tone, the low local unemployment rates (2.5% in February, 2005) in a context that implied that the socio-economic problems of the city were well into the process of disappearing. Local media people also contributed to the spread of an unbalanced portrayal of what the city was becoming. It was not at all uncommon that local journalists published – without any investigation, alterations, or contextualization – declarations of the unemployment office that blamed the poor for depleting unemployment money while working in the informal economy. Essentially, these articles suggested that unemployed people made good money sponging off the state's welfare system (e.g. Gazeta de Cluj 2007/07/09).

The spread of these types of public discourses in Cluj Napoca made it impossible for the poor who did not fit the 'prototype' of the 'average unemployed looking for a job' to narrate their problems and needs in public without being stigmatized. In local public discourses there was almost no mention of the existence of the 'working poor', pensioners, children, unregistered long-term unemployed, and some of the 'new migrants' who moved to Cluj Napoca after regime change, many of whom were still living on the margins of society. There was no emphasis on the fact that Cluj Napoca became the second most expensive city in Romania after Bucharest, the country's capital (Capital 2006), and that salaries and welfare benefits of the low income strata were far from keeping up with the cost of living (Raţ 2003). There was no explanation of the fact that the drop in unemployment numbers was only partially a result of the creation of new workplaces and jobs, but also the result of former industrial workers moving out of Cluj Napoca because of lack of employment and retraining opportunities (Pásztor and Péter 2007). At the time, there was no mention in public speech of the high rate of international migration among the city's inhabitants. Newspapers did not write about the fact that most (new) employment opportunities for low-skilled

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[27] See, for example, Petrovici's work on the appropriation of the city center by elites (PhD thesis, Babes-Bolyai University, 2008). Also from Petrovici: 'Workers and the City: Rethinking the Geographies of Power in Post-socialist Urbanisation.' In *Urban Studies,* August 2012 vol. 49 no. 11.

and unskilled people did not fit the 'employment profile' of the urban poor, and that these positions, in most cases, did not offer any kind of economic or social security for those who filled them (indicators of the spread of job insecurity).

In her studies, Cristina Raţ writes about some of the possible consequences of such silencing processes for the interaction between social workers and welfare clients. Raţ highlights that, owing to a lack of understanding of complex and interrelated conditions, even legislation meant to improve the situation of these groups often backfired and made worse the situation of such families during the process of implementation (2007). In one of her studies Raţ also points out that 'blaming-the-poor' discourses still existed in Romanian society: Approximately 45% of those categorizing themselves as being members of the middle class considered 'laziness' and 'lack of willpower' the main causes of poverty (2007:13).

Sociological and anthropological research conducted on Cluj Napoca highlighted that the Iris district, the research site for this thesis, was seen by the city's inhabitants as the poorest and least safe neighborhood of Cluj Napoca. Violent crime was associated with this area, and it was often talked about as the district with the highest percentage of Roma population (Pásztor 2003). Analysis of the 2002 Iris-district census data showed that people in Iris had the lowest level of education compared to other districts, that the age of the population in most parts of the district was significantly higher than the city's average, that unemployment numbers were still very high compared to other parts of Cluj Napoca, and the number of unemployed/inactive people was much higher than the number of active people when compared to the situation that characterized other districts of the city (Petrovici 2008).

However, my experiences in 1993 when I briefly lived in the Iris district, as well as the impressions I had when I started my fieldwork and walked around in the area in October 2007, suggested that the ethnicized/racialized media portrayal and public perception of the district as a poor, dilapidated, and unsafe 'Gypsy neighborhood' did not reflect the conditions on the ground and was partly constructed in keeping with the long-engrained and ideal-typical dual categories of "The Marginal/Rural Place" versus "The Central/Urban Space". This image did not allow alternative and co-existent temporalities and trajectories to enter the public space/discourse. Just as

in Erik Harm's research findings (2011), often my informants themselves contributed to the reproduction of such ideal-typical dual categories and structured their own life history narratives along such categories. And, just as with Harm's subjects, the Iris district inhabitants – as will be seen throughout this thesis – often developed coping strategies that helped them take advantage from being 'on the edge', at the fringes of the social and geographical space of the city.

2.2 The Iris district

> *"In Cluj there are three zones with very bad reputation: Aurel Vlaicu (the "Pit"), Mănăştur ("under the forest"), **and the Iris** (Byron street's area). According to the police, most crimes happen in these three areas of the town." Clujeanul- local daily newspaper (February 22, 2008)*[28]
>
> *"Another dangerous area is that of the **Iris district**, especially the area of the Byron Street, where many fights were initiated by district gangs and criminals using knives for attacks." Vertical News – online news magazine (February 3, 2013)*[29]

Byron Street in October 2007, when I started my fieldwork

Byron Street in September 2008, when I was nearing the end of my fieldwork

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[28] Article title: *Cluj's Gangs*. Last accessed: January 5, 2013: http://clujeanul.gandul.info/cluj/gastile-clujului-2407643

[29] Article title: *Worst-reputation districts in Romania*. Last accessed: January 5, 2013: http://verticalnews.ro/cartierele-rau-famate-ale-marilor-orase-din-romania/

"In Spain I work to save money because I want to buy a flat here in Cluj. But not in Iris, I want to move away from the Iris district. I don't like it here. Look at all the decaying factories. And look at the heavy traffic on this main road in front of our house; the whole district is just a transit area. I want to buy a flat in a different part of the city. In a place that has a neighborhood feeling." (Daniel, 22 years, Iris district resident, 2008)

"We built our family house here in Iris because the air is clean, it is quiet, we have a beautiful panoramic view, and the land prices were low. And I also like it because I don't have to interact with anybody, you know: I just get into my car and that's it, I am wherever I want to be in twenty minutes. And from here is much closer to the city center than from the much more expensive Bună Ziua area, with all those fancy villas. So it is very convenient. I don't feel at all as being marginal or as living in a non-urban area." (Alexandru, 22 years, Iris district resident, 2008)
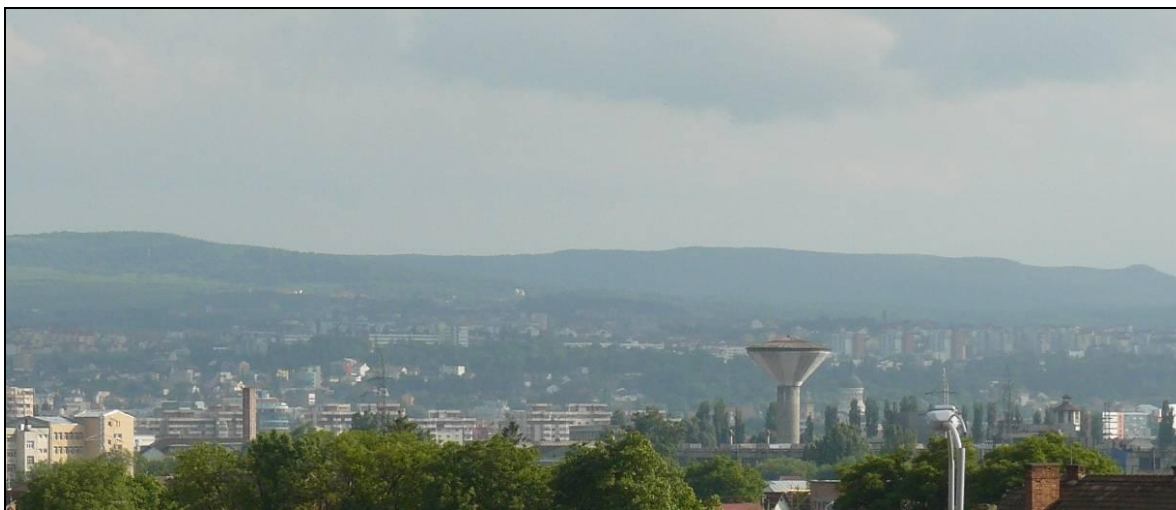
Views over the city from the Iris district hills where Alexandru's house is built

"Oh, the old times in the Iris district … We were poor and never had enough money, and we always lived from one paycheck to the next, but we never had to ask for a loan from anybody [because we produced our own food]… And I loved the holidays in the district: usually all neighborhood families got together to celebrate… And the pig-killings, they were religious-like ceremonies: they started at dawn on the first day and ran till late evening on the next day… All these were things that made us forget about poverty… The Iris district means the true roots of my life." (Adam, 25 years, Iris district resident, 2008)

"The Iris district was always marginalized to some degree, people always told me that 'Oh, if you live in the Iris we don't go there to visit you… it is full of Gypsies.' This is what they said. And when I changed schools and started going to a new high school in another district, my classmates always told me that I was a blonde-haired Gypsy. But I replied to them that you wish you were such a blonde-haired Gypsy as I am." (Ivan, 55 years, Iris district resident, 2008)

"I don't like this district at all, but I had no other choice. We didn't have enough money to buy a flat in another district; we could only buy this studio apartment. We moved a few years ago, but I have a very bad opinion of this area. Even people are different here; they have a mentality that is worse than that of village people. Can you imagine that there are not even sidewalks along the roads...? I have young children and I cannot walk around with them using the baby carriage or a tricycle. And what you see now is already an improvement, because they refurbished the streets not so long ago." (Adriana, 30 years, Iris district resident, 2008)

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Overview of the Iris district. Family homes in the foreground, factories in the background.

The Iris district consists of two distinct areas: an old part (built before Communism) and a new part, the product of the 1970s and 1980s communist industrialization and urban systematization. The old part of Iris, approximately twelve crisscrossing streets bounded by the Someş River and Oauşlui and Fabricii streets (see Map 4 in Appendix I), developed starting in the early 20th century, around the newly established brick and porcelain factories. The maps in Appendix I graphically represent the gradual development of the area from 1873 to the present day. As the maps indicate, the Iris district was – and still is – separated from the older parts of the city by the railway lines and railway station (extended in that direction in the late 1890s) and by an 'industrial belt' that runs along the southern part of the district, cutting off Iris from other neighborhoods. Besides the existing factories – porcelain, brick, paper, furniture, and timber – in 1920 the THERAPIA pharmaceutical factory was built, and in the 1960s a heavy equipment factory was also moved to the district.

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Deserted buildings of the Terapia pharmaceutical factory in the Iris district (2008)

The core parts of the old area of Iris consist of family homes built after the turn of the 20th century by and for workers employed in the local factories. One contemporary writer, István Nagy, wrote this account of the Iris district in 1942:

> "The name of the district comes from the Iris porcelain factory which is located here. The establishment of the factory quickly resulted in many surrounding tumble-down cottages, populated by workers' families. This shanty-town area is called the 'Iris district', and it looks like a big but not very happy and harmonious family. But, in actual fact, this site long ago ceased to be just a settlement around the factory. It now looks like a separate small town. (…) During the night, from under the roof of the porcelain factory, huge flames burst forth. Children living in the neighborhood of the factory, full of horror, ask their fathers, "Are these the flames of hell" they heard about? Fathers reluctantly answer, "Yes…" and they are not far from the truth: The more beautiful and shiny the porcelain, the more pale and bare-boned is the maker. And the beautifully named district is even duller than its worker inhabitants. In this area buildings are not very well constructed, and even the new houses quickly become dilapidated. The locks on doors and gates are rarely used. People living here have nothing so they need not to fear thieves. (…) What is plentiful here are the children, the shabby children. They are on the streets all day, searching among garbage, just like dogs." (1942:24-27)

According to a report on the Iris district issued by the Communist Party on December 24, 1949, at that time the district had "24,923 inhabitants[30], of which 50% were skilled and unskilled workers; 18% administrators and intellectuals; 16% urban farmers, 8% artisans and craftsmen, 2% tradesmen and shopkeepers; 1% self-employed; 5% schoolchildren and students." In comparison, according to the 1930 census data, the number of unskilled workers was the highest in the district,

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[30] Currently the district has approximately 35,000 inhabitants. I asked for more exact information from the city's statistical offices, but I was told that because of a restructuring in the voting and census quarters/districts over the past twenty years it is difficult to give a more accurate estimate.

followed by urban farmers and skilled workers[31]. It is likely that, over the almost two decades between 1930 and 1949, the numbers changed somewhat. However, based on church and other archival data I examined, as well as life history interviews and family genealogies I conducted, there is reason to believe that both Communist Party documents and the 1930s census data were biased; distorting the reality that many district families had diversified household economies[32]. According to records and biographies, as making a living by agriculture alone became increasingly difficult and industrial wages were insufficient to provide a secure lifestyle, in the late 19th century it became already common among district families to combine farming and industrial work. Simultaneously, some people worked after factory hours as self-employed artisans and craftsmen doing ironwork, sewing, building, etc. (see for example the Kovacs biography in Chapter 7). With the structural changes that resulted from rapid industrialization and urbanization in the city this was the only way many families were able to cope with impoverishment. Following the Second World War, with widespread post-war poverty, communist labor market restructurings and large scale land and private property nationalization, diversifying household economies and combining industrial employment, agricultural work, and after-hours craftsmanship remained important means to cope with economic insecurity.

Typical old Iris district houses on one of the main roads.

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[31] Courtesy of Norbert Petrovici.

[32] These household patterns were not unique to the Iris district, by the end of the 19th century it was characteristic for most regions of Europe.

In the early 1950s, when forced industrialization began, some new apartment blocks were built among and around the streets with family homes. The first one-story blocks of flats were of impeccable quality. Each of them was allocated to 6 "Stakhanovite" workers' families that had many children, and the buildings were pictured prominently in many of the period's propaganda publications as the highest achievements of socialist urbanization (e.g. Pascu et al. 1956). However, because of the industrial character of the district, and the area's huge agricultural lands, there were almost no other state orchestrated residential developments until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the national-level systematization project started.

According to the older residents I spoke with, the district kept its "rural village" atmosphere throughout the 1970s, the majority of houses remained privately owned and had well-kept gardens. Adult-age children who remained at home necessitated that the family home be enlarged with the needed number of rooms. Nevertheless, in the mid-1970s with the new laws on systematization of the country (Law 58/1974) many of the family homes that were at the outskirts of the city were demolished, privately-owned agricultural lands taken over, and the previous owners moved to apartment buildings all around the city. According to local history and family biographies many members of the local urban farmer families (especially males) committed suicide following the forced nationalization of their homes and gardens.

The new apartment blocks built on these nationalized lands were not only of very poor quality, but most flats consisted of only one small room, with a minuscule kitchen and bathroom (7-12 sqm flats). Into these new buildings socialist urban planners moved people who were working in various industrial settings, mainly heavy industry, located in the Iris district.

After the collapse of communism in 1989 many workers in Iris lost their jobs and the area retained the reputation of being one of the poorest districts of Cluj Napoca. This was reflected not only by the stigmas of 'poor-' and 'Gypsy districts' attached to Iris by people living in other parts of the city, but also in the very low real-estate prices (Pásztor 2003). Thus, for most families affected by the collapse of industry and the economic restructuring of the country and the city, it became almost impossible to sell their apartments for a price that would have allowed them to move to nearby smaller cities, such as Turda or Câmpia Turzii. For families living in 'better rated' districts

selling their apartments and moving away from Cluj Napoca was one of the many survival strategies used during the economic downturn of the mid- and late 1990s.
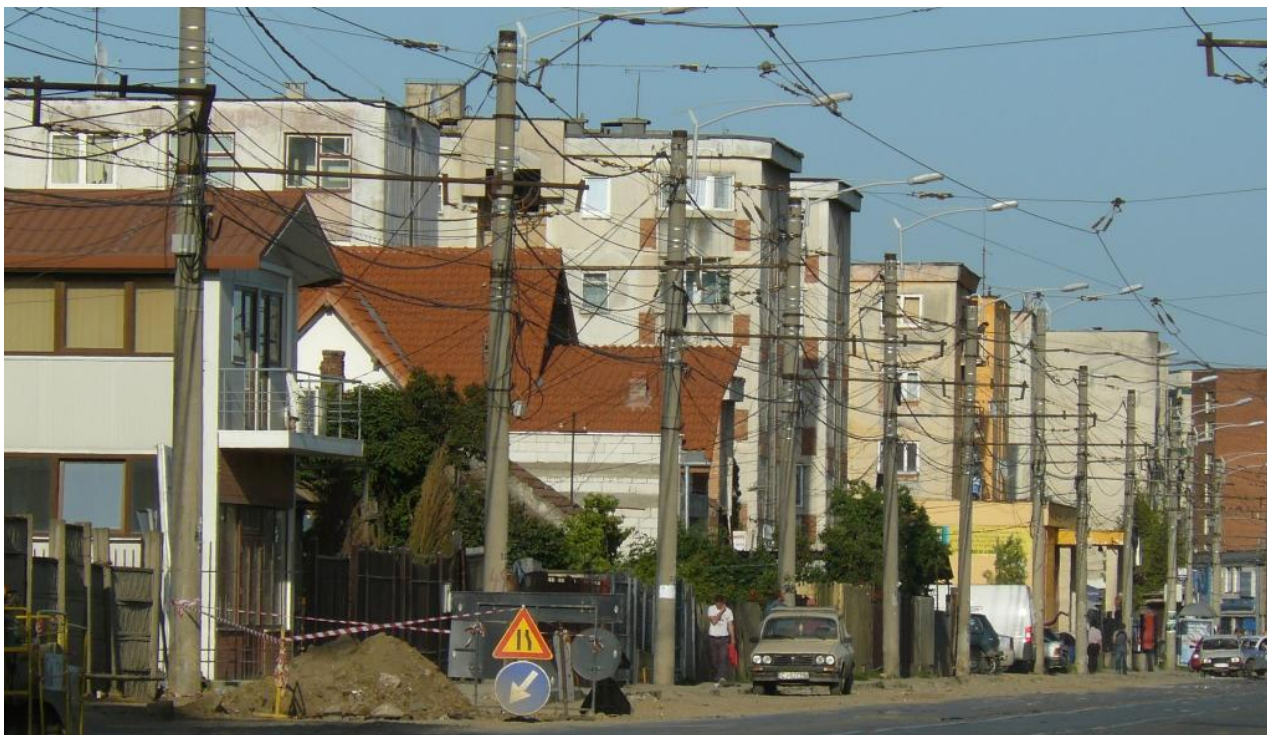
Typical Iris district apartment blocks built on one of the main streets in the early 1980s at the outskirts of the district

Nevertheless, precisely because of the inexpensive real-estate and building lot prices, development in the area began starting with the early 2000s. On the one hand, international companies (e.g. Nokia, Siemens, etc.) started to buy land and move their offices and industrial units next to this district, investing also in the infrastructure of the whole area. On the other hand, as a result of the restitution process of the land that was formerly nationalized by the Communist state[33], many of the families who used to own agricultural land inside the district and on the hills around it, had their former holdings returned. Since most families no longer worked in agriculture, they started to parcel out the land restored to them and either built new homes for their families there, or sold it to property developers and people interested in building family homes in the area. The interest in these parcels was high, not only because of the advantageous prices, but also because the views over the city were spectacular. Families who could not afford to buy or build a house in other parts

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[33] Law 18/1991 on Agricultural Land Resources; and Law 1/2000 on the re-instatement of the property right over agricultural and forestry lands, claimed under Law no. 18/1991 and Law no. 169/1997.

of the city but had some capital for acquiring land and building a house embarked on new building projects in this area.
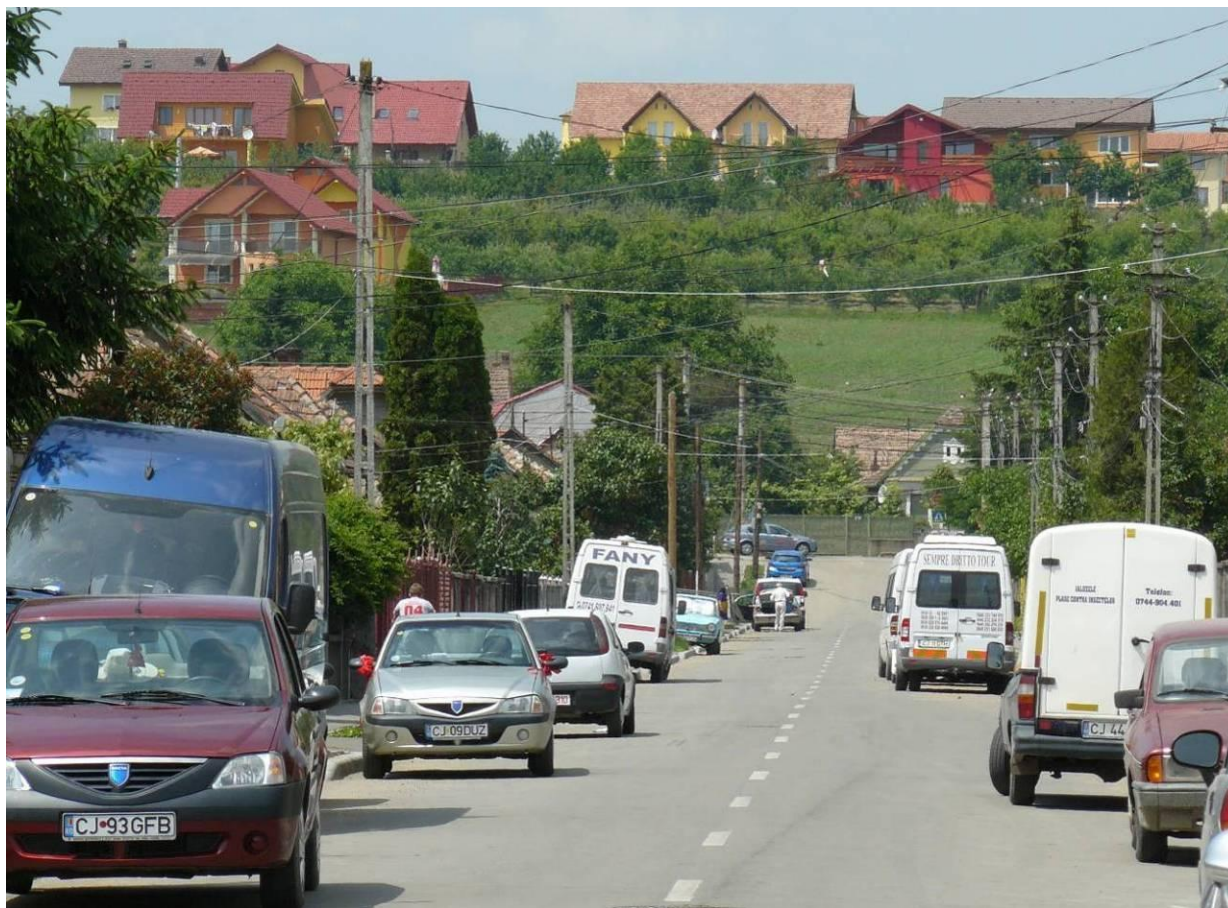
Newly-built houses on the hills of the Iris district (observe the many small trucks that were owned by local family-run businesses)

Further, increasing numbers of students and young professionals were buying or renting apartments both in the newly built and the Communist-built apartment blocks. This resulted in improvement in the condition of some of the apartment houses and forced the local city administration to make new investments in the infrastructure of the district.

After two decades of absence, 'the state moved back' to the Iris district: a new city council office was opened where people could take care of local administrative issues; two banks opened branches next to the city council office; utilities companies opened payment offices in the district; the medical office was refurbished, enlarged and hired an additional nurse in addition to the general practitioner; and most roads and the drainage systems were replaced or repaired. In the new residential development areas drainage, gas, electricity and potable water were installed – in

part paid for by state funds, and also by locals' contributions – and new roads were built on the hills.
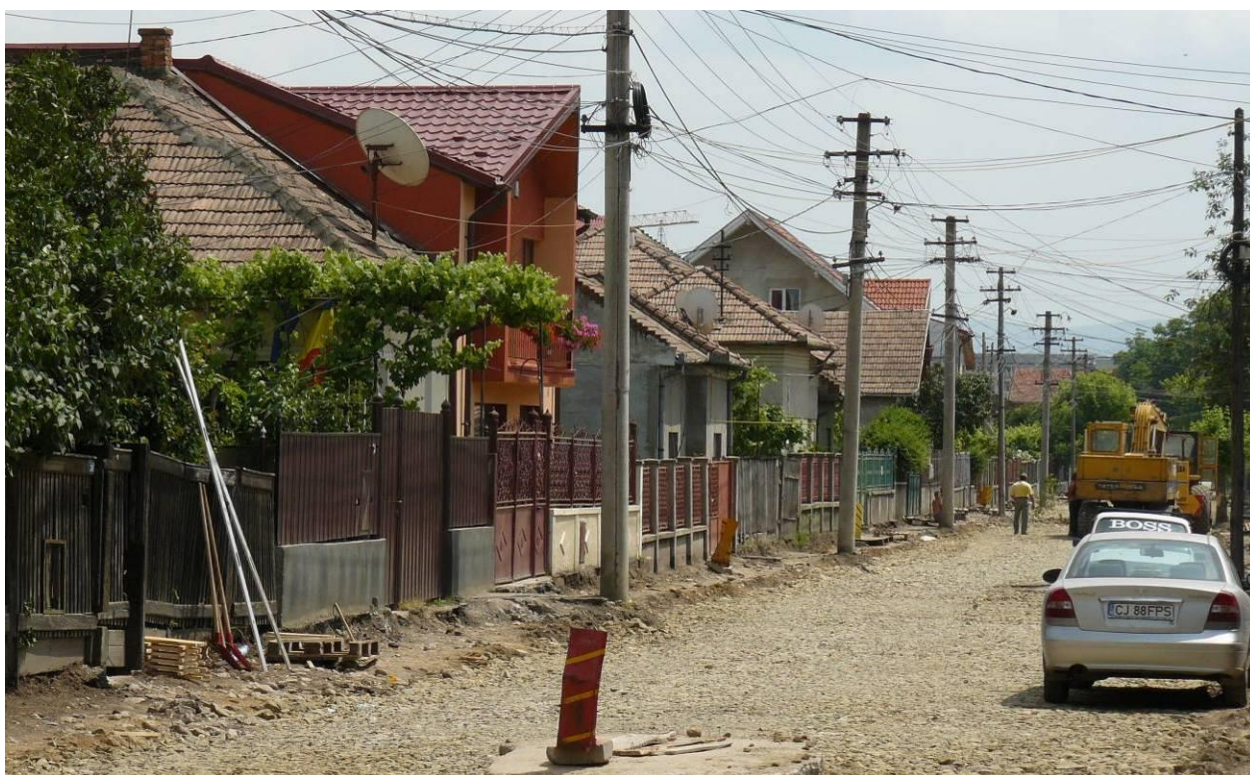
A typical Iris district side street. The city crews were in the process of preparing the roadbed for paving.

In the late 1990s, as a result of several state and local government decrees, most operating industrial units in the district that caused environmental pollution were ordered closed and relocated outside the city. Some of the old industrial buildings were sold to property developers who transformed them into apartment houses. As a result of these interventions, what was seen throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as a dilapidated and 'wasteful' area – where population density and quality of accommodation was low – now suddenly became highly valued. That is, what was once seen as *undesirable* became *desirable*: low population density, a large number of privately owned family homes, and few communist-type apartment blocks.

It is important to highlight that despite the decades-long stigmatization of their living spaces and the use and reproduction of such stigmatizing categories (even among Iris district inhabitants) when we got to know each other better, many people who had lived in the district for decades talked about how much they liked living there, and how many advantages they thought they had during communism compared to residents of other districts. During the life history interviews it

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became clear that many residents used the widespread ideal-typical dual categorizations that described the district as marginal, while at the same time taking advantage of this 'marginality' by refusing to conform to the dominant norms of the communist period, during which the private domain was strongly infringed upon by the public domain in a world of 'systematized' and engineered living spaces[34].

Closed factories in Iris. The factory on the left was transformed into an apartment house soon after this photo was taken.

District residents attempted to dismantle the linkages that were established by the Communist state between the workplace, the home as just a place of accommodation ('dormitory cities'), and the state subsidized rental contract as a form of dependence on the state. Even in those places where people lived in state-rental flats allocated to them by their factories/employers, most families emphasized that the space adjacent to their houses and apartment blocks 'belonged' to them. This approach gave them the opportunity to keep animals and grow vegetables and fruit around their homes, which – they argued – afforded them a measure of 'independence' during times when a

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[34] See more on the public/private divide during Communism in studies of Pittaway (2000), Gerasimova (2002), Kotkin (1997), and Boym (1994).

poor economy would otherwise have led to food insecurity. Scarcity of open land made such coping strategies much harder to implement in most other neighborhoods of the city.

In this context it seems relevant to refer to Erik Harms' use of the term "social edginess":

> "Unlike the concept of marginality, which struggles to account for active agency, has no active verb form, and can be written only in the passive voice, the semantic fluidity implied by the English word *edge* more accurately conveys the way many Hoc Mon residents deploy their edginess to complicated effect. Like the double-edged blade of a knife, this edginess cuts both ways, sometimes cutting back against structures of power and sometimes cutting the very social agents who wield it. Sometimes people actively edge their way into opportunities created by their position on the urban fringe; at other times they are edged out by processes beyond their control. The edge in Saigon's edge operates as a verb and a noun, and edgy is an ethos, a set of actions and attitudes as much as an adjective." (2011:4)

In the Iris district the attempts for the preservation of the private sphere and the partial self-sufficiency achieved through gardening and keeping poultry and pigs, was only one of the many coping mechanisms that emerged among district inhabitants. Just as Harms argues, these and other similar strategies were possible partly because people lived "on the edge" and – to some small degree – outside the gaze of the state.

2.3 Race/ethnicity/nationality in the Iris district and Romania

As previously noted, the Iris district, in addition to being perceived as on the "edge" of Cluj Napoca and a "poor and marginal neighborhood", was also frequently referenced as a "Gypsy" district[35] and sometimes, in more specific terms, as a district with "the Gypsies who cause most of

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[35] The claim that the percentage of 'Roma' was higher in the Iris district than it was in other areas of the city is not supported by research findings. Neither census data (see for example work done by Norbert Petrovici), nor other research – conducted specifically on the 'Roma' of Cluj – confirmed such claims. See for example work by Eniko Vince: *The socio-economic profile of Roma communities from Cluj Metropolitan area* (Presentation prepared for the Seminar on Social Economy Models for Roma Communities "Rethinking socio-economic policies addressing Roma communities in Romania" 26-27 October 2011, Cluj-Napoca; last accessed on January 10, 2013: http://sparex-ro.eu/wp-content/uploads/socio-econ-profile-Roma-Cluj_october2011.pdf). Further, although there was anecdotic evidence claiming that the levels of criminality are higher among Iris district Roma than in any other parts of the city, during 15 months of research nothing I found lent validity to these claims. However, since there was a small number of families that identify as 'Gabors' and live in the center of the Iris district and members of this community wear very identifiable cloths that set them apart, the increased 'visibility' of these families reinforced some of the long-standing stigmas and stereotypes that were attached to the district, even though most of these families were well-to-do, not engaged in criminal activities and had no criminal records. Also, for several decades there was a small 'colony' of several dozen poor families living at the margins of the Iris district. This neighborhood – called 'Bufniţa' – was

the problems"[36]. Thus, as soon as I began my fieldwork and told my friends and acquaintances that the scope of my research was to understand the (re)production of poverty and inequalities over many decades in the Iris district of Cluj, I was immediately asked: "So are you basically going to research the Gypsies?" When I said "No", the most common follow up question was, "Then who are you researching, Romanians or Hungarians?" In response, when I continued to emphasize that 'ethnic groups' was neither the driver nor the central organizing principle of my research, but rather the 'space' of the district and its local residents, my questioners remained confused and puzzled: "But there are Hungarians, Romanians, and Gypsies [in the Iris district]. Which group are you going to study? You surely have to select among these groups, don't you?"

The issues raised by their questions were all too familiar to me and very disconcerting. It was a vivid reminder of my own growing up in Romania as a 'minority Hungarian'[37] that, for the most part, did not allow for a de-ethnicized view of the society in which I lived. As a teenager I witnessed a violent 'multiethnic' conflict in my hometown, the March 1990 events in Tirgu

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perceived by outsiders as an exclusively 'Gypsy' area. This area had its own school and most adults worked in the mainstream economy, and state institutions (such as medical services) were present. The houses of the area were demolished in the early 1960s by the Communist state, and the families were moved to blocks of flats all over the city. Some of the families moved back to the Iris district over the years, and a few of them now live on Byron street and Sobarilor street. However, there is no reason either of these streets should be perceived as 'Roma' streets. It is rather a concentration of poverty and low standards of living that gave rise to such stigmas. Both on Byron and Sobarilor the size and quality of the communist built blocks of flats is very low, and the apartments – originally consisting of a very small single room – used to be allocated by Communist administrators to young and single men who moved to Cluj over the years to become factory workers. Some of these men were unable to move away even after they established families. Since they still occupied one-room flats, their living conditions deteriorated in proportion to the increase in their household size.

[36] For example: "As far as the Byron Street is concerned, the Roma from there are infamous for the quickness with which they use their swordsticks (concealed swords). At nighttime, few dare pass through their neighborhood/area." (Clujeanul, 22 February, 2008); "A cabby from Napoca Taxi was attacked with canes and a metal bar by Iris district Gypsies." (Stiri de Cluj, 20 May, 2013); "The more than one hundred local Roma families that regularly attend the sermons of the neo-protestant church in the Iris district of Cluj say that this one church succeeded in doing something for them what no other institution was ever able to do – integrating them into society. At the Sunday sermon, the Roma sing in Romani language and learn how to behave in the family and the world." (Clujul Evanghelic, 16 November, 2009)

[37] Throughout this first section I use single quotation marks '…' for all ethnic/racial/national coda to indicate that I only intend to exemplify – and not reify – a 'groupist' approach that has been the most dominant discourse/approach towards social phenomena in Transylvania. Later in the text I will discuss my approach to ethnicity/race/nationality in more analytical terms.

Mures.[38] At the time this made it very difficult for me to distance myself from the views that claimed that 'ethnicity' was one of the most salient explanatory frameworks for (all) events that took place in Transylvania (and Romania). Being a student of the Bolyai High School – an institution seen to be at the heart of the conflicts that eventually escalated into bloody violence – determined and framed many (if not most) interactions we had as students. Our daily experiences in school and those of our extended families – which often contradicted the dominant discourses about 'ethnic belonging' and 'ethnic relations' – were rendered irrelevant in a context where 'identity politics' seemed to offer one of the most powerful approaches to and explanations of the changing socio-economic and political conditions of the post-1989 period.

The questions I repeatedly asked about our family's 'ethnic background' were treated by my parents and relatives as having only anecdotal relevance. Nobody felt any need or obligation to truly reflect on the meaning and implications of 'our Hungarian identity'. Their single-minded emphasis on 'belonging' to one (and usually only one) 'ethnic group' was maintained even though nobody had coherent answers to my questions relating to what defined us as 'Hungarian' in a context in which I was told I was partially of 'Secler' and 'German/Saxon' origin; on both sides of the family I was told I had (some) 'Romanian' great-grandparents; and that part of the family – for varied reasons – was Romanian-speaking. And, as I continued asking questions and – unwittingly though – forced my family into 'deconstructing' the readily assumed 'blood-ties', suddenly 'Polish', 'Czech', 'Armenian', 'Croatian' and other 'ethnicities/nationalities' appeared in the family genealogy.

To further complicate matters, in our extended family both language usage and institutional and church affiliations cut across (so-called) 'traditional Hungarian ethnic' lines. As a child I spent years living with my grandparents in Petrosani, the city/region of the 'Romanian' miners that became notorious for violent clashes with political power groups both during and after

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[38] The conflict, narrowly speaking, was offset by the 'Hungarians' demanding the restoration of Bolyai High School as an autonomous Hungarian-language school. The move would have involved all Romanian-language classes and teachers moving over to Papiu High School in the middle of the academic year (January 1990), and all Hungarian-language classes from the Papiu High School moving to Bolyai High School. The account of what followed, as summarized by Brubaker et al.: "The proposed "unmixing" of high schools engendered a spiral of mobilization, culminating in two days of street fighting that left six dead and hundreds injured." (2006:128) For a more detailed account of these events – and for some of the reasons why the authors think the conflict did not spill over to Cluj Napoca – see the same book, pages 128-136.

Communism[39]. In Petrosani, a 'Romanian' town, I went to 'Romanian' kindergarten, where I spoke Hungarian with some of the children; and my friends were said to be 'Romanian' but many of them had 'Hungarian', 'German', or 'Jewish' names and understood me if I talked to them in Hungarian. Some of them even spoke German at home. It was here, at the age of 5, that I first fell in love, with a 'Romanian' boy who spoke Hungarian with me and was my Hungarian-Romanian translator in kindergarten until I became fully bilingual. Some of these 'Romanian' kindergarten mates who later went on to 'Hungarian' or 'German' schools, turned out to be 'Catholic', 'Jewish' or some other religion (quite often not 'Romanian Orthodox'). When they were grown they had ethnically mixed relationships/marriages, some of them in Romania, others abroad. Notwithstanding all these realities that showed just how complex, blurred and open these categories and identifications were – and still conforming to the dominant discursive frameworks – our family (and most people I knew) continued to identify and narrate their family histories structured (in part) along ethnic categories and (assumed) blood-ties.

However, at some point in these family discussions a new distinction was made: I was told I needed to understand that in our family there were 'Hungarian Hungarians' (a branch of our family originated in Tatabanya, Hungary and close relatives still lived there); 'Transylvanian Hungarians' (the 'regular/ordinary' Hungarians from Transylvania) and 'Secler Hungarians' (the branch of the family from the 'Secler' region of Transylvania). Depending on the context and types of arguments and debates among family members, for the parties involved these different categories of 'Hungarian-ness' often became either 'stigmatizing' or 'glorifying'. Other 'bloodlines' were suddenly 'remembered' and brought into such discussions, being used stereotypically and to stigmatize or glorify one or the other person. Although it was not readily apparent, at this point our family discussions started to move beyond 'blood-ties' and into the realm of some kind of socio-historically constructed 'distinctiveness'.

Then, on several occasions when, as a young adult I moved to other countries/continents, I had the experience of being identified as 'Romanian' and, in the United States, as 'European.' Suddenly, my 'citizenship' (Romanian) dissolved into a 'Romanian ethnic identity' which, as a 'Hungarian', I had always been 'taught' to reject and separate myself from. Contrary to my family's

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[39] See for example David Kideckel's work on the Jiu Valley miners (2001, 2004, 2008).

expectations and to my great surprise, this shift actually felt liberating. However, even after many years spent abroad and distancing myself from and reflecting upon the phenomenon of 'ethnic groupism', in my professional work, I continued to do research on 'ethnicity/race/nationality' and examine the formation and context of 'European', 'Roma' and other identities. For a long time, it still seemed impossible to avoid such 'categories' if and when talking about Transylvania, Romania, or Central and Eastern Europe.

Thus, preparing to start my fieldwork in Iris and Cluj Napoca, a 'multi-ethnic' district and city in which I was always told/taught that 'Hungarians', 'Jews', 'Roma', 'Romanians' and many other 'ethnic groups' lived together for centuries, at first I was not entirely confident in deciding to do an analysis of factors/processes that shaped inequalities/poverty that did not have 'ethnicity' as its central focus. Reading media commentaries, social sciences scholarship, and historical accounts from and about the region always increased the temptation – just as my former education/socialization had – to return to an 'ethnic framework'. In this context, the approach of my research design rarely felt 'innovative' or 'original'. In fact, at the beginning, it even seemed a bit naïve. I was struggling with concerns similar to those which Brubaker et al. (2006) included in their book on 'everyday ethnicity' (their research site was also Cluj Napoca):

> "The case we address – drawn from a region with more stable, deeply rooted, and intensely politicized ethnic and national identifications [unlike in the United States], and from a town that has experienced continuous and often embittered elite-level ethnopolitical conflict since the fall of communism – would seem to be more resistant to constructivist analysis. Talk about the fluidity, contingency, and perpetual negotiation and renegotiation of identities can appear frivolous or naïve in this context, and the critique of groupism might seem misplaced. If ethnic and national boundaries are harder, more durable, and more constraining in Eastern Europe than in the United States, it might be asked, then why *shouldn't* one take ethnic and national groups as units of analysis?" (2006:8-9)

And indeed, as they pointed out and my own experiences and research suggested, even to try and talk about the 'history' of such a 'marginal' district as Iris, based on historical and local ethnographic scholarship – if I was to avoid falling into the 'groupist' trap – it was almost impossible to create a de-ethnicized historical account of the place. Even the simplest available archival data most often framed "accounts of ethnic, racial, and national conflict as the struggles "of" ethnic groups, races, and nations." (2006:8) This was reminiscent of Jean and John Comaroff's observation:

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Once ethnicity "takes on concrete form, it has an almost uncanny capacity to naturalize cultural identities at the expense of other kinds of collective consciousness, to conjure up communities of belonging and invest them with affect, to incite passions and primordialist fantasies, to valorize the vernacular, its practices and its commodities, to fashion a perceptual universe in which otherness appears as immanently antagonistic. And, sometimes, [ethnicity has the capacity] to do all of these things in varying proportions." (2006:144)

My task seemed to become even more difficult when I decided that I wanted to take this non-groupist approach even further: Whereas Brubaker et al. sought to "develop an analytical vocabulary for talking about ethnicity without (necessarily) talking about ethnic groups" (2006:8) I not only wanted to approach the subjects of inequality and poverty without talking about 'ethnic groups', but also without having my research driven by 'ethnicity' at all. Since my understanding of 'ethnicity' was closest to that of the Comaroffs, it seemed sensible that my de-ethnicized approach would yield relevant data. The Comaroffs argue that,

"ethnicity is neither a monolithic 'thing' nor, in and of itself, an analytic construct: that 'it' is best understood as a loose, labile repertoire of signs by means of which relations are constructed and communicated; through which a collective consciousness of cultural likeness is rendered sensible; with reference to which shared sentiment is made substantial. Its visible content is always the product of specific historical conditions which, in variable measure, impinge themselves on human perception and, in so doing, frame the motivation, meaning, and materiality of social practice." (2006:38)

If/when ethnicity is understood this way, it loses its appeal for providing salient and overarching explanations for socio-economic and political phenomena, and becomes only one component in a much more complex process of social interactions.

It is important to emphasize that this approach and understanding of ethnicity is not 'foreign' to research done in 'multiethnic' places in Europe. In a recent edited volume called "Multi-disciplinary Approaches to Romany Studies" several of the authors took similar approaches. Judit Durst, for example, argues that,

"Ethnicity cannot be seen as a 'culture-bearing unit', as an ethnic group 'sharing of a common culture' (Barth, 1969). Instead it should be perceived as a *relational* variable (Eriksen, 1993) which is not only the result of the interplay between a number of different factors (social status characteristics and cultural practices) but is also deeply embedded in the social context which defines the location of the ethnic groups examined within the interethnic tissue of the society to which they belong." (2010:13-14)

However, while Durst – in the particular context of biological reproduction – still examines 'Romany-ness', Michael Stewart in the same volume argues for an even broader approach:

> "[I]n the absence of state institutions that might clearly define the Roma, in the way citizenship regimes, educational institutions, passports etc. determine state affiliations, the Roma will never possess the kind of clearly demarcated 'group' boundaries and 'distinctive features' that those gathered within nation-state categories have acquired. (…) To put this another way, one of the recurring themes of the papers in this volume is how the all-pervasive methodological nationalism of anthropological and other social scientific approaches produces false and misleading accounts of Romany lives in Europe today; and how, therefore, rich and honest analysis of Romany lives demands that authors transcend the 'ethnic' frame of reference." (2010:2)

My approach, in keeping with Stewart's argument, aims for such an analysis – "transcending the 'ethnic' frame of reference" – not only in the case of "Romany lives", but also in the case of the many other Iris district residents, be they perceived or categorized in whatever mixture of 'Hungarian', 'Romanian', 'Jewish', 'Polish', 'Saxon', 'Secler' or other 'ethnic identities'.

With all this in mind, and attempting to understand the (re)production of inequalities in a particular place and over time, the framework developed by Narotzky and Smith (2006) seemed to be the most productive for my own work. Narotzky and Smith, in their research about the ways in which people – as historical subjects – seek a livelihood in rural Spain, show that local power relations and the resulting complex regulations often rested on the creation of "a series of differentiations." However, as they make clear, their data did not point to the conclusion that these differentiations emerged – first and foremost – out of the "cultural":

> "At a structural level, we might speak of these [differentiations] as inhering in the particular way the various relationships clustered through the region are reproduced through time. But in speaking thus we obscure the way practices, infused with different degrees of power, over time bring about differentiations. At any given moment these may appear as cultural differences, even as emergent differences between kinds of (collective) social identity, but this quick resort to 'culture' obscures the extent to which these differences are produced out of dynamic relationships of class." (2006:212)

Such an approach in the case of my research not only offered the opportunity to take a step back from the cognitive frameworks that 'ethnicity' would have imposed on data analysis (possibly limiting that analysis), but it also allowed for a much broader and flexible interpretation of "culture" and the "cultural". The theoretical considerations that emerged from this approach – regarding social reproduction, inequality and poverty, and social class – will be discussed in **Chapter 3**. However, before turning to these particular theoretical issues, I would like briefly to clarify the consequences of such a de-ethnicized approach for my fieldwork and data collection.

2.3.1 Race/ethnicity/nationality and fieldwork

Attempting to "transcend the 'ethnic' frame of reference" in my own work – in a society where 'ethnic groups' were often referenced in "commonsense 'folk' sociology" (Brubaker et al. 2006:9) as closely bounded entities – did not mean that when narrating their life stories I was planning to discourage my informants from talking about 'ethnicity', or whatever 'groupist' language to which they were accustomed. Even after deciding not to use 'race/ethnicity/nationality' as my major analytical categories, I knew it would be neither productive nor possible to sidestep or completely ignore in my ethnographic fieldwork the ways in which such perceptions factored into people's lives. Finally, in the encounters with my informants I knew it would be impossible to avoid occasionally being personally 'marked' by others as a '(minority) Hungarian' (I have a 'Hungarian' name).

Brubaker et al. argue that while their research highlighted that "much of everyday life is not ethnically differentiated or experienced in ethnic terms" (2006:265), there were still certain "worlds" – often institutional (school, church, theater, etc.) – where 'Hungarian' or 'Romanian' ethnicity could become 'marked' as distinctive in comparison to the "default" category of that given reference system. While I agree that the authors' assessment about the ways 'marking' works can be valid in those (mainly hypothetical) situations where an interaction would be read solely in ethnic terms – Hungarian versus Romanian (in their data) –I would argue that there is an embedded weakness inherent in their method: On the one hand, their Hungarian-Romanian binary research design, somewhat arbitrarily, un-marks all other 'ethnicized' encounters of their subjects. While they might assume that 'everyday ethnicity' works the same in all instances – even when multiple ethnic and non-ethnic identifications are involved (as the authors themselves indicate elsewhere in their text) – I contend their model under-estimates the complexity of such a condition. On the other hand, their approach also un-marks – or subsumes as less influential – all the non-ethnic "repertoires of signs" emerging out of age, gender, class-like relations, or regional and local embeddedness (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:38) by means of which relations are constructed and communicated.

Thus, ethnicity aside, I was equally concerned with the possible distortions that might be caused by age and gender, or distortions that could emerge from social distance between interviewee and interviewer (in Bourdieu's sense of 'non-violent' communication where for best effect social distance between the two actors in the interview situation should be minimized, 1999:608-609). In an effort to address these issues, I decided to place a strong emphasis on my student status and my affiliation with a 'Romanian' anthropology department, while underplaying my ethnic background and gender. Fortunately, my accent was not pronounced in the languages I needed to use and by dressing in a neutral way I de-emphasized perceptions of my gender.

Throughout fieldwork all these decisions proved to be useful. Underplaying 'gender' and de-sexualizing my appearance helped to establish more meaningful interactions with both men and women of all ages (and not only with women and children, as is often the case with female researchers). Also, my status as a student – living on a stipend in student housing, and receiving occasional food packages from my mother – was often perceived by my informants as dependency on the state and my family, and demonstrated for them the precariousness of my financial situation. This created an unanticipated additional bond with many of my informants, leading them to want to incorporate me into their support and exchange networks.

2.4 Methodology and type of data collected

The previous sections of this chapter, as well as Chapter 1, discussed many of the particularities of my approach. Chapter 4 will further reflect on methodological issues, and address in detail the life history method and its applications and relevance to this work. Thus, in the following I present only a brief overview of the type of data collected and used in my analysis.

Type of data collected:
(All sources of information are identified and referenced throughout the analysis in the thesis.)

- Ethnographic data collected on the daily rhythms and practices/patterns of the lives of district inhabitants, gathered through participant observation: I took long walks alone or accompanied by district residents; made subjective mappings of the space of the district; I spent many hours

in a variety of areas where people tended to congregate – streets, squares, bus stops, courtyards, shops, supermarkets – and engaged in occasional informal conversations with locals, often while taking photographs of people, the landscape, and the built environment of the district.

- Ethnographic data collected via participant observation among Iris district families, during fifteen months of fieldwork in Cluj Napoca (October 1, 2007 – January 4, 2009): I spent time with families on a daily/weekly basis (sometimes also stayed at their homes) and participated in their everyday activities, from family reunions and celebrations to work commitments, from neighborhood visits to occasional meetings with acquaintances. I became incorporated in many of their networks through helping them with their work, being asked occasionally to lend them small amounts of money, helping them send packages to kin living abroad, etc. This frequent, everyday participation characterized my contacts with approximately 15 nuclear families and through my contacts with them I was able to greatly extend my network of contacts to include their extended kin as well as friends, acquaintances, work colleagues, administrators, and others with whom they had contact.

- Thirty-five family case studies and genealogies and sixty semi-structured and life-history interviews. Medical histories of many of the families I talked to, on those occasions when they volunteered to share their medical records with me: Some of them were undergoing medical examinations or treatments while I was there. Occasionally, and only upon their request, I accompanied them to visits with nurses and/or doctors. Although I treated this information as confidential and did not use this data in the thesis, I occasionally referred to the health related problems that were specific to the person if and when they shared this information with me in the setting of the formal interviews I was conducting with them. However, even in such cases, I concealed the informant's identity.

- Additional general data about the economic and social circumstances of approximately 150-200 families was obtained from apartment block administrators.

- Files of a law suit initiated by a group of 44 former brick factory worker families against the factory's parent company: The suit was filed in an effort to buy their homes which had formerly been communist state owned. Some of these families won the case, others lost it. The lawsuit took place between 2004 and 2008. Most cases were concluded during my fieldwork,

but one case is still pending, affecting the housing status of seven families. Their case was forwarded to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In order to understand the framework against which the case unfolded, I also collected and processed all the laws referenced during the suit.

- Data from the local district school and some of their employees: This included participant observation of the school's activities, interviews with the school's director and other staff, and informal discussions with present and former students of the school.

- Seven semi-structured interviews conducted by Norbert Petrovici (Cluj Napoca based sociologist and academic) with the city's architects that were in key professional and administrative positions during communism. Norbert Petrovici was extremely generous in sharing full original recordings and letting me use them for the purposes of analysis.

- Ten original recordings of semi-structured interviews conducted by Norbert Petrovici with former and present Iris district factory managers, which he also shared with me.

- Four focus groups with 21 Hungarian district inhabitants ranging in age from 18-78 and many occupational backgrounds (workers, urban farmers, entrepreneurs, managers, politicians, etc.): we discussed their memories about the district, their family trajectories, and issues linked to ethnicity. I later conducted one-on-one follow-up interviews with some of them.

- More than 1500 photos taken throughout the district during 2007 and 2008: These included new building sites, transformation of factories into apartment blocks, the demolition of old houses, as well as families living in the district. All photos included in this thesis were taken by me and reflect the conditions of the district as it was between October 2007 and January 2009. Any photos that include people completely obscure their identity.

- Novels, short stories, and autobiographies of Cluj Napoca born writers, who grew up and lived in Cluj Napoca and the Iris district: Some of them were born into extremely poor families, lived in absolute poverty in their childhood and young adulthood, and became writers/intellectuals during socialism. They wrote about their life experiences in detail. Although the data needs to be used/treated with reservations (the books were written and published at a time when communist censorship was enforced), some of these writings are very interesting and colorful accounts of the everyday lives and struggles of local people and their families, going as far back as the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

- Studies and journal/newspaper articles about Cluj and the Iris district, written by local researchers (historians, sociologists, ethnographers) and journalists.

- Secondary data was collected from state and church archives after a pilot study to access the types of data that were available. I requested and received special permission from these institutions to photograph all documents intended for use. The final count of the photographed archival data reached several thousand pages. I processed and analyzed these documents in detail upon returning from the field:

  o Official censuses for Cluj, and also for the district – 1930, 1992, 2002 (complemented with similar data I received from Norbert Petrovici);

  o Censuses for the years 1942 through 1951 of all families having school-aged children, made by the district school and kindergarten, including occupation and place of employment for both parents, registered together with ethnic data;

  o School registers, for the years 1932-1964, of all pupils including data on the occupation, place of employment for both parents, and ethnic data.

  o Detailed maps of the district for the years 1868, 1933, 1937, 2002 and 2007. Some of these maps include numbered plots and houses on each street;

  o Histories of the major factories in the district through the 1960s, and into the early 1970s.

  o Factory files with employment information: handwritten resumes of people, data on salaries, employment history, etc. Data for some months and years was missing from the files, but still gives a good idea of employment data and certain processes in some of the factories;

  o Factory files with housing information: These include both handwritten applications of people with their argumentation as to why they need the requested apartments, what their housing conditions were at the time of application, and justification from factory administration as to why they supported or declined the application;

  o City Council documents, mainly for the 1960s, about building permits, allocation of apartments to families, justifications of allocations;

  o Files of the Communist Party, from the 1950s, about party members and membership, socio-economic and industrial background information on the different districts of

Cluj, as well as detailed data on two major employers and their employees: the Railway Company and the Herbak-Clujana Shoe Factory. A significant percentage of both companies' employees lived in the Iris district.

o Correspondence and other documents of the school in the Iris district from the 1930s to the 1960s;

o Data and history of the State Agricultural Farm "Gostat", with information on collectivization in the city, and especially in the Iris district;

o Causes of death of district inhabitants from the 1940s to the 1990s, from local Protestant church archives: This was not necessarily reliable as statistical information, but offered some insight into the types of illnesses and causes of death in the district. For example, it is probable that there was a high rate of suicide in the late 1960s and during the 1970s. Local narratives link this to patterns of collectivization in the district. There was a higher than usual number of cancer cases and deaths caused by cancer among middle aged men which were possibly linked to working in toxic environments. Again, although not conclusive or completely reliable, this data was reinforced by my informants.

It needs to be noted that only a small fraction of this huge amount of data made its way into this thesis. However, almost all the data was processed, and my understanding of many of the processes and phenomena that manifested themselves in the district came from searching through and analyzing these thousands of pages of information.

Chapter 3

Theoretical considerations

To be able to grasp the effects of the political, economic, and social changes over the past decades on families in Romania and analyze the coping strategies they developed in response, one needs first to contextualize the more general questions of 'poverty' and 'inequalities'. This chapter begins with a discussion of my reasons for using these two concepts together, and the ways they fit within frameworks of social reproduction theories. In the second part of this chapter, through the lens of these concepts, I offer a brief overview of the socialist and post-socialist state and economy, followed by a discussion of some of the most influential recent theories that have attempted to explain poverty in Romania.

3.1 Poverty and inequalities: an analytical framework

In **Chapter 1**[40] – based on Kaneff and Pine's argument (2011) – I pointed out that although there is an increasing tendency in the social sciences to apply the concepts of "inequalities" and "poverty" as "part of the same production-consumption process", it still makes sense to differentiate between them and use both concepts "in order to emphasize different dimensions of what is one connected process." (2011:7) Kaneff and Pine argue that,

> "Much like poverty – as a social, economic and political form of deprivation that must be understood to have agency and to be embedded in the global political economy – inequality is a concept that needs to be understood in the context of the global restructuring of capitalism. Whereas concepts of poverty are *traditionally* rooted in production (and attributed to failures in production), discussions of inequalities are centered in social differences that ultimately rely on consumption practices." (2011:6)

According to these two authors, for a long time processes of impoverishment were analyzed through frameworks that focused more on dimensions that were rooted in 'production' and its possible failures. However, the restructuring of global capitalism and the (partial) removal of production from the 'core' countries to the 'periphery' brought about an increasing interest in

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[40] See Footnote 6 in Chapter 1.

dimensions of impoverishment that were rooted in differential 'consumption' practices. This led to new focuses in social science research where "novel ways of expressing social difference (and identity) – as well as new forms of resistance through membership in various social movements" (2011:7) were examined. It is for this reason that the concepts of poverty and inequality have a "different referential importance" and can and should be used together in the same analytical framework. While 'poverty' speaks "more to particular places/contexts/groups, and sometimes is even identified as a static concept (Moser 1998, 3) although this need not be so, 'inequality' has more comparative value, useful in recognizing differences between different groups and spaces in the social and physical landscape." (2011:7-8)

This approach is novel because it both acknowledges the multidimensional, contextual and political nature of poverty and at the same time also draws attention to a possible and useful analytical distinction for studies of impoverishment along the production-consumption continuum. This distinction – without actually separating the two phenomena – helps illuminate a much wider and more complex array of social processes than those that can be uncovered by only using the more conventional poverty analysis frameworks [41].

Using Kaneff and Pine's argument as a starting point, I would argue that there is even more to this distinction than the two authors explore, especially if one designs research that uses households (families) as basic analytical units. Of course, one could argue that putting households at the center in such an analysis means a narrowing of focus, especially when compared to the much broader approaches that are customary in some of the more recent theories of poverty research (e.g. 'social exclusion' theories, where broader institutional processes and their relationships with 'micro' social phenomena are considered). Never the less, as Susana Narotzky explains (1997), focusing on households as core units in consumption processes could mean quite the opposite:

> "[I]f households are the units pooling and internally allocating resources we may think of relations of consumption as growing around the circulation of resources between different households, between households and the state, between households and the market. But households are not stable and are more accurately described as bundles of relations – of consumption, production, reproduction – that are constantly

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[41] See an excellent summary of 'classical' approaches in Samantha Jane Yates' *Living with Poverty in Post-Soviet Russia: Social Perspectives on Urban Poverty* (2004:25-47). Another very good overview can be found in Kaneff and Pine's introductory chapter, in the edited volume *Global Connections and Emerging Inequalities in Europe* (2011:1-12).

being negotiated in a wider economic context. (…) Consumption processes, then, are intertwined with relations of power which are forged and reproduced in the daily struggle to make a living." (1997:139, 143)

In this context, Narotzky argues that this broader understanding of household consumption processes can reveal how intermingled consumption is with other phenomena. Her approach highlights that exploring these connected processes together, as they are located within (and beyond) household relations, while acknowledging their distinctiveness, can expose new structures of inequalities:

> "We are drawn increasingly to the awareness that consumption cannot be easily separated from production, distribution, and circulation processes. Ironically, it is domestic labor, at the heart of consumption, that has provided the strongest evidence for a need to link consumption and production in a simultaneous expression of economic activity." (1997:147)

In an attempt to highlight the complexity of the 'domestic labor' process, Narotzky explains that,

> "Domestic labor is probably the most debated aspect of 'consumption'. Domestic labor includes the production of goods and services. The 'goods' that are produced, for example, meals or Do-It-Yourself (DIY) provisioning, are often immediately consumed and tend to be assimilated to 'services'. Services are not 'goods' but activities which are consumed as they are produced such as cleaning, caring for the young and old, and socializing children. Another aspect of domestic labor is care not as a concrete material service (as when taking care of a child's needs) but a general overall state of awareness, of disposition to household members' needs (De Vult 1991)." (1997:147)

When relationships in households are explored in this way, understanding of consumption is no longer limited to the (exclusive) binary link that is often assumed to exist between income (as money) and consumption. Rather, it becomes clear that the process itself is much broader and incorporates a wide variety of incomes and resources for personal consumption, with actors having differential access to, control over, and management of such resources. Thus, although 'resources' managed in a household can incorporate money, they are much more than that; they also mean in-kind resources (housing; objects needed in the home, from large items such as furniture to the day-to-day necessities; and virtual goods such as information), as well as services (care in the broadest sense of the term; everyday routines in the household such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, etc.).

According to Narotzky this understanding highlights that "Material constraints of relations of consumption are not free from ideological assumptions. In fact, who has access to which resources and how to establish a hierarchy of priorities in allocating final consumption, is mediated by ideologies about family responsibilities, about gendered capabilities to compete in the labor

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market, about energy requirements, about identity representation, etc." (1997:136) One of the clearest examples to consider, when reflecting on such 'ideological' influences on household consumption, is the distribution of meat among household members when resources are scarce. Research by Charles and Kerr (1987; quoted by Narotzky, 1997) on food distribution within poor families in the UK highlighted that in most instances where a household was constituted of men, women and children, working men got to consume not only *proportionally* more but *inequitably* more[42] meat and other scarce "highly valued" food resources than women and children. In this context "employment is the main power asset of men within the family in relation to differential food access." (Naroztky 1997:137) In contrast, when men in the household were unemployed resources were distributed more equitably; when the household was constituted of women and their children only, children received most of the "highly valued" food resources. In this latter case, in determining how food was distributed "poverty was the basic material constraint with motherhood being the fundamental ideological constraint." (1997:137) In light of this, the important aspect to consider – once domestic labor is included in the analysis – is that differential possibilities of household members are always "strongly related to the political and economic structure enabling some people but not others to get hold of specific resources." (1997:138)

Narotzky's emphasis on the multilayered and pluridimensional relationships that are found in households sheds light on limitations that might emerge from the more traditional poverty and inequality research approaches, where 'poverty' and 'inequality' concepts often focus only on selected aspects of this complex process, for example on private consumption (measured through low income), on lack of entitlements (often focusing on welfare allocations), or on capability deprivation (focusing on human agency and its capability to achieve things that are intrinsic to a person's well being) (Yates 2004). Approaches that do not link production and consumption (and the related processes of circulation and distribution) can be useful and provide relevant data in cases where the socio-economic dimensions of poverty and/or inequalities are analyzed in the present or short-term. However, in this thesis, approaches that do not link these phenomena would

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[42] Narotzky emphasizes that the question is not that of equal distribution, but that of equitable distribution: "[A]s Carloni (1981) stressed, we must try to uncover not so much unequal but *inequitable* distribution of resources which, in relation to food, means trying to assert the differences between the nutritional needs and the respective food intake of the different members of the family." (1997:137)

not have sufficed to explain precarious livelihoods across generations, over the span of many decades, and (re)produced over several politico-economic regimes.

The approach of this thesis, by attempting to disentangle relationships built in and around households, helps to better understand the ways in which these processes are embedded in the broader social context and influence impoverishment and deprivation. However, at the same time, such a focus poses new questions as to how poverty and inequalities (and the production-consumption continuum) are situated in processes of reproduction, if and when the reproduction of the broader social structures and power relations is assumed to be happening (already) at the level of and among members of a household. Further, if (social) reproduction is seen in this way, then the question emerges as of how (social) change happens at all, either at the level of the family/household or at the societal level. These issues are all relevant to my own research and approach to the topic.

3.1.1 Poverty and inequalities, and the concept of 'reproduction'

Among the reproduction theories that specifically examine the reproduction of social inequalities the most influential ones have been those that emphasize the role of human action/agency in relation to larger structures of society. Paul Willis (1977), for example, argues that while structures do matter in the reproduction of inequalities (class background, geographical location, local opportunity structure, educational attainment, etc.), interaction between structures and human agency is not a one-way process and that researchers have to consider the "cultural milieu" and accept,

> "Certain autonomy of the process at this level which defeats any simple notion of mechanistic causation and gives the social agents involved some meaningful scope for viewing, inhabiting, and constructing their own world in a way which is recognizably human and not theoretically reductive." (1977:172)

The work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) points in the same direction as that of Willis: while the authors emphasize the consequences of structural elements on reproduction of

inequalities, they pay equal attention to the role individuals and their habitus[43] play in larger structures. According to the two authors the culture of dominant groups forms the knowledge and skills that are most highly valued in society. Thus, when the educational system rewards the possession of high amounts of cultural capital, a condition that is characteristic mainly of middle- and upper-middle class pupils, it automatically contributes to the reproduction of inequalities. However, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that,

> "The habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences, and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (…), and so on, from restructuring to restructuring." (1977:87)

That is to say that this continuous restructuring with the participation of the individual, the family, the educational system, and all the other stages of human life plays an important role in making access possible to desirable employment and broader life chances. However, although both Willis' and Bourdieu and Passeron's theories highlight important sites of reproduction, they render such processes too strongly in the 'cultural' dimension – underplaying other dimensions – and distract from one of the most important and immediate sites of reproduction: the family/household. While they all emphasize the role human agency and habitus play in challenging structures that constrain human actions, they do not sufficiently explore the ways socialization at the level of family

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[43] In this book Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) define habitus in the following way: "habitus, defined as the principle generating practices which reproduce the objective structures" (p. 33) and "the theory of the habitus as the principle unifying and generating practices enables us to understand why the durability, transposability and exhaustivity of a habitus in fact prove to be closely linked" (p. 34). Loic Wacquant in the *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology* wrote the following about Bourdieu's understanding of habitus: "As individual and group history sedimented in the body, social structure turned mental structure, habitus may be thought of by analogy to Noam Chomsky's 'generative grammar', which enables speakers proficient in a given language to produce proper speech acts unthinkingly according to shared rules in creative yet predictable ways. It designates a practical competency, acquired in and for action, that operates beneath the level of consciousness; but, unlike Chomsky's grammar, habitus (1) encapsulates not a natural but a social aptitude which is for this very reason variable across time, place, and most importantly across distributions of power; (2) it is transferable to various domains of practice, which explains the coherence that obtains, for instance, across different realms of consumption – in music, sports, food and furniture, but also in marital and political choices – within and amongst individuals of the same class and grounds their distinctive life styles (Bourdieu 1979/1984); (3) it is enduring but not static or eternal: dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by situations of migration, for example; (4) yet it is endowed with built-in inertia, insofar as habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them, and because each of its layers operates as a prism through which later experiences are filtered and subsequent strata of dispositions overlaid (thus the disproportionate weight of the schemata implanted in infancy); (5) it introduces a lag, and sometimes a hiatus, between the past determinations that produced it and the current determinations that interpellate it." (2004:316-317)

happens – and how, in turn, this allows for changes that depart from the structural constraints of 'social reproduction.'

Bertaux and Delcroix (2000), discussing the notion of capital developed by Bourdieu – which is at the core of his social reproduction theory – make two important points. First, they argue that the theory in the form developed by Bourdieu is more relevant for middle classes and elites, because if it is applied to people at the bottom level of society it presents these people as lacking all types of 'capital' (in Bourdieu's sense)[44]. They state that this is not the case, and if one adheres only to these three categories – cultural, social, and economic capital – then he/she could not explain why and how people without capital are able to break the poverty cycle and become upwardly mobile. The research conducted by Bertaux and Delcroix indicated that,

> "Bourdieu's theory of family 'capitals' only takes into account parents' objective resources such as property assets and income, culture and connections. Other more 'personal' and definitely subjective resources may be used by parents, especially those deprived of any capitals, to build into their children self-confidence and

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[44] Bourdieu, in *The Forms of Capital* (1986) explains: "Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. It is what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle."
The three main types of capital identified by Bourdieu in this study are:
1. cultural capital ("Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.")
2. social capital ("Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word."); and 'conversion' capitals, such as
3. economic capital ("Economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words – but only in the last analysis – at the root of their effects.")

In addition, Bourdieu also mentions symbolic, commercial, financial and family capital, with the understanding that these are some kind of 'subcategories' of the above three types of capital. About symbolic capital he states: "that is to say, capital – in whatever form – insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity."

other personality features, which may in turn prove very useful later on in their struggle for occupational achievement and status attainment." (2000:81)

To overcome this gap in Bourdieu's theory, Bertaux and Delcroix constructed and introduced two new concepts in their analysis, that of "subjective resources" (2000:82) and "capital of a specific biographical experience" (2000:77). The former refers to situations where non-objective resources are transmitted between generations, while the latter points to situations in which certain events in one's life history help to accumulate experiences that generate new skills (e.g. living in mixed marriages). Although Bertaux and Delacroix's arguments could be challenged by saying that the dimensions they claim to be missing from Bourdieu's theory are actually included in his work as part of the (embodied) habitus, the points the two researchers make are still relevant, because they draw attention to the types of 'resources/capital' of the poor that are rarely acknowledged and highlighted in Bourdieu's or (other's similar) theories.

Another argument Bertaux and Delcroix make is that "family capitals are capitals or 'trumps' in the games of generalized social competition only insofar as the rules of such games are biased in favor of members of the ruling class" (2000:80). If large-scale social changes occur in society – a revolution for example – cultural, economic, and social capital might very well change their meaning to the opposite, cease to be resources, and become instead significant handicaps. Again, although it could be argued that Bourdieu did address such concerns when he wrote about issues of 'transmission' and 'reproduction'[45], he did not test these ideas in any other contexts than that of the developed capitalist countries (he uses as an example processes of reproduction in French education). That is to say, that Bertaux and Delcroix's points draw attention to under researched

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[45] Bourdieu's explanation goes as follows: "Because the question of the arbitrariness of appropriation arises most sharply in the process of transmission – particularly at the time of succession, a critical moment for all power – every reproduction strategy is at the same time a legitimation strategy aimed at consecrating both an exclusive appropriation and its reproduction. When the subversive critique which aims to weaken the dominant class through the principle of its perpetuation by bringing to light the arbitrariness of the entitlements transmitted and of their transmission (such as the critique which the Enlightenment *philosophes* directed, in the name of nature, against the arbitrariness of birth) is incorporated in institutionalized mechanisms (for example, laws of inheritance) aimed at controlling the official, direct transmission of power and privileges, the holders of capital have an ever greater interest in resorting to reproduction strategies capable of ensuring better-disguised transmission, but at the cost of greater loss of capital, by exploiting the convertibility of the types of capital. Thus the more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure." (1986)

aspects of this theory and the possible limits to its application in contexts other then the 'mature' capitalist societies.

Work of Frances Pine in two different regions of Poland and of Julia Szalai in Hungary seems to support the above assumptions of Bertaux and Delcroix. Pine (1998) compares two very different regions of Poland: The Podhale area, which has always been marginal to the center, and where migration, entrepreneurial activity, and fragmented labor patterns have been long-term characteristics; and the Lodz area, which was highly integrated into the central economy, both in terms of industry and farming. Pine's two case studies clearly show that the differing histories of the two regions resulted in very different attitudes and strategies towards work, state, kinship, gender and local communities. One of her final points is that while people in the Podhale area under the new system (postsocialism) were able to benefit from the practices and attitudes they developed − both as survival strategies against marginalization and as a form of resistance to socialism's intrusive practices − villagers in the Lodz area seemed to be "learning the survival skills associated with marginality" for the first time. Similar processes were uncovered by Julia Szalai (2000) in her analysis of the role of women's work in the second (informal) economy in socialist Hungary. Her findings show that certain forms of capital that were highly valued during socialism (and were possessed mainly by men) lost their value and importance during regime change, while formerly undervalued skills that often served only as means for basic survival (developed mostly by women), became highly valued in the new regime and led to a considerable improvement in the lives of some of these women (Szalai 2000).

Narotzky raises similar concerns to that of Bertaux and Delcroix when she cautions that preoccupation with social reproduction[46] should not lead to assumptions that suggest that "the objective of a society is to reproduce itself, to maintain a certain order of things, to perpetuate a concrete form of organization. (…) In so doing we obscure the possibility of dissent and conflict between groups. By presupposing perpetuation as the aim of the social body we also preclude the viability of rupture, of radical change or the mere construction of alternative ways of life and of

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[46] Narotzky operationalizes 'reproduction' as 'social reproduction', 'reproduction of the labor force', and 'biological reproduction', but she suggests that − while one should keep in mind these distinctive dimensions of the process for analytical purposes− the theoretical aim should be to create an integrative framework of these 'reproductive' processes that contribute to the understanding of the 'economic' processes in society. (1997:160-162)

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thinking within a dominant hegemony." (1997:177) Frances Pine's comparative ethnography of the Lodz and Podhale areas (1998), discussed above, is a case that clearly addresses this point by presenting two alternative ways of life – one of dissent (Podhale) and one of integration into structures (Lodz) – within the same dominant hegemony. What Pine also highlights very clearly – through her keen attention to historical social processes of production and reproduction – is how these ways of life can contribute to a shift in positions in social space, once a dominant social order is reorganized (as happened after the collapse of communism both in the Podhale and Lodz areas).

In summation, such understandings of processes of social reproduction and the concepts of poverty and inequality, in my own work, allow for a more thorough examination of deprivation and impoverishment over a longer/extended time frame. They help to uncover how household practices and relations among people – power struggles, dissent, compliance, and negotiation – were shaped by their interactions with broader structures and by their particular understandings of the world around them. At the same time, such a household centered and nuanced analytical framework allows observation of the ways in which families themselves shaped the social and material worlds they inhabit.

Finally, one could still argue that the above discussed conceptual frameworks were developed to analyze processes embedded in capitalist power relations, and as such, they are not well suited to explain either the conditions found under socialism, or the socio-economic relations that developed after its collapse. However, Hann and Hart (2011) argue that although the dominant image of socialism suggested that a centralized (totalitarian) state held a strong grip on all dimensions of the economy and society, the reality on the ground was much more ambiguous:

> [In rural contexts] "Redistribution was the most salient 'mode of integration': socialist officials formed a new class, although low-level bureaucrats in enterprises and farms who tended their own gardens were obviously a different stratum from the all-powerful nomenklatura at higher levels. But socialist redistribution was tempered over the years by elements of the market: work points were replaced by salaries and wages and private access to markets expanded. Thanks to the generous allocation of plots and gardens, the household remained a vital unit of production as well as consumption. Finally, complex patterns of reciprocity linked households both to each other in patterns of mutual aid that predated the socialist period and to socialist office-holders through the 'second' or 'shadow' economy. The latter fed back into the redistribution mode and constituted a key feature of the socialist variant of what was elsewhere called the 'informal economy'. (…) In urban industrial contexts, socialist work generally remained more clearly demarcated from domestic

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life. However, networks of reciprocity were no less significant here, if only because shortages of consumer goods, including food products, were commonplace." (2011:126)

Similarly, Hann and Hart argue that "[l]ike its predecessor, the postsocialist economy is a mixed, complex whole" (2011:136) and it would be simplistic to claim that the collapse of the communist states resulted in the complete emptying of previous norms and practices in these countries, or that capitalist market conditions were transferred fully into these post-socialist societies. Nevertheless, even if it were so, to argue that employing capitalist market structures would result in as clear and straightforward social (and economic) structures as many economists claim, would be very misleading. As Narotzky explains, evidence from capitalist market economies showed that "provision of the means of livelihood occurred not only in the connected realms of market production and consumption, but also in the realms of reproduction, leisure and non-market exchanges of goods and services." (1997:39) Further, along with the dismantling of the welfare states, personalized, informal, non-market economic relations expanded "to occupy spaces of production (and reproduction) previously covered by market relations and state subsidies. The family, relatives and friends, neighbors and the local community have been stressed as networks of economic relations, covering formal and informal production processes." (1997:39) That is to say, that once the complexity and ambiguity of the relationships that structured economic processes over the decades in capitalist, socialist and post-socialist societies is recognized and acknowledged, research results are likely to be more productive and predictive if the entire complex of processes is linked, considered together. In the application of research tools, rather than separating these processes, they ought/need to be applied based on what is best and most effective to understand and make sense of observable realities of peoples' practices as they actually operate in their lives.

3.2 The socialist state, economy, and households in Romania

According to Katherine Verdery (2002) communist leaders in their attempts to build an alternative to "bourgeois capitalism" aimed at eradicating all forms of inequalities in their societies, including those "based in kinship status, gender, class, and ethno-national difference" (2002:9). Their (declared) goal was to create a homogeneous society where classes and private property were abolished, kinship structures were broken up, the authority and gender relations in families altered,

and national minorities were given equal chances[47]. As a result of interventions from communist leaders and party members, new social entities – for example state and collective farms, teams, and brigades – emerged in these societies. Nevertheless, as Verdery argues, while the new entities complicated social structures, they could not replace old ones and created new power relations and inequalities.

Placing the state's needs above the population's and emphasizing accumulation was an attitude that predated socialism in Romania, argues David Kideckel (1993). He thinks that the domination of Romanians by other nations and empires resulted in an increased effort by Romanian leaders to reach national political independence and related autarkic economic development. Except for a short period following World War II, when the Communist Party was dominated by Stalinist loyalists (Muscovites), this aspiration also characterized the actions of socialist political leaders, and resulted in the most thorough centralization in Eastern Europe. According to Kideckel, centralization in Romania was further intensified by two other factors. First, the socialist revolution had succeeded in Romania with support from the Soviet military, and second, there was no popular support in Romania for socialist ideologies and the Romanian Communist Party: When they took power in 1945 party membership was less than 2000 people. Over time the originally

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[47] As will be seen later in the chapter, establishing gender, class, and ethno-national equality never went beyond an aspiration. In terms of ethnic inequalities Brubaker argues that although the communist states' ethnic policies were organized along those of the Soviet state's "which prescribed native-language schooling and cultural institutions for all 'co-inhabiting nationalities', in the first instance for Hungarians" (2006:108), and attempts were made throughout the 1950s and early 1960s to adhere to such policies, those aspirations quickly changed and assimilative policies began to gain ground from the mid-1960s on. According to a report by the Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe the situation of the Roma was much worse than that of the other ethnic minorities (e.g. Hungarians, Saxons): Quoted verbatim, "Roma were considered to be foreign elements that had to become Romanian, their culture being considered as one of poverty and underdevelopment (Pons, 1999: 29). Because of that something had to be done in order to destroy the specific culture of Roma and their distinct pattern of living – the most important element that has made them different for centuries. The state by eliminating any references to it from its discourses denies the specificity of the Roma community within Romanian society. According to the principles of the communist regime 'private' occupations had to be destroyed. Therefore all privately owned factories were confiscated by the state. The state also confiscated the tools and the materials used for traditional occupation of Roma (metalworking, carpentry, jewelry making), especially the gold used by Roma for jewelry. At the same time, Roma were integrated in agricultural activities by the agriculture production cooperatives. Those who were good in processing metals were recruited by the metallurgical cooperatives. Until the collapse of the communist regime, 48-50 per cent of Roma workers worked in agriculture. Trade was a prohibited activity for them. Those who had continued to practice their traditional occupations were not considered as authentic workers anymore. But the law proscribed them, considering them to be 'social parasites' being at a high risk to be punished (imprisoned or put forcibly to work) (Pons, 1999: 34)." (2001:9) Michael Stewart's book on Roma in communist Hungary – *The Time of the Gypsies* (1997) –also deals with such issues.

weak and divided party achieved cohesion, and as a result all levels of society became strongly centralized. This process reached its heights under Ceausescu's rule. In this period the economy was fully subjected to centralized political control, large numbers of technocrats were incorporated into the party, loyal cadres were given control of economic enterprises, while a continuous rotation of cadres from the state to the Party then to the economic sector and back was maintained to impede the formation of alternative power centers. Accumulation and centralization were thought to be achieved by central planning, so the state formally dominated nearly every aspect of society (Kideckel 1993).

However, the results of these interventions were very mixed and "socialist governments were continually plagued by the unforeseen consequences of their policies" (Verdery 2002:10). Resistance to social engineering was common among the population and forced socialist governments to implement reforms. Redistribution and socialist paternalism tended to create "subjects" that "adopted dissimulation as a mode of being: apparent compliance covered inner resistance" (2002:11). This duplicity resulted in "social schizophrenia", dichotomization of the world to "Us" (the people) and "Them" (the authorities), and encouraged

> "[S]elf-making *in people's own terms*: they definitely consumed forbidden western goods, created self-respect through diligent second-economy work while loafing on their formal jobs, participated in ethnic- or kin-based identities and rituals constitutive of self, and gave gifts not just to secure advantage but to confirm their sociality as persons and human beings." (Verdery 2002:11)

To understand why this and other socialist systems survived for such a long period, although they tried to appropriate all stages of the lives of their citizens, Livia Popescu suggests the evaluation of the peculiar "social contract" that existed between the socialist state and its citizens (2004:14). According to Popescu, the "social contract" established in these countries was built on a discrepancy between discourse and practice: while on the discursive level the state promised full employment, social justice, solidarity with the disadvantaged, and equality for all members of society, in practice it failed to fulfill many of these commitments. This led to the apparition of the "practice of duplicity" in totalitarian states, where citizens accepted and participated in this "double game" of their leaders, but they "dissimulated" their true intentions.

However, Alexei Yurchak, who is critical of such approaches, argues that many researchers fail to understand the complexity of the "everyday realities" of the communist system and the paradoxes that resulted from contradictions between practice and ideology, exactly because they translate complex phenomena into binary categories such as 'us' and 'them' or 'private' and 'public':

> "[T]he roots of these binary categories go much deeper, originating in the broad 'regimes of knowledge' formed under the conditions of the Cold War, when the entity of 'the Soviet bloc' had been articulated in opposition to 'the West' and as distinct from 'the third world.' The act of critiquing isolated binaries does not necessarily deconstruct these deeper underlying assumptions behind them. For example, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman provided a crucial critique of many binary divisions that dominate the studies of state socialism, arguing that in these societies '[r]ather than any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public,' there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories.' And yet, they connected this critique with another claim that '[e]veryone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated,' and that often even 'intimates, family members and friends informed on each other' (Gal and Kligman 2000, 51). The emphasis on such categories as duplicity, lying, and informing on others – which suggest moral quandaries at the core of the people's relations with the system and with each other – implicitly reproduces an underlying assumption that socialism was based on a complex web of immoralities." (2005:7)

According to Yurchak those who organize their analysis of the communist system along such binaries and "moral" judgments, miss the crucial fact that a great many of the "fundamental values" represented by these states, "such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future" were of genuine importance for the citizens of these countries. Yurchak states that this was the case even though "many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state." In this context, for many people socialism "as a system of human values and as an everyday reality of 'normal life' was not necessarily equivalent to 'the state' or 'ideology'; indeed, living socialism to them often meant something quite different from the official interpretations provided by state rhetoric." (2005:8) Yurchak concludes that:

> "Without understanding the ethical and aesthetic paradoxes that 'really existing socialism' acquired in the lives of many of its citizens, and without understanding the creative and positive meanings with which they endowed their socialist lives – sometimes in line with the announced goals of the state, sometimes in spite of them, and sometimes relating to them in ways that did not fit either-or dichotomies – we would fail to understand what kind of social system socialism it was and why its sudden transformation was so unimaginable and yet unsurprising to the people living within it." (2005:9)

The socialist reorganization of the state and economy inevitably led to changes in the structures and attitudes of households, even if not always to the ones foreseen by the Communist Party. One

of the processes that contributed to the restructuring of households was the accelerated urbanization and industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s. While in 1948 Romania's population was 80% rural, by the mid-1970s it was almost evenly divided between rural and urban areas. These changes led to the apparition of a huge stratum of first generation urban families still largely involved in subsistence agriculture, developing multiple identities – "polybians" – and multiple commitments (Nagengast 2001). As a consequence of the state's intervention in economic processes the sexual division of labor also changed, resulting in the increased authority of women in household subsistence farming as men took industrial jobs. By 1973 only 35% of men worked in agriculture, whereas 65.7% of women did. It is also important to understand that while on the discursive level the equality between sexes was promoted, women had almost no involvement in politics; instead many of them experienced a triple burden in fulfilling their "threefold economic role" – agricultural work (subsistence economy), childrearing, and wage-earning public sector work. It was also part of the "social contract" that socialist authorities "provided" workers with the time, resources, and facilities to engage in work in the second economy (Kideckel, 1993).

The fact that work was considered to be both a right and a duty in Romania, and thus mandatory for all adults, led to stratification among households and to the reorganization of family life. Welfare policies differentiated between "working" and "non-working" poor, and while the "working (deserving) poor" had access to all types of social benefits (housing, targeted social support through the workplace, child allowances, free healthcare, etc.) the "non-working (undeserving) poor" were considered to be without work due to the weakness of their character and were therefore excluded from most types of benefits. For example, free health care for adult men and women who were not mothers was work related. Likewise, only a working parent was entitled to receive child allowances for his or her children (Zamfir, 1998). Further, without having stable employment individuals were not eligible to receive state subsidized housing, and did not have access to targeted social support which was distributed through various enterprises. Nevertheless, official state discourse claimed to offer universal social benefits to all its citizens. Researchers, such as Zamfir (1998), say that until the end of the 1970s more or less generous social benefits existed, but they were drastically cut back with the worsening of the economic situation in the early 1980s. It remains largely unexplored territory as to how differentiation and selection worked in such services as housing, schooling, and employment under socialism in

Romania. All these processes of 'selection' were essentially invisible, taking place in the private or semi-private domains of people's lives, as well as in "behind the scenes" offices, bars, cafes and other semi-private domains of the nomenklatura, where they decided whom to include or exclude in the distribution of their favors. These processes inevitably contributed to the (re)production of inequalities and poverty.

Because research on poverty and related phenomena did not exist in socialist Romania, there is very little information on who was excluded from the "universal" welfare system and why; what happened to those who were excluded; how the welfare policies were implemented at the national and local levels; and how the system of work related social benefits contributed to stratification among households and to the reproduction of inequalities. The fact that these and other similar issues have not been researched in the Romanian context, leads to suspicion when reading arguments that suggest that the communist poverty was mainly a "life cycle phenomenon" (Szelényi, 2001). This suspicion seems to be validated given that research conducted in other countries of the region, for example in socialist Hungary, showed that in most cases poverty was not exclusively a life cycle phenomenon (although it was in many cases), but a result of several interrelated problems, such as the nature of the socialist economy, the design of the welfare system, as well as the disadvantages that accumulated in families over the decades (e.g. Csalog 1977; Ferge 1998; Kertesi 2004; Szalai 1995, 2002; Solt 1998). Similarly, findings of Elzbieta Tarkowska (2001, 2002) in Poland link poverty – among other factors – to the number of children in a household, and to various other conditions such as unemployment, and the breaking down/failure of the educational and social services systems. This was particularly the case in the countryside.

Since there were so many dividing lines, differing interests, multiple identities and commitments, and varied life trajectories among all those classified under the term "workers", it is also very questionable whether a unified (class-conscious) and more or less stable socialist "working class" even existed before 1989, as is presented by many researchers (e.g. Kideckel 2002, Peter 2003, Ruszuly 2004).

3.3 The collapse of socialism and its effects on society

The collapse of socialism in the late 1980s brought about changes in the social systems and social practices of the former communist countries. This, Kaneff and Pine (2011) argue, coupled with the "global restructuring of capitalism" and "technological advances" that led to the further reorganization of labor markets and capital movements, had particularly dire consequences for formerly communist states. In post-communist countries, where interventions were "designed to alter, radically, centralized socialist states" the reforms led not only to economic and political restructuring, but "they also had significant social impact, reflected in dramatic demographic changes (e.g. declining life expectancies and birth rates), falling living standards and general disruption and fragmentation of communities and households" (Kaneff and Pine, 2011:2).

One of the important theoretical debates generated by these changes concerned the possible directions in which these societies would develop. Although there were competing arguments about what might follow, many social scientists assumed that a particular (post-socialist) type of capitalism, with its corresponding social configurations, would develop in the majority of these countries. In contrast to such generalizations, many sociologists and anthropologists working in the region emphasized that fragmentation, polarization, and complex patterns of adaptation characterized post-socialist societies, where old inequalities and social structures (even those that pre-dated socialism) greatly influenced which paths the lives of certain groups were able to take (e.g. Kalb 2002; Nagengast 2001; Pine 1998; Stewart 2002; Szalai 2000).

Addressing this debate, Chris Hann (2002) points out that the decisive effects of the "experience of Marxist-Leninist socialism, the reproduction of a common layer of socialist institutions, ideology and moral purpose over two generations or more" were often underplayed by researchers (2002:11). According to Hann, owing to the closed nature of socialist countries, it wasn't until the 1970s that the interest of Western anthropologists turned towards these societies. Although at that time the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology had already partially broken down, for the most part, the few researchers working in socialist countries "adhered to the paradigm that was being gradually abandoned in Western countries: the primary concern was with remote, disappearing social worlds, the antithesis of the dominant aggressive modernism of socialist ideology."

(2002:2) However, after regime change new research interests emerged in these countries, reflecting both changing concerns in the discipline, and the fresh focuses brought about by local and western scholars who started working in post-socialist societies. Issues which became important concerns were dilemmas of privatization and moral justice; increased poverty and the ways in which different groups responded to it; the phenomenon of nostalgia for the old system; the social factors that shape changing consumption patterns; and problems related to human trafficking and prostitution. However, Hann argues, scholars of post-socialism often treated these processes as completely 'new' social phenomena, disconnected from the socialist past.

Raising similar concerns, Caroline Humphrey (2002) points out that many concerned with research in post-socialist societies had overlooked the fact that during this period it would be misleading to talk about "a sudden and total emptying out of all social phenomena and their replacement by other ways of life." (2002:12) According to Humphrey, socialism existed not only as a set of practices, but also as public and covert ideologies and contestations and a foundational unity that derived from Marx and Lenin. From her perspective, the various structures of socialism had more in common than existing capitalism, and people used this category profitably and without qualms to the present day.

Based on the anthropological evidence collected in the past two decades, Hann warns that attempts to transfer the western institutional, economic, and social models to post-socialist societies are, in most cases, misplaced and doomed to failure because they overlook such continuity. According to Hann strong similarities existed across socialism – for example institutional practices and the logic of bureaucratic centralism – as well as many ongoing practices that are found in other parts of the world such as civil society, trust, and legitimacy. However, again according to Hann, in the post-socialist context scholars should be very cautious when using such terms as community, (civil) society, and culture because of the frequent misuse of these terms. He uses "culture" as an example, stating that this is a concept that was often abused when referring to things that supposedly explain reasons for the failure of policies (e.g. Gypsy culture, Balkan mentality, etc.). Hann sees the integration of different fields and different methods as tools to better understand these societies, where micro-research can illuminate the macro-societal problems: "Thus, although

most anthropological work focuses on specific practices at the micro-level, it invariably carries wider implications." (2002:7)

It is in this context that Rainer Neef's findings (2002, 2004) – based on both qualitative and quantitative research – on the different aspects of the 'informal economy' in post-socialist Romania need to be understood. Neef argues that research evidence showed that market forces and institutional reforms in East Central European countries have not reduced the informal economy to the scale known in Western European countries, instead forced even more people into dependency from this segment of the national economies. According to Neef the actors in the Romanian informal economy can be categorized in five umbrella categories:

1. Industrial and agricultural workers, who are either dependent on subsistence farming, or are involved in producing and repairing services, street trading or household services;
2. Qualified workers and employees, supplementing their incomes by subsistence farming and/or informal trade, modern services and specialized producing and repairing activities;
3. Small informal entrepreneurs who gained their position through personal dynamism, good household potential and enabling networks;
4. Qualified workers, clerical workers, professionals and academics who usually have the highest informal incomes from agrarian and non-agrarian businesses, or from providing modern services;
5. Others, with marginal activities (criminal and illegal activities, tax evasion, etc.) (2004:119-131)

The accuracy and utility of Neef's five categories is arguable. Although his work was valuable in shedding light on an historically under-researched area of study in Romania, some of his specific conclusions may be the result of conceptual and definitional shortcomings: closure and group divisions might be non-existent where he sees them; and use of a western concept of 'informal economy' may have made it impossible to grasp the complex economic phenomena he observed on the ground and thus created major conceptual confusion (e.g. overlaps between his analytical categories, confusion among the use of informal/illegal/marginal/corrupt, etc.). His analysis may even have overlooked the continuities between socialist and post socialist economic activities, further distorting some of his conclusions as to how 'informality' should be understood in post-socialist economic contexts.

Nevertheless, Neef's findings did draw much needed attention to some of the under-researched fields of Romanian economic and social conditions, emphasizing that a more complex and ambiguous stratification structure existed than had been previously thought. From Neef's findings

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it is also evident that activities of households in the formal and informal economy rarely overlapped, and that if one looked only to positions held in the formal economy (as surveys usually do) the data would not record and reflect all simultaneously existing commitments of families and individuals.

Only with the above caveats in mind, and with some reservation, should one interpret the findings of national and international organizations on Romanian poverty. The ability of the methods that are used in such large-scale surveys is limited in grasping all the complex phenomena that emerge with and around poverty and inequalities. Nevertheless, the tendencies in poverty trends signaled by such surveys often corresponded with data collected by scholars using ethnography and micro-level research in an effort to understand the very same phenomena. A World Bank (2003) evaluation report indicated that by 1995 a quarter of the Romanian population was already poor (25.4%), and after a brief decrease in 1996 (to 20.1%), poverty continued to increase and reached its peak (35.9%) in 2000. Although the rate of poverty among the population was still 28.9% in 2003, and the incidence of "extreme poverty" was 10.9%, from 2000 on there was a slow decrease in both numbers.

However, there are some major concerns with conclusions that are based on such an approach. For example, according to the same 2003 World Bank report, the best predictors of poverty in Romania, and most East Central European countries are household size and the number of children in a household; a low level of education of the head of the household; gender, in cases where the head of the household is a woman; race (Romany-ness); and unemployment. Never the less, artificially creating 'group-ness' and suggesting homogeneity – in households, among women, Roma, unemployed, large families, the less-educated – and linking these "groups" to poverty, contributes to the reproduction of stereotypical images, greatly reinforcing distorted perceptions of individuals who are seen as members of such 'groups'. In addition, it often further distorts such data when it is incorrectly assumed that a male is always the head of a household in cases when couples live together. This is especially the case in poverty research as it frequently leads to a reversal in the understanding of what the causes and effects of certain processes are. This, in turn, results in superficial judgments as to why certain conditions develop and/or persist, making more likely misguided and badly targeted poverty policies.

On the other hand, while there is a claim that such research findings are broad and comprehensive, as referred to above, many aspects of social realities on the ground (that need ethnographic and other qualitative research methods to be better understood) cannot factor into this type of data. For example, other research data indicated that in Romania unemployment is a relatively poor predictor of poverty, because only 11.9% of the poor are unemployed (Popescu 2004). Data from the 2005 Barometer of Public Opinion on "working poor" supports this statement, finding that 32% of urban and 18.4% of rural households living in poverty had at least one employed member (2005). These latter findings are important because they help to shed light on how local governments often try to manipulate economic data when they present decreases in unemployment rates as the best indicators of the economic wellbeing of their inhabitants.

Further, such data – compiled to 'identify' groups that were at high risk for poverty – and the resulting policy decisions, often created categories of 'undeserving poor' that brought about new disadvantages for people who were perceived as belonging to such 'groups'. Lydia Morris, for example, argues that in capitalist societies ideologies built around family, work and citizenship that operate through the public and private dichotomy and the welfare state often marginalize women to a position of dependency. In this ideological context, categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor are created and institutionalized through social policies: thus, single mothers, and families with many children (as well as categories of people in other socio-historical environments) often come to be reified as the "dangerous classes" (1994)

While data showed that increases in inequalities and exclusion from "normal" consumption came to characterize large segments of Romanian society after regime change in 1989, anthropologists carrying out research in the region were working to uncover the complex adaptation patterns that emerged within the population. Some of their findings highlighted that the roots of many inequalities went as far back as pre-socialism. Embedded in this research approach, and attempting to transcend the 'socialist/post-socialist' historical dichotomy that often neglected socio-economic conditions that pre-dated socialism, Pine (2002) argues that depending on existing historical and regional preconditions, different and complicated sets of "regimes" of value arose not only among different countries, but also within different regions of the same country. This resulted in "multi-

layered and textured attitudes to labor and consumer goods" (2002:213). However, she also points out that while such differing histories need to be kept in mind, it is often the case that phenomena identified and analyzed in one country "can be used to highlight similar processes in the former satellite states" (2002:212). Her points are supported not only by her own work, but for example, by evidence resulting from research conducted by Fehérváry in Hungary (2002) and Iliev in Bulgaria (2001).

Work of the three authors (Pine, Fehérváry, Iliev) suggests that now differences in access to consumption (and discourses about it) are smaller across countries than across social classes. It is interesting to see that individuals who occupy distant positions in social space apparently develop very different discursive and adaptation strategies towards consumption, while individuals who are close to each other in social space develop very similar ones. That is, new dividing lines appeared in post-socialist societies between those who are "included" in the act of "normal" consumption and those who are "excluded" from it (Fehérváry 2002, Iliev 2001, Pine 2002).

Pine, Fehérváry and Iliev all argue that during socialism, in a shortage economy, patterns of consumption and access to goods were more a function of symbolic capital (networks and status) than of economic capital. According to these authors, if one looked only at the superficial changes in the three societies, it might seem that in post-socialist consumption emphasis was shifting more and more towards the absolute hegemony of economic capital (consumption depends on what can be afforded by individuals). Moreover, it also seems that an increasingly homogenized view of what is considered to be "normal life" and "normal consumption" becomes dominant in public discourse. Nevertheless, while attempting to understand the phenomena of "normal" consumption, Fehérváry shows that many norms related to consumption that were thought to be new are actually rooted in past socialist consumption. Focusing on the post-socialist 'obsession' with clean, tidy and hygienic kitchens and bathrooms, Fehérváry highlights how such 'norms' were constructed already during communism:

> "State-socialist understandings of a modern, discriminating subjectivity focused on hygiene and an informed consumer consciousness. Hygiene was central to notions of modern lifestyles, as in this description of the up-to-date bathroom in a 1977 article in *Lakáskultúra*: 'The bathroom is the home's most intimate place. If there is any place one can pass judgment on the [family,] this place offers the most opportunities. The family's hygienic demands (*igények*) and their level of culture is displayed' (1977/5). An article on new state-produced kitchen items from 1967 implies that the modern, cultured person was responsible for keeping

abreast of constantly changing technologies, design innovations and even fashions, striving to incorporate them into his or her own life." (2002:386)

Studies by Iliev and Pine point to another aspect of the process: Consumption patterns thought to serve the "normal" way of life (that which is similar to an imagined western lifestyle and level of consumption) are put into practice in innovative ways and translated into a material culture even by those who otherwise cannot afford consumption of these expensive goods (for example, buying fashionable designer clothes in second hand shops; sewing their clothes based on western patterns; decorating their apartments in a western style, etc.). Apparently, deviations from that which is thought to be "normal consumption" positively correlate with a somewhat lower social position. These studies on alternative and atypical consumption practices offer some insights into how people in possession of different amounts and types of social, cultural and symbolic capital try to transform these other forms of capital into substitutes for their lack of economic capital.

3.4 Explanatory frameworks of socialist and postsocialist poverty and inequalities

Researchers working on post-socialist poverty and class formation (Szelényi and Emigh 2000, Szelényi 2001; Ladányi and Szelényi 2004, 2006) argue that the collapse of socialist states put an end to many processes known during socialism, and brought about radical restructuring at the bottom level of these societies: "post-communism may have produced 'new poverty' and an 'underclass' is in formation, especially in cases when poverty is racialized" (Szelényi 2001:5). Szelényi and Ladányi argue (2006) that there is evidence that an underclass[48], very similar to the one that developed in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, was in formation in post-socialist societies. According to Szelényi and Ladányi, in some countries this underclass was strongly racialized (e.g. Hungary), while in others (e.g. Romania) race was not the main factor determining membership in this underclass.

Hence, because of the similarity, they argue that it is justifiable and useful to look at the processes that contributed to the formation of such an underclass in the United States. They point to the

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[48] Their definition: "We interpret the underclass as one specific case of social and economic exclusion. Hence we consider alternative concepts, such as lower class, under-caste, and underclass, to describe the structural position of groups at the bottom of social hierarchy in different social and historical contexts." (2001:5)

restructuring of the economy of the two countries as the main cause of the appearance of an underclass, saying that the demand for unskilled and low skilled labor drastically dropped in both countries in the periods discussed. They cite J.W. Wilson, who argues that Black poor existed even before these economic changes, but their marginalization became irreversible only after they were excluded from the mainstream labor market, which led to the consolidation of a Black underclass[49].

Another framework applied by Szelényi and Ladányi to explain post-socialist poverty is the "culture of poverty" theory. They argue that the term "culture of poverty" is not problematic if it is used in its original meaning developed by Oscar Lewis. As they say, the problem is not that this phenomenon is identified and analyzed by researchers, but that often the causal relationships between structural and cultural factors are inverted. Nevertheless, the validity of their approach and arguments is questioned not only by research data collected in socialist and post-socialist countries (see for example works by Csalog, Kemény, Kertesi, Pine, Solt, Spéder, Stewart, Szalai, etc.), but also by a whole stream of ethnographic scholarship that developed in the United States in order to refute many of Oscar Lewis' claims about the way of life of the poor[50].

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[49] It is important to mention that since its spread in academia and public discourse, the "underclass" theory was much debated already in the United States. The term was coined by Gunnar Myrdal (1962) who originally used it to describe a stratum of the U.S. population that was affected by structural changes in the economic system of the 1960s. But, as Herbert J. Gans highlights (1995), the term quickly became racialized, combined with the theory of the "culture of poverty" developed by Oscar Lewis, and transformed into an "umbrella term". This meant, according to Gans, that the theory was extended without much consideration to the totality of the poor, and with the assumption that the roots of poverty were not in the structural changes of the economy, but in the behavior of the "undeserving poor." This assumption was soon turned against the poor. Loic Wacquant argues (1993, 1996, 1999) that these changes in public discourse had effects on public policies, and were complemented both by withdrawal of the state from many levels of the social support system, and by criminalization of poverty. These processes led to further marginalization of the poor. For all these reasons, many researchers in the United States refused to use the term "underclass", and even researchers like W.J. Wilson, who contributed to the refinement of the "underclass" theory, distanced themselves from the term in the mid 1990s.

[50] One of Lewis's main conclusions (1966) is that positive change among the poor occurs only at the societal level (revolutions; ethnic, religious movements, etc.) or at the community level (sense of belonging to a larger group; strong value system and organizational culture of an isolated community, etc.). Consequently, he assumes that once the culture of poverty develops in a society, upward mobility at the level of families or individuals is not possible. However, research conducted in poor communities in the U.S. showed that there are individuals/families that succeeded in breaking the cycle of poverty. For example Carol Stack (1997) concluded in her research about kinship relations in a deprived black community in the U.S. that while the welfare system kept mothers dependent (an entire way of life organized around kinship and community relations), there were two factors that helped families to escape poverty: First, the creation of the nuclear family (breaking up most kinship relations), and second, the accumulation of at least a small amount of capital savings. Longitudinal research data presented in the book of Jay MacLeod (1995)

Michael Stewart in his article *Deprivation, the Roma, and the Underclass* (2002) directly addresses some of the theoretical assumptions of Szelényi and his co-authors. Stewart engages in the ongoing debate as to whether or not theoretical models "borrowed" from other countries (underclass, culture of poverty, human rights approach), especially from the United States, can have any explanatory value in processes observed in relation to the Roma of post-socialist countries. Stewart argues that there are many problems when applying these niches to the Roma. He contends that the use of the 'underclass' theory tends to portray the marginalization and exclusion of the Roma as definitive, while recent ethnographic findings from the region show that exclusion often is only situational (migration research), ideological (Roma and peasants in Romanian village), and the degree of geographical exclusion is often constructed artificially, at the discursive level (Budapest ghetto). In relation to the application of the 'culture of poverty' niche he emphasizes three important aspects of the problem. First, he states that many researchers writing about the Roma in Hungary continue the unfortunate traditions of seeing the Roma as marginal groups that 'lack culture'. According to Stewart this is "the legacy of an unanthropological understanding of public culture predicated on notions of civility." He thinks that many setbacks of public institutions in effectively addressing the needs of the Roma were a result of "failure to pay attention to distinctive Romany social patterns". Second, he argues that while the culture of poverty model portrays the poor as disorganized, it misses the fact that there might be patterns of organization among the Roma that are different from those of the majority population. Third, the culture of poverty model wrongly assumes that "there might be a single, coherent way of adapting functionally to long-term deprivation", but in reality the adaptation patterns of deprived people are always more varied and complex. Stewart concludes that owing to the debate surrounding the terms 'underclass' and 'culture of poverty' he prefers "the blander term 'social exclusion'".[51]

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about the connections between school success and employment market position among white and black ghetto youth also provided evidence that upward mobility is often possible only at the family/individual level. Paul Willis – who provides evidence that the resistance of certain students to the dominant school structures (self-exclusion from the educational setting, deviant behavior, and seeking employment at a very early age) often contributed to the reproduction of their working-class status – argues that "it cannot be assumed that cultural forms are determined in some way as an automatic reflex by macro determinations such as class location, region, and educational background. (…) Just because there are what we can call structural and economic determinants it does not mean that people will unproblematically obey them." (1977:171)

[51] Stewart concludes his article by pointing out that the solutions offered from a United States human rights perspective ("juridical changes and legal challenges to established practice can offer a road to 'liberation'"), in most

Loic Wacquant, another author who questions the relevance of concepts such as "culture of poverty" and "underclass", suggests analyzing such processes through the "advanced marginality"[52] framework he developed. In his work (1996, 1999) he compares the situation of poor urbanites in European and American metropolises, and argues that the novelty of this new marginalization lies in the fact that poverty in western metropolises is no longer cyclical or residual, it is not remediable by market expansion, and it is not as geographically diffuse as it used to be. Instead, it appears to be increasingly long-term, disconnected from macroeconomic trends, and located in "disreputable" neighborhoods. Waquant claims that contrary to first impressions in Europe "the changeover of the continental metropolis has not triggered a process of ghettoization" (1999:1644) where culturally uniform populations live together, and where group- and space-specific organizations appear and duplicate the institutional framework of the broader society. In European metropolises poor neighborhoods can be perceived as "anti-ghettos", since conflicts arise precisely because of the extreme ethnic heterogeneity in these areas, because of the great propinquity in social and physical space between natives and immigrants, as well as because of the incapacity of these places to supply the basic needs and support the daily activities of their inhabitants. Although it would be a mistake to transfer uncritically Wacquant's theoretical framework into a postsocialist context, nevertheless, his line of thought helps to put in context some of Szelényi's and his co-authors' claims about the appearance of an American-type 'underclass' in the European urban areas, and about the existing similarities between processes observed in European metropolises and cities in the U.S.

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cases are not applicable to the situation of the Roma, because, when compared to the United States, there have been different legislative frameworks in place in Hungary, the racial traits of the Roma are less visible than that of the blacks, and the racial conflicts have been very different in the two settings.

[52] Wacquant posits four structural causes that he contends fuel this new marginality:

1) the changed macrosocial dynamics of these societies (rising inequality despite economic increase; splitting the workforce and polarizing access to durable employment);

2) the economic dynamics, namely the mutation of wage labor (elimination of millions of low-skilled jobs under pressure from automation and foreign labor competition; degradation and dispersion of basic conditions of employment, remuneration, and insurance);

3) the political dynamic, namely the reconstruction of welfare states (states are major producers and shapers of urban marginality, therefore they need to be analyzed both as "generative" and "remedial" institutions);

4) the spatial dynamics, namely the concentration of poverty in given neighborhoods and the consequent stigmatization of these areas (poverty seems to conglomerate in metropolises around "no-go" areas that are clearly identified as such both by residents and outsiders, and thus the place in which one lives becomes a territorial stigma which further burdens the residents of these areas; since the creation/appearance of such neighborhoods depends on the state's presence or absence in these places, their emergence and consolidation are political issues).

While the above quoted scholarship that is critical of such concepts as "culture of poverty" and "underclass" offers insight into some of the flaws in Szelényi and Ladányi's theoretical approach, such flaws become even more visible if we contrast their studies of the poor (2001, 2004, 2006) with one of Szelényi's earlier, large scale researches on the East-Central European elites (Szelényi, Eyal, and Townsley 1998).

Szelényi, Eyal, and Townsley in their book *Making Capitalism without Capitalists* (1998) claim that in the transition from socialism to capitalism in Central European post-communist societies the main source of power became cultural capital. They argue that in Central Europe, contrary to what other social scientists claim (e.g. the theory of political capitalism developed by Elemér Hankiss and Jadwiga Staniszkis), possession of political capital – defined as social capital, highly institutionalized by, and through membership in, the Communist Party – became an advantage in the transitional years only if the individual possessed other forms of capital as well – most importantly cultural capital. The empirical data Szelényi and his co-authors collected in Central European countries shows that the majority of the former communist party members who held administrative positions (the nomenklatura), experienced significant downward mobility (e.g. they were driven into early retirement), and that converting political capital into economic capital was more the exception than the rule.

In order to explain such social change, Szelényi and his co-authors introduce the idea of "trajectory correction/adjustment" and claim that "habitus links individual actors to social-structural determinants, and in this interactive process, *both are likely to be altered*." (1998:44) That is, in the process of "trajectory adjustment", individuals whose habitus is not serving their interests in successfully adapting to the changing society look for other behavioral and societal models which are accessible to them, for example from the pre-communist past of their countries. In this context, Szelényi and his co-authors see "*capitalism without capitalists*" as a distinctive new strategy of transition adopted by an educated class of technocratic-intellectual elites to create a new bourgeois society and a capitalist economic order[53].

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[53] They argue that the spirit and ideology of this post-communist technocracy has its roots in economic rationalism (monetarism) and the idea of civil society. However, they say that at the moment of their writing, this 'second Bildungsbürgertum' – an alliance of dissident intellectuals and reform-minded communist technocrats – seemed to be

analysis

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Szelényi and his co-authors find Bourdieu's idea of habitus crucial to understanding the "interaction between social agents and the social relationships they both constitute and confront" (1998:44) in Central Europe during the past century. In their attempt to "conceptualize the dynamics of changing social structure in the biographies of the actors who lived through this turbulent century" they envision social structure – based on Bourdieu's theory – as a "traveling space" in which different social actors in possession of various types of capital engage in classificatory struggles "to negotiate the social meanings of positions, boundaries, and collective identities." (1998:41) In this framework they argue that class boundaries are only imaginary, drawn "on paper" by social scientist, in contrast to the social spaces studied by sociologists which are "real positions and dispositions around which the formation of classes can occur." (1998:41)[54]

That is to say, that Szelényi and his co-authors in their book *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists* (1998) – which predated their subsequent research on the poor that used as analytical tools the "culture of poverty" and "underclass" theories (2000, 2001, 2004, 2006) – developed a theoretical argument about "trajectory correction/adjustment" and the "transformative power of capital" which they thought was applicable to post-socialist elites, but not to a post-socialist poor "underclass". Thus, although not in an explicit way, their approach implies that there is a category of poor people (an 'underclass') that lack agency and have no 'capital' and/or 'culture' that could be used 'in trade' or 'transformed' in the process of "trajectory adjustment". Thus, if we accept Szelényi and his co-authors' premise, then no trajectory adjustment would be possible for the poor, other than occasional downward mobility.

"more successful in establishing the market institutions of modern capitalism than in creating a class of individual private proprietors." (1998:9)

[54] Szelényi's and his co-authors' final conclusion is that "the formation of classes under post-communism is a highly contested process involving diverse candidates who could constitute a new propertied class – the technocratic-managerial elite, foreign investors with their compradore [native managers of houses of business] intellectual allies, and the new entrepreneurs who are starting small businesses in the hope that they will grow big." (1998:15) In their view capitalism is a "mosaic of the most diverse socio-economic structures and institutions" (1998:16) and in order to understand the processes going on in different societies they "call for a study of comparative capitalism", a "neoclassical sociology". The question, as they see it, is "how do the initial conditions of capitalist transformation affect the kind of capitalism that will be made, where it will be made, and by whom it will be made?" (1998:16)

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The lack of consistency in Szelenyi and his co-authors' approach reinforces the critical voices quoted earlier in this chapter (Bertaux and Delcroix 2000), claiming that some elitism might easily originate from Bourdieu's initial theory of capital. Further, such contradictions also reinforce Michael Stewart's (2002) arguments about "the legacy of an unanthropological understanding of public culture predicated on notions of civility", understandings that define categories of people as completely 'culture-less'..

At the same time, the comparison of Szelényi and his co-authors' work on elites and the poor also raises the more general question about the relevance and validity of their postsocialist "class formation theory" in which they created a framework and undertook research at the two 'extremes' of the spectrum – 'elites' and the 'underclass' – without bringing the findings and the two frameworks together. The question then becomes, whether it is possible to talk about 'class formation' – either of 'elites' or an 'underclass' – in a context where the authors completely ignore the (simultaneous) formation of the other 'classes' in post-socialist societies? If we accept their premise about social space as a "traveling space" where mobility and class formation can occur around certain "real positions and dispositions" why should one imagine and accept the existence of two totally 'segregated' physical and conceptual (social) spaces – one comprised of the elites and the other the underclass?

Although 'class formation' is not the focus of this thesis, and I will only briefly return to this issue in the concluding chapter, the prominence and the extent of the debate surrounding the issue in the postsocialist context make it necessary to reflect briefly on the topic in the closing paragraphs of the theory section of this chapter. My understanding of 'culture' is closest to that of Narotzky and Smith (2006) as explained in their book, *Immediate Struggles*: "seen over a historical period, changing concrete abstractions combine with the agency of people's practice to change the conditions that confront them. Language, gestures, and signs, patterned by the structures of feeling of a given place and time, then make those things knowable. And these taken together – concrete abstractions, practiced agency, and structured feeling – cast each of us into a particular kind of person: a historicized social subject/agent." (2006:6)

Using this broad understanding Narotzky and Smith argue that their findings in the region of Spain where they conducted their research indicated that "instituted practices and structures of feeling – a combination many would be quick to gloss as 'culture' – are the crucial elements of social regulation in this regional economy. But if culture is to be seen as a form of social regulation, then surely it is impossible to talk of regulation without power. When we talk of the ability of a social actor to mobilize the capital of his family (and let's be specific – his daughters, his grandparents), we must surely be referring to power. When we go further and recognize that this control is specifically directed to economic ends, it is hard to escape the need to configure this in terms of class." (2006:209)

In this context, the two authors argue that it is not the structural properties of class – "be they Weberian social strata or Marxian relations to the means of production" (2006:9) – that are the most important for them, but the principles that made class interesting for researchers in the first place: the (Marxian) image of society "in which the process of social reproduction generates structural contradictions which, in turn, are resolved – technologically through greater overall productivity, geographically through displacements of capital across space or, most important, through the outcome of social conflicts – conflicts that cluster people around the control of property and the necessity to offer out labor." (2006:9) This understanding of class, which I find the most useful to define and operationalize class for my own research, is an understanding that acknowledges the simultaneity and scale that are inherent in the processes that produce and reproduce unequal social relations, and sees them as embedded in the broader social structures and reproductive processes of society. These dynamic and multilayered dimensions are missing from the framework developed by Szelényi and his colleagues, leading them to see 'closure' and 'crystallization' in their understanding of classes, especially in their analysis and perception of a consolidating 'underclass'.

PART TWO

NARRATIVES OF POVERTY

Chapter 4

Negotiating poverty: constructing frameworks of inclusion

This chapter is structured around the edited transcript of the first two conversations I had with Anca, one of my informants in the Iris district. Her life history narrative reflects on the trajectories of several generations in her family and highlights how interdependent and interconnected most processes are that create and/or reproduce inequalities and poverty. Anca's narrative is rich in biographical details that illustrate how her family and others coped with events in their lives both on specific occasions as well as over several decades. At the same time it also encompasses a range and depth of human experience which would have been lost if I had only used brief quotes from her comments, inserted within my analysis.

As importantly, however, the transcript of my conversation with Anca reveals some of the narrative structures by which many individuals and families gave meaning to their own actions and lives within broader historical events[55]. As Vieda Skultans points out, in a life history "the narrator seeks to bestow a unity of experience upon the narrated life" and thus, the "narrative form reveals the cultural resources upon which people draw in order to restore meaning to lives" (1998:22-24). In such a setting, Skultans claims, "narrative grants a more radical role to individuals in the shaping of their ideas. (…) The narrator imposes a design on her life and this offers scope for creativity" (1998:22).

Thus, including a comprehensive transcript, leads to a better understanding of the existing narrative forms of inequalities as they are present in society. As referenced in previous chapters, selective and exclusionary narratives of poverty and inequalities dominated/dominate discourse in

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[55] Anca's narrative had much in common with many of the narratives I collected during my fifteen months in the Iris district. However, I chose to incorporate her narrative into this thesis not only because of these commonalities, but because Anca was one of the few informants with whom I had the opportunity to talk in two consecutive sessions, lasting several hours each. Therefore, Anca's narrative could be incorporated without much editing, capturing her voice with only minimal intervention.

the Romanian public sphere. Therefore, my informants in their life history narratives regularly engaged – both directly and indirectly – in a dialog with such dominant public discourses.

However, as Michael Gilsenan (1996) argues, in a society there is no such thing as one coherent narrative, rather many different narratives exist and circulate. Some of these narratives are constantly retold and enacted, while others cannot be or have not been told. By including such a comprehensive transcript in this thesis I hope to begin to fill a void in the discursive space in which life history narratives of poverty – that are often silenced and hidden from public view – are recounted and enter the public sphere.

The chapter starts with a discussion of some of the methodological implications that emerged from using life history interviews in combination with ethnographic research. Immediately following is the transcript of Anca's life history. This transcript affords the opportunity to expose some of the most important aspects of Anca's use of her life history to establish her 'social' persona and self, and to give meaning to her family's life. As will be seen, Anca's narrative interpretations were influenced by her understandings of the mechanisms that created inequalities and poverty in her life, effecting the strategies she employed to negotiate her way through difficult life situations. The conclusions section to this chapter briefly discusses some of the narrative structures Anca used to reflect on her agency and her actions in the context of her wider environment.

4.1 Methodological considerations

During our first encounter my relationship with Anca was clearly not taking place on a level playing field: I was asking questions about her life and intimate feelings and she agreed to answer those questions without asking for the same information about my own life. However, what helped to maintain some degree of balance during our conversations was the fact that Anca knew I had no prior knowledge of events in her life and thus she was in control of the information she decided to share, putting forth her interpretations and perceptions of her life and 'persona'. Although I had been conducting research in her neighborhood for months, prior to this first conversation we had heard about, but did not know much about, each other. Our first meeting was further balanced by the fact that it was not possible to know how our relationship would develop; although she agreed

to talk to me it was still an open question whether or not – in the end – she would give her consent to write about her family and life. In this sense, during this first conversation, while I was trying to balance professional considerations with my respect for her privacy and the gratitude I felt that she agreed to share her life history with me I was also working hard not to disturb, misuse or lose the trust she decided, in advance, to give. I am sure that these attitudes – unconscious to a great degree at the time – are reflected in my questions and in her answers, thus having some influence on the outcome of the conversation.

Even though our second conversation – four days later – was in many ways similar to the first, our relationship was, by then, on a much more equal footing. During our first conversation, Anca demonstrated a need to be assured that I respected her and could be trusted. To this end, and only at her request, I shared stories about my own life and circumstances. My willingness to do so convinced her that my intentions and interest were genuine and that we shared commonalities. It became clear that my openness was appreciated when, as our first meeting drew to a close, it was Anca who took the initiative in telling me that she still had "so many stories" to tell and would be happy to have me back sometime soon. It was in this context that during our second conversation I was more confident asking questions about issues I thought might be too sensitive to pursue in greater depth during our first conversation.

At these first two meetings, our situation – structured primarily by the dynamic of me asking questions – required a lot of trust and openness on Anca's part. Aware of the necessity and complexity of trust in such relationships, I have taken great care not to appropriate Anca's or other people's stories in ways that might cause them harm. In relation to this I feel as Bourdieu felt when he wrote, "How can we not feel anxious about making *private* words *public,* revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals? (…) [N]o contract carries as many unspoken conditions as one based on trust. In the first place, we had to protect the people who confided in us." (1999:1) In order to protect Anca and her family, I changed her name and the names of all the people in her story, as well as the names of some of the places she talked about. Her identity is further concealed because she changed houses and jobs on several occasions. In addition, due to economic and spatial restructuring that took place in the city and the district, many of the companies and places

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she talked about no longer exist. Finally, the lawsuit she talks about in the transcript – which they initiated in order to keep their home – was over by the time I finished my research and Anca no longer lived in her old neighborhood as their homes had been demolished.

Besides concealing Anca's identity as described above, the transcript of our discussion is not identical to the original in several other ways: transcription cannot convey many important nonverbal aspects of the interaction, while the translation from Romanian to English required changes in syntax as well as of words that allowed her essential meaning to be preserved. Although I tried to translate Anca's words and expressions as close to the originals as possible and included many descriptors of her non-verbal communication – her silences, laughs, irony – I am aware and want to make clear that some changes in tone and meaning were inevitable. Nevertheless, as Skultans argues, transcription and translation are sometimes necessary and helpful steps for the anthropologist to be able to gain some intellectual distance from her/his informants: "both transcription and translation open up the possibility of greater analytic understanding. Both processes involve an act of distancing: transcription moves away from individual voices, translation from the familiar embeddedness of words." (1998:126) In this case, transcription and translation gave me a clearer perspective on the individual/particular frameworks Anca used in order to establish meaning in her life and highlighted some of the common and widely shared explanatory patterns she relied on when constructing her narrative.

Further, although I did as little editing of the two conversations as possible, it was still necessary to cut sections of the text, owing to length: The two transcripts totaled 120 pages, approximately 26,000[56] words. That would have been impossible to handle in the framework of a thesis with strict limits on length and format. Thus, I deleted most of the sections during which Anca showed me photos of her family. The accompanying conversation could not have been understood without seeing the photos. I also left out a section during which one of Anca's neighbors stopped by for 30 minutes to talk about a variety of neighborhood issues. Observing their interaction was valuable to my ethnographic insights of the neighborhood and of people's relationships, but had no direct relevance to Anca's life history. I also left out sections during which Anca was involved in

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[56] The length of the transcript I used in this chapter is approximately 10,200 words.

activities not directly related to our conversation, such as offering me food, answering the phone or calling her family.

Finally, I also had to make more explicit what would not be well understood other than in a face-to-face conversation. One of the potential sources for a lack of clarity is that Ioana, a mutual friend, came along to introduce me to Anca. Ioana stayed with us for the first thirty minutes and took part in the conversation. During this time – although we mainly talked about the circumstances for my visit, the history of the district and the people we both knew in the area – Anca did bring up several things about her own life and circumstances, and about the shared work experiences she and Ioana had at the brick factory. After Ioana left Anca made oblique references to that conversation, but did not repeat it. Where it was necessary for the understanding, I "filled in the blanks" with these bits of information. The transcript always indicates the changes I thought to be important for understanding the dynamics, meaning and emotions of our conversation in the context of Anca's increasing trust and openness.

Even after translating the conversation and editing the transcript in the ways described above, I am confident that the main purpose for which I decided to include this transcript – to understand the ways in which Anca's life history reveals the broader social processes that, over the decades, shaped her life, the life of her family, and many people in this and other similar neighborhoods – was in no way obscured. Further, I am also confident that the internal and emotional logic of Anca's fragmented and non-linear narrative of her life history has been preserved. This is why I think that – regardless of the above-explained interventions in the text – I was still able to portray Anca's life in a way that is very close to the way in which she wished to reveal herself and contextualize the events that shaped her and her family's life.

4.1.1 The "Biographical Illusion"

The "life history" method – which I originally wanted to use to complement data from participant observation and archival research – usually requires the researcher to intervene as little as possible in the subject's narrative; let the narration flow as freely and unstructured as possible; and use only a few, preferably open-ended, questions. However, in my experience, fieldwork rarely worked this

way. Most people I talked with in the Iris district had no structured narratives of their lives, or at least no narratives they were ready or willing to share with others. This also meant that when I asked them to tell me about their lives many were puzzled, became silent, apologetic, or even dismissive. I tried using different approaches; asking them to tell me about the Iris district and how they came to live there, about their childhoods, their parents, or something else I thought they might relate to and want to talk about.

However, in practice, this approach was, for the most part, unproductive as well; people became extremely circumspect in their answers, often arguing that all the information they could give me was irrelevant and boring. I also tried to guide conversations with open-ended questions, to help them recount their lives in their own words. In most cases, this approach created difficulties as well, with some people saying that they felt "interrogated" from the many "how" and "why" questions and became anxious, expressing their wish to end the interview. This is why I finally decided to have conversations instead; relinquishing some of the distance between interviewee and interviewer talking freely with people about all kinds of topics, becoming engaged in a way that made for a more natural flow of thoughts, while striving for as much specificity as was possible without having people shut down. These comprehensive conversations and resulting – often fragmented – narratives necessitated spending extended periods of time in the homes of informants, taking part in while observing their lives and daily routines. As Bourdieu puts it: "Against the illusion which consists of seeking neutrality by eliminating the observer, it must be admitted that, paradoxically, the only "spontaneous" process is a constructed one, but *a realist construction*. (…) It is this participation, in which one engages in conversation and brings the speaker to engage in it as well, which most clearly distinguishes ordinary conversation (…) from the interview in which the researcher, out of concern for neutrality, rules out all personal involvement." (1999: 618-619)

As a result, everything became part of the record. There were times when I thought my presence in the interchange became too pronounced; some questions strayed from generally accepted professional practice; I sometimes missed clues which would have helped me to better understand certain aspects of a life, but which I did not realize at the time and so never followed up. In retrospect, I now recognize some of these oversights resulted in missing pieces of information I

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could have collected but did not. When I analyze these texts I can fill in some voids using my ethnographic data, but these are my observations and interpretations, not direct information from the interviewees.

I can also see now, in a number of instances, when I asked leading questions, it would have been possible (and more professional) to ask completely open-ended questions. However, the reality of being in the moment, I sensed from the nonverbal communication of my informants that if I had not offered encouragement they would shut down and terminate the conversation. My feeling at the time, and as of this writing, was/is that if I had not engaged at all in a conversation so as to make it clear that I understand what my informant said, was implying, or what might be indicated by their pauses and silences, they might disengage and withdraw trust. Experience demonstrated that this was a productive way to get my informants to relax and therefore to talk about the issues that were originally difficult for them to raise and share with me. Although in the transcript included here I edited out most of my "response tokens" – the parts of speech that "signal the interviewer's intellectual and emotional participation" (Bourdieu, 1999:610) – to make the text easier to read and understand, these tokens were very important in helping to both create a more level field for conversation and to establish trust with my conversation partners.

I felt, as part of this thesis, I should include a transcription that helped to document the process I am describing here. In anthropology, our choices of methods – with all the subjectivities and possible shortcomings – are greatly reflected in the results and interpretations we arrive at in our writing. Thus, offering an early insight into my fieldwork and my data analysis is important because, in the end, my ability to make sense of the larger picture evolved by understanding one person, one story, one life at a time. By focusing on one specific case, I came to understand where and how that person and those closest to her fit within a larger network of people. Through the frames and patterns that emerged from one family's life and circumstances, I began to better understand the lives of others as well. In addition to this, I also had to make sense of the data collected while spending time in people's homes and neighborhoods, discovering discrepancies between what they told me and the behaviors in which they engaged. It was only then that I was able to place all the families within larger context.

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This leads to another important issue, raised by the use of 'life/oral history' as a method of inquiry, and the considerations one needs to take into account in order to be able to process and integrate the data collected using this method with data coming from other sources. Hareven (1982) argues that although oral history has often been criticized for its subjectivity "when used discriminately as a source for perceptions, rather than "facts", its subjectivity becomes its strength" (1982:xiii). She posits in her work on the intersection between "family time" and "industrial time" that only findings that came from oral history revealed that her informants' perceptions of their life – as evolving and organized according to a "life plan" – greatly effected the responses they gave to broader/historical events: "Although economic forces and constraints were crucial in shaping or handicapping these plans, they did not necessarily determine the style of response. Responses were shaped by the degree to which individuals held on to their culture of origin and family traditions. For example, to the first-generation immigrants, married women's employment was acceptable, whereas the second generation had begun to follow the standards of the native-born that dictated a wife's place was in the home." (1982:361) Hareven's oral history narratives revealed not only that such "life-plans" existed but also the complexity of individual and family conditions in her research field. Narratives helped to explain the discrepancies she observed between her interviewees past lifestyles (rural, peasant), their present ways of living (urban, working class), their aspirations (middle-class and professional), and the family decision making processes (migration, work at an early age, prioritization of economic needs, etc.) employed to adapt to, minimize and/or resolve such contradictions.

Bourdieu, who also emphasized the importance of treating life history narratives as representations – as "biographical illusions" –, argues that it is not sufficient to dissect the elements of this "illusion": One also needs to find and define the context/framework in which these narratives can be interpreted. Such an inquiry, if successful, can reveal dimensions of the life of individuals and groups that cannot be grasped, for example, by statistics. He suggests that there should be two levels in such an analysis: one level in which we analyze the social processes that function in the construction of the life history and where we attempt to understand why the text of the life history is constructed in the way that it is. The other level of analysis is the reconstruction of the (objectively accessible) elements of the world of the narrator.

In his study "The biographical illusion" [57] Bourdieu argues that talking about a 'life history' always implies the presupposition that life is a history and unfolds according to a logical and chronological order. And, while events offered in the narrative may not always follow in strict chronological succession, there is always a tendency to organize them into sequences that are linked to each other based on intelligible relationships. This is because (auto)biographical narrative partially is motivated by a concern to give meaning, "interest in accepting the *postulate of the meaning* of narrated existence" (2000:298).

However, in this context, Bourdieu poses the question about the "existence of a self irreducible to the rhapsody of individual sensations" (2000:299). According to him, the habitus is the key to this "self", because it links "the practices and the representations". Or, as he paraphrases Kant: one must postulate the existence of a self that creates the synthesis of sensations given through intuition and the representations in a consciousness (2000:299). Given its elusiveness, the self/practical identity needs to be grasped somehow; this is why the social world – in a response – creates institutions like the proper name for the integration of the self. Since there are multiple social spaces in which the same biological individual moves as multiple social agent(s), this one name – the "nominal constant" – is used for identification and for creating continuity. Thus, the name is an abstraction and cannot be anything else, because the personality it names is a socially constituted individuality, a composite of "biological and social properties undergoing constant flux", and "all descriptions are valid only within the limits of a specific stage or place" (2000:300). According to Bourdieu, however, it is important to keep in mind that the acts of attribution of the proper name are "operated under the control and with the warrant of the State", a fact which greatly contributes to the creation of "*official description* of this kind of social essence" (2000:300).

Nevertheless, the "laws of official biography will tend to impose themselves quite beyond official situations" (2000:301) determining the types of discourses that are produced about the self and offered for different types of markets. Thus, he states that the "critical analysis of the social processes … that function … in the construction of … the 'life history', and in particular in the privilege accorded to the longitudinal succession of constituent events of life considered as history

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[57] Originally published in 1986, but the text I used was published in 2000 in "Identity: a reader", pages 297-302.

in comparison with the social space in which they are carried out, is not an end in itself." (2000:301) The critical analysis of social processes leads to the construction of the notion of trajectory defined as a "series of successively occupied positions by the same agent" (2000:301) in a constantly changing/transforming space. "One can understand a trajectory (that is, the *social aging* which is independent of the biological aging although it inevitably accompanies it) only on condition of having previously constructed the successive states of the field through which the trajectory has progressed. (…) This preliminary construction is also the condition of all rigorous evaluation of that which can be called the *social surface*, as rigorous description of the *personality* designated by the proper name, that is, the collections of positions simultaneously occupied at a given moment of time by a biological individual socially instituted, acting as support to a collection of attributes suitable for allowing him to intervene as an efficient agent in different fields." (2000:302)

Skultans, while she acknowledges that these two dimensions need to be addressed together when working with life histories, focuses on the narrative aspects of the life history and pays more attention, on the one hand, to the social categories that underpin discourse, and on the other hand, to the content of such narratives that frequently open "windows on unknown, often deviant, realities" (1998:26). Just as I have done in this chapter, Skultans decided to include in her book "much larger segments of direct speech than is customary in an anthropological monograph" (1998:28) in order to expose the ways narrative mechanisms' are employed in practice. Her work in post-Soviet Latvia highlighted that "narrators attempt to compensate for biographical disruption by restoring unity and coherence to narrated lives. The breakdown of the everyday structures of living creates a need to reconstitute meaning in storytelling. (…) Clearly, narrators select and organize memories. But equally the substance of those memories is rooted in past experience (…). Historical narratives are born in the re-encounter between past events and the individual's unifying vision." (1998:26) Skultans' solution to this conundrum, in contrast to that of Bourdieu's, was not to challenge "the truth of the past as witnessed, but rather investigate the cultural resources used to make sense of the past and incorporate it into a personal history." (1998:27) And while she recognizes that there is an ambivalent relationship between cultural representations individuals mobilize and the social reality they experience, she still argues that her research proves that "there

is a continuity and commonality of narratives" and after "the emergence of characteristic patterns and themes, narratives, like texts, take on lives of their own" (1998:27).

Finally, another aspect that is revealed by such a comprehensive narrative and can help to better understand individual and family life trajectories is the interplay between perceptions and human actions, and the role human agency plays in shaping the life course of individuals and their families. While all the above authors are concerned with the relationships that exist between narrative as a constructed reality ("illusion") and social reality as a lived experience, it cannot be ignored that "the ways in which people understand their own relationships to the past, future, and present *make a difference* to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort" (Emirbayer, 1998:973). This approach, which is less concerned with narrative structures and their relationships to "reality" – where reality is understood as a sequence of socio-economic (historical) events – and is more concerned with the influence of individual perceptions on individual actions, complements well the previous approaches in as much as it "allows us to locate the interplay between the reproductive and transformative dimensions of social action (Hays 1994) and to explain how reflectivity can change in either direction, through the increasing routinization or problematization of experience" (Emirbayer, 1998:973).

For the purposes of this thesis I see the above theoretical approaches as complementary and useful in understanding the many different layers of life history narratives as they are embedded in social relations, historical changes, and individual and family life trajectories.

4.2 "…I would rather remain poor…"

Anca was born into a brick factory workers' family in the Iris district in the early 1970s. Both of her parents came to Cluj from nearby villages during the 1960s, and both of them began working at the brick factory almost immediately after their arrival. They met each other there, liked each other, and got married after a few years. They had five children, three daughters and two sons; Anca was the oldest among them. Anca's mother was employed as an unskilled worker at the brick factory for more than two decades before she found other employment in the city, while her father – after a life spent in the same unskilled position – retired from there. Anca, even though she tried to pursue a different career path, was just one among many other brick factory workers' children who ended up continuing their parents' employment patterns. She started work at the brick factory in October 1987, after her vocational school graduation, and remained employed there until the factory was closed in December 2000.

Anca lived in the Iris district for most of her adult life. This was where I met her during my fieldwork, in November 2008. That year was a very busy one for Anca; she was working two shifts at a single-use camera recycling factory and was orchestrating her family's move from the flat they used to rent from the brick-factory to a new one, which they bought in September of 2008. This was the reason that – even though I spent most of my time in that neighborhood and I already met Anca's two sons on several occasions – it took me almost a year to get to meet Anca. She barely had time to come and visit Ioana, or any of the other neighbors I knew well and spent time with.

Then finally, on a Sunday afternoon in mid-November 2008, Ioana – our common friend – took me over to introduce me to Anca. Seeing Anca for the first time it surprised me how different she looked, to what I imagined of her, based on the look of her sons, both of whom had dark-brown hair and eyes and a strong muscular build. In contrast, the 37 years old Anca had golden blond hair, blue eyes, delicate features, and pale, translucent skin. She wore glasses with strong prescription lenses set in light colored plastic frames. Although not beautiful, she was so luminous that I started to understand the stories about her husband being extremely protective of her, so much so that he quit his job in Italy on several occasions, just to be at home and have her "under

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control". Tall and thin, Anca moved quickly when she was walking or working, but she sat unusually still when we talked about her life, showing no facial expressions and making almost no gestures at all. She just held her cigarettes – lighting one after the other – and refilled her coffee mug whenever it was empty. However, her animated voice, silences, mumblings, humor and the use of irony and sarcasm in relation to her situation told a lot about her personality and the feelings she was trying to keep in check while telling me about her life.

Soon after she invited us in, Anca told Ioana – factually and without much emotion in her voice – that she learned a few days ago that as of the first of December she would be laid off from the camera factory. She had worked there for more than five years, but as of December she would not have to go in anymore. Then she switched topic, and asked me about my work and the people I met in the district. After a while, as we continued talking and realized that we had many common friends and acquaintances, Anca visibly relaxed and felt more comfortable about my presence. It was only then that she told Ioana and I how uneasy she felt about losing her income, even if she was eligible for unemployment benefits and her husband was working at the time. She also talked about how this present redundancy brought back many of her anxieties from the past: In 2000, when the brick factory – her first and longest place of employment – was closed down, both Anca and her husband were made redundant on the same day, December 22, 2000. This happened to them – she recalled – even though it was against the law to fire members of the same family at the same time, especially if they had minor children. "It was our worst Christmas ever, we thought at the time, but this year is probably going to be even more dreadful" she said to me and Ioana. It was after this brief introductory conversation that Ioana said goodbye to us and took off, leaving the two of us alone to start talking about Anca's life.

4.2.1 Anca

You said you were born in the Iris district, in 1971. In 1974 your family moved to another district of the city. Where did you go to school?

A: In the district to which we moved in 1974. 'Til fourth grade. And after that in the city center. To some special school, for kids with learning disabilities. We had some problems in the family and I couldn't study.

Why not? And who decided that you should go to this school?

A: Just because I couldn't. That was the problem.

I think most people I talked to said that there were problems that affected their kids, because of the hard work…

That's how it was… there is no point in… (*silence*)

So from the fifth grade you went to a special school…

A: Yes, 'til the eighth grade. And from there they sent me – I have no idea if there were such vocational schools in Cluj as well – so from there they sent me to another city, to Oradea. My sister was also sent away, to Bistrita, to study tailoring.

[Here she unintentionally switches to the less formal, "you'", in addressing me. Earlier she had been more formal in her address. Related to this shift we talk for a few minutes about our ages being so close. She tells me jokingly that she is getting gray and already needs to color her hair to cover it up. Then she looks at me as if she is expecting we will go on talking about her life, so I ask her:]

So, all four of your siblings were sent to special school?

A: No. Only two of us. Me and my sister. The two older ones.

And where did your other siblings go to school?

A: To normal school.

Did this mean that things got quieter in the family?

A: Yes.

How? Did your parents separate?

A: No.

No? So things just got quieter?

A: Yes. No, it is just that my father… *(long silence)* Eh, that's how it had to be… (*silence*)

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So only the two of you, you and your sister…

A: Yes, only the two of us.

But still, how is it that the two of you were sent to special school, and the rest of your siblings weren't?

A: But they didn't send us to special school! You chose that... your parents.

So your parents decided to send the two of you there?

A: Yes. When your teachers saw at school that you cannot study, instead of letting you repeat the same class again and again… they thought it would be better to… so they told your parents and your parents signed the forms agreeing… and they moved you there. To this special school… and it was easier, and the school gave you food and schoolbooks… *(she stops talking)*

And did your parents ever regret that they agreed to put you in this school?

A: Oh, yes! Probably even now.

But how did this happen, didn't they try to fight to keep you in the regular school?

A: They did, of course they did. But my mum, without school, having no schooling at all… she couldn't help me. Until the fourth grade I could manage studying by myself, but after that, from the fifth grade, I couldn't.

And I was also stressed by the atmosphere at home… *(she stops talking)*

Why, how was the atmosphere?

A: Well… (*silence*)

[Anca clearly did not want to talk about this issue anymore; I could sense how tense she became. So I let that topic drop and continued with questions about other issues.

However, four days later, when I went back for a second conversation to her to continue our discussions, she brought up the topic again. Since we had gotten to know each other better by then, and in our prior discussion she already made several indirect references to the frequent violence between her parents, in the second conversation (immediately following) I decided we had developed sufficient trust for me to be able to ask more direct questions:

Did your parents fight?

A: Yes.

And how do you see it now, who's fault was it, your mother's or father's?

A: My father's. He used to drink… he drank until he passed over there… (*silence*) six years ago.

For what reason do you think he drank?

A: I think mainly the company, the friends. People used to drink a lot at the brick factory. That was it… *(she stops talking)*

And what about your mother? Did she drink as well?

A: She drank sometimes a glass or so, but never to get drunk. And she never drank when she went to work. But that is normal. I also drink a glass of beer sometimes, or liquor, but never strong drinks. You drink only the amount you can handle.

And your mum stayed with your father even under these circumstances?

A: Yes.

But why?

A: She judged him, of course, but… (*silence*)

And has she ever regretted staying with your father?

A: Well… she says sometimes "how stupid I was to stay with him for so long and bear so much…" (*silence*)

[Excerpt from the second conversation concludes here.]

[Our first conversation resumes here:]

And your siblings, how many years of schooling do they have?

A: They didn't have much schooling. My youngest brother went to normal school, but

did only six grades. He was the worst among us. He didn't want to study at all. Poor mum, she begged him so much, and went after him to find him on the streets when he ran away from school… But it was all futile… My youngest sister went to a neighborhood school, a regular school. But she left school after the eighth grade, just as my older brother did. They both have only eight grades, no more. And they all took up work quite young… my brother had unskilled jobs at the brick factory, my sisters worked as cleaning ladies... But they all work in Italy now. Only seasonal work, in hotels and construction, but most of the year they are there.

And how do you see this now? Was there anything that could have been done differently to avoid going to this special school?

A: Now I cannot change anything anymore… (*silence*)

I do not mean now, but at that time could you have been…

A: (*silence, hesitation in her voice*)… No, I don't think so. It was different at that time. The teachers were not supporting the students as they do now; there was no tutoring, not like now. There are so many possibilities now. And now you see that kids do not want to study. I sometimes have to

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fight with my kids to go on with school and study, not to drop out. Especially my older son. He is at vocational school, studying to become a car mechanic. He likes it, because he chose it for himself, I did not force him into it… He is in his last year now. But I lost my job in December and so he wanted to drop out of school and go to work. But I told him "You didn't die of hunger in years past, you are not going to die now either. Just go on and finish, because you do not want to end up like I did…"

And what about your younger son? He is twelve now, isn't he? Does he have any ideas about what he wants to do for a living?

A: Yes! He wants to be a cook… (*Her voice lightens up; there is a pinch of a smile and some sarcasm in it.*) For years he's been telling us that he is going to be a cook. We'll see. But I told him: "Good, be a cook! And then your woman will stay in bed and you do the cooking instead of her. Great! But 'til then – I told him – you go to cooking classes, learn the skills, come home and practice here in my kitchen. And then I'll stay in bed, and you do the cooking for me! I did enough for all of you, now it's your turn to do something for me!" (*She laughs*.)

How do you see it now? Have you ever been disadvantaged because you couldn't go to regular school?

A: Oh, sure I was. I am even now. Because for many jobs they want you to have 10 grades. But I have only eight, and three years of vocational school. And even these eight years were different, not like regular school. So I cannot enroll now and do the missing two grades, because I couldn't. It is a different system.

So you think that they would not take you?

A: I do not know if they would take me, I do not know about that… (*she stops talking*)

But would you like to do these additional two grades and have 10 grades?

A: I would like to try, but it is so, so difficult… It is difficult for me, math and so forth, you know? I cannot manage that… And I lost so much while at this special school… because at our school they didn't do what they did in other, normal schools.

But what did you study there?

A: We did very little. We did math, multiplying, dividing, and subtracting… these very easy things. We never did anything more complicated than that. It was very simple, the system, you know? I wouldn't be able to do fractions, or anything

more complicated. And we had fewer subjects.

So what subjects did you have?

A: We had literature, math, history and geography… I think that's all.

And did you like studying?

A: Yes, very much! We stayed at school from morning till five in the afternoon. You did your homework there, you had lunch there… it was good. But we didn't have much to study.

And when you graduated from eighth grade you said you went to Oradea.

A: Yes. Because that was the natural continuation of the special school to which I went previously. So it was like a vocational school for us. Upholsterer, and duvet and mattress maker. I remember some of it, but I would not be able to make them anymore as a profession.

Have you ever been upset with your parents because you didn't have proper schooling? Or do you just think that's how it was at the time?

A: (*mumbling, long silence*) Well… well… I could have studied further, you know, and become a trainer in a vocational school here in Cluj… But, stupid as I was, I had to rush to marry.

How old were you when you got married?

A: Seventeen and a few months. I got married in 1989. I had my seventeenth birthday in September 1988 and next year in March I got married. The problem came again from how it was at home, the atmosphere in the house, the relationships, so the overall situation in the house… (*she stops talking*)

You mean between your parents?

A: Yes. I had a former classmate from Oradea, she lived in Zorilor (*one of the better districts of Cluj*). She had two brothers. And I visited her once and said to one of her brothers, he was ten years older than I… "I'll be marrying you." But just as a joke, you know? And Christmas came, I went caroling with my sisters, and by the time we came home, he was there and already asked for my hand from my mother. And I just jumped up, and said to my mum: "I'm getting married. I will get out of here, no more listening to your scandals." And I indeed got married… And then I was divorced 10 months later.

How come?

A: That's it. He slapped me on the face and because of that… (*silence*) I hated these things, because I saw it in my family, and I did not want the same things to happen to me as well! He hit me in the evening, and the first thing I did in the morning was to call my mum at her

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workplace. You know, because she was at work in the mornings. "Come and take me home, I won't stay here anymore!" And I was gone! Even though he had a three room apartment! But I hardly cared for things like this! I was poor, I will remain poor, but no one hits me! I'm sorry! He hit me because he brought home all kind of friends, they got drunk, and one of them wanted to take advantage of me. And he was drunk as well *(she is referring to her husband here, but without ever actually mentioning him as "husband/former husband"),* so he did not even realize what was going on. When he woke up at night I told him about what happened, and he got really angry and hit me… (*long silence*) That's it, what could I do? I was very young, he was older… *(she stops talking)*

But why did he hit you instead of his friend?

A: Because the friend was gone by the time he woke up. It was a… eh, that's it.

But his friend did not take advantage of you, did he?

A: No, of course not! God forbid! No, no. (*she sighs*) Anyway, when I got married I was still a virgin our first night together. Now, this is not fashionable anymore. But when I went to the priest before our wedding day and I told him that I was still a virgin the

priest congratulated me! (*she laughs*) This was my wish… And I had boyfriends before, who tried to get me to that thing, but I broke up with them! Nobody could force me into this… (*silence*) I told them: "Go and mind your business!" Sorry that I am not more explicit, but I can't… (*silence*)

But otherwise, except for this fight, how did you get along with him?

A: Oh, we got on very well. And in a way he was very proud of me. He was 27, I was just over 17… I had long hair, you know… And I was young… we went out almost every night to restaurants… *(she stops talking)*

What was he doing for a living?

A: He was a shoemaker some place… I don't remember where. I've been at his company at the time, but that was twenty years ago, I do not remember anymore.

Was it him or you who decided not to have children immediately after you got married?

A: I was pregnant when I divorced, and I lost/destroyed[58] the pregnancy… because I did not want to have any connections with him anymore.

How did he feel about that?

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[58] In Romanian, the expression Anca uses is "Eram însărcinată când am divorţat şi l-am pierdut…". The verb "l-am pierdut" has a double meaning: Most often it means to lose something, but it can also mean to destroy something. See the following analysis for further explanation.

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That's his problem. None of my business…
(she stops talking)

[Confused as to what really happened and taken by surprise by her frankness about her pregnancy I switched topics and asked her:
"And you haven't seen him since?"
"Yes, we did meet."
"And was he sorry?"
"Of course he was…" And then she went on to explain how they met a few years earlier at a bus stop and he still lived alone and apparently still regretted the breakup of their marriage, telling Anca how beautiful she still was. In these few minutes Anca's nonverbal communication made it clear to me that she used the verb "l-am pierdut" in its second meaning, that of 'destroying something'. After it became clearer to me that she was indirectly telling me that she had an abortion I dared to ask her:]

Did he know that you were pregnant, and that you had an abortion?

A: Yes, he knew about it, actually before... And I told him "no" when he asked me to reconcile and keep the baby! I did not want to have… sincerely… *(she does not say the word, but implies "his baby")*.

Could you at that time…

A: Yes, I could arrange for an abortion.

So it was legal at that time?

A: Yes. He came to my mum, with his sister *(she implies it was his sister that she went to school with and who introduced them)*. And she said that she is going to be the godmother and that we should definitely reconcile. But I said "Nooooo! Since you hit me…!" And, you know, on that day when he slapped me in the face I grabbed a big bowl – I told you I was strong – and hit him over the head with the bowl… So that was how I reacted. And that was it… *(she stops talking)*

And what did you do, move back to your parents?

A: Yes!

And did your parents take you in? They had no problem with that?

A: Yes. Sure enough!

And you already worked at the brick factory at that time?

A: Yes. I had my salary, but it would not have been a problem even if I hadn't worked! My mother wouldn't let me down anyway. And in April 1990, after I got divorced, I met my husband who was discharged… (s*he refers to her second husband here*.)

Discharged from where? From the army?

A: Yes, from the army. At that time the army was mandatory, not like now…

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But did you know your husband before his deployment?

A: No, I didn't know him. I met him only after he came back from the army. I went to a restaurant to pick up my sister who was there with a friend – you have to know that my sister and I had many funny stories at the time – and he was there as well… So this is how it was: before I went to the restaurant, my sister, some of our friends, and I watched movies on video at somebody's place. And after the movies were over I went home. My sister went with one of the guys to a restaurant, but when my mother heard this, she beat me up so badly… As grown up as I was! So I went back to find my sister and take her home, and he was there as well, my husband (*she refers to her second husband*). He had a boil on his hand (*she shows me where*), and had matches in his hand, and poor him, he was struggling to light his cigarettes. He was my age *(she smiles),* very handsome and I helped him with the matches, and liked him, and we have been together ever since. And on September 17, in 1990 we got married at the council, because we had to be at my sister's wedding two weeks later. And I was in the sixth month of my pregnancy. I kept it even though we weren't married yet, because I was afraid that I might not have children

anymore, you know, because they say that after your first abortion you might not have kids anymore… *(silence)*

But you had no problems with the pregnancy, did you?

A: No, I've also had another one since.

[Here she takes out a big box of photographs and shows them to me. She shows me a photo of her husband and we continue talking about events in her life.]

And what was your husband doing for a living?

A: He was a locksmith, a skilled worker at a heavy industry company here in Cluj. And then he worked in a mine for a while, unskilled work, and then I took him to the brick factory. When he worked at the heavy industry company he earned less money than I did, and he always said: "What? My woman brings more money into the house than I do?" So he went to work in this mine in Dej, and he indeed earned quite well. But it didn't last long, because they closed down the mine. And so I talked to people at my workplace and brought him there. So he worked in the brick factory as an unskilled worker.

But didn't he mind that from a skilled worker he became an unskilled one?

A: No, because he earned much better, you know? And that was the important thing. At the brick factory we had higher salaries. And this is from where he was made redundant when they closed the brick factory in 2000.

[The following excerpt is from the very beginning of our conversation, when Ioana was still sitting with us.]

And what about you? What happened after you graduated from vocational school?

A: After I graduated in 1988 my mother went to Libertatea, the furniture factory here in Iris, to get me hired. And that guy asked her to pay ten thousand lei, the director! [A*t that time the amount was more than half a year's salary of an unskilled worker.*] "But sir, I have five children, for each of them we saved five thousand lei. She has five thousand, take that if you wish to…" my mother said to him.

You mean that you had to pay in order to be employed?

A: Of course you had to pay! You had to pull strings, pay bribes. And the director said: "Eh, I cannot, I have to give two thousand to this one, two thousand to that one, so that amount won't be enough." And my mother came home and told me: "Look, what he asked from me…" "Eh, damn him!" I said. "I'll go to daddy and see if they are hiring at

the brick factory. If they do, I start working there!"

But how come they did not hire you at the furniture factory? You had the proper training as an upholsterer.

A: Eh, it didn't matter.

This is how it worked?

A: Of course! But what, you think that now it isn't the very same?

This is what you think?

A: It is even worse now! And I told my father: "Ask whether they are hiring, and I'll go!" And I started work in the brick factory in October 1988.

Didn't you have to pay to be hired there?

A: If you had somebody working there from your family, you could enter. If somebody worked there you were in. So each worker had the right to bring one child to the factory. So they employed me and I stayed for almost thirteen years. Until 2000, when they closed it down.

But how did you cope with the hard work? You are so thin.

A: And what muscles I got there (*she laughs and shows me her biceps*). I liked it there, I liked it.

And so you never worked in the profession for which you were trained?

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A: No! At home I do things sometimes. I did that couch on which you are sitting, and the rest of the chairs, the ones I could do by myself. But that is it.

And it was like that everywhere? If it was a little bit easier work, you couldn't get in without bribes and relations?

A: But it wasn't only for easier work! It was like that everywhere.

You mean that it was the same at the brick factory as well?

A: If I wouldn't have had somebody working there, I couldn't get in[59]…

And you said your mother did not want you to go to the brick factory. Why?

A: Because it was hard work. She used to work there, got sick, and so she didn't want me to…

And what did she say when you got hired there against her wish?

A: What could she say? That it is your business; you will be the one to break your back and legs… (*silence*) The truth is that it was very difficult work. I was carrying 8 kg in one hand, 8 kg in the other, one leg on the conveyer belt, bent over all day long… I moved several hundred kilos per day. It was very difficult. And the air was filled with

dust, and gasses… Inside it was very hot, and if you went out to take out the bricks, in winter it was freezing cold … We got so dirty that we had to go and take a shower as soon as we finished our shifts... Many of my colleagues got lung cancer or other related diseases and died... I have terrible back pain since then. And I have a very severe form of rheumatism... (*silence*) I also went blind in one of my eyes. The lens inside my eye broke, not then, later on, but the doctor said it was because of the hard work I did all my life... And giving birth to two kids… I can hardly see with my other eye. It is minus 9 diopters… Now I am not allowed to do any hard work anymore, not even to lift more than two kilos…

But I assume your two sons and your husband help you out with such things, don't they?

Eh… they are hardly ever around to help me… and if I cannot be careful with this at home, how could I be in other places, or at work? (*silence*)

And the fact that both you and your husband worked at the brick factory…

You know, my husband and I have almost never had time to spend together while we worked there. The kids were small and we had to take different shifts not to leave them alone. So one of us started at 6am in the

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[59] Beginning in the mid-1980s, the lack of new jobs in Cluj was becoming a significant problem.

morning and came home at 2pm. The other went in at 2pm and came home at 10pm. And in the evening, when the one with the second shift came home, the one which did the morning shift was so tired that we had to go to bed soon. We only met in the evenings and at the factory entrance, when we changed shifts. (*silence*) It wasn't easy, but I liked it.

But tell me, what did you like about it?

A: I liked it because I have no patience to moon away for hours in the workplace. And at the brick factory I did not have to… I started with hard work, you know, so I have no patience for meticulous work. Maybe if I would have started with something meticulous it would have been different. But I started from the beginning with the heavy work.

And you stayed there until they closed the factory?

A: All of us! And if it would be open now, I would still be working there. Probably I would be torn in two pieces by now (*she laughs*), but still working there. Because I liked it that way.

And what happened? Were you made redundant?

A: They put us all on unemployment.

When did this happen?

A: At the end of 2000. From January 1, 2001 we were unemployed. They just told you that you're fired. These were our Christmas holidays. Exactly the way it happened to me this year. Because I am unemployed now. From the 1st of December. Only this time they told me a little earlier.

[Excerpt ends here.]

[Our original conversation resumes here:]

And what do you do now? You have to take care of the paperwork to get unemployment benefits?

A: I've had no time for that yet. I do not know for how long the papers they gave me last week are valid.

What do you need to do?

A: I do not really know. I need to go to some office and get a paper saying that I have no income.

But did they give you an official paper from the factory?

A: Yes, official… (*she laughs ironically*) Now my life goes officially badly… (*she laughs at herself and at her own joke*)

And while you and your husband were working in the brick factory was the money you earned enough for you?

A: Yes.

So your salaries were enough.

A: Well, you were never paid for the amount of work you did, but they paid quite well.

This means that the two salaries covered the costs of the family.

A: Yes, yes. But in 2000 they closed the factory. They said it was not profitable anymore.

And so both of you were unemployed. And you said that after two months your husband was sent by the unemployment office for requalification training?

A: Yes, yes.

And while you were on unemployment did you try to get some extra work?

A: No, we did not need it. After two months my husband went to this three months training, and after that he was employed by the company that did the training. So he had a salary. And after I ran out of unemployment and got only the social benefits, I took up some work, on the black market.

But that means that in the first few months you could live on the money you received?

A: Yes, because we had a few compensatory salaries from the factory, you know.

And what did you do then?

A: I stayed at home.

How did you feel about both of you becoming unemployed?

A: It was terrible; I don't even want to remember it. Terrible… I don't want to remember… *(silence)*

How many months of unemployment and social benefits did you receive?

A: Maybe one year? I don't remember the exact time period anymore.

But still, usually this is little money, didn't you have to find some other work as well?

A: I had to, after a while. So I worked informally *[she said in Romanian "la negru"; if translated word-for-word means "in the black" or informally]*, at a company where we bottled wine. But it was no holiday, it was very hard work. And it was very bad, because I started work in the mornings at 6am, and I never knew when I would get home. Sometimes late in the night at 1am, sometimes it was the next day in the morning and at noon I already had to go back to work. And we had no holidays; we had to work on Easter day, Christmas night... And the worst was that they never told us in advance, not even the previous day. And I had the two kids at home.

And did they pay you for overtime?

A: Hardly ever…

What did you have to do there?

A: There were big barrels, filled with wine, and through a pipe they were connected to a

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small tap, and you put the bottle under the tap and filled it.

So you worked on a conveyor belt, or what?

A: (*she laughs*) You are joking! No, no conveyor belt at all…

So how…

M: You had two barrels, filled the bottles completely manually – two of us did that – then another worker put the cap on, another one put the label on, another one packed them, and so on…

How did you get to this place?

A: My sisters… my two sisters were working there.

So you had to have connections to get in?

A: Oh, yes. But soon after I got there the wine company went bankrupt… I brought them lots of bad luck. (*she laughs*)

Why did they go broke, did they have bad wine?

A: It was not that their wine was bad, but the guy running the company didn't know how to do it. He was younger than I was. He was a boss, but had no clue about business… he is only 33 now. He couldn't run it properly. He was in debt all the time. He hardly ever had any money.

And did he pay your salaries?

A: That's what I am telling you. He had to give us money, but had no money, of course,

so he told us "Just stay and work, I will pawn my car and give you money!" Yeah, right! That was just a smoke screen… But well, we moved with the company from one place to another, then to another again, and then he went bust. So he opened another company, a second-hand shop for household appliances, washing machines, TVs, refrigerators, these kinds of things.

And what happened, did he pay you after all?

A: Yes. Late, always late, but he did pay us.

So you continued with him in this new place and new company as well. But for how long did you work for him?

A: I worked for the wine company for half a year, and then I was at the second-hand shop for about a year and a half.

And what did you do at this second-hand shop?

A: I was cleaning the appliances. But I had to do everything. I was his secretary, cleaning lady, storekeeper, everything. I was the one who took over the deliveries, sent it to the store, everything.

And how come you stayed with him even after he went bankrupt with the other business?

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A: I heard that he had a new business. I needed work, so I went and talked to him, and I continued to work for him.

And many of those who worked for him previously stayed with him at this next company, as you did?

A: No.

And why did he hire you and not the others?

A: Well… the previous company was small. Only four or five people worked there. And two of those were my two sisters. But by then they moved to another workplace. And there was another girl, but she found the work too hard, so she left. And it was hard, indeed. Because you had to work outside most of the time. You warmed up water inside for cleaning the appliances, and then you cleaned them in the freezing cold outside. But I had no other choice. I needed the money. It wasn't much, though, 500 new Romanian lei [*that was the minimum wage, app. 118 EUR*]. And I had no benefits, it was all informal work.

And was this money enough to live on?

A: Not really. But I was working as a cleaning lady in another place as well, cleaning three hallways in ten story apartment houses in the district where my

parents live. I earned some 85 lei there as well [*app. 20 EUR*].

And how often did you clean these apartment house hallways?

A: Every day.

Every day? But how many hours did you work a day?

A: Many. In the morning I took my younger son to kindergarten, to one that was close to my mother's flat. It was a four-hour kindergarten, from 8 am to noon, so I did not have to pay for it. Getting to the kindergarten from our district took at least half an hour. From there I went to the second-hand shop, in another part of the city. It took me almost an hour to get there. I finished work at 4 pm. I ran back to my mother's, which took me an hour, cleaned the three hallways in about two and a half hours, and then took my son back home. It was usually late evening by the time we got home.

So your mother took care of your son when he finished at the kindergarten?

A: Yes.

Was she a pensioner?

A: No, she still worked.

But how could she then be with your son?

A: Because as a cleaning lady she always worked early in the mornings.

You said that you worked at this shop for one and a half years. What happened that you left?

A: He went broke again… (*she laughs*) And so that was it. But no wonder, everybody was cheating him and stealing from him. But I could not intervene in that. There were two guys. When the merchandise arrived one of them was writing the numbers on a sheet, just like that, the numbers never matched with reality, with the appliances that were on the truck. And there were also many broken appliances, so my boss had to throw them out. He had no idea about business.

You said that you got to work at this wine bottling company through your sisters. But how did your sisters end up there?

A: The father-in-law of my boss, the owner of the company, was working at the workplace where my mother worked as a cleaning lady. At the university. And this is how.

It's good to have connections, to be well connected, isn't it ?

A: Well, I wasn't, my mother was. Working there she met so many people. And she learned so many tricks from these university professors. For example, during communism many of these professors got fake divorces only to have the right to receive two apartments from the state. It never occurred to us to do something like that. But if we would have known earlier, we could have had two apartments now. But when we found out about this, it was already too late, at the end of communism. My mother handed in a divorce, but it was too late.

So they told your mother about such things…

Yes, and when I had my first child these people at the university were the ones to tell my mother that I could stay at home for three years on childcare benefits, if I wanted to, instead of the one year which was the legal leave at that time. They helped me to get a paper from a doctor that stated that my child had a grade three permanent severe handicap and I needed to stay at home with him. And so I stayed at home for three years with my first child. And when I had my second child, five years later, I stayed at home again, three years instead of one. We wouldn't know about this without them telling us.

But how did your mother end up at the university? Didn't you say that she used to work at the brick factory?

A: Yes. But she got very sick at the brick factory. And so when she gave birth to my third sister and stayed at home with her for the three months allowed by law under communism, she started to look for another job. And she found a night job at the

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university, as a security guard. And she took that job because she wanted to be at home with us during the day. And later, when we were older, she became a cleaning lady at the same facility. But it was good that she was there, it helped us. I had no connections at all, but my mum had some.

Tell me what happened when the second-hand appliance shop went bankrupt. What did you do, how did you manage financially?

A: My husband was working in construction. You know, he was re-trained by the unemployment office as a bricklayer.

And how come they did not re-train you while you were unemployed?

A: They never really called me in. And when they did, they sent me to tailoring and other things like that. And you know I have serious problems with my vision, so I couldn't take these things.

So what did you do then?

A: I found employment.

Where? How?

M: At a company in the electronics and photo business. I ended up there through my sisters, once again… (*she laughs*)

And how did they get there?

A: I think through a newspaper advertisement.

So you started work at this electronics and photo company in 2003. And how was it? Did they train you?

A: No. I had to pass a test, but – of course – one of my sisters, the older one, brought me some pieces to show me what they would request from me at the test.

And what did you have to do?

A: I had to disassemble a photo camera flash. And during the test I was not allowed to stop, to look around, to talk. You know, that was their working principle, what they followed. So I just stared in front of me and worked quietly, and they were watching us, and sometimes said: "this women stays, this one goes…" And they hired me based on that, but I had never had to disassemble a flash camera again while working there. They put me to work doing other things.

Was it a job with a valid contract and with all the legal benefits?

A: Yes.

And how was the salary?

A: It was five hundred new Romanian lei [*app. 120-130 EUR, the minimum wage for that period*].

And you had to work eight hours?

A: Yes.

And you had fixed working hours, or you had different shifts?

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A: No, we worked in two shifts, from 6am to 2pm, and the next day from 2pm to 10pm. Then the third day you went in again from 6am to 2pm, and so on. Only during the last two weeks, while they were preparing the documents for our unemployment, we worked in one shift, in the mornings. They closed down the whole factory and moved it somewhere else, where it is cheaper for them.

And how was it? You worked individually, or on an assembly line?

A: Each of us individually, you know. They brought you big boxes with the returned single use disposable cameras and you had to disassemble them. Some parts of them were reused; other parts were just thrown out… Others inspected the individual pieces, and if they were still good they were sent back to the company.

And did they come to check on you a lot?

A: Yes, they came. Especially at the beginning, you know. Not to scratch or destroy the pieces.

And did you have breaks during the eight hours?

A: Well…we started in the morning at 6am, then we had a ten-minute break at 8.10am, then from 10.20am to 10.40am we had our lunch break. We had our breaks in two shifts, and I was always in the second shift. And

from 12 to 12.10pm we had another ten minute break.

And how were your colleagues?

A: They were ok.

Was there anybody from your neighborhood?

A: Maybe there were, but not in my building. I wouldn't know, because we were working in six different halls. We were moved together in the same building only in the last period, or at least those of us who stayed for that long, because many colleagues left much earlier.

What about your sisters, did they stay?

A: One of them left early on maternity leave, the other stayed longer, but she also left after a while. But they started work there before me.

Why did they leave?

A: Probably because…. you had 1500 cameras. That was your daily quota, to disassemble 1500. I disassembled 3000, 4000, 5000, depending on the type of camera. Because there were different models, you know? And what did you get for them? 10 or 20 lei in addition to your monthly salary? (*app. 3-7 EUR*) So it wasn't worth it.

So it was not worth working hard?

A: No, but what could I do? I finished my 1500 in two hours. And what do you do after

that? Because if they would have let me go home… but you had to stay till 2 pm, you know? So you kept on working, there was nothing else to do.

But then you just do less, no? Everybody disassembled that many?

A: Only a few of us, five or six people. Others were struggling to make their quota. Many worked like they were in a slow motion film. But I envied them so much!

So there was no motivation to work more or harder?

A: Oh, no, not at all!

So how did they increase the salaries?

A: Over the years, by the rate of inflation. But it hardly reached the national minimum wage. I had five hundred lei, the minimum; it increased to six hundred after 5 years, just before they laid us off.

And did you receive food stamps?

A: Yes, at the beginning, but then they cut them off in the last period.

And for how long can you stay on unemployment now?

A: I have to find that out. But not too long. My understanding is that they call you and offer you jobs when they have them. Or send you to re-training. Each month they call you into the office and distribute you…

And would you like to go to a re-training course?

A: Yes, something, but what?

Is there anything that you would be interested in?

A: I do not know yet, I haven't been there to see what they have.

If you were free to choose, regardless of what they have on offer, would there be something you would like to learn?

A: (*silence*)…well, I really don't know what…I understood that they have more in computer work or tailoring, such things… And I cannot do these with my eyes.

Will they take your vision impairment into consideration when they send you to a job opening?

A: I don't know. I will have to request a paper about this from my family doctor. In the unemployment documents they always write whether or not you are able to work… and it says in my papers that I am able to work. So if I refuse something on this claim, that my eyes are bad, they will say "What, but it is written here that you are able to work… it is written here that your eyesight is good… So you are able to work!" So I will need a paper from my family doctor about this. About my eyes.

And why didn't you leave the camera factory earlier, as your sisters did? Why didn't you go to work with them in Italy?

A: I couldn't, because of my health condition. This form of rheumatism I have, I get pimples all over my body, the VHS in my blood increases a lot, I get high fever… And this happens several times a year. And these pimples I have, they disappear very slowly, and they are sometimes on my foot, and I cannot walk because they hurt so much. My sisters work as maids in hotels, fourteen-sixteen-eighteen hours, all day on their feet… If these pimples would appear while I am there I could not walk at all. I would need to be in better health to be able to work in Italy.

And this rheumatism you have cannot be cured?

A: No. Sometimes it recedes, but then it reappears. And you know, there are the kids as well. I am used to being with them all the time, they grew up with me. I could not leave them behind. One of my sisters has no kids, the other has two, but they never really lived together. Her daughter hadn't even started walking yet when she left for Italy.

So where are her kids then?

A: My mother is raising them. She always did, since they were babies. My sister sees them only for a few months a year, when she comes home at the end of the tourist season, from October to early March. And her husband not even that much, because he works in construction in Italy, so he stays there almost all year round. And, look what happened to my brother's son. I take care of him. My mother raised him for a while, and now he is with us. Because his mother left him, you know, she is somewhere in Italy. And my brother is in Italy as well. He has a new girlfriend. They will have another baby soon. So this boy, he is ten now, he has no parents, you could say, although my brother sends me money to cover his costs. 150 Euros a month. And calls him regularly on the phone, and asks him about school and everything. Because he was given to my brother, you know. I mean legally, and not to his mother. So you see, I couldn't leave my kids behind like that, you know.

But what do your sisters hope to get from working in Italy? Do they want to remain there?

A: No, not at all.

So what are their plans, then?

A: One of them has no family, so she just squanders all the money she earns there. The other, with the kids, they wanted to buy a flat for themselves. So they saved money and bought my mum's flat. They paid our share, that of the other four siblings', you know, and bought it.

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So why don't they come back now? They have what they wanted, don't they?

A: Yes, but now they want to buy two more flats, you know, they have two kids after all. So they will stay for a while longer. And they are employed officially there. In Italy. So they get unemployment in Italy when they do not work in the winter.

How come?

A: I don't know the exact details, but they receive unemployment benefits in Italy. For the months they don't work there. They can't come home during the period they are unemployed, they must stay in Italy, because that is a requirement, but they come home anyway. And they still receive the money.

And what about your husband? Did he ever go to work in Italy?

A: Yes, he is there now. He had to go; we have so many debts to pay back. And he was there once before, but he didn't really stay. He said that "At my age, and with two kids, to go away for such a long time." So he went for two-three months, came back and stayed at home for one or two months, then called his boss to ask whether he still had work for him, and went back again… On the one hand I can understand him, it is difficult to judge this from here. Maybe I couldn't stay if I went… But all those who go and work there stay for the whole year. But he, having

stayed with me and the kids all his life, being so attached to the family, it's difficult! Now when he left he did not take family photographs, as he did last time. He said that he was homesick and missed us terribly and he just cried and cried. Can you imagine? He was crying. He said that "Each evening I looked to the photos of the three of you, and I couldn't get you out of my mind, not for a moment. You were there when I woke up in the mornings, or when I went to bed in the evenings…" And he is sometimes jealous, and afraid that he is going to lose me… *(she stops talking)*

But you never had problems with him, did you? He never hit you, or anything?

A: No, never. But if he would hit me I would leave him even if we have one hundred kids together. I would be gone, I wouldn't care. And he knows that.

And what about drinking? Does he drink?

A: He drinks sometimes. But not excessively. A few beers, mainly in the summer. And he is never aggressive. And he loves the kids, he spoils them… *(long silence)*

So for how long did he stay the first time?

A: He left in January 2007 and stayed there for two and a half months. And then he stayed two-three months at home.

And did he work while at home?

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M: Yes, on the black market, in construction.

And when did he go back?

A: I do not know exactly, but it might have actually been more than 3 months, he stayed for six, I think. So he went back in September. And came home again for the winter holidays…

So was he able to save any money at all?

A: Eh, he did save some, but all the savings he brought home, he spent it. He stayed at home 'til he had that money. And after a while we lived only on my salary. It was very hard. But he is difficult!

What do you mean by difficult?

A: He doesn't fight for his family as I do, you know? He doesn't fight. I would do anything, anything… And he knew that I always got on somehow… if we had no money I went and borrowed from my mum, you know, and then I paid back the money when I got my salary…I am like my mum in this respect. She was always very tough, she had to be. She grew up in a small village close to Cluj. But her mother never cared about her and her four siblings, so she ran away when she was nine. She caught a train to the capital city, she hid under the bench, and she went to one of her aunts there. And she worked in Bucharest as a maid for families for some time. And then she came to

Cluj, and she was hired in the brick factory, she was barely thirteen… so somebody, an adult, had to put her on his identity card in order for her to be employed. And she worked there for many years, even after she got sick from the hard work.

So you are the one to fight for the family…

A: Yes.

But how did you manage under these circumstances? I mean, you said your salary was 500-600 new Romanian lei. That was all you had when he did not work?

A: Yes, more or less.

How could you live on that amount of money? The four of you…

A: I managed.

But how?

A: We didn't eat.

What do you mean by you didn't eat?

A: I made a soup for three, four, five days… and I didn't cook several dishes, just one. And so I had money for bread.

And what did you eat with the bread?

A: Margarine. And soup. We had only one course, and we had no fruits or such things in the house. I bought sweets for the kids sometimes. And I saved in other ways as well. I washed by hand, not with the washing machine… that saved lots of water and electricity. Because I have a washing

machine, you know. My mother and my two sisters gave it to me as a gift, to make life easier for me. But, I rarely use it. I cannot afford the costs. So, you see, I save money on things like these.

And have the kids ever complained that they do not have more food or other things?

A: Whether they liked it or not, that was what I could give them. But they never went hungry… Many times I did not eat and remained hungry, but they had enough to eat…Even if I ate once a day, I gave them food three or four times. But I do not complain, because there are many that are in an even worse situation than we are. Maybe, maybe if I would not have become ill, you know, I would have gone to work in Italy as well.

And what do you think, is it harder or easier for your kids than it was for you?

A: I say that compared to how I lived in my childhood they live like kings. Although they don't see it like that, of course, they don't see it like that. But compared to our lives they are kings! They don't believe me, though, you know, they don't believe me.

And when did your husband go back to Italy again?

A: It was in January, this year. But again, he stayed only for a few months, and then he

came back in May. And now he went back, in late October. But this time at least he worked while he stayed at home, in construction, informally.

And how much money does he earn a month in Italy?

A: He earns about 1100 Euros, but he saves only about 700, the rest goes for food and cigarettes.

So how much money did he bring home in May, when he came back?

A: About 3500 Euros, because he had to pay for travel, bring some gifts for the kids…

And he lived off these savings as well?

A: No, he didn't. We paid back some of our debts.

You spoke about debts earlier as well. What debts do you have? And why?

A: Because we had to buy the flat which we are in now. We were evicted from our previous place, we lost the lawsuit against the brick factory, and we were offered this instead, but we had to buy it. And it was more expensive than they originally said it was going to be. And the bank gave us only 30% of the price, and we had to pay the rest. We had the money my sister paid me for my share in my parents flat, 13,000 lei, approximately 3300 Euros. And we had the 3500 Euros my husband brought back from

Italy. But we still had to borrow money from my sisters, 7000 Euros. One of them gave me 5500, the other 1500. But I have to pay them back as soon as possible. They also need the money.

But it is good that they gave you money at all, isn't it?

A: Yes, it is. But it wasn't easy to ask this favor of them. I had to humiliate myself in front of them. They humiliated me. They made very nasty comments about my husband; it was hard to take.

But why? And what did they say?

A: They said that we could have had this money if my husband would have stayed and worked in Italy. But he didn't. And they were right in a way, because he could have stayed, indeed. And in two years he could have saved twenty thousand Euros, and that was all we needed. But he didn't want to… and he didn't want to do jobs like dishwashing, or agricultural jobs, as my siblings do. He felt it was humiliating. He worked only in construction, and if there were no skilled jobs, then he came home. And because of this my family condemns him. But for me it is difficult to condemn him, from here it would be easy. But I understand his reasons as well. He thought maybe that… better to remain poor, than feel humiliated… it is

difficult to judge this from here, from the outside… *(silence)*

But your siblings, they gave you the money after all, didn't they?

A: Yes, they did. They did this for me. Because they didn't want me to be on the streets, and I would have lost the money, our savings, that I paid as an advance for the flat… and also the sum the bank paid on our behalf would have been lost.

And how much do you have to pay back to the bank?

A: We have the mortgage in Swiss francs, for 33 years, and we pay based on the exchange rate on the first day of each month. Now it's around 220 lei [at the time this was app. 100 Swiss Francs or 60-65 Euros], but it depends on our luck with the exchange rate. And I always have lots of bad luck, and only little fortune.

This is more than one third of your current salary. And you lost your job this month. How will you be able to pay this monthly amount?

A: I don't know…I really don't know what am I going to do. And my husband just called me a few days ago and told me that he is coming back from Italy, there is no work in construction 'til January. He stayed only one and a half months; he will not be able to

bring more than 1000 Euros… And from that we have to pay the mortgage for three months, the electricity bill, because this flat has electrical heating and that is very expensive, and have to pay our living expenses for December and January, till I get my unemployment money…and we have to pay his trip back, and he needs some money there till he gets his first paycheck again…I don't know how are we going to manage this. And I also want to pay back some money to my sisters. I am not well since this whole thing started, since we had to move here in October, and buy this flat. The previous one was much better, and cheaper to maintain. We had no mortgage there, no high electricity bills; we could manage on the money we earned. But now, I haven't slept for weeks, I just lie in bed and think about it over and over again, what to do… And the unemployment money will not be enough, not even for the mortgage… And I have to pay the mortgage, that's the most important. God save us from losing our flat again… And then, you see, there are our living costs and I have no money left for that… it's only now that the hard part begins... I do not know how it is going to be…

4.3 Conclusion

In order to better understand Anca's life history and the ways her agency and environment shaped her actions, analyzing Anca's narrative without contextualizing it is not sufficient. Ethnographic data provides that context. I will do that in detail in the next chapter. However, there is one dimension of her narrative that I will discuss in closing this chapter.

Just as many other life history narratives I collected in the district, Anca's narrative was framed by her feelings of being trapped: as we began our first conversation she talked about losing her job and not knowing what to do. Our second conversation ended the same way, with Anca saying she could see no way out of her family's current situation. Although I did not indicate that I wished to end our conversation, Anca drew it to a close by saying "I do not know how it is going to be" and signaled that she had nothing more to say.

Given the frame of her life history, the meanings she attached to her life throughout the conversation – attempting to construct a 'narrative of inclusion', as I will argue below – were rendered largely irrelevant. With her closing sentence Anca seemed resigned to the impossibility of successfully pursuing a "life plan" (Hareven 1982:360) for the future of her family. As she gave voice to her history, the journey went from the very factual account of losing her job, to her deeply emotional account of feeling powerless in her own life and isolated even from her siblings. As the telling of her life history progressed, she placed ever more emphasis on being trapped and less emphasis on those aspects of her life that highlighted the ways she had, over decades, successfully negotiated difficult situations.

Skultans argues that many of her informants, in closing their narratives, often used patterns such as "now my life is over" or "that's what my life has been". In Skultans' interpretation of Latvian narratives such formulas often signaled failures to achieve explanation and were part of a "shared conceptual strategy which has its roots in the violent events which have dislocated lives" (1998:48). In Anca's case, I argue, the function of such a closing is similar: signaling her failure to explain the discrepancies she felt existed between her continued efforts to become 'included' and the recurrent fears and anxieties of risking being 'excluded'. As for Skultans' informants these strategies were born out of a need to explain their dislocated lives. Anca's strategies can, in part, be located within the broader and shared conceptual strategies employed by people who struggle to break the cycle of poverty. As Anca's life history reveals there are important contradictions between her narrative account of her ongoing (and so far successful) efforts to keep her family afloat and maintain/achieve social inclusion, and her framing that focused on her emotional distress and the lived experience of social exclusion, conditions that – she implied – characterized and summarized her life trajectory.

Although it could be argued that these contradictions in Anca's narrative were only a result of the timing of our conversations – for example, she had recently lost her job – in Anca's narrative 'feeling trapped' and struggling to find a way out also appeared on numerous occasions in relation to much earlier life experiences such as when she talked about her educational history. However, talking about the consequences of attending a school for children with learning disabilities, Anca

rarely argued – even in retrospect – that her family should or could have made different choices than the ones they believed were available to them at the time. Rather, she chose to emphasize how she successfully avoided remaining unemployed even though vocational school greatly limited her choices even in securing employment for which she had been trained: Instead, Anca emphasized how quickly she found a solution by immediately obtaining a job at the brick factory, where her parents worked.

This is where the duality in Anca's narrative is confusing: she portrays herself both as having and lacking agency. While human agency is relational and thus always needs be examined and validated in the interplay between the structural constraints and the respective (re)actions of the individual, in Anca's case it is noteworthy that she often discredited as essentially meaningless many of the actions she took on her own behalf (i.e. she felt she had no agency to change her own position in social space). When she talked about her school years she presented herself as a child with no agency; she studied as much as she was able to on her own, but after a while – with all her family problems – she "failed" to fulfill basic academic requirements and was moved to a school for children with learning disabilities. Thus, Anca felt that the external limits to her agency – the fact that parents, teachers, and schools made decisions on her behalf – left her with no choices and unable to change the course of events. This narrative framing – being a victim of forces beyond her control during childhood – is important because feeling powerless in controlling certain dimensions of her life is among the most lasting memories she carried into her adult life. When we talked about opportunities that might exist for her in adult education and retraining for other jobs, or finding work abroad as her siblings did, Anca always argued that she no longer had either the power and health or the means to change things in her own life. This argument, where she uses the narrative pattern that references the passing of time and suggests that "it is too late" for her to change things, reinforces perceptions of having time-specific 'limits' on her life and agency.

However, there is a clear discrepancy between her feelings as represented in the narrative of her own education, her narrative about her children's education, and her actual everyday practices as I observed them during our time together. On the one hand, when it came to her children's education, Anca's attitudes were very different than those she said she had in relation to herself. In

her life history she talked at length about how she supported her children in being free to choose what they wanted to study, but they did not have the choice to drop out of school. And her engagement did not stop there; she was actively involved in their education. Although she did not talk about this during our conversations, I saw her on many occasions sitting and helping the younger children with their homework. In addition, she was also an active and leading member of the Parent Committee at her younger son's school, negotiating many delicate issues with the school administration on behalf of children and parents. When asked about her involvement, she said that as a parent it was her responsibility to actively support her children in their education.

Emirbayer argues that "As actors encounter problematic situations requiring the exercise of imagination and judgment, they gain a reflective distance from received patterns that may (in some contexts) allow for greater imagination, choice, and conscious purpose." (1998:973) In Anca's case, the framework offered by 'motherhood/parenthood' and the feelings of responsibility that came with it (as she expressed it, "women are the ones who hold families together") brought about such a reflective distance from some of the received patterns and allowed for a change in her attitudes towards educational structures. So while she maintained the feeling that she was not able to study for her own benefit, she felt empowered to fight for her children's education. Anca's active engagement with her children's education, at the same time, clearly contradicted the message of 'having no future' as she implied in her final statement: investing time, money, and energy in her children was part of a "life plan" that suggested that Anca did project a future for herself and her family.

As Anca's life trajectory reveals (contrary to what she stated about her inability to learn new skills) she exhibited an extreme flexibility and openness to mastering new skill sets, and adapting to new jobs and working environments. She talked a lot about her long working days over many years, and the reasons she liked working hard instead of just trying to look busy. Nevertheless, since these efforts were not sufficient to be promoted, earn more, and improve her family's economic and social standing, Anca felt powerless to turn her life around. This, in turn, led her to conclude that she and her family were somehow 'undeserving'. It was clear that she was struggling with such issues, and engaged in a dialog with broader discourses on poverty and the

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poor: She routinely linked her narrative of becoming poor to not accepting the idea that poor people necessarily have to lose their independence, self respect, and dignity. But Anca was in an extremely difficult and delicate position, because her feelings of inadequacy and humiliation were reinforced not only by the broader social discourses on the 'undeserving poor' but also by her own siblings, who argued that it was Anca and her husband's fault that they had not been able to improve their financial situation over the years.

Emirbayer argues, as referenced at the beginning of this chapter, that focusing on human agency as it works in practice and as it is embedded in social interactions helps researchers better understand "the interplay between the reproductive and transformative dimensions of social action" (1998:973). He also posits that "All social action is a concrete synthesis, shaped and conditioned, on the one hand, by the temporal-relational contexts of action and, on the other, by the dynamic element of agency itself. The latter guarantees that empirical social action will never be completely determined or structured. On the other hand, there is no hypothetical moment in which agency actually gets "free" of structure." (1998:1004)

Anca's life – as revealed in her life history narrative and coupled with ethnographic data – exemplifies well Emirbayer's argument. Although Anca's narrative suggests otherwise, it is misleading to explain her actions only as the result of reproducing behavioral patterns she had internalized earlier in her life. For example, while many other children in the neighborhood were school dropouts or had educational histories similar to Anca's, her sons succeeded in school, in large part due to Anca's commitment. However, despite her many successful strategy changes, Anca's overall feeling continued to be that she was 'trapped' in circumstances she could not overcome and faced an ongoing risk of becoming 'excluded' from mainstream society.

Although soon after our conversations Anca's husband's persistence enabled him to find a job in Italy and Anca, who applied for various positions in Cluj, was able to secure a night job at a company where she counted and bundled money, by the time they thought they had stabilized their financial situation in early 2009, the global economic crisis hit Romania and the country's currency collapsed, sending exchange rates sky-high. Between November 2008 and March 2009

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the Romanian Leu depreciated by 23% in relation to the Swiss Franc, and – as the Leu continued to weaken – by August 2011 it was worth 63% less in relation to the Swiss Franc than it was in November 2008, when I recorded Anca's life history. Since the loan on Anca's flat was in Swiss Francs, their fragile household finances once again collapsed, putting them at risk of losing their flat and becoming homeless.

The chain of events in Anca's life history and her reactions to these events exemplify well how interplays between structural factors and human agency can constrain or enable change in family life histories. Anca's case study also highlights that in hierarchical and/or unequal structures and relationships, while focusing on narrative and individual level analysis is important to our understanding of some of the factors that enable change and cause reproduction at the micro level, having insight only into these aspects of a life cannot explain the ways in which social change and reproduction are facilitated by broader socio-structural processes. In what follows, this thesis will more fully integrate these aspects into the analysis.

Chapter 5
Lives out of balance: the lived and the narrated experience

The previous chapter was structured by Anca's life history narrative and constructed along the interaction between us, during two long conversations in Anca's flat, on two contiguous days, in November 2008. My analytical insights in Chapter 4 were drawn from that narrative and focused on the interplay between events in Anca's life, the narrative junctures in her life history, and her self-perception as an active agent in her own life, as established in the narrative. This chapter focuses on Anca as well, and is the (re)constructed and contextualized history of her life[60]. It examines Anca's life events in a broader socio-economic and political context, touches on the history of three generations of her family, and situates her in the circle of her friends and neighbors. Without losing sight of the larger forces that shaped their lives, the aim of this chapter is to portray Anca and her family and friends' lives in ways that offer insights into their everyday routines and their relationships as they evolved over time.

Throughout the chapter I endeavor to understand how certain conditions in Anca's life – for example her housing situation or the fact that Anca's parents both came from very poor peasant families, started work at a very young age (her mother at age 9), and were first-generation migrants to the city – defined the choices and opportunities Anca had available to her, the coping strategies she developed under the existing circumstances, and the ways in which these strategies contributed to shaping her life. I will argue – using Anca's life history as a case study – that during communism there were many processes that did not end inequalities (as was claimed) but rather reproduced them (e.g. in education, housing, and employment patterns) and for many people these processes had the effect of producing new disadvantages (e.g. Anca's health being greatly impaired at a very young age; the precariousness of their housing situation having its roots in the communist housing system, etc.). In the light of these processes, I will examine how families that

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[60] The data used for this chapter is drawn from conversations I had with Anca and her family members following the first two long conversations with Anca about her life (transcripts of which I included in the previous chapter); 15 months of participant observation in the Iris district; the conversations I conducted with many families living in Anca's neighborhood and other areas of the district; as well as the archival research I undertook, complemented by document analysis from lawsuit files and media reports.

struggled to overcome such long-term inequalities tried to find workable coping strategies and address their increasingly precarious circumstances.

This chapter, although theoretically informed, is not structured along theoretical arguments; it rather reflects the kind of non-linear narrative – interwoven with my analysis and ethnographic data – that emerged during conversations with Anca, her family, and other district inhabitants. As such, it follows an emotional logic that proceeds from the more public dimensions of an individual's life – education, employment, housing – to the more private and intimate dimensions: family, children, and friendships. This is not to suggest that the public and private domains of one's life can be separated. As will be addressed later in the chapter, it is rather to emphasize and draw attention to a distinction made by Anca herself between the spaces in which she felt she had the power to change and influence events, and the spaces she did not.

5.1 "…my friends are all from around here…"

When I started my fieldwork in the fall of 2007 Anca and her family still lived in the courtyard that used to belong to the brick factory. There were four such neighboring courtyards, a total of eleven buildings, housing 44 families, all former employees of the brick factory. The small, one story houses were spread along one of the main streets of the Iris district, a few tram stops away from the square considered to be the district center, and close to the fringes of the city. They were at the foothills of a small clay mine, the former mining site of the brick factory, which closed in 2000. On the opposite side of the road stood the industrial buildings of former communist factories, none of them operating.

Although the brick factory workers' houses were not clearly separated from other parts of the district, due to their location, they stood a bit apart from other neighborhoods. This slight isolation was also reflected in the networks of the people living there. While most of those with whom I talked said they had their "best friends" outside this circle, it was clear that their most frequent contacts involved spending time with their neighbors, hanging out together in the courtyards. In

decades past it was not at all uncommon for the children of these courtyard families to marry each other and establish their own families there.

For the most part, sharp differences in the standard of living of the 44 families were not obvious, with the exception of three families. One of the families was much better off than all the others (both in terms of income and housing), while two families were in a financial situation that made it difficult for them to secure sufficient daily food for themselves and their children. Most adults in the 44 families had jobs in the mainstream economy (skilled and unskilled), with working contracts, healthcare and pension benefits. In most cases their salaries were very low, not more than the national minimum wage. The amount of money earned, even where all adults in the household worked, made it impossible for them to get by without constant struggles. It was rarely possible to accumulate any savings or make investments that could have improved their standard of living. The majority had experienced unemployment during the previous 4-5 years, none of them felt that they were likely to be employed long term, and most of them tried to supplement their income through various additional, informal activities.

In the fall of 2008 this neighborhood – where many of the residents had lived for decades – was suddenly broken up. The houses and land that once belonged to the brick factory were bought by foreign investors and the former brick factory mining sites were turned into a large shopping center. All families from Anca's courtyard were ordered by the new owner to move out, or else they would be evicted forcibly.

As seen from the conversation in Chapter 4, Anca believed the eviction from their old, rented, brick-factory flat marked the beginning of her family's "real hardship". Before, she said, "we always got by somehow", "we always had what we needed" and "we were actually better off than many other families I know". According to Anca, the fact that they had to move from flat to flat many times over the years, that they never had a proper holiday or were able to afford travel, that they were unable to save money or improve their economic standing caused, for the most part, no extreme stress to them. "Most families I know are not able to afford such things either" Anca said at one point in our conversations, "so why should our situation be different?"
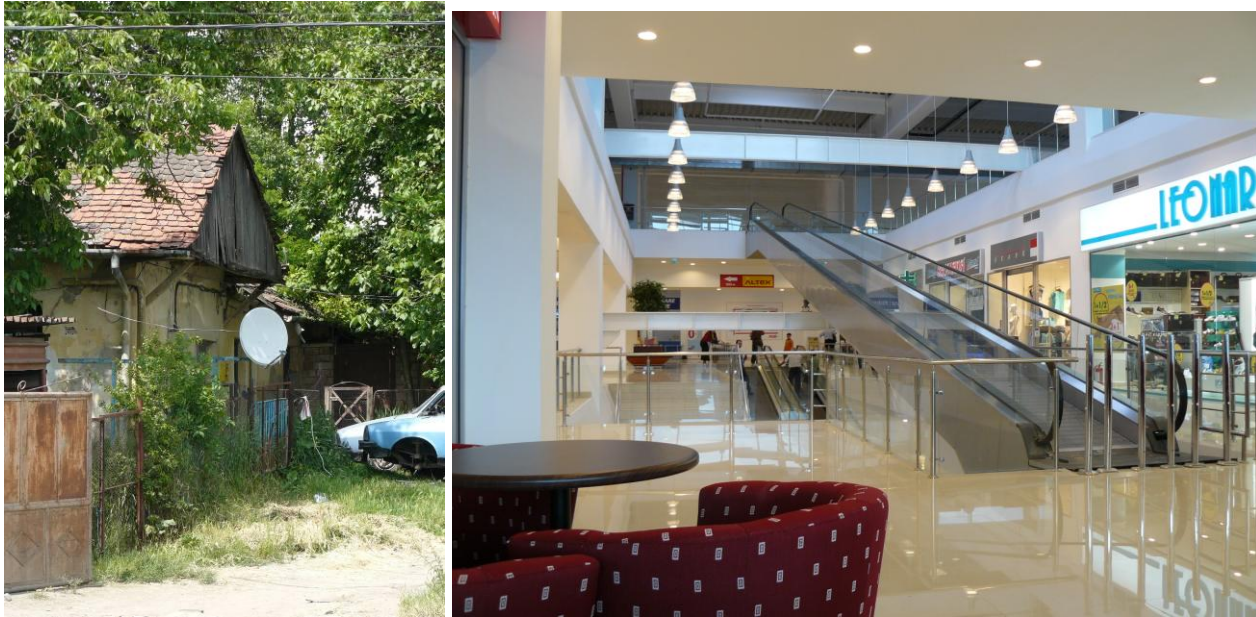
Former brick factory houses, and the new shopping center built in the place of the former brick factory's houses and clay-mines

However, not long after we met and talked for the first time in the fall of 2008, Anca said that she and her husband felt "cornered" when – after losing their much loved, rent-subsidized courtyard flat – they were pushed into buying a brand new flat:

> We had no other choice than to buy this new flat offered to us as a replacement for the old rental. There was no other place we could have moved into with the two kids. My mother sold her flat to my sister; my husband's father lives in a far away village… we couldn't move in with any of them. Rents in Cluj are very high, and we could not afford renting. Or if we did, we would only have been able to pay for a year or so, using up the money I received from my mother for my share in the flat she sold to my sister. But that would have been stupid, that would not have been a long-term solution. We asked the city council as well, but they told us they no longer had social flats. So we bought this flat, even though we knew that we would be in big trouble paying the monthly installments if one of us lost a job. And you know I did lose my job, and for my husband it is also more and more difficult to find employment either here or in Italy… (Fieldnotes, AH, December 2008)

Anca's family was not alone in this situation: all her friends and their families in the neighborhood also lived under the threat of eviction.

5.2 *"…this is our house now, but not our home…"*

It was immediately after moving into their recently purchased 42 sqm one-bedroom apartment that I first met Anca. During our conversations Anca emphasized repeatedly – as did many of her

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neighbors – that they bought these flats in a newly built apartment house not because they wanted to, but because they had to: this was the flat that was offered to them as a replacement by the company that evicted them. Although they felt cornered and forced into buying, after consulting with their families, Anca and her husband decided to go ahead. They applied for a loan at a local bank and for their downpayment used all the money Anca received from her mother when Anca's sister bought-out her siblings' portion of their parents' flat. To supplement this money, Anca also asked for a loan from her sisters who were working in Italy. When they got loans from both the bank and her sisters, they decided to proceed with the purchase, completed the paperwork with the bank and the building company, and in October 2008 they moved in.

But Anca's husband never really lived in their new apartment: In order to be able to repay their debts, a few days after they moved in her husband left to work in Italy. They had not even arranged the flat with him in mind: there were only two single beds in the apartment, on the two sides of the bedroom window. One bed was for Anca and her younger son, the other bed for her older son and the son of her brother who was in Anca's custody at the time. Between the two beds, in front of the window, there was a small desk where the children could do their homework. The room was almost full with just these three pieces of furniture. When Anca showed me the flat for the first time she said, "When my husband comes home we will need to reorganize everything, but I don't know how yet." Her concern was understandable: the bedroom was 7 sqm, with no room for a third bed. The living room was only 5 sqm and because of the positioning of the windows and the door there was no room for a bed or a sofa. They were using the room as a walk-in-closet. There was a disproportionately large, 14 sqm windowless hallway along which all the apartment's doorways were located. They set up this space as the living room with two armchairs and a small table, but apparently nobody ever used it for sitting and talking. Anca always invited visitors to the kitchen. The 12 sqm kitchen was the homiest place in the flat. Anca arranged the space with a good sized table and a comfortable seating set comprising a sofa and some chairs (made by Anca herself), placed close to the window. There were some climbing plants around the window. The walls were light green and the afternoon sun shined in. When I asked her about the blues, greens, light reds, and yellows on the walls of the flat Anca said, "We hate white walls. We wanted to have colors in the house, so my husband re-painted everything before we moved in." The rooms

always looked nice and tidy and everybody visiting Anca congratulated her on their new apartment, but it was apparent that she had very ambivalent feelings about the new flat.

Anca – when telling the story of their eviction and the reasons why they bought this new flat – emphasized on many occasions how much she loved their former courtyard, the garden and the 25 sqm, single-room rental flat, allotted to them by the brick factory. Their former apartment was in a long, one-story house, built at the beginning of the twentieth century, opposite the brick factory, situated in a courtyard with a big garden.

For a long time the building was used as offices for the factory. In the late 1960s, when the offices gradually moved out, it became a dormitory for factory workers, and then in the late 1970s it was transformed into small one-room and a kitchen flats. A very advantageous rental contract – low rents and other benefits – was worked out for the families that moved in. In the years Anca lived there they had seven other families as neighbors, all of them employees of the brick factory.

Anca's old, demolished house (the two windows on the right were those of their room)

The building and the flat were run down; no refurbishing had been done for decades. The apartments had no running water or inside toilets; instead, a few wooden lavatories had been placed in the back of the courtyard. Still, Anca and her husband felt extremely privileged that they were the ones to receive the flat.

> "An old couple died and so the flat became empty. But there were 30 applications for this one flat. And some of the applicants were engineers working for the factory", Anca told me with traces of pride in her voice. "But we received it because we had a paper from our dorm administrator that we had to move out in a month's time. We were staying in a men's dorm. And we had two small kids." (Fieldnotes, AH, 2008)

She told me later that they actually used their contacts "astutely" to get the flat: in fact, they did not really have to move out, but she "arranged this with the dormitory administrator":

> "He knew that our housing situation was unbearable. The four of us were living in a small room in a men's dorm in the Iris district, with shared kitchen and bathroom on the hallway of the dorm. It was better than the previous places we stayed at, but still, it was unbearable. And so we tried to do whatever we could to get this flat." (Fieldnotes, AH, 2008)

However, this was far from being the first time they had moved from dorms to flats and back again. Anca and her husband – as well as most of their friends and acquaintances – had no place of their own when they got married in 1991, and so they moved several times until they settled on the flats allotted to them by the brick factory. Anca and her husband started married life in a few square meter men's dorm room in the Iris district. Their first son was born there. After two years they moved to a colleague's house, where they did not have to pay rent, but had to take care of the owner's five pigs. After living there for a year they were told by the owner that the family was going to open a restaurant in the rooms used by Anca's family. The five pigs were slaughtered and, with just a week's notice, Anca's family was asked to move out. As she says, "Twelve years passed and the restaurant never opened. Even now, the wind is blowing through the rooms from which we had to move in such a rush".

Out of necessity, they moved in with Anca's parents and four younger siblings. They lived with them for a year and a half – eight adults and two children – in a 60sqm flat. Anca said, "It was hell. Constant tensions and daily fights…" Thanks to Anca's dorm administrator friend they were able to move from her parents' house to a men's dorm again. Their second son was born there.

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Finally, after two years in the dorm, they received the flat from the brick factory, their "real home", as Anca called it.

She showed me the many photographs they took during the ten years they lived there, and she told me that these years were probably the happiest of her life. Although the flat was small, they never really felt crowded, because the kids spent most of their time outside in the courtyard and the garden. Both Anca and her husband worked, and although their salaries were not high, they had no financial difficulties during that period. She recalled, "Even after the brick factory was closed and both of us were unemployed, the cost of living was not so high and so we were able to buy the basics." When they could afford a small luxury they sent their younger son to a school summer camp at the seaside. Anca very much wanted him to go, to have at least somebody in the family who saw the Black Sea. Neither Anca nor her husband had seen the Romanian seaside. There was no bitterness in her voice when she said that they could never afford to go anywhere for holidays. "But none of our friends, colleagues, neighbors or acquaintances ever took a vacation" she added. According to Anca, the family's prospects changed for the worse when it seemed it would not be possible to buy the 25sqm flat from the brick factory for less than the market price as they had hoped.

5.3 "…it was our fault; we should have paid the bribes…"

Legislation instituted in Romania after the fall of communism in 1990 made it possible for tenants to buy what were formerly state-owned apartments in which they lived at the time of, or after regime change (Laws 61/1990 and 85/1992). The prices of these apartments were not determined by the real estate market, but established through a 1995 law setting prices at much lower levels (Law 112/1995). Basing their claims on these three laws Anca and 43 other families from her neighborhood requested that they be allowed to buy their flats from the brick factory. For years, their claims were denied by the factory's board of directors on the grounds that the property status of the brick factory and the houses they were living in was still unclear. However, while the factory management refused workers' requests on numerous occasions, the "unclear" status of the factory property did not impede management's privatization of the company between 1990 and

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2000, and the sale of its holdings – including land and buildings – to national and international enterprises[61].

In 2003, when land prices started to sharply increase in Cluj, and when Iris became more and more important as the site of new housing and commercial development, the company's management started to put pressure on the former brick factory worker tenants, trying to force them to move.

New developments in Iris (these newly built houses are less than a kilometer away from Anca's former flat)

The former brick factory management no longer accepted rent and cut off gas, water, and electricity to the houses, services provided previously through the brick factory's supply system. When tenants turned to utility companies directly to make new contracts for these services, their

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[61] As I will elaborate upon in the next chapter, such disparities in property relations give the poor less rights in relation to the more powerful, and – as the brick factory case highlights – powerful actors did all they could to maintain the ambiguities and disparities for as long as possible, in order to assert their control over assets.

claims were denied on the basis that they were unable to provide a valid rental contract or property ownership document. Since there was no hope of making an informal agreement with the brick factory, in the spring of 2004 the 44 families affected by this situation decided to go to court to settle the issue. Coincident with this, they organized a protest at the city hall and also turned to the media. By then they had been without gas, water, and electricity for more than a month. As a result of the protest the city council intervened, and they were finally able to contract individually with the utilities companies. However, they could no longer extend their old rental contracts with SANEX, the parent company of the brick factory, because the company refused to cooperate.

But things did not go well with the lawsuit. Differences arose among families on how to deal with this issue, which lawyers to hire for the task, how much bribe to pay – if at all – to judges and other court people. As a consequence, the 44 families did not submit one unified claim, but went to court with three different lawyers, and had three different trials. To the great surprise of the families involved, the results of these three hearings, all of which were based on the same legal grounds (Laws 61/1990, 85/1992, and 112/1995) led to very different outcomes. One case is still pending, because it was decided in favor of SANEX, but the tenants appealed the decision and requested the case be forwarded to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. One case was decided in favor of the tenants, and thus four families were allowed to buy their flats. One case was decided in favor of SANEX, and the tenants – Anca's family among them – were told to move out of those houses[62].

The irony of the situation was that SANEX – a company established by the communist state in 1970 and bought by an Austrian porcelain manufacturing company in 2004 – won its lawsuit against brick factory workers by making reference to the law on the restitution of nationalized property. That is, the lawyers of the Austrian company – owner of the communist state-established SANEX – based their arguments on a law that normally would not have applied to this case. However, they implied that SANEX was one and the same entity as the brick factory that was established in the early 1900s, had been nationalized in 1958 and closed down definitively in

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[62] A detailed discussion as of why and how such differences among the outcomes of the lawsuits were possible, and how could four families actually won their case, will follow in the next chapter.

2000. And although there was no continuity among these three entities in the ways the law seemed to require, the court accepted this as a valid argument, giving its consent to the eviction of more than 30 families[63].

Even before the lawsuit was decided, part of the land on which some of the brick factory workers' houses stood was taken over by the Romanian Commercial Bank in lieu of payment of SANEX's debt, while the rest of the land and houses was sold by SANEX to the international METRO Group. In 2007-2008 METRO built a huge shopping center on part of the land. After the lawsuit was settled, METRO Group prepared to demolish the old houses to further extend the parking lot of the shopping center. Anca's family was living in one of the houses that were to be demolished.

Houses waiting to be demolished after eviction of tenants

However, even though the companies had won their case, the local city administration did not allow them to evict tenants without offering them comparable replacement housing. The court decision stated that if the company fulfilled this obligation, tenants were obliged to accept the offer, or move away and solve their housing problems on their own. But, since the clause "comparable replacement housing" did not specify anything in detail, a negotiation process

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[63] The next chapter will discuss in detail the law suit and how and why the company could take the steps they took, to the detriment of the tenants.

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between tenants and the company started. The company promised tenants that they would build a new apartment block, not far from the original courtyard, and sell them the new flats at the very advantageous price of 100 Euros per sqm. Most tenants, not seeing any other viable solution, agreed to the deal. It was only after this that the company showed them the floor plans and told them more about the architectural plans of the building and the flats.

The one story apartment house was located at the foot of a hill in the path of rainwater runoff. It was made of wood and had electric heating. The floor plans of most flats (especially the smaller ones) were not designed in a way that the space could be efficiently used by the owners, but rather to make construction as quick, inexpensive, and easy as possible. Insulation was of poor quality and made using materials that did not allow the walls to "breathe". The plastic windows had no drain holes, so the walls around them became moldy within a few weeks after people moved in. The laminate floor was not installed properly and, after the wood dried, cracks and gaps appeared between floorboards. After families moved in it became obvious that there was no sound insulation in the interior walls, so neighbors could hear each other clearly from one apartment to the next. In two apartments the ceiling fell down after a week, because the water pipes in the upstairs apartments were not connected properly and water leaked into the walls. There was no proper road leading up to the house, and there was no parking at all for cars.

There were two other problems as well: Most families moved in October and they were horrified to see that as a result of improper insulation and the installation of an inefficient electric heating system, they had heating bills that were well beyond their ability to pay. Further, families not only had to put up with the very poor quality of the house, but they also learned after the building was ready that instead of the originally agreed upon 100 Euro/sqm they would have to pay 475 Euro/sqm. They tried to appeal the price increase in court, but their complaints were turned down with explanations about inflation over the previous two years, and rapidly increasing real estate prices.

Details of the replacement housing

As I was told in private conversations, most families that were affected by eviction did not want to buy these new replacement flats. They hoped to be offered the possibility of continuing their rental contracts, either with support from the national and local state administration, or getting subsidized rental flats from the company that evicted them. However, the company was interested in selling these low-quality flats as soon as possible, while Romanian state administration had no existing support schemes for people in such a situation.

The causes for the lack of state support and affordable rental flats were manifold. Ideologies that saw housing solely as a commodity became increasingly widespread in post-socialist Romania. Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, real estate had been advertised by banks, international developers, and state/nonprofit actors as an "investment in one's future". Mainstream discourse often presented renting as "shortsightedness", as something "irresponsible", and renters (other than students) who did not own a flat as people who lived only for the present. To make matters worse, several other parallel processes were working against those who needed a flat: after 1989 the house building industry collapsed creating a huge shortage of affordable flats, and state decision making on housing policy radically changed. In the early 1990s, formerly communist

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state properties were almost completely privatized[64] which led to the disappearance of socialized flats, state-subsidized rents, and affordable rental housing. There was a constant shortage of rental properties in big cities that caused the price of rental units to rise. As a result, an informal and unregulated nationwide rental market developed, in which families with limited resources were greatly disadvantaged. Although the homebuilders industry started to pick up in the mid-2000s, the gradual increase in supply did not result in the lowering of prices. House prices in Cluj went significantly down only after the global economic crisis hit Romania in 2009.

For example, when I started my fieldwork in Cluj in 2007 rent for a 28 sqm studio flat varied between 100-200 EURs for a month, depending on location, quality of the flat, and the extras provided (for comparison, Anca's monthly salary at the camera factory was approximately 130 EURs). Rents were required to be paid in foreign currencies, most commonly in EURs, but occasionally dollars or Swiss francs were also accepted. The preference for foreign currency most commonly depended on the type of loan the owner took out on the flat. Foreign currency made it possible for landlords to shift their currency exchange risks to the tenants. In addition, no legislative framework was in place to protect either the rights of the landlords, or the tenants. Rental incomes were not reported and most landlords paid no income tax to the state. Under such circumstances almost all landlords in Cluj were looking to rent their properties to students or young, childless professionals, seeing these populations as less risky or complicated than families with several young children and unstable employment prospects. It is easy to see that people in Anca's situation were deprived of real options in terms of housing, stigmatized for not being able to take part in the shared "societal dream" of full ownership, and were pushed into decisions that often made extremely difficult their present and future.

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[64] "By the early 1990s, there was a tenure structure throughout the transition economies, with very high rates of private-owner occupation. Thus the transition countries were able to move relatively swiftly towards a privatized housing market with high ownership rates without first establishing much of an institutional structure that is normally associated with a private real estate market. These very high rates of owner occupancy have largely been maintained due to a number of factors, including the lack of rental alternatives." (UN Housing in ECE, 2005:4) "The lack of a well developed rental market, especially for low-rent accommodation, further restricts mobility. Privatization reduced the properties available for rental, as tenants became owners." (UN Housing in ECE, 2005:5)

It was not necessary to ask Anca or others how they felt about this, because all evicted families were talking continuously about what happened. They thought that a great injustice had been done, talked about corruption infiltrating and controlling everything, and said that they felt they were not able to control any aspect of their lives. However, although Anca took part in these conversations and often repeated these narratives, she also blamed herself, saying it was their own fault, because they should have known how the system worked and paid the bribes, just as those few neighbors did who had won their cases. As often happened when she thought there were things in her life she could not control, she said that there was "no point in talking about it anymore" and "nothing to be done"[65]. So I asked her, if this was how she felt, than why wasn't she – at least to some small degree – happy with their new flat: it was bigger, was in better condition than the previous one, and although it was more expensive than what they expected, it was still well under the market prices for that area[66]. She could not or did not want to explain her feelings, so she just mumbled something about missing the big garden and courtyard they used to have "over there", and the family feeling better in the old place.

The humiliating legal procedures and the injustice they felt they had suffered explained part of Anca's aversion. The anxieties that resulted from losing the benefits that came with factory housing (i.e. subsidized utilities, low rental fees) and her fear of defaulting on the mortgage of the new flat also contributed to her feelings of insecurity and isolation. But still, I felt there was a more personal side to her story. She and her family found themselves in a paradoxical situation: here they were, owning a brand new flat bought in a brand new development, the first big thing they ever owned, everybody was congratulating them on their new apartment, and she was crying over her old, rented, run down 25 sqm flat. It was clear that these things were not about property or ownership for her. Home ownership, as such, was never a goal in itself. They wanted a home they felt they could afford, be that owned or rented. And their old flat was exactly that. The social pressure for owner-occupancy had no meaning or value for them as such. What seemed to outsiders – banks, entrepreneurs, politicians, administrators – to be a sensible and good choice, an

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[65] As pointed out in the previous chapter, based on the analytical framework developed by Skultans, such narrative patterns (i.e. Anca saying, "nothing to be done") were used on occasions when interviewees could not find an explanation for the unfortunate turns their lives were taking. In Anca's case the function of this sentence was similar.
[66] They paid 475 euro/sqm, while other newly built flats in the neighborhood started at 750-800 euro/sqm.

improvement in the situation of these families, for Anca and most of her neighbors was just a further limitation on their choices, a worsening of their situation.

The thought that in this new flat they would struggle each and every month to pay their tremendous electricity bills and mortgage rates, created anxieties for Anca and her husband that were hard to live with. At the old flat there were no such bills and payments. While living in their old home they only rarely had to make a choice between eating and paying bills. Now, this had become a daily issue for Anca. She felt caught in circumstances she did not create or control, "I haven't slept for weeks; I just lie in the bed and think about it over and over again, what to do…" She could not see a way out. It was a situation about which she thought the sacrifices required were disproportionate to the benefits. Living in their old home did not force them into situations that went from bad to worse. Although they were always living from one month to the next, Anca and her husband felt they had choices when deciding to do or not to do certain things. Before, her husband could choose not to leave his family behind and go to Italy, he could decide not to take jobs he felt were beneath him, and they could choose not to ask for money from family members who they knew would humiliate them and criticize their decisions and lifestyle, as Anca's sisters did when they asked them for a loan for their new flat[67].

For Anca and her husband to be forced into buying the flat meant loosing this freedom and their self-esteem. The only occasions when Anca used the term "poor" in relation to themselves, were when she felt the loss of their self-esteem was at stake. "I'd rather remain poor, than be beaten or humiliated" she said when talking about her former husband who abused her, or her sister who humiliated them by making rough and vulgar remarks about Anca's husband. Dissociating herself so clearly from poverty shows that "being poor" was perceived by Anca as a stigma, and the only way for her to accept that such a stigma might be attributed to her was when a positive quality was associated with it. In this case preserving her integrity and dignity, feeling that she was not selling out for money and financial security, not compromising the values she tried to live by (and thought society believed in) made her feel that she was among the "deserving poor".

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[67] See details in Chapter 4, in the transcript of our dialog with Anca.

This is what remained of Anca's house after it was demolished

The paradox of her situation that gnawed at Anca, although she never said it exactly this way, was that she always struggled to live a "normal" life, a life where she would not run afoul of social norms and conventions, for example the norm of living within one's means. And even though she thought she had done "everything right" according to her own and the larger society's value system and social practices – went to school, worked, got married, established a family and raised children responsibly, sent them to school, tried to pay her bills on time, never borrowed in order to buy expensive things – against her will and all their legal struggles, she was forced into a situation where she had to forsake many of these values. Borrowing meant more to Anca than just being in debt: It made her feel she was becoming a bad mother who was unable to provide for her children. She felt she was a bad wife by accepting the 'sacrifice' her husband had to make by living abroad without his family. She thought she was a bad sibling because she borrowed money which she knew she might not be able to pay back by the time her sisters might need the money. She felt she "had become" something she never wanted to be, and she was suffering not only because of the

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insecurity the next day might bring, but also from not being able to erase, for either herself or her family, the stigma attached to being labeled as "undeserving poor", of having and not paying back debts and not caring 'properly' for her family. Even though they now "owned" a flat, she continued to feel that slowly but surely her family had slipped from being part of the "deserving poor" into the group of "undeserving poor". As she expressed it, "We own this flat now, but that is only theoretical. Practically speaking, the bank owns it. And God save us from not being able to pay the monthly mortgage installments and losing our house again…"

Both Anca and her husband associated this new flat with all these bad alternatives and conditions. They felt that now they would have even fewer choices than before. Although she never directly spoke of her uneasiness in these terms, she did say on several occasions that she could not look at the new flat as her *home*. For her it was the place that had turned their life into a trap from which they could not escape: "…It is only now that the hard part starts...I do not know how it is going to be…"

5.4 "…I just want to have a normal life…"

While Anca seemed often to conform to the rules imposed upon her by the "outside" world, in her personal life she still tried very hard to "do things differently" than her parents did. As I got to know Anca better, she once said that the only thing she always wanted was a "normal" life. And she often phrased things in terms of "normalcy" when she talked about her life or answered questions. I once asked why she took so many photos (several hundred) of her kids, and other aspects of their life: birthdays, cakes, gifts, family reunions, holidays, their old flats and their furniture, her family members, as well as her workplaces. I said that as far as I knew not many people in her neighborhood had so many photo albums, and that paying for the developing of all these photos had to be a considerable financial burden on their family budget. She replied, "It was, but still, that is normal". "I want my kids, and also us, to remember these things. It is normal to have memories of our celebrations, of the relaxed moments of our life together." And indeed, on the occasions when the family got together, and sometimes even when friends or neighbors visited, they took out these photographs and almost ritualistically relived these 'key' events in the

life of the family, reinforcing the memories of their happy moments – and in doing so, placing in perspective and 'forgetting/silencing' the unhappy and problematic memories[68].

It was the same desire for "normalcy" that led Anca to buy relatively expensive gifts for her loved ones; to take on family obligations when she was asked to; to try to pay for the kids' school holidays; or, when needed, to finance her younger son's sports aspirations. "It is normal to do these things for your family" she replied when asked why she was taking on these commitments, doing all these things, although they required many sacrifices on her part. It seems "normalcy" for her meant living by a set of rules[69] – "social norms" – that she believed would help her integrate into society in a way that might erase the stigma she felt was attached to her because of her troubled and abusive childhood, and her fragmented and disadvantaged educational and employment history. She tried to create and validate a "persona" – even if that meant extreme sacrifices from time to time – she hoped would not be rejected in the environment in which she lived and would be radically different from that of her parents.

Taken together, when her remarks on the subject were placed in context, it was clear she definitely did not think of her childhood as being "normal": She said once that there were almost no memories from her childhood she wished to recall or share. She had only a few pictures from her youth, and none from that period she wanted to show. Listening to stories about her early life the most striking aspect was the lack of "family" as such in her narrative. She had stories about her mother taking care of them; stories about her father teaching them about religion; memories of herself and her sister going to the special school together; some memories about her grandparents on her father's side after a few summer weeks she spent with them in their small village in her early teenage years. But no memories of them, as a family, doing things together. The few occasions when she mentioned her parents being together involved violence, the "atmosphere at home" from which she tried to run away. The "things happening at home" from which (she did not really understand why) her mother never walked away. Her descriptions gave hints of an everyday

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[68] I had this experience with other families as well, even though most families did not have as many photos as Anca. The fact that she worked at a disposable camera factory for years made it more affordable to take and develop photographs.

[69] Or at least attempting to do so within her means and possibilities.

life that on the surface seemed to be dominated by males, who were forcing things on women both by sheer physical force and by being the main breadwinners. However, as Anca put it, the women were the "tough ones", keeping families above water, not letting their kids down and caring for their husbands.

5.5 "…if my husband hit me…"

Part of Anca's adult life was characterized by efforts – as in the case of many other women I talked to in her neighborhood – to break behavioral patterns "inherited" from her parents. As she grew up seeing how her mother was always the object of her father's violence, she especially wanted to avoid this happening to her and her children. She desperately wished to have some control over her life. And although she said she felt she did not succeed in doing this in the public domains of her life, she wanted to keep things "straight" at least in family and personal matters where she felt she had some power to change things.

At the first signs that her life would mirror that of her mother's – when her first husband hit her – she ended the relationship and got a divorce. Terminating her pregnancy was another way of taking more control over her life and body. Although she conformed to and accepted the gender roles and values prescribed by her social environment which would make her the object of male sexual desires – youth, beauty, long hair, dress codes, virginity, fertility – she resisted the absolute right of her husband over her body, saying things such as, "Sorry, but nobody hits me", and "I did not want to have _his_ baby" and "I wanted to have no connections to him anymore." From her point of view having her first husband's baby – not their baby or her baby – would have meant that, even if she divorced him, it was still possible for him to have a claim over them and their bodies.

However, it was clear Anca still internalized many of the normative inhibitions prescribing a woman's behavior. These inhibitions led her at first to recount the story of her abortion in a way that left room for her to back out of her role as active initiator/creator of events and be able to distance herself to some degree from her own actions: "I was pregnant when I divorced and I lost [destroyed] the pregnancy." The Romanian expression she used to describe what happened, "Eram

insărcinată când am divorţat şi l-am pierdut…" has a double meaning. The first and most commonly used meaning of the verb "l-am pierdut" is "I lost it". In Romanian, in case a woman had a miscarriage, this is a common way to refer to what happened. However, the verb has a second, rarely used, but very powerful meaning as well; "destroying/annihilating/eradicating" something. The choice of wording seems to make clear Anca's ambivalence about what happened: on the one hand, it indicates that she still experiences "losing" the pregnancy and her marriage as accidental to some degree and therefore beyond her immediate control. But, on the other hand, the choice of words – the use of a verb that has two relevant meanings in this context – reveals her extremely strong negative feelings in relation to the pregnancy and her very strong wish to retain control of her body. And, taken in the overall context, the less common meaning of the verb – "destroying/annihilating/eradicating" – likely best represents her feelings. Although Anca could have said from the start that she decided to have an abortion, only later, when she talked about the legal implications of abortion during communism, she finally directly stated she had "arranged for an abortion".

While male violence against women was seen by Anca, and many other women in the Iris district, as something unacceptable in a relationship, they were somehow more permissive about drinking. The fact that their boyfriends, husbands, and sons got drunk occasionally was acceptable; especially so because men – finding pub prices too high – were more likely to drink in their homes or courtyards. If there were fights and violence in the neighborhood, as there were sometimes, they occurred more often among men – often between fathers and their grown sons – than among men and women.

It seemed that there was a new generation of women, in their thirties and forties, who were able to manage to better protect themselves from domestic violence than their mothers' generation could. But, this might have been because relationships between men and women were shifting as well. Or at least that was what many women were telling me: While they never saw men of their fathers' generation cry, it was becoming more common to see their husbands and adult sons openly crying in situations of grief, emotional distress, and desperation.

Two brothers crying and saying goodbye to each other on the evening of the older brother's departure to work in Spain

It was not only that men became "softer" and more "talkative", as one woman put it, but being in a relationship and having a family somehow had become more important for men as well. One reason for this was the fact that the home had started to partially replace restaurants, pubs, coffee houses and confectionaries; places these men once regularly frequented, but were now beyond their financial reach. Thus, some of the 'stages' upon which 'rituals of masculinity' used to be played out exclusively among men became less frequented (along with some of the gendered workplaces and unions), and the other 'stages' – e.g. parties held at home, family meetings, celebrations, playing games in the courtyards – imposed a much more active negotiation of gender relations and roles, possibly resulting in the changes some women informants referred to as 'softening up'.

Another possible reason for this shift in gender relations might have been the fact that many men lost their positions as the main breadwinners in the family; the restructuring of the city's economy

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and the tilt towards the service sector and other gender-specific industries (i.e. electronics assembly/disassembly companies) put many women in a new and better financial position. While under communism most men in the Iris district were working in higher wage heavy industry, most women were employed in lower status/lower pay light industry. In contrast, in the post-1989 economy, the job market shrank considerably for men who would or could not migrate to western countries, as Anca's husband did when he went to Italy. Most men periodically experienced unemployment and/or had extremely high job insecurity with salaries that were often below the national minimum wage. Besides, as Romanian "state paternalism" reoriented and began protecting the more powerful (Popescu 2004:11) and the welfare system 'deserted' many of these families, it was a frequent complaint among male informants that "there is nobody we can rely on anymore". In this context, for many of them, relationships with their wives, children, parents and siblings became even more important than before.

As a result, while core labor division in the household did not change radically, many of the men I talked to, expressed their desire to do their part in the education of their children and to spend weekends and holidays with their families[70]. Cooking, cleaning, washing, and ironing remained tasks performed mainly by women; shopping was routinely shared/alternated among all household members; and more often than before, men spent time at home with their children and engaged in the many administrative tasks that emerged in/around the household (banking, bills, relations with state and employment offices, searching for new jobs for family members[71]). It is important to

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[70] Work of Lydia Morris on male unemployment in the United Kingdom (1990) suggests the opposite: men who lost their jobs when the steel works closed were less likely than before to do housework and childcare. However, in Romania, I suspect one of the reasons for such a difference can be found in the working schedules many families had during communism. Since parents, in order to be able to provide childcare, often had to work alternating shifts in factories (as was the case in Anca's family for years), fathers got used to the idea that childcare can sometimes become a shared responsibility among parents. It was probably this tendency that became even more pronounced over the years.

[71] Even in these tasks there were divisions along gender lines: Women almost always negotiated childcare benefits with state administrators; and when delays on mortgage and loans occurred, it was more common for women to go to the bank to negotiate. However, when families were asking for a loan from the bank, it was more common for the men to negotiate. Further, it was more likely for men to handle issues that needed negotiation with state offices – such as the problems around their factory flats. These details are important ethnographic insights; however, they do not constitute the focus of this chapter. It is important that such data not obscure the fact that many men were more actively involved in household tasks than before.

note that these changes – men's partial reorientation towards family and children – might also reflect their desire to be able to project themselves into the future: as continuity and security in their working lives and professional careers disappeared, parenthood/fatherhood offered the possibility of partially filling these void(s) in their lives.

5.6 "… my husband is so difficult…"

While many of the men I conversed with no longer went to pubs and restaurants, a new "men's world", from which most women and children were excluded, seemed to be emerging. It was the world of computers and the Internet. Few, if any families in Anca's neighborhood could afford to have a computer and an Internet subscription, thus only two or three families invested in this. Anca's family did not. However, she said many times that it would be good to have at least a second-hand computer, so her children could learn how to use it, and she could talk to her husband in Italy from her home, not always from the neighbors' living room.

Having a computer and Internet subscription was somehow a privilege and empowerment in this micro environment. But, it was also something around which the "men's world" was organized – men holding strict monopoly over it. When they had some free time, over the weekends or on weekday evenings, they gathered in one of the homes that had a computer and access to the Internet. They discussed hardware, software, kilo- and megabits, computer programs, free downloading and file sharing sites. Women just rolled their eyes and left the room when they heard the same conversations over and over again. On these occasions I usually left the room with the other women, to participate in their "kitchen talks". However, I was often invited by men to take part in their discussions, since they considered me to be an "expert" when it came to computers and especially the Internet. Since this did not create tensions between the wives and me, I took advantage of these opportunities to get to know the men better and also to talk with them about issues not related to computers, such as their lives.

The most common topics of discussion among men, besides computers and the Internet, were usually related to their anxieties, fears, and feelings of insecurity and isolation. Although on most

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occasions they were not articulate about this, and they only shared stories about what had happened to their kin and friends during the week, the underlying messages of these stories were almost always the same: how to cope with a life they often felt was out of their control. When they talked about these things the storytelling was always very fragmented. Nevertheless, after a while it seemed that the repetitive patterns they were using in these dialogues became, in a sense, almost ritualistic.

Michael Gilsenan (1996), in his book on the practices of power in Arab societies, examines how "narratives of power" and the repetition of their performance changed over time among men in Lebanese social settings. He argues that while in the past these narrative rituals were most often performed in order to establish and reinforce hierarchies of dominance among these men (and their families), over time, as social conditions changed, narratives shifted and "discrepancy and discontinuity had become central to the rhetorics and narratives of everyday practice" (1996:300). Gilsenan argues that while "men were acutely conscious of different discrepancies and discontinuities in their lives, self-representations and histories" they also "played on these dimensions in narrative and metanarrative, while at the same time expressing the conventional feeling that they had, contrary to the ideology of hierarchy, 'no choice'" (1996:300).

In the context of my own research, Gilsenan's findings highlight how the "narratives of power" (constructed around the Internet and computers) of male informants and the "narratives of powerlessness" (constructed around everyday occurrences) were closely related and complemented each other. They were enacted and performed together in order to share, partially dissolve, and at the same time attempt to make universal the frustrations and feelings of being unsuccessful in their everyday lives.

When my male informants gathered, computers were always the excuse for their meetings: Men almost never came together just to sit and talk, as women did when they met to have a coffee and a cigarette. But, as they were downloading content, chatting online with friends and family abroad, or with strangers who occasionally popped onto their computer screens, stories always emerged about what had happened during the days on which they did not meet. These story-fragments were not intended for outsiders, as I was at the beginning. In most cases men made only brief references

to recent events, or used only first names when referring to common acquaintances: "Have you heard that Mircea lost the case against his employer?" "Did you hear that Dan is on sick leave again?" "Lazar went to Spain, but he was not sure if he was going to be able to find work in the same village." "Viorel fell off his bike yesterday morning. He can't go to work, so his employer threatened to make him redundant." "Florin started to gamble again." "Alin broke up with his girlfriend and he's living on his mother's pension now." "Pista has problems with his blood pressure and the medications they gave him didn't help, so he stopped taking them." These sentences were just thrown into unrelated discussions, followed by some brief replies, such as "Yeah, I heard that." or "What to do?", or "Maybe he should have hired a different lawyer", or "My doctor is the same. He doesn't care at all." And then they went back to talking about computers, movies, and the information they found on the Internet. At first, as I listened to these interchanges, I paid more attention to the networks through which information was passed and the speed at which it was disseminated within the neighborhood and among kin abroad.

It was only later that I started to "listen to" particular details of these interactions and understood that this type of repetitive and fragmented storytelling functioned as some sort of ritual. It was performed to establish a sense of belonging and a sense of shared fate among these men, while at the same time it was somehow much more than that: It helped them to communicate and re-live through other's lives their individual frustrations and anxieties, without being forced to spell out their particular life stories in public. In this way they did not have to take the risk of being shamed, while creating a semi-public space where they were able to communicate difficult feelings, and where individual "failure" – as they sometimes interpreted their own lives – could be shared with other males and where frustration eventually dissolved in the feeling that their lives were not the exceptions but the norm, when compared to others.

When I conducted life history interviews with these men, one-to-one, with no other people around, they were more forthcoming about their feelings and individual experiences. The topics they brought up were, most commonly, related to feeling isolated in their distress, and a lack of power in managing many aspects of their lives. Most of them were no longer the breadwinners in their families, they were fighting a losing battle with their employers over paychecks, they were constantly forced to work overtime without being compensated, or to undertake tasks that put their

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health at risk. And although many of them reported the unlawful practices of their employers to the Employee Protection Office, and sometimes even sued these companies, at the end of the day they felt as if they were fighting a losing battle. Each and every time they turned against their bosses, they ended up with the company taking revenge at a later point in time, by cutting their paychecks under false pretenses, by placing them on unpaid leave for weeks, by assigning them the most difficult tasks at work, by making them work for hours in extreme hot and cold weather conditions, or by laying them off first when there were cutbacks at the company.

They had similar experiences with the healthcare system: Many of them had problems with their blood pressure, heart, lungs, or stomach. They had recurring fears about their mortality because no one in the health care system ever took the time to explain what their condition(s) meant, the risks they were exposed to or what they needed to do to protect their health. When they complained about the service at hospitals, they often felt that the doctors and nurses took "revenge" by making them to wait for weeks for important medical tests, by not giving them sick leave when they needed it, or by scaring them about their health condition with stories that overstated possible future consequences of their given condition. As a result, they often lost trust in the healthcare system, they stopped taking prescribed medications in fear that they had been intentionally misdiagnosed, and many relied instead on the medications they received from friends and neighbors.

The fact that their "fragmented storytelling" was framed by and included in discussions about the virtual world of the Internet and fiction films made even clearer the powerlessness they experienced in their real life, and the empowerment they felt from having and using computers. When placed in context, it was reasonable to conclude that the importance of having expensive, high-performance computers had, in part, to do with issues of power and control: They often talked about the fact that they had some expertise that women and children did not have; they were proud that they had alternative sources of information and were able to access music and films for free (things that previously were not available to them); they emphasized that they were able to make free international phone calls through the Internet; and finally, they also said that they engaged in chats with strangers – especially women – from whom they usually could hide the realities of their everyday lives and identities. In addition, an internal hierarchy among the group

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developed, based on who had a computer and who did not. Men with computers felt more empowered and in control, setting the tone and nature of their relationships with the others. As pointed out earlier, Anca and her husband had no computer, and so they depended on those, who had.

Anca's husband spent a lot of time with these men when he was not abroad. However, Anca never ever complained in public about her husband neglecting her. She was extremely loyal to him in all these social settings, vigorously defending him and his choices. And although neighbors were gossiping that her husband was drinking a lot, when Anca was confronted with this information, she always said that he was no worse a drinker than any of the other men, while at the same time he was quieter and less volatile during his "drinking sprees". The gossips also talked about the jealousies of her husband, and his (sudden) returns from Italy to "check on" Anca. Anca admitted readily to this charge, saying that "… my husband is so difficult, so jealous, oh my!" However, her interpretation was that this behavior gave her and her children an extreme feeling of security. She said she never had to be afraid of losing her partner and his support. She had many stories to prove this: Her husband turned against his own mother when she wanted to stop him from marrying Anca, "a divorced woman". She showed me their wedding picture and laughingly said how hurt and upset her husband was each time he saw that picture because he thought that while he was staring at her in the picture, crazy in love with Anca, she was just looking away, "toward the empty horizon". She also showed me some albums that were almost empty because her husband took out photos to take with him to Italy, to remember his wife and kids on evenings when he was lonely.

It was this very close relationship – as well as Anca's feelings of being more in control in their relationship than her husband – that made it possible for her to confront kin, friends and neighbors, whenever she felt the strength of their relationship or lifestyle were questioned. And it was this reliance on and interdependence that helped them to always support the other in trying to escape one of their worst fears: that of repeating their parents' fate. Anca did not want to relive any form of abuse in her life again, while her husband wanted to escape the lifestyle of his parents' who were poor village peasants. Anca supported her husband through vocational schools and professional training, and always understood and supported him when he did not accept

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agricultural work in Romania and Italy – "because it would have been beneath him" – even if this meant that they might run out of money and have to borrow from Anca's mother or sisters. This was the setting in which, both Anca and her husband, struggled to remain 'respectable' and 'deserving', and as they said, to live a "normal" life.

5.7 Conclusion

Throughout the chapter I tried, in part, to reveal the tensions that surfaced between the 'ideal-typical' categories and 'norms' to which Anca said she wished to conform, and the everyday realities where she and her family struggled to find coping strategies and create 'in-between' spaces that opened up new opportunity structures for them. Just to sum up a few of these 'tensions': Anca was successful in her desire to remain a virgin and have children only after she was married. Soon after, she was confronted with the reality of a violent husband, and so divorced him after nine months and terminated her pregnancy. This sequence was soon followed by Anca's second wedding – when she was six months pregnant and had a huge belly – something harshly judged within her environment. Nevertheless, she chose to take the risk of being shamed as a 'fallen woman' rather than endangering the health of her future children by having a second abortion. Another such situation emerged when Anca – in order to remain a 'deserving' person – decided to take a job at the brick factory as soon as she graduated from school, but then – trying to escape extremely difficult working conditions that damaged her health – she twice took the opportunity of extended maternity leaves and stayed home with her two sons, even though that meant she needed to get medical documents that (temporarily) categorized the two boys she dearly loved as "children with severe disabilities". Another such situation in Anca's life emerged in relation to her self-perception as a 'hard-working', self-reliant person. Although it caused her extreme anxiety, when she and her husband were made redundant at the brick factory, they decided to stay at home for three months and use up part of the money they received as compensatory salaries, just to be able to spend some time together, something they had previously never been able to do. Further, although Anca tried to conform to the law and be a good citizen, she occasionally 'gamed' the system by taking jobs in the informal economy, when the mainstream economy did not pay enough to cover their living expenses.

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In order to understand the complexity of such decisions and the contradictions and discrepancies that emerged between Anca's discourse, her aspirations, and her actual coping strategies, we need to understand that divergences appeared not because Anca and her family were part of a different and non-mainstream 'culture' (as it is often claimed) but because the conditions they had to face often did not make it possible for them to act in accordance with the 'ideal-typical norms' that would make a 'normal' life possible. Nevertheless, as illustrated in this chapter and will be seen in the following chapters as well, in order to cope with their fragmented and complex life events, for most people I talked with, it was established practice, not the exception, to develop coping strategies that diverged from the 'ideal-typical' categories which they reproduced at the discursive level. In no way did this mean that they were part of a 'culture of poverty' or an 'underclass' that was disconnected and excluded from the mainstream. Fear of becoming 'excluded' was an everyday reality for most of my informants; however, even the families that were 'pushed out' of the city and ended up living in absolute poverty in far away villages, remained embedded in their old networks and continued to reproduce such 'ideal-typical' categories at the discursive level. As Erik Harms argues, as social scientists, instead of helping to reproduce such categories, we should attempt to understand "how people deploy them to achieve material gain, construct meaningful identities, and carve a space for themselves within society." (Harms 2011:5)

In this context, it is important to recognize that, based on the 'hard' (statistical) facts that categorized Anca as poor – illiterate and poor parents, many siblings, education in a school for pupils with learning disabilities, unskilled positions throughout her employment history, a husband in a similar socio-economic position, loss of their home and the purchase of a new flat through bad credit constructions – she might well be found in the 'exemplary' category in policy makers' statistical tables. However, when examined in detail, her life history is not just a product of these "statistical components" but instead is a constant flow of events coupled with her reactions to these events, enduring the consequences of her decisions, creating interpretations of what happened and why, then following up with new decisions and strategies to adapt to constantly changing circumstances.

As such, Anca's life has never been and it is not now, a closed 'story' in which the outcomes can be predicated upon such statistical markers. As seen in the interview – and this demonstrates how

contextual and subjective poverty can be – even with all the struggles and difficulties they went through, Anca said that her own life trajectory and especially that of her children was actually an experience of upward mobility: She indicated that over the years her living conditions improved compared to what she experienced in her childhood; and that she thought her children lived much better than she or her husband used to live when they were their children's age. In this context, it is also important to recognize that while statistical factors most often exclude extended kin from such examinations, when upward mobility and an (even temporary) improvement in economic status occurs anywhere in the network, its effects often migrate well beyond the nuclear family of husband-wife-children. Anca's life history is but one among many in which a family's extended networks of support are effected, both positively and negatively, by changes anywhere in the kin network.

The chapter also makes clear that the difficult conditions in which Anca and her family found themselves at the time this research was conducted, was not "new poverty" – as it might appear at first, if only statistical signifiers are taken into account – but was the result of a combination of long-time inequalities (in education, employment, housing, social networks, etc.) and the changes that took place after 1989 in the socio-economic space in which Anca's family was/is embedded.

Without taking into consideration and understanding the entire constellation of factors, it is impossible to have a clear understanding of socialist and post-socialist (re)production of inequalities and poverty. This is why, while my focus will be on housing and property relations in the following chapters, during my analysis keen attention will be paid to these different aspects of my subjects' lives. By focusing on housing I will not only endeavor to understand one particularly important aspect of the lives of these families – how people cope on a daily basis with the constant threat of losing their home, which is among the most significant places in assuring the permanence of their social, biological and economic reproduction. Further, I will endeavor to disentangle the much broader processes that bring actors together in social and geographical space, and the ways in which all these actors take action and respond to constantly changing circumstances.

PART THREE

SPACE, POWER, AND PROPERTY

Chapter 6

Exclusion and displacement in Cluj: Coping with housing-insecurity

In the previous two chapters, from the perspective of one life history, the focus was on how the politico-economic and administrative changes of the past decades influenced the social and economic standing of one woman and her family. As seen in the case study, the many spheres of everyday urban life in which Anca and her family 'navigated' over the decades – housing; work and employment; money and debt; kinship and friendship networks; migration; as well as links to the state through transfers and services, to name only a few – interacted and influenced each other, sometimes contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities and poverty, on other occasions making it possible to escape precarious livelihoods.

In this chapter, examining only one of the spheres where inequalities play out, that of housing, the focus will be on how changes in urban housing influenced the (re)production of marginal positions of families across social space and across generations, and how households with limited amounts of capital mobilized resources to cope with the difficulties they were faced within the "housing market."[72] At the same time, I want to understand how people's life-styles and coping strategies – constrained and restructured by the broader reconfigurations that took place in the historical geography of the area – also shaped and structured these "space-times"[73] throughout the decades. Finally, as I explore the historical and political construction of inequalities in urban space – with a

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[72] I use quotation marks for "housing market" because in Romania there was no western-type property market for the most part of the past sixty years. In communism there was no formal housing market at all: flats were distributed by a state agency through workplaces, while a parallel (informal) "market" flourished, but this existed mainly for exchanges of flats among families, not for buying and selling property freely in an open market. After the collapse of the communist system it took a long time for a "housing market" to develop: especially in the early 1990s it was all about the privatization of the communist state housing stock. Only from the mid-1990s the real-estate sector started to pick up, and it was only in the early 2000s that private companies entered the market to build new apartment houses.

[73] In the context of this chapter I understand "space-time" in the way Doreen Massey conceptualized it: "The view, then, is of space-time as a configuration of social relations within which the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity. Moreover, since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification." (Massey, 1994:3)

special focus in housing – I also wish to study "instituted social practices", meaning the "dialectical constitution of practices and the emergent elective affinities that structure them" (Narotzky and Smith, 2006:5).

The chapter begins by describing a social situation witnessed during my fieldwork: the debates over the paying of a shared water bill in one of the courtyards in which I conducted research. On the one hand, the analysis of this particular case helps to explain some of the major processes that contribute to the changes taking place in urban housing: the commodification of housing and land, changing property relations[74], and the resulting displacement many families are currently experiencing. On the other hand, this event, while providing insights into the housing situation in the district, also exposes the complex and changing relationships among the families that live in the neighborhood, shedding light on the restructuring of the social field from below and from within. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, this case will be used as a way to expose the involvement of many major players that act to shape the structure of the broader field to their own advantage, most importantly state actors, actors from the Romanian judiciary system, and actors from the global economic field.

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[74] Although in this chapter on housing my focus is not "property relations", where relevant, I understand "property" along Hann's argument that: "the focus on property must not be restricted to the formal legal codes which play a major role in our own society, but must be broadened to include the institutional and cultural contexts within which such codes operate. (…) If we adopt a broad analytic concept of property in terms of the distribution of social entitlements, than it can be investigated anywhere in time and space" (Hann 1998:7).

6.1 A social situation: Paying the water-bill

On a Wednesday afternoon in mid-November 2008, towards the end of my fieldwork, I arrived at Ioana's house[75] only to find her at her kitchen table, fuming with anger and frustration, and telling me about the dispute she just had with several of her neighbors. The argument was about increases in the courtyard's water bill. As I learned from Ioana, a few of the eleven families on the bill decided they would no longer pay their share.

A typical courtyard house

The hundred-year old houses that used to belong to the brick factory had no running water, canalization, or a sewage system, and so the families living there all used the water tap installed in

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[75] Ioana was a 37 years old woman with a husband and two sons in one of the courtyards where I carried out extensive research during my fieldwork. She was one of my informants during the 15 months of my stay.

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the middle of the courtyard. Ioana explained that for decades, when the monthly water bill arrived, she picked it up and divided it among the eleven families, based on the number of household members in each. When ready with the calculations, she sent word to everybody; the neighbors came, paid their share of the bill, and then she took the full amount and paid it at the water company's cashier desk[76].

Although the utility bill listed the flats in the way they were registered decades ago in the books of the brick factory, and this no longer reflected the real number or condition of the inhabitable and inhabited flats, the courtyard people worked out among themselves a consensual system for dividing these bills. As the families I spoke to later that evening argued, the system worked well for decades because they "trusted"[77] Ioana and each other, and because everybody was "content" with the "principles" of dividing-up the bill. Most of them also said that "back then", during communism and even for a while after 1989, they were all "equal", being "good" colleagues, friends and neighbors and, on many occasions, also becoming kin to each other. However, on that November evening, I was told by both Ioana and some of her neighbors, that "trust and equality were gone for good" and that there was no longer "consensus" as to how to equitably divide the water bill, or for that matter, any of the other issues of mutual concern.

6.1.1 The courtyard people

The courtyard where Ioana lived was along one of the busiest roads of the Iris district; buses, trams and big trucks ran day and night a few meters from their windows. On the occasions when I slept at Ioana's place I remember lying in bed for hours, listening to the outside traffic, not being able to sleep because of the excessive noise. The trams and trucks were especially annoying. Each

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[76] Ioana said that until the brick factory closed down in 2000, electricity and gas bills also came the same way, for the entire courtyard, and they were divided and paid based on household size. However, both electricity and gas came not from the city's utilities companies, but from the factory's supply system, at very low, subsidized prices. This was a decades-long practice, introduced during communism and left in place even after 1989. The brick factory always covered part of the utilities costs from its workers. After the brick factory closed the electricity and gas companies installed individual meters for each flat in the courtyard. From then on courtyard people paid the full price for these services.

[77] Issues of "trust" in the courtyard's context will be discussed later in the chapter.

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time one passed, the house shook to its foundation. Ioana said that they got used to it over the years and that they no longer heard the traffic. For them the real "headache" was the long and widening cracks on the walls of their rooms, caused by the heavy traffic, and the fear that their houses could crumble at any moment. The courtyard was on a long, rectangular piece of land, approximately 50 meters wide and 100 meters long, with houses built in three groups, so some families had their flats further away from the main road, towards the back of the yard, where there was less noise and no shaking.

Detail of the courtyard in foreground

While originally all houses were the property of the brick factory and the families living there were all sitting tenants, in 2006 four families (of the eleven living in the courtyard) won a court case that allowed them to buy their flats from SANEX SA, a subsidiary of the brick factory. In contrast, Ioana and the other six families, who had a different lawyer, lost the case and were refused the opportunity to buy the flats they lived in[78]. Although their lawyer appealed the

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[78] The lawsuit of these eleven families was similar to that which Anca's courtyard had to go through before they lost their homes (see detailed discussion in the previous chapter). In the case of this courtyard there were two different

decision in Strasbourg in early 2007, at the European Court of Human Rights, one and a half years later, in November 2008, the case was still pending[79] [see the map on next page, the flats of the owner families are in green]. The eleven families who were on the water-bill in Ioana's courtyard and the approximate size of their flats are as follows:

1. **Flat 1 (30 sqm)**: 7 people (Tanti Kati – grandmother; Balog Anti – TK's son; Balog Irina – TK's daughter-in-law and wife of Balog Anti; the younger Balog Anti – grandson of TK, son of Irina and Anti; 2 grandsons of Tanti Kati and the wife of one of the grandsons)

2. **Flat 2 (25 sqm)**: 2 people (Tanti Elena and her adult son, Nelu)

3. **Flat 3 (30 sqm)**: 4 people on paper, but 1 lives in Spain (Ioana and her husband, Stefan; Petru, the son of Ioana and Stefan; Andrei – Ioana's son from a previous relationship, Andrei lives in Spain currently)

4. **Flat 4 (25 sqm)**: 3 people; This flat was bought, the family owns it (Laci, his wife Ildiko, and their 6 year old son)

5. **Flat 5 (12 sqm)**: Empty, uninhabitable (on paper is rented by Irina, but she lives in **Flat 1** with her mother-in-law)

6. **Flat 6 (20 sqm)**: 2 people; This flat was bought, the family owns it (Bojin Emilia and her husband)

7. **Flat 7 (20 sqm)**: 2 people (Blaga Mihai and his wife)

8. **Flat 8 (20 sqm)**: 2 people (Petrescu Ana and her husband)

9. **Flat 9 & 10 (8 & 12 sqm)**: 3 people, a single family (Varga Liana, Liana's husband, and Liana's mother)

10. **Flat 11 (20 sqm)**: 2 people; This flat was bought, the family owns it (Benedek Gavril and his wife)

11. **Flat 12 (85 sqm + 80 sqm stockyard with adjacent buildings)**: 6 people on paper, but 4 of them live in Spain; This flat was bought, the family owns it (father and mother of Muresanu Adrian; Muresanu Adrian and his wife, plus their two children – the 4 of them live in Spain)

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lawyers representing four and seven families each. As mentioned already, the outcomes so far were very different: four families were allowed to buy; seven were refused the right, but appealed the verdict and were waiting for a final decision from the European Court of Human Rights.

[79] The case is still pending as of this writing in April 2012.

Map of Ioana's courtyard[80]

Newly built apartment block (16 flats in total, all in private ownership) Varga Liana & husband & mother (from Flats 9-10) bought a studio flat here	**BELONGS TO FLAT 12 STOCK YARD OF THE MUREȘANU FAMILY** **OWNER 4**	**FLAT 12** Mureșanu mother & father M. Adrian (son, in Spain with his wife + son, daughter) **OWNER 4**

COURTYARD ROAD

WATER TAP

FLAT 9 & 10 Varga Liana's mother	**FLAT 9 & 10** Varga Liana & husband
FLAT 6 Bojin Emilia & husband **OWNER 2**	**FLAT 7** Blaga Mihai & wife

FLAT 11 Benedek Gavril & fam. **OWNER 3**
FLAT 8 Petrescu Anamaria & husband

NEIGHBORING COURTYARD

Pantry	Pantry	Pantry	Pantry	Pantry

WC
WC

(FLAT 5) Not in use (Balog Irina's house)

FLAT 4 Kerekes Laci & wife, their son **OWNER 1**

Terrace to Flats 3 & 4

FLAT 3 Popa Ioana (mother) & Ștefan (husband) Petru (younger son) Andrei (older son)

FLAT 1 Tanti Szabo Kati (grandma) Balog Anti (TK son) Balog Irina (TK d-in-law) Balog Anti (TK grandson) 2 more grandsons+wifes	**FLAT 2** Tanti Moldoveanu Elena (mother) & Moldoveanu Nelu (her son)

MAIN ROAD – MAJOR DISTRICT STREET AND TRAMLINE

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[80] **Flat 5** (12 sqm) was in such a bad condition that it was never used by the family who was officially the renter of this space. Since they had kin in the courtyard [**Flat 1**], they rather moved in with them, even if in this way there were 7 people living in a 30 sqm kitchen-and-room flat. **Flats 9 & 10** were used as one home, since it was the same family using them. **Flat 12** – bought recently by the family living there – used to be two separate flats but the owners merged them into one big house after they bought them, basically extending and rebuilding the whole house from foundation. In **Flat 4** – also recently bought by its owner – the roof was redone and the owner started using the space under the rooftop as an extension to his flat (as an extra small room and storage space). **Flat 11** was refurbished by the owner, although without any extensions as of yet. On **Flat 6** no refurbishing was done as of yet, the two pensioners living there used up all their savings for buying the flat, none was left for improvements.

At the start of my research in 2007, only these eleven families lived in the courtyard, but by the time my fieldwork neared to its end in December 2008, fifteen more families moved into a newly built one-story apartment house at the back of the courtyard [see map above]. The "newcomers" ("ăştia noi"), as the courtyard families called them, were all brick factory workers, former colleagues, friends, and acquaintances of the courtyard people. After a judiciary procedure that went on for several years these fifteen families were all evicted from their old brick factory flats located in two neighboring courtyards, and offered instead replacement accommodation here. Anca's family, presented in the previous chapter, was one of them.

As seen in Chapters 4 and 5 (Anca's story), these families did not choose to move of their own free will. They were all forced into buying these newly built low-quality flats, which were beyond most people's financial means. And, although from the perspective of people who knew little of the situation, these families were seen as experiencing an increase in status – finally becoming the 'owners' of their flats and escaping the daily anxieties of eviction – in reality most of the new owners felt that their flats were owned by banks, and that they were quickly sliding into a precarious life in which they could lose everything overnight.

As some of them told me, they were actually envious of the courtyard people, even of those who were still not allowed to buy their houses. They were all convinced that, in the end, Ioana and her neighbors would be allowed to inexpensively buy their old brick factory homes. They argued that SANEX would not be able to do anything else with these pieces of real estate, because in all three groups of connected houses there was at least one flat that was privately owned, and – they said – the "rights of owners must be respected". But, according to Ioana and the other families, the most likely scenario was for things to happen as they had happened with the other courtyards: they would not be allowed to buy their flats, those who already owned their flats would be forced to sell their property back to the company, and everybody would be forcibly moved to replacement accommodations. And, as an even more threatening reality, there was the fate of the three families from the neighboring courtyard, who were not able to buy the replacement flats allocated to them, because banks were unwilling to give them loans. These three families had to move out of the city to far away rural areas, losing their jobs and livelihoods, and struggling just to survive.

From these discussions it became clear how contradictory the interpretations of the courtyard families were on what "property rights" meant in their particular situation, and how binding these rights were for them and their neighbors and for other (state, economic) actors. As seen from the above, there were two groups with very different interpretations of the same situation. One group, the non-owners, argued that "a title to a house in Romania" was a "valueless piece of paper", and that "the government and big companies" would "have priority" if that was in their interest, and that these "politicians and big entrepreneurs could easily do it because nobody protects people like us"[81]. That is, they basically emphasized the relational aspects of property, and claimed that outcomes of conflicts of interests depended on the power relations that existed among the different parties. The other group, mainly the families who bought a flat already, argued that having a "title" was clear-cut, showing in "black and white that from that point forward the flat belongs to a family". They claimed that "such a paper" was so strongly binding on everyone, that "even big private companies would yield in their fight over the remaining flats in the courtyard", in order not to violate the "ownership rights"[82] of those who already bought their houses. In this case, the families focused exclusively on the "rights" aspects of property, claiming they had "trust in the legal system" and "those responsible for enforcing it".

However, as will be seen in the following section, the everyday practices of these people were much more complex and ambiguous than the straightforward opinions they were voicing on this issue, and their actions were often the exact opposite of what they said they thought about the workings of ownership rights.

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[81] AH, edited field notes, November 2008.

[82] AH, edited field notes, October-November 2008.

6.1.2 Struggles for and against appropriation of space: Restructuring of the social field from below and from within

The shared water-bill (discussed above) arrived on Monday morning and the debate in the neighborhood about its payment escalated on Tuesday. On Wednesday, as soon as I entered Ioana's door, she immediately began to talk about and ask for advice related to her problem:

> **Ioana, from my fieldnotes**: "Tell me, what should I do with this situation? Liana [*Flat 9 & 10 on the map*] told me on Monday, right after the water bill arrived, that she is not paying for water anymore… They bought this studio flat in the new apartment house [*see on the map; in the back of Ioana's courtyard*] and the company handed over the flat in late October. Liana said that from now on they will bath and wash in their new flat, and so they are going to pay for water where they have individual meters showing only their family's consumption. But at the same time she also told me that the three of them will not move over there yet; they'll stay put in their old flat [*Flats 9&10 on the map*]! They are afraid that there will be an inspection because of our Strasbourg file[83], and if it is found that they have moved away, they could lose the right to buy their old house. And they want to keep it; they plan to rent out the old house if they will be allowed to buy it cheap… in that case they can pay the monthly installments of the bank loan taken out for the new flat from the money they receive as rent from the old… Anyway, not moving over there means that they will have to use water from our common water tap; at least for cooking and cleaning... so they should pay their share until they move! But when Muresanu [*Flat 12*] and two of the other owner families heard about Liana's decision [*Flats 4, 11*] they said that if Liana is not paying, then they are not going to pay for water either. Tanti Emilia said nothing [*owner of Flat 6*], of course, she is going to continue to pay. You know that she is not like them. But the other three families claim that they haven't used our tap for months now, because they have water inside their houses…" (Ioana, edited fieldnotes AH November 2008)

Of the four families that were allowed to buy their houses in 2006, three families installed water, toilets, and canalization in their flats in January 2008. Tanti Emilia did not [Flat 6], because they were pensioners and had no money for improvements. In buying their flat they had used all their savings. The other three owner families were better off: two of the families [Flat 4, 12] had relatives who emigrated to Spain, sending home remittances for building and refurbishing, while the third family [Flat 11] consisted of two working adults, with reasonably good salaries and no children in need of financial support.

> **Ioana, from my fieldnotes**: "So on Monday evening I told the rest of the families who are on the bill about these discussions, and asked them whether we should recalculate. But they all started yelling and complaining. Irina [*Flat 1*] told me that if this is the case she is not paying for herself and her son anymore, because the kid is handicapped and at the swimming pool where she takes him daily they both shower

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[83] As explained above, seven out of the eleven families in the courtyard were waiting for a decision from Strasbourg, the European Court of Human Rights, in the hope to be able to buy their flats from the factory.

anyway. She also said that instead Tanti Elena [*Flat 2*] should pay more, because she has a garden on the hillside and she takes water from here to sprinkle her plants. But then Tanti Elena [*Flat 2*] came along and told me that she is using very little water because Mihai [*her son*] showers at his workplace and the garden needs watering only in early spring. However, she claimed that she saw Laci [*Flat 4; they bought their flat and had all utilities inside their house*] washing his car on more than one occasion with water from our tap. And that she also saw Muresanu's mother [*Flat 12*] watering her flowers from this tap…" (Ioana, edited fieldnotes AH November 2008)

At the time when the owner families were said to be using water for washing cars and watering flowers they were actually 'entitled' to use the tap. During those months they were still paying their share of the water-bill. However, claiming that they did not use water from that tap was not true, either.

Ioana, from my fieldnotes: "[Then] Tanti Elena [*Flat 2*] finally left, but a few minutes later she came back again to question the grounds on which Irina [*Flat 1*] is making such a fuss, because for the past two months Tanti Kati [*Flat 1; Irina's mother-in-law*] moved her two orphan grandsons and the wife of one of them to their flat [*Flat 1*], and they did not pay anything on their behalf… I got so upset from this quarreling that I said I am not going to do the calculations anymore… But then all the neighbors attacked me saying that I should pay much more, because I wash the most, you know, because of Petru's [*Ioana's younger son, Flat 3*] daily weightlifting trainings. But they are stupid if they think I am going to take this; Andrei [*Ioana's older son*] left for Spain two months ago, and I am still paying his share of water... Anyway, after I calmed down a bit I went over to the families who said that they are not going to pay, and told them that I cannot change the calculations as long as we have this common tap outside in the courtyard, there is no way to make this work… But then Muresanu [*Flat 12*] and Laci [*Flat 4*] came over this afternoon, yelling at me, that they already said a long time ago that we should also install water, toilets and canalization in our houses, as they did; and that having our wooden, rural-type, old toilets next to their houses [*see on the map*] is not acceptable anymore, and that in urban areas this is against European Union regulations. They also said that they are going to talk to the administrator of the owner company of our flats, because they could easily force us to make these modifications… And they also threatened to report to the city administration that we still have illegally built storage places on common courtyard ground [*see on the map*] and this might contribute to the proliferation of rats in the neighborhood… I said nothing, but my blood pressure was sky high…" (Ioana, edited fieldnotes AH November 2008)

The storage buildings the owner families were complaining about were built decades ago, under communism, by the residents of the yard at that time, and originally all flats – owner families included – had storage buildings. However, the four families that bought their houses in 2006 gave up these original buildings and instead built storage places attached to their houses. Since tensions in the courtyard were not resolved, in the end, Muresanu and two other owner families [Flats 4, 11, 12] did indeed report Ioana and the other non-owners to the local council. As a result, a few months after this conflict began the storage buildings were demolished by the city administration.

Ioana, from my fieldnotes: "You know that we would love to have water and bathrooms in the house, especially now that winter is coming and the tap will freeze all the time. But this would be so expensive that none of us could really afford it... and the banks would not give us money because we do not own these houses… You know that I don't even have a proper ID for this flat. None of us who are still waiting to buy these houses has any proper ID. The ID office only gives us temporary residency cards[84]. This is why none of us was able to get a passport and go and work in Greece or Spain, to save some money. You remember that I could have gone with Cerasela [*her sister-in-law*]. She found me work in Greece at the hotel she works at. But I had no ID, so I had no passport either. I couldn't even get the papers for Andrei [*her older son*] to be done here. I had to ask my mother to register him in her flat, so Andrei was able to get a passport and leave for Spain… But Stefan and I cannot register at my mom's, because then we would lose the right to this flat. This is why none of us can go abroad… And you know that without a loan nobody here has enough money for refurbishing. And besides, you see what happened to the neighbors in the other, demolished courtyards. They did the bathrooms with their own money, and now they lost it all. Nobody compensated them for their investments… If the company or the city would do the refurbishing, then that would be a different situation. But they don't do it, don't even consider that. And you see that nobody among us dared to do any improvements in our houses for the past several years, since the lawsuit for the houses started. I told you, we just have our lives on-hold, while the others who bought their flats already, take the courtyard over…" (Ioana, edited fieldnotes AH November 2008)

In fact, as can be seen from the above, the issue was not so much about the payment of the water bill, but rather about the sudden and unexpected change in the longstanding status quo of the courtyard, with the resulting inequalities and the formation of new alliances among neighbors. After 2006, when the court decision allowed buying property for some and refused this right to others, two groups formed – created entirely by an external intervention, or so it seemed to courtyard people at the time – the owners and the non-owners. This new situation could have changed the relationships among families in the neighborhood outright. However, since at the beginning everybody in the courtyard perceived the denial of the right to buy as being only temporary, and they expected that the other families would soon be allowed to buy as well, nobody had yet acted on these changes. This was all the more so because one owner family apparently had no intention or resources to change things in or around their home [Tanti Emilia – Flat 6]. In the case of the other three families, it took some time to save enough money to start

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[84] In Romania, at the time of this research, all citizens had mandatory Identification Cards ("carte de identitate"); however, these were issued only if a person had a "declared" place of abode. In order to receive the card the person had to prove that he/she had a rightful claim to live in the named abode, either as an owner (or relative/friend of the owner), or as a tenant. If they did not have such documents the ID was not issued, or it was issued on a temporary basis ("carte de identitate provizorie"), for a maximum of one year and with restricted rights to travel abroad (among many other restrictions). As seen from Ioana's narrative, there were ways they could "circumvent" the system, as she indeed did for her son, making travelling abroad possible for him. But, for themselves, they did not apply for permanent ID cards using Ioana's mother's address, because they were afraid that being registered as living at another address could be used against them in court, and they could lose entitlement to their current flats.

refurbishing. Nevertheless, although during my first few months of fieldwork things seemed quiet and static, as the months passed I more frequently heard from my informants that "things were changing" and "tensions were intensifying" in the neighborhood. As Liana (one of the non-owners who became a "new owner" in the newly built apartment house) suddenly began overstepping established boundaries and acting contrary to engrained practices, tensions and conflicts emerged into the open, and arguments in the neighborhood became more heated. That is, the social aspects of the courtyard's existence – the dynamics of alliances and the rolling effect of dissatisfaction and contention – in the beginning took precedence over the "objective" property regime and the entitlements that came with it for the new owners. Long-time practices, such as the agreement around the use of water, were maintained, not disturbing old alliances. Nevertheless, when it became clear that a situation once thought to be temporary would remain in place for a much longer period, and the seven families were not going to be allowed to buy their houses, new alliances slowly formed based upon shared interests. As soon as the new owners realized that the change in their ownership status might have empowered them in new ways, the former dynamics of their social relationships changed.

While I discussed the water-bill with Ioana, several neighbors stopped by her house. When they heard what we were talking about, it did not take long for them to join the discussion and expand the topic from the water-bill to the broader conflicts in the courtyard that had been frustrating them for the past few months. When I asked them about these conflicts, Ioana told me – and all the neighbors agreed with her assessment – that the problems started shortly after the four families bought their flats. A few months after three of the four families, received the court decision and property titles to the flats, they started refurbishing and expanding their houses. And, some of them did this by overcoming both the law and the informal practices of this small group of people in the courtyard.

For example, I was told, they started building on land they had not bought and which was previously shared by all neighbors, acting clearly against the interests of the non-owner families. On other occasions, people said, the owner families suddenly discovered that they had 'new entitlements' and 'rights', and thus started forcing others, most often renters, to acknowledge and respect these newly discovered rights. Demolishing the storage places of the non-owner families

was one such initiative. But, there were constant debates over who was allowed to dry clothes in the courtyard, and when and where drying was permitted; whether it was acceptable for the families living in flats without canalization to throw their used water in the courtyard (all eleven families had done so for decades); whether Ioana could have a dog and doghouse on common courtyard ground; and if Tanti Elena and Tanti Kati should be allowed to cook marmalade over an open flame, outside their houses, along the common fence. Again, all eleven families had done these things for decades. Ioana said it caused even more outrage when the Muresanu family built a two-meter high stone wall around their house, enclosing a big area of previously commonly used courtyard, and greatly narrowing the exit path from the houses of several other families, all non-owners.

The courtyard water tap
(seen in front of machinery)

Ioana's dog in the courtyard. Refurbished houses in the background

I could see that this new situation caused a lot of tension for the seven families with no ownership rights: While they were waiting and hoping for a positive decision from Strasbourg, they felt that they were forced to "keep their lives on hold", increasingly losing out compared to their owner

neighbors. It was in this context that Ioana and the other six families felt that they needed to resist the "territorial expansion" of the owner families. Tanti Elena summed up most people's feelings when she said, "What a shame, we had to live to see ourselves pushed out by the courtyard people we were good friends with for the past 30-40 years."

Drying clothes in the courtyard (one of the storage areas that were later demolished can be seen in the background)

On that mid-November evening Tanti Elena said to me:

"Do you remember how it all started? It happened this year, in early summer. I remember that you came along later that day as well. The *four* bought their flats not that long before, and some of them started bribing the city administration to look the other way when they start extending their houses… and now they build on land that is not even theirs. They never paid for that ground! They have no right to it. The courtyard belongs to all of us! And do you know how it happened? At midday, several of us were sitting outside, and we saw Adrian's father packing big boxes in the city-council guy's car. They didn't even care that we saw them. And when Irina later told them, after the city council guy left, that she was going to file a complaint about bribery at the local council, Adrian – who was in Spain at the time – sent word through his father that when he comes

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home for vacation he will set Irina's house on fire. This is why Irina moved away for July this summer, because she was afraid of Adrian. You remember that she and her son weren't around for a while." (Tanti Elena, edited fieldnotes AH November 2008)

As seen from the above, in part, the tensions surfaced among people were the result of 'conflicting moralities' (Kaneff 2002, Pine) that existed and were mobilized simultaneously in the courtyard community. Humphrey and Mandel (2002) argue that "postsocialist societies still struggle to come to terms with the clash between deeply ingrained moralities and the daily pressures, opportunities and inequalities posed by market penetration." (2002:1) In this case, at the discursive level of these conflicts there was a clear contradiction between the 'ingrained moralities' that were rooted in one-to-one negotiation and informality, and the 'new moralities' rooted in the formal language of rights and legitimacy. However, in everyday practice, these moralities became convoluted, and incongruities appeared not only at the discursive level, but also between the speech and actions of the very same actors. While the owner families defended their interests, basing their claims on a 'rights' discourse, at the same time they acted in keeping with 'ingrained (old) moralities': they used informality and bribes to secure privileges over others and behaved as if they could opt-out freely – when convenient – from the very same laws they were using to advance their private interests. That is, whereas previously the issue of drying clothes, paying a water bill, having a small storage area, or sharing common courtyard ground were all negotiated informally and debates were carried on until everybody was content with the results, now 'external forces' – agents seen to represent and protect 'ownership rights' (the local administration, police, legislators, etc.) – became involved, seemingly no longer leaving any place for informality. But, at the same time, informality prevailed in the practices of the owner families as well: taking advantage of their 'strong', legally fortified status in the courtyard, they expanded their control over common land to the detriment of the non-owners, expecting bribed officials to legalize these informal practices. And when the non-owner families themselves began using 'rights' language – saying they would report these illegal "territorial expansions" to the local council – the owner families, instead of continuing along the legal path which they had previously advocated so strongly, again resorted to 'informality', threatening physical harm to the non-owners, such as when they sent word to Irina that her house "would be set on fire".

The phrase Adrian Muresanu used in this case, "setting ones house on fire" was a quite commonly used threat not only in the courtyard but in the neighborhood as well; I heard it brought into disputes on several previous occasions. Although not necessarily obvious at first, this was even a greater menace than direct physical violence. In a context where a house and personal possessions represented everything people had accumulated in a lifetime, such a threat was a very significant and symbolically meaningful declaration: In a very real way it was meant to convey, "I will make you homeless". Or, more explicitly, "I will erase your social existence from the Earth". It is also important to note that on all occasions when this phrase was used, it was by people who felt they were in a superior/power position, being convinced that they had "more rights/entitlements" than the individuals they threatened. This also meant that both parties assumed that if the police or other official entities became involved in the debate, in the end they would protect those posing the threat and not the ones whose house was on fire.

The consequence of these events, as Tanti Elena expressed it, was that "equality and trust were gone in the courtyard." Her framing of problems as an issue of lost "trust and equality" (an opinion shared by most people in the courtyard) offers a key to understanding the unfolding of events over time and the actions of those involved in them. Giddens defines trust as "confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles." (Giddens 1991:34) He goes on to argue that in trust relationships "facework commitments and faceless commitments" should be distinguished, where the former refers to "trust relations which are sustained by or expressed in social connections established in circumstances of copresence", while the latter concerns "the development of faith in symbolic tokens[85] or expert systems[86]", referred to by him as abstract systems/principles. He concludes that

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[85] "By symbolic tokens I mean media of interchange which can be "passed around" without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them at any particular juncture. Various kinds of symbolic tokens can be distinguished, such as media or political legitimacy; I shall concentrate here upon the token of money." (Giddens, 1991:22)

[86] "Expert systems are disembedding mechanisms because, in common with symbolic tokens, they remove social relations from the immediacies of context. Both types of disembedding mechanism presume, yet also foster, the separation of time from space as the condition of the time-space distanciation which they promote. An expert system disembeds in the same way as symbolic tokens, by providing "guarantees" of expectations across distanciated time-space. This "stretching" of social systems is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical

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one cannot exist without the other, and that faceless commitments are closely and "ambiguously" linked with those requiring facework, on occasions supporting, on others undermining each other (Giddens 1991:79-80).

Thus, looking at trust not as static but as dynamic and socially (re)constructed in interactions over time, in the social situation described by Tanti Elena –recounting of bribery, individual and state violence, and divergence in wealth – several new layers of her story are revealed. Under communism, in the courtyard, the organizing principle of "property relations" was "use-rights" [87]: Whatever needed to be done in the communist "economy of favors" [88] (Ledeneva 1998) to receive such a flat [89], once people moved in, they considered that they were equal in their entitlements. And even though people were aware that inequalities existed in the distribution of flats (and often experienced them in their everyday negotiations for receiving a flat), their beliefs in the "symbolic token" of "a right to abode" were so dominant during communism, that even as late as 2007-2008, when research for this thesis was being conducted, most informants said that "under communism everybody had a right to a flat and indeed received one" [90]. Although such arguments reflected the

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knowledge and by public critique (upon which the production of technical knowledge is based), used to control its form." (Giddens, 1991:28)

[87] I emphasize here that I am talking about the situation 'in the courtyard' because even under communism the possibility existed for people to buy a flat/house (instead of renting one from the state or their company). In the next chapter it will be seen that there were actually cases when the only possibility for a family to have a home was buying one, since there were certain categories of people that were not 'entitled' to rent a state owned flat. In any event, the most widespread practice for housing in communist Romania was that which I described above, renting an apartment from the state/company.

[88] The term "economy of favors" refers to the set of communist practices that developed in order to informally negotiate economic and other types of advantages. Terms such as the Soviet "blat" – denoting the use of informal agreements, exchanges of services, connections, Party contacts, or black market deals to achieve results or get ahead – are also frequently used to describe this set of phenomena. In Romania one of the expressions used was "are pile" meaning "he/she has influential contacts/relations".

[89] As will become evident in the next chapter, in fact many people did not receive flats during communism, and in order to receive one, they often needed to be able to navigate their way in the communist economy of favors.

[90] It is informative to examine Anca's attitude in this process: while she was aware that people with better contacts – e.g. university professors at her mother's workplace – were able to receive additional flats by filing for divorce, she did not feel that her family was excluded from this possibility/system per se. She just said that they were not aware of this possibility, and had they learned sooner about how the system worked her family could have taken advantage of it (actually, her mother did file for divorce, but with the collapse of the communism there was no longer any point to going ahead with it). So while Anca knew that 'facework' commitments could influence outcomes of an application for a flat, she did not question the validity of the 'symbolic token' of the 'right to an abode' or the fact that once a flat was received, all renters believed they had the same entitlements.

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slogans of the communist state that attempted to present an "ideal-typical" social reality, as Harms argues, these modes of representation are "idealizations" only to the extent that "they represent ideals; they are not illusions, however, but simply provide another way of explaining and presenting social reality, with their own unique but always very real social effects" (2011:222). In this context – since there was a more or less shared understanding that the socialist housing distribution system would not fail families – most individuals acted upon these beliefs, negotiating many of their local problems among themselves, through "facework" commitments.

In contrast, in the post-communist era "property relations" became linked to "ownership rights", and even though, as the courtyard people perceived it, "use rights" continued to exist, they became inferior to "ownership rights" and clearly fell outside the regulations of the reconfigured "property system". From the point of view of the courtyard families, the transition from one set of abstract principles didn't simply occur through faceless commitments (rewritten property legislation). They were also mediated through facework commitments with the representatives of the abstract system: administrators, lawyers, judges, company people were frequently involved in local courtyard debates on issues related to land use and basic everyday practices (drying clothes, having a dog, having a pantry, etc.). Since the outcomes of these interactions were seen to be much less predictable than they were during communism, and as frequently having negative outcomes for 'ordinary people' ("oamenii simpli"), people lost 'faith' in the 'principles' of the 'expert system' which were seen as both unfair and – whatever legal experts claimed – unpredictable.

That is to say, under communism – at least in this one context and courtyard – facework and faceless commitments supported each other, creating an atmosphere of trust among courtyard people. In contrast, in the post-communist era these very same commitments undermined each other, leading to loss of trust, and unavoidably, to loss of equality. And here it is important to emphasize again that the above analysis of trust relations is not a merely intellectual exercise, but rather a set of affinities upon which individuals based their actions in real life: those families that were confident that the 'expert system' (and state 'violence') were on their side took actions that were often to the detriment of the other families, further increasing the divergence in wealth among courtyard families.

The role of 'trust relations' in shaping human practices and interactions becomes even more evident if we examine the attitudes people developed towards the European Union. In all the issues where they felt that their own state failed them – that is, their confidence in the fairness of the principles guiding Romanian state decision-making was shaken – they used the EU and its human rights legislation as a 'supranational' reference point and 'symbolic token', expecting that it would deliver justice in the courtyard. And because Romania's 2007 EU accession opened new pathways for seeking justice in national legal debates, the lawyer for the seven families that were involved in this case who lost at the national level decided to try and get the decision overturned at the European Court of Human Rights. Since, in this case, there were no facework commitments with any of the EU institutions and faith in the fairness of the principles guiding this supranational body had not yet been challenged, people were less reluctant to "put their lives on hold" for years[91] while waiting for a positive legal outcome. Examined from this perspective, trust in the EU of the non-owner families was somehow understandable, even though on several occasions (such as the courtyard pantries or mandatory canalization) the owner families did use references to "some" regulations of the very same European Union to improve their own positions vis-a-vis the non-owners.

And, although my research and the family life story interviews showed that internal divisions and inequalities had existed among courtyard people for a long time before 2006[92], the earlier distinctions were not perceived as such because they were more subtle, hidden and informal. In addition, earlier conflicts were perceived not as questioning the basic organizing principles of courtyard life, but as disagreements being contingent on concrete events that were present in the

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[91] It could be argued that they had no other choice than to sit and wait, but that is not entirely true: if they were totally convinced that they were going to lose at the ECHR, many of these families, just as Ioana did with her son, could have sent one or two members to work abroad in order to improve their economic standing. That would not have necessarily altered the outcome of the lawsuit, because – although they were treated as families during the court hearings – officially they filed complaints not as families but as individuals, having included only one representative from each family. But, as they said to me, they 'trusted' the EU that it would provide justice to them. However, these feelings of trust were not unconditional: on many occasions they also said that 'SANEX" had so much more power than they did that the company would still find a way to get rid of them if they wanted to. This indecision, the emotional roller coaster between hope and fear, kept these families in place and waiting.

[92] For example: They worked in different positions in the brick factory, had different incomes, different levels of education, arrived to the city at different times, had more or less children, more or less elderly relatives to support, etc. Also, after the brick factory closed the employment histories of the former employees suddenly and greatly diverged. This created additional differences in income, social status, and networks.

life of every courtyard, and thus could be negotiated informally among equals. In contrast, the sudden and unexpected change of the abstract system (property relations) and the loss of trust in its organizing principles, contributed to the establishment of an internal hierarchy among neighbors which the "new owners" built upon and took advantage of when refurbishing and expanding their houses[93].

Thus, while previous differences were not visibly played out in the geographical space of the neighborhood, the recent restructuring of social space and the increasingly unequal power relations became highly visible when instituted in the physical space of the courtyard. As Massey (1984) argues "[T]o say that space is relational means that (…) it is actually *constructed out of*, is a product of, the relations between social phenomena. We actively create space (time-space, time-spaces) in the organization and living of life. Moreover the way in which we do so will have its impact back upon the structuring of society and of our lives." (Massey 1984, 1995:1)

That is, when social mobility and escaping a precarious life came within reach for some of the families, their confidence in the predictability of space-time and their faith that the 'expert system' was on their side, made it possible for them to take actions through which they 'extended themselves' into an imagined future: not only bought their houses but improved and expanded them in physical space as well, even if that harmed others' interests. Nevertheless, these actions, when translated into the "space" of the courtyard, visibly (re)structuring it, led to struggles – as we will see below – that, in turn, limited some of the choices these families thought they had. Or, as Massey puts it "Spatial form can alter the future course of the very histories that have produced it." (Massey, 1992:84)

The situation, said Ioana and her neighbors, deteriorated further when the new apartment house for the families who were to be displaced from two neighboring yards started to be built behind their courtyard. Big, heavy, construction machinery was moving back and forth on the courtyard road, turning their lives upside down, and endangering the already fragile condition of their

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[93] For example the unresolved ID card situation of the non-owner families – although on the surface it seemed to be a solely administrative issue - led to them being disadvantaged financially as well, and also led to the imposition of unwanted decisions upon them.

deteriorating houses. And, in October, 2008, when the fifteen families moved, new and unexpected tensions appeared. The "newcomers" suddenly also made claims for "territory": for their cars, for storage space they wanted to build, and some of them for plots for vegetable gardens. While the courtyard people argued on that mid-November night that these people did all these things because they were "thinking they have more rights than we do because they bought their flats" (Irina, AH fieldnotes, 2008), the situation was not as clear-cut as it seemed.

The courtyard road and some preparations for refurbishing some of the newly purchased houses

I had talked to the evicted families on many previous occasions, and they all claimed that when their houses were demolished by the company which evicted them, they were promised "similar" conditions in their new place to that which they had in the old courtyard. Their understanding was that they would be "entitled" to parking places, storage rooms, and eventually gardens for those who had them previously. But after they moved in, the company completely ignored their claims,

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arguing that based on their ownership documents they had no entitlement to such things: they only owned their flats and land equal to that on which the apartment house was built. Out of frustration, owner families decided that whatever their "property titles" indicated, they were still entitled to these things, because their decades-long use rights from the old courtyard and the fact that they were made to move "basically, illegally and forcibly", gave them "rights to act" ("avem dreptul să facem noi"). So, the "property regime/law", believed by legal experts to be clear and objective, was actually re-interpreted during social interactions and informal practices. And, once again, the role of mistrust in the expert (legal) system clearly and strongly influenced the decision making process of these families.

As a result, the owner families took action on their own: they created parking spaces for their cars, laid down a rudimentary road in the courtyard out of the pre-built concrete elements of their former courtyard's fence so their kids did not have to walk in mud when it rained, and started building some storage places around their apartment house, mainly in the back, on the hillside. An interesting aspect in the attitude of these families was that while they – at least to some degree – assumed that their 'ownership rights' would restrict others from making claims on their 'property', others' 'ownership' rights did not stop them from making claims on things they did not 'own'. More concretely, the limits of their ownership rights that were made clear to them by the company did not hinder them from feeling entitled to things that in legal terms belonged to the company. Their feeling of entitlement extended beyond the 'unlawful' use of land around their apartment block, and was also used as pretext to take material from their old courtyard's deserted buildings (company property as well) to build the road or their storage areas (the bricks, wood, concrete slabs, etc.).

In their opinion, both their decades-long use rights of things in the previous courtyard and the feeling of 'injustices' committed against them, instituted entitlements that were seen as 'equal' in form and content with the legal ownership rights. The surprising thing was, however, and it showed how 'conflicting' and ambiguous moralities were, that it seemed newcomers never assumed that there would ever be disputes with their old friends and colleagues from the courtyard, who made similar claims on the land. In their new courtyard, the families approached the space of the yard as a 'blank page', no longer bound to its communist past and its former users.

But, since the owner company said nothing and had not yet interfered with their initiatives, their actions led to direct tensions and arguments with those who had lived there for decades, and who felt that "the newcomers were taking away *their* land".

Ironically, because of the spatial proximity, the strongest conflicts of interests emerged with Muresanu, one of the owner families from the courtyard [Flat 12 on the map]. They were one of the most active against Ioana and the other non-owner families in the water-bill fight. Adrian Muresanu was questioning the "newcomers" over their parking and storage places, claiming that they trespassed upon his rights. Meanwhile, the "newcomers" started complaining because of the smell coming from the Muresanu's stockyard, arguing that "in the European Union one cannot keep livestock in such a crowded urban location". At the same time, they also started asking questions about the property status of the Muresanu stockyard and the adjacent enclosed yard around their house, saying that to their knowledge that land was common ground: because Muresanu had not bought that piece of land, he was not entitled to fence it[94]. Whatever the truth was, when the "newcomers" brought up this issue, the Muresanu family suddenly stopped complaining about parking and storage places.

Nonetheless, while those present at Ioana's house were clearly upset with the three owner families [Flats 4, 11, 12] and the "newcomers" [from the newly built apartment house], and they seemed to be happy that these two groups actually turned against each other, Ioana said that they were most upset with "Liana's attitude". Indeed, during the discussion that November evening they were constantly returning to Liana's situation and to her future plan to rent out one of her flats in order to earn extra money. She was said to be "shrewd", "self-interested", and "profiting from others' misery", because she "bought her flat well under the market price" (AH, edited fieldnotes,

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[94] Nobody in the courtyard knew what the property status of that piece of land was; people told me that the Muresanu family used it for at least two decades, and that they were not requested to vacate it by the new owner. The Muresanu family refused to talk about this issue to me: I got the impression (but have no proof), that they have no title to it, but when speaking with courtyard people they claimed the piece of land to be theirs based on long-time use rights. They have been building several new buildings on that land over the years, apparently in the conviction that they will be able to "arrange" and clarify property rights with the owner company and the city council in the future. Anyway, compared to all the other families in the courtyard, they controlled the biggest piece of land. The total land – approximately 200-250 sqm – was larger than the piece of land on which the new apartment block was built, for sixteen families.

November 2008) from one of those poor families who were not able to get a bank loan and thus were forced to move out of the city. In this context, Liana's gesture of refusing to pay for her part in the shared water-bill, which was "actually an insignificant amount" as I had been told [10-15 RON/month, app. 2-3 EUR], was even more upsetting to neighborhood people. At some point in the discussion Ioana turned to me and said, "You have to understand that this is not about the water money anymore, for us this is about principles". And indeed, it was about 'principles', but it was not *only* about the 'principles' around Liana's ownership status in the new flat, it was at least as much about her "dissent" from the social links and principles (e.g. water bill) that kept this courtyard going and functioning so long, even under changing structural-economic circumstances.

Late that night I asked Liana about the situation and she offered her own explanation about what happened. She said that one of her dear aunts died earlier that year, and since she loved Liana as her own daughter and had no children of her own, she left her flat to Liana. After selling the flat – in a small provincial town not far from Cluj – Liana received some money, but not enough to buy a flat in Cluj, not even in one of the less expensive areas of town. However, she desperately wanted to buy something because she was tired of the constant anxiety and fear of suddenly being evicted[95]. So, she used the money she inherited to make a large deposit which enabled her to buy the studio flat in their courtyard's new apartment house and paid the difference from a bank loan she and her husband took out together. If things turned sour with their Strasbourg file, Liana said, and they were evicted from their current flat, they would have an alternative place where the three of them could move. Besides, Liana argued, she was about to turn 32, and felt a greater urgency to have a baby: not to be in the situation of her aunt, who died alone. But her husband – a divorced

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[95] As discussed already in the previous chapter, in the case of Anca's housing situation, renting was not a real option for these low-income families: renting a flat in the city was so expensive that it would have been impossible to securely build their lives (there was no state subsidy for such expenses). Even though many families wished they could have just done that, i.e. rent an affordable low-cost flat and carry on with their lives as they did before, this choice was not there for most of them. In cases when they lost their (state) tenancy status and were not able to buy a flat, they either had to move in with relatives (as Irina and her husband did in Flat 1 in the courtyard), or they had to move out of the city to far away villages, where rental prices were much lower (as it happened with three families from the neighboring courtyard). In both cases mentioned, families, even though they had applied for state housing many years ago and they were on the city council's waiting list, they never even got close to getting a flat. Irina had one handicapped son and was living in a 30 sqm flat with seven other people. The other three families – all with young children and low incomes – had to move out to a village 50 km away, in a rental house that only had one 20 sqm room in total, it was at the end of the village, and had no water, gas, or electricity at all.

man with two teenage sons to support – told Liana that he could not afford another child, and if she wanted one, she had to create the conditions for that. Feeling that she had no other options, Liana accepted the situation and worked hard in a disposable camera factory[96], trying to save as much money as possible. In her free time she also worked informally as a hairdresser, since this was her original job, doing the hair of friends and acquaintances in the neighborhood. However, it was clear – she argued – if she had a baby her income would decrease to the maternity money offered by the state, and not being able to rely on her husband's income, she would need some additional resources. She reasoned that a rental income would be ideal in that situation, and would compensate for the shortfall of her husband's income.

> "And since we've been lucky for once, after all this misfortune, and it was possible to affordably buy this studio flat next to us, why wouldn't I buy it? We are not rich enough to pass up such an opportunity. And those people had to sell it to somebody anyway; they received no bank loans to buy it for themselves… As for the water-bill issue: why should I pay for something I am not going to use anymore? After all, isn't that fair?" (Fieldnotes AH November 2008)

Once again, Liana's situation highlights that these (micro-level) courtyard debates in the context of both changing economic status and 'conflicting moralities' (Kaneff 2002, Pine 2002) led to ruptures in and the reorganization of social relationships, as well as widening the discrepancies between discourse and practices. The perception that income generated through 'work' and 'productive' activities were superior to the 'non-productive, market activities' was so strong that Liana was harshly judged by neighbors ("this is not about money but principles") for her decision to try and rely on investment income. This 'moral' imperative was so strong, that even Liana felt that in order to justify her decisions she needed to distance herself from the 'productive work – nonproductive work' dichotomy, and use 'moral' arguments justifying her motives as serving a greater good and thereby enabling her to equate investment income with income resulting from physical labor. This is why, in her explanations she shifted to issues of 'life and death' ("I do not want to die alone as my aunt did"), 'motherhood' ("I want to have a baby"), and even though she was a married woman, she used 'sacrifice' and the fate of 'single mothers' to defend her choices. Although Liana's concerns were genuine in her situation, and she felt that the strategies she devised were appropriate for both the new economic context and her own family's circumstances,

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[96] Liana was a colleague of Anca at the disposable camera factory (see Chapter 4). When Anca lost her job at the factory a month later (in December 2008) because the factory was closed down and moved to India, Liana was made redundant as well. When I finished my fieldwork in January 2009 both of them were still looking for a job.

others argued that, at one time or another, all of them had children but still had not broken the unwritten 'principles' of the courtyard. However, none of these families took into account that all their children were already in their teens or even grown up, and that the 'community' viewed the care of children as a shared responsibility less frequently than they used to.

In addition, courtyard people believed that there was another discrepancy between their 'moral' perceptions and Liana's. While most courtyard families thought about a house/flat as an exclusively "social investment" which is both the place for and guarantee of "social and biological reproduction" of the household unit (Bourdieu 2005:21), Liana's purchase of a second flat was seen as a solely "economic" investment which was motivated by greed and profiteering. And although Liana's 'non-economic' arguments explaining her decisions were known to others, and actually reflected Liana's own wishes for "social and biological reproduction", many in the courtyard felt that the "Us" – formerly *all* courtyard people – should remain intact and such inequalities should not be instituted, because that would mean that people would "look out only for their individual interests". It was in this context that Liana was judged to be overly "materialistic" when she stopped paying the small amount for the common water bill.

6.2 Struggles for appropriation of space: The 'invisible' actors

In the water-bill debate a great deal was said about the courtyard-level confrontations and frustrations that resulted from everyday friction among neighbors, but – to my great surprise – I learned very little about the broader context of these events: about the lawsuit and the many other actors involved in it. When asked, people only talked about being in dispute with "SANEX", the ceramics factory. If I persisted, they went on and explained that the brick factory, their former workplace, was considered a subsidiary of SANEX. They recalled that when finances turned bad at SANEX in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the company decided to close the brick factory, but kept the right to dispose of all brick factory possessions. I was told this is why people lost their jobs, and this is why they were in litigation with SANEX for their flats, and not with the brick factory.

They also said that they had never seen anybody from the company besides 'the administrator', a man in his late 50s, who periodically came to the courtyard and checked on people and property. When I asked to meet this person I was told by neighborhood people that they had no idea where I could find him or when he would come again. He never gave any notice before he stopped by and never left any way to contact him. Apparently, beyond knowing a few general 'historical' facts about these two companies, the current day SANEX management remained 'invisible' to courtyard people. Thus, they remained invisible to some degree to me as well: I found the name of the then executive director in the files of the lawsuit, but no other details about them whatsoever. When I contacted them the company management said that nobody in a leadership position was available for interviews. At the City Archives I was told that the files on SANEX and the brick factory were in the possession of SANEX, and that SANEX's library was not open to researchers[97].

However, I had seen the files of the courtyard's lawsuit. Reading the successful arguments of the company lawyers – claiming that SANEX was one and the same entity as the brick factory – I became more and more interested in what SANEX actually was, and the agents that the courtyard people were up against in their court hearings. Because of the difficulties in finding and accessing data, I constructed a 'history' of post-1989 SANEX from newspaper articles and from a Romanian state monitoring report on economic power concentration in the field of ceramics, published in the Official Journal of Romania[98].

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[97] When I talked to one of my former university professors who was sitting on the board of the State Archives and I asked for his help to get access to SANEX and brick factory documents, he told me – informally – that in the 1990s most documents that could have made it possible for people to prove their entitlements to land/property on which communist factories were built were cleared from the state archives. In his opinion this was the reason why I could not find any meaningful documents about these two factories.

[98] Decision nr. 237 on the results of the analysis of the economic power concentration in the hands of Goodison Holdings BV after purchasing a majority shares-packet of SANEX SA (Internet, last accessed on May 30, 2012): http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=28588

6.2.1 The privatization of the brick factory and SANEX

As explained in the previous chapter, the brick factory opened as a private company at the end of the 19th century. In April of 1958, more than a decade after the establishment of communism in Romania, it was nationalized and all its properties were transferred to the state. In 1970 the communist state added a new division to the brick factory, called SANEX, a factory that manufactured ceramic tile and bathroom fixtures. SANEX quickly became a leader in its field in the 1970s, so eventually the brick factory – the older but the smaller and less profitable of the two – became a subsidiary of SANEX.

After the fall of communism in 1989, new legislation made possible not only the privatization of state-owned companies, but also the restitution of properties that had been nationalized by the communist state[99]. As a result of these laws, the legal situation of the conglomerate formed by SANEX and the brick factory became quite complicated. While that part of the company that was nationalized in 1958 fell under the jurisdiction of restitution laws, SANEX was regulated by the privatization laws. In 1990, since no former owners made any claims to the brick factory, the brick factory was definitively placed under the control of SANEX and privatized along with it. Both became private shareholder corporations, jointly owned by factory employees and the state. However, it seems from the narratives of brick factory and SANEX workers that while SANEX employees were offered shares in SANEX in the early 1990s, when the national level privatization of communist industry took place, the brick factory workers had no opportunity to become shareholders[100].

In the privatization of the two factories another major step followed when additional legislation was introduced in 1995 and 1996. After the laws went into effect, Romania's president approved the privatization of the conglomerate through the framework of the Management Employee

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[99] Laws 15/1990; 55/1995; 10/2001.

[100] I was not able to clarify the reasons for this. Although this fact might highlight a deliberate 'disempowerment' of certain groups from the very beginning of post-communism, I do not have enough data on this, privatization issues were not the main focus of my research at the time that I did my fieldwork. This is why, at the time, after several unsuccessful attempts to find relevant and reliable data on the privatization of the brick factory I stopped trying to collect data on this particular case.

Buyout program (MEBO)[101]. MEBO entitled all employees of a factory to either buy shares of a company with cash and/or exchange the coupons they received during the first wave of privatization in 1990 ("cuponiada") for either cash or additional shares of a company. Although this protocol should have been followed by all former state companies, SANEX employees were not notified by the seven-member board of directors about the day shares would be exchanged[102]. As a result, the factory came under the total control of the Administrative Council and most workers no longer had any ownership rights. Approximately 8-12% of the shares still remained in employee hands. These were the shares employees indicated they would be able to buy during the SANEX privatization. However, since most of them did not have the money to pay for the shares, control of the shares was taken by the Romanian State Property Fund. After the privatization of the company was finalized in 1997, SANEX was listed on the RASDAQ (one arm of the Romanian stock exchange) and stock market trading of its shares became possible.

At the same time, investigations of economic fraud were started against the management, but none of the new owners or managers – all of whom were rich and influential entrepreneurs with strong political ties – were ever convicted[103]. Witness testimonies from these lawsuits claimed that the new owners of SANEX – using subcontracting as a facade – 'de-capitalized' the company during the following three years (1997-2000) and turned over money and other resources to their own private companies. According to media reports, by 2000 the company was under severe financial strain and on the brink of imminent financial collapse[104].

It was then that a Netherlands-based investment fund, Goodison Holdings BV, over the course of several months, bought up 50.80% of SANEX shares and, by the end of 2000 Goodison became

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[101] A more detailed study on the MEBO privatization in Romania: Almos Telegdy (2002). Management – Employee Buyouts in Romania. Privatization Process and Ownership Outcomes. On the Internet, last accessed on May 30, 2012: http://www.efesonline.org/CEEEONet/REPORTS%202002/National%20Report%20Romania%20EN.pdf

[102] Information on this originates from the law case initiated against SANEX factory management, written about it in Romania Libera: "Sanex" Cluj-Napoca iese de pe Bursa (Joi, 18 Mai 2006). On the Internet, last accessed on May 30, 2012: http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/locale/sanex-cluj-napoca-iese-de-pe-bursa-46819.html

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

the majority shareholder of the company[105]. The acquisition of SANEX was highly debated at the time because of the ownership structure of Goodison Holdings BV. As a Romanian state investigation from 2001 showed, Goodison was an investment company controlled indirectly by the Romania and Moldova Direct Investment Fund (RMDF)[106], based in the United States that specialized in buying up struggling Eastern-European companies. Their declared goal was to break up these large conglomerates into smaller pieces, get rid of the unproductive subunits by selling them as land and real estate, restructure the core business, and then in 3-4 years time sell it to strategic investors[107]. Newspaper articles at the time argued that behind the U.S. fund there was actually a Romanian businessman, Dinu Patriciu[108], who was very active in Romanian politics as well[109]. Indeed, immediately after the acquisition by Goodison of the majority of SANEX shares, Patriciu joined SANEX's board of directors [110].

In late 2000, when Goodison became the majority shareholder of the conglomerate formed by SANEX and the brick factory, the new board of directors decided to reorganize the factory: Eight out of the ten subunits of the company were deemed to be unproductive and were closed down. Of the 2,500 employees only 400 were kept on the factory payrolls[111]. The brick factory was one of the first units to be shut down, and, in December, 2000, courtyard people were among the first to be notified that they would not have jobs as of January, 2001. The brick factory's mining sites as well as its land and adjacent real estate were taken over by SANEX and treated as disposable property that could be sold or given over to creditors to decrease losses and liabilities of the

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[105] In the first stage they bought up 33.28% of the SANEX shares on the Romanian stock market (RASDAQ); after that they bought a 9.65% packet from the Romanian State Property Fund, comprised of the shares of those SANEX employees who were not able to pay the price of the shares they received from the company. Finally, Goodison became the owner of a 7.87% packet of SANEX shares through a mediated and controlled capital increase procedure, initiated by the SANEX board of directors.

[106] Decision nr. 237 on the results of the analysis of the economic power concentration in the hands of Goodison Holdings BV after purchasing a majority shares-packet of SANEX SA (Internet, last accessed on May 30, 2012): http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=28588

[107] Journal article on 06-09-03: Sanex Sale Rumour Induces 40% Gain (Author: Laurentiu Ispir, Ziarul Financiar)

[108] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinu_Patriciu

[109] Romania Libera: "Sanex" Cluj-Napoca iese de pe Bursa (Joi, 18 Mai 2006). On the Internet, last accessed on May 30, 2012: http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/locale/sanex-cluj-napoca-iese-de-pe-bursa-46819.html; also in Romania Libera (June 8, 2005), on the Internet, last accessed May 30, 2012: http://www.romanialibera.ro/index.php?section=articol&screen=print&id=19354&page=0&order=0&redactie=0

[110] Since then Patriciu became the richest Romanian entrepreneur with major holdings in oil and energy.

[111] In Romania Libera, ibid.

factory. Most of the land and buildings had already been sold by Goodison Holdings BV in the early 2000s to Romanian and international companies. Some parts of these properties – including the courtyard and its neighborhood – in exchange for SANEX's unpaid loans – were transferred during the 1990s to the Romanian Commercial Bank[112], one of the major creditors of the company at that time. As a result of this restructuring SANEX became profitable again and after four years, in 2004 it was sold by Goodison Holdings BV to Lasselberger, an Austrian conglomerate – one of the largest porcelain manufacturing companies in Europe[113]. Lasselsberger is still the owner of SANEX.

6.2.2 'Behind the scenes': Struggles for power and capital, and the 'space of possibles'

As explained above, 'SANEX' – even though lawyers claimed it was the same entity – in fact was radically altered and restructured over the course of two decades. First, it was privatized in a state-employee buyout scheme. Then, it was bought by the company's management in the MEBO program and turned into a shareholder company traded on the Romanian stock market. Later, in order to escape bankruptcy, it was sold to a Dutch-American investment fund that – behind a global façade – was actually controlled by Romanian economic and political elites. Finally, in 2004, after breaking up the formerly communist conglomerate and selling most of its subunits, those parts of SANEX and the brick factory that were still operable were sold to an international European ceramics company.

If the timeline of these economic moves around SANEX is compared to the timeline of the lawsuit of the brick factory workers, it is clear that by the time their lawsuit started in July 2003, the privatization of SANEX and the restructurings in the ownership scheme of the company had

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[112] The Romanian Commercial Bank (BCR) was one of the banks that was deeply involved in the Romanian privatization and other commercial banking activities during the 1990s. Besides loaning to Sanex, they were the creditors in the privatization of several other factories in Cluj and when some of these factories went bankrupt a few years later, they were the ones that took over the land and buildings of these factories. The Romanian Commercial Bank was bought by the Austrian Erste Banking Group in 2006. The courtyard land and buildings are BCR property now. They received them in exchange for the loans they gave out to SANEX in the late 1990s.

[113] Company webpage in English: http://sanex.ro/index_en.php

already concluded. The investment fund Goodison Holdings, the new majority owner, had no ties to the formerly state-run SANEX and brick factory. Although it seems from reports that among the minority shareholders there were a few members who remained from the old management of the factory, they no longer had any influence over what happened with the company.

However, as the courtyard people recalled in their stories, when in the 1990s and early 2000s they asked the factory management to let them buy their houses (referencing the 1990 and 1992 laws on privatization of communist state housing), they were always told informally by company leadership to be patient and wait, because the privatization of the state-owned SANEX was not yet finalized. Then, with insufficient notice and no way to influence events, in the spring of 2003 people were faced with a situation where the company decided unilaterally to end their rental contracts and evict them from their homes. I was told that this was the moment when the 44 families in the neighborhood – "in an act of desperation" – decided to sue SANEX.

During the lawsuit, the factory's lawyers portrayed 'SANEX' as being the same entity as the former brick factory and, based on their arguments, the judges decided that SANEX was indeed not obliged to sell the courtyard houses to their long time tenants. But, as seen above, breaking down the company's ownership history highlighted that over these past fifteen years 'behind the scenes' a series of 'invisible' economic and political actors – with varying degrees of power and forms of capital (symbolic, social, economic, financial, technological) – struggled successfully to privatize the assets of the two factories and to improve their own standing in social space. And, while most courtyard people experienced what happened to them as a 'freezing of their own/individual life-time' for the fifteen years of post-socialism – "our lives have been on hold all these years" – at the other end a 'transnational' time of global and local elites just 'flew by' in a struggle for appropriation of social and physical space. As Neil Smith argues, "It is not just that the rich express their freedom by their ability to overcome space while the poor are more likely to be trapped in space; differential access to space leads to differential power in constructing the spatial scale of daily, weekly, and seasonal life." (Smith, 1992:71) The 'stillness' of time – the feelings of courtyard people that they were trapped for two decades in their precarious lives – compared to the 'speed' in changes in the company's ownership structures, as well as the

differential access to capital and the unequal positions in social space, greatly increased the invisibility of many of the economic and political actors for the less powerful.

Given all the above, the intriguing question emerges that with such a clear inequality in power relations, how could it happen that four brick factory worker families out of the 44 actually won their case against the company? Doreen Massey argues that "as a result of the fact that it is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation. This aspect of space has been referred to elsewhere as a kind of 'power-geometry'." (Massey 'Politics and space/time' 1992:81) If the 'power-geometry' of the 'courtyard's space' is to be understood, and the "unintended consequences" resulting from the "element of 'chaos' which is intrinsic to the spatial" (Massey, 1992:81) are to be uncovered, the complex web of relationships among courtyard people and 'invisible' actors needs to be examined further.

Bourdieu, in order to explain the uneven positions of actors in social space and their 'movement' in this 'space', argues that one needs to take a "structural vision" which

> "… takes account of effects that occur outside of any interaction: the structure of the field, defined by the unequal distribution of capital, that is, the specific weapons (or strengths), weighs, quite apart from any direct intervention or manipulation on all the agents engaged in the field; and the worse placed they are within that distribution, the more it restricts the space of possibles open to them. The dominant is the one that occupies a position in the structure such that the structure acts on its behalf." (Bourdieu 2005:195)

According to Bourdieu the force of each actor within a field depends on the "volume and structure of the capital the agent possesses". He names financial, cultural, technological, juridical, organizational, commercial, social, and symbolic capital as being the most important for actors, and highlights financial capital as the "main condition for accumulation and conservation of all other forms of capital". He concludes that actors – if large/powerful enough – are not necessarily constrained by the structural logic of their own field, and accumulation of certain types of capital (e.g. technological, financial) facilitates such boundary crossings. However, as Caldwell cautions,

> "[A]ttention to the social context in which these activities occur reveals a more balanced negotiation among participants. The institutions and structures to which Bourdieu and de Certeau ascribe power are not, in fact, monolithic, autonomous structures, but rather associations composed of independent individuals with the ability to act in their own self-interest. In this sense, not only is improvisation not possible outside the realm

of social relations, but the potential for its expression is also the result of the careful coordination of the interests of all participants." (Caldwell, 2004:37)

Thus, while one pays attention to the 'structure of the field' in Bourdieu's sense, the possible (self) interests of all participants to be found in this field have to be considered. One needs to examine not only the conflicts that appeared between the long-time tenants and the owner company, but also the relationships among individuals from the city administration's urban planning center, the lawyers who represented the individual families, the lawyers that worked on behalf of the owner company, the judges conducting these trials, state actors, and the courtyard families themselves.

In addition, regarding the 'structure of the field', it needs to be kept in mind that – because of the 1989 regime change – in Romania it was still difficult to identify crystallized 'economic fields' in Bourdieu's sense: many economic fields/sectors never existed before (e.g. a housing market) and were only just coming into being, while fields that existed for a long time, became less significant or disappeared completely (e.g. extensive state housing). Besides, most agents were positioned simultaneously in different and often competing fields (e.g. economic, administrative, political – i.e. investor-politicians in the SANEX case). Finally, certain types of capital were losing value (e.g. cultural, symbolic) while the value of other types of capital was marked up (e.g. financial, technological), and during this 'reorganization' even dramatic and unexpected shifts in power relations were not unheard of.

This reorganization in economic fields and the changes in the value of the types of capital one held greatly impacted the outcome of these conflicts of interest, and thus the life and possibilities of courtyard people. In order to understand how a case where the "hard facts" and the "legal framework" were completely identical resulted in three radically opposing outcomes, a brief overview of the actors and their positions is needed[114].

1. The city administration's urban planning center held a monopoly over the building and infrastructure permits for the whole urban area; this generated a steady and direct income for them each year. However, as Caldwell pointed out, the individual functionaries working in the

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[114] As already described, some families were allowed to buy; others were refused the right, were evicted and re-housed in replacement housing; and yet others were refused the right to buy but they were still waiting for a final decision from a supranational legal body, the ECHR.

system – many of whom were expecting bribes[115] to make any decisions at all – had their own (economic) self- interests, while they also worked to improve the amount of their social and symbolic capital (promotions, friendships with influential people, etc.). In most instances this made the workings of the system and the outcome of certain requests for permits unpredictable, just as it happened in the case of Ioana's courtyard.

2. The <u>lawyers</u> representing the different groups (tenants, owners) during the lawsuit had direct economic interests in the case (salaries and fees); while at the same time they were also working to increase their symbolic capital. Winning such a high-profile case meant recognition and mainly fame (the media often reported on this case), bringing more clients. This was probably one among many reasons why some of the lawyers were willing to take the case as far as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, even though this did not necessarily mean additional income for them.

3. The <u>judges</u> conducting the trials had their own financial interests as well; many of them accepted/requested bribes[116] in exchange for their supportive decisions. Besides, their future symbolic and social capital was also in play (promotions, links to powerful actors, etc.), complicating decision-making and increasing the unpredictability of the outcome.

4. <u>State actors</u> – in this case local politicians – also had their interests: since the case was highly mediatized for a while, and the possible eviction to the street of many families with young children was presented by the mass media [117], some local politicians (e.g. the mayor himself) mobilized themselves to find a solution. Besides, the mayor of the city had a personal relationship with one of the courtyard families, so he took a particular interest in the case. In the end they succeeded in forcing the hand of the owner company, which had to promise to allocate housing with at least similar conditions to the old flats of the displaced families. However, they were not able to stop the evictions; they only were able to arrange for a solution in the form of replacement housing for evicted families.

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[115] I have no 'direct' proof for this claim; I have never seen bribes changing hands. However, many of my informants talked about their experiences in the system. For example, one of the quotes I used above from my fieldnotes, describes such an event. Since I heard it confirmed by others as well, I have no reason to believe that it was invented by my informant.

[116] I have no 'direct' proof for this statement either (i.e. I have not seen any bribing in person). However, several of my informants talked about they themselves paying bribes during the lawsuit; others – who refused to pay although it was suggested they do – argued that they lost the case because of their reluctance to bribe.

[117] I wrote about this in detail in the previous chapter.

5. The <u>owner company</u> had a clear economic interest in getting rid of as many long-time tenants as possible, because if these families were removed, the company was free to sell the land and the adjacent real-estate for the highest possible price. If, on the other hand, a court decision forced the company to sell these houses and the land to the long-time tenants, the price of the flats was regulated by the *Law on the Privatization of Communist Housing Stock* (Law 112/1995, but also law 61/1990 and 85/1992) and thus it stayed well under the market price; this is what happened in the case of the four families who already bought their houses in Ioana's courtyard. Such an outcome meant that the company would lose a significant part of its potential profit and revenue. However, the pieces of land in question were not equal in "financial exchange value". The land where the shopping mall was eventually built, and from which families were evicted, was much more valuable and strategically located than the land where all the rest of the families lived, and where the four families were allowed, in the end, to buy property.

6. <u>The European Union.</u> Romania's accession to the European Union and its ratification of the European Union documents/legal framework – as pointed out earlier in this chapter – opened up new possibilities for people to seek justice in matters affecting their lives. So, just as the financial capital of many actors became "globalized" and "supranational", the same was true in terms of juridical capital, with the European Court of Human Rights becoming the possible end point of national legal disputes. Of course, the impact of the European Union's legal framework on the lives of these people was much more ambiguous and complex rather than a completely positive force for good – and they were very aware of and open about this. But, in this particular case they perceived the EU as an institution "empowering" and not restricting their lives.

7. Finally, the <u>courtyard families</u>. As seen from the previous sections and chapters, the 44 families did not act unanimously, as one 'monolithic' group; they developed different coping strategies. One of the important issues to understand, then, was why did they decide to go forward with three different lawyers? Ioana, and the families that joined her, chose a lawyer Ioana knew well and trusted, because she "worked at their law firm as a cleaning lady for years" (Ioana, AH fieldnotes). The other families, who were evicted in the end, also went with a lawyer one of the families from the courtyard knew well and trusted. The four families that won their case went with a lawyer who they did not know originally, but was "strongly recommended" to them by a friend. Since this lawyer assured them that they could win the case if they were willing to "pay the money it takes to win" (Muresanu, AH fieldnotes), they felt

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they could trust him and went with him. Further, even among each other – based on their long-time facework commitments – they had clear and diverging ideas about which family and opinion was to be trusted in the courtyard, and which is not. Thus, it seemed, their decisions were made partly based on "trust relations". The other important question was how did families decide to take action along certain "moralities/principles" and not others? The most important aspects here seemed to be, on the one hand, the value different types of 'capital' held in the given context, while, on the other hand, it was decisive to their actions what people thought about their own control/possession of certain types of capital. The families that were evicted at the end of the process decided not to pay bribes at all. The reasoning behind the decision was that one of the leaders of their group had a good relationship with the mayor – he worked for him as a construction worker/contractor – and he said that he would contact the mayor informally and ask for his help. Ioana's group decided not to pay bribes or mobilize any 'influential' people on their behalf because their lawyer said that the case was pretty straightforward and there was no need for bribes. The four families that won their case paid the bribes because their lawyer told them so, but also because they thought that "this is how things work in Romania" (Muresanu mother, AH fieldnotes). That is to say – slightly simplifying – that the first group of families believed in the high value of social capital, the second group believed in the value of juridical capital, while the third group of families opted for the 'exchange value' of financial capital. Since they thought they were in possession of these types of capital, they used them in the hope that they would improve their own standing in social space.

In summary, it can be seen that this complex web of actors and their conflicting interests played out in a way that broadened the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu 1998:195) in all directions: First, it opened up new possibilities for large and powerful economic agents by allowing them to privatize housing that was nationalized by the communist state and according to current Romanian legislation should have been the right of the present tenants to buy. Second, for a few individual families with limited amounts of capital, it became possible to improve their own social and economic standing. And, finally, it opened the 'space' to downward mobility for some families that ended up either homeless and moved to rural areas or with debts from banks that pushed them into a precarious life situation which they had never experienced before. From the perspective of the power-geometry of the space-time of the courtyard, one can see the relevance of Massey's argument:

"'Space' is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global. What makes a particular view of these social relations specifically spatial is their simultaneity… It is not the 'slice through time' which should be the dominant thought but the simultaneous coexistence of social relations that cannot be conceptualized as other than dynamic." (Massey, 1994:80-81)

And at this point is important to highlight that while the conflicting interests of the more powerful actors greatly contributed to the outcomes of the trial, the coping strategies and affinities of individual families, the way they estimated the "exchange" value of the types of capital they possessed, as well as the networks they were able to mobilize – the dynamics of social relations in space-time – strongly influenced the positions in which they 'came away' from this situation. As Bryan Roberts argues

"the poor tend to be viewed as being incapable of improving their situation by themselves and change originates from above. Until that time, the poor are relatively ineffectual actors in the urban political and economic scene. Such approaches underestimate the resourcefulness of the poor and the extent to which they participate actively in urban economic and political life." (1978:140)

As seen throughout the chapter, this was true for the unfolding of events in the courtyard: none of the families affected was sitting around passively doing nothing, while things "just happened to them"; all of them mobilized to form alliances and to come up with coping strategies they believed would be the most effective means to a positive end.

6.3 Conclusion

The above social situation demonstrates very clearly how a change in broader structures – a reorganization of the legislative and property system of Romania – and the ways individuals and institutional actors coped with these changes, led to different outcomes in property relations for all these actors. It also helps to clarify how gaining legal ownership of a house/flat is often not an end in itself in "property relations", but rather creates the circumstances for continued and dynamic negotiations and new claims directed towards other actors in the economic and social field: kin, friends, neighbors, businesses, the state, and on occasion even involving supranational actors, such as the European Union. Further, it also shows that although the structure of the field in which individuals act seems to be dominated by the more powerful actors – many of whom are

'invisible' from the bottom of the social space – the outcomes of struggles for space are not always predictable and determined by the amount of power/capital different actors hold. If we view these institutions as not monolithic and autonomous structures, but as associations of individuals that act in keeping with their varied interests and along ingrained moralities and individual dispositions, it is easier to see where and how the "space of possibles" [space of possibilities] opens up, allowing some of the less powerful actors to improve their positions, even to the detriment of the more powerful. Finally, the social situation analyzed throughout this chapter highlights that it would have been too narrow a view to focus only on relations and conflicts that occur among actors that are positioned at different social and spatial scales in relation to each other. Struggles for space are often played out from below and from within: not only between actors on different scales and holding more or less power and capital, but also among actors that are at the bottom of the spatial scale, the individuals who perceive each other as 'equal' and are perceived by 'outsiders' as lacking power and capital.

While the case I described above is unique, it is not at all atypical: the situation in this one courtyard contains many of the larger processes that reshaped the district, the city, and the country. Thus, these findings have relevance both for how we research and conceptualize property relations in the post-socialist era, and also for our understandings of the relationship between inequalities and housing/property. Addressing similar issues, Verdery argues in one of her studies about (rural) property relations in Romania, that:

> "'[P]roperty' is about social relations. These include both relations among persons and the power relations in which persons act. The evolution of a post-socialist property regime involves complex interactions between macro-systemic fields of force and the behaviors and interconnections of people caught up in them. In other words, for property to crystallize as individual, exclusive private ownership requires a very specific field of political, social and cultural relations, and that field does not (yet) exist in post-1989 Romania." (1998:180)

Although I agree with Verdery's assessment about how property is about social relations and interactions between 'fields of force' I do think that her approach – only focusing on power relations in property – creates boundaries around property and power, locking them into a self-contained analytical field that limits her findings and conclusions. Disregarding the dynamics and simultaneity inherent in space, she fails to observe the social relations and practices that are structured around the 'in-between' (non-property) spaces of this 'power-geometry', but which still

have strong structuring effects on how 'property' is socially negotiated and at the same time also used for further negotiations. Also, excluding 'space' from examining property relations obscures the existing 'crystallized' or 'settled' relationships around property, those that are seemingly not contested anymore and thus 'invisible' to somebody who is inclined to focus on "contestation" and "fuzziness", that is, on the <u>lack of</u> possible forms of "individual, exclusive private ownership". Thus, I argue that if one looks at property through the lens of 'space-time' and 'scale', one discovers, on the one hand, that "crystallized" and "fuzzy" property relations are not mutually exclusive, but rather co-exist (and already co-existed under communism, as I will further examine in the next chapter). From this more inclusive point of view, "crystallization" does not necessarily require a different or "a very specific field of political, social and cultural relations", as Verdery assumes. On the other hand, after taking the previous clarifications into account, one sees more clearly that property is often not an end in itself but only a means for further (re)negotiations for the control of both social and physical space. For example, the way the owner families reorganized the social and physical space of the courtyard (paying the water bill, using the road, drying clothes, making marmalade in the common courtyard, having or not having pantries on shared courtyard ground, building fences, etc.) was only partly about the 'amount" of space they controlled. It was also about the quality and thus the 'exchange value' (in the broadest possible sense) of the space under their control. And all their actions that structured space in one way or another, led to other actors – owners and non-owners alike – reacting to these newly structured spaces. Their actions then, in turn, created a feedback loop involving other actors and having very clear effects on both "fuzzy" and "crystallized" property relations. All these, as Massey puts it, create "mutual interdependence", meaning that one cannot change one element within the construct of this interdependence "without at the same time necessarily affecting the other." (Massey, 1994:290)

Verdery also claims that "striving to clarify one's ownership rights is sometimes a weapon of the relatively weaker trying to protect themselves from abuse by the stronger." (Verdery, 1998:179) While I agree that her assessment is accurate in many instances, her argument omits those elements which might reveal that the opposite of her assertion is often similarly true: as seen throughout this chapter 'strong(er)' actors also strive to clarify ownership rights in order to 'close down' space and stop or hinder upward mobility of those who have less power, and in so doing

institute and maintain inequalities. Or – putting it in Verdery's terms – stronger actors also try to 'protect' themselves from 'abuse' originating from the 'weaker'. These processes might be more easily discernible if we observe the struggles that take place at the bottom of social space, among apparently similarly unequal actors, but are, probably, no less relevant if we examine relationships that are visibly unequal in social space.

Finally, I argue that using theories of space as an analytical framework and at the same time examining instituted social practices and the affinities that structure them, highlighted once again that the perception of and the actual experience of inequality is not rooted only in divergence of wealth and property, but it is also created by conflicting moralities and dispositions – acted out – in the surrounding human environment. This chapter has attempted to capture in novel ways the dynamics in which these inequalities are being 'simultaneously' (re)constructed.

Chapter 7

Inequalities Rooted in Housing and Property Relations

In this chapter, I further explore the relationships between poverty, inequalities and urban housing. To this end, I endeavor to understand how major shifts and ruptures in state policies influenced both collective and individual coping strategies of families in relation to housing and – in turn – how coping strategies also shaped the spaces these families inhabit. Throughout the chapter, although pre-communist housing conditions will be discussed briefly, priority will be given to communist and post-communist policies and the effects they had on housing and inequalities. This framework makes it easier to expose how, at the same time, urban space and the relationships in which actors are now embedded have been a historical product of struggles over the appropriation of space.

While in the previous chapter my analysis was centered on a social situation in which trajectories of multiple actors intersected in space-time, in this chapter I focus on two multi-generational family trajectories[118] that never directly intersect, but are, nevertheless, linked by the processes that shaped space[119] around them over the decades. Structuring the chapter along these two narratives allows for a more thorough examination of what Bourdieu called the "space of points of view", meaning the "perspectives that correspond to the multiplicity of coexisting, and sometimes directly competing, points of view" of the multiple actors that are brought together in places (Bourdieu, 1999:3). Since the ways in which people see the world are never just representations of a particular social reality but also impact on the social world around them, uncovering these points of view can result in a better understanding of practices and dispositions of individuals and families. And, as highlighted in the previous chapter, too narrow a focus on binary analytical

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[118] I use trajectory to mean a "series of successively occupied positions by the same agent" in a constantly changing/transforming space (Bourdieu, 1986).

[119] In this context, and as explained in Chapter 1, I view space as always being under construction, "never finished, never closed" "where there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (…), relations which may or may not be accomplished" (Massey, 2005:11).

categories can often cover up the in-between spaces that open up new opportunities for action for families. Missing these aspects we might exclude from the focus of our analysis – and/or make invisible – categories of people and their coping strategies.

In Chapter 6 – because of the particularities of the social situation I discussed – empirically examining the social construction of scale and the ways in which jumping scales shaped social relations were core concerns in my analysis. Using the case of one courtyard, I showed how, after the collapse of communism, struggle for control of territory happened both at the local level – among individual families – and, at the same time, involving state actors and large, international investors as well. This chapter will show how issues of control of land/territory are not new to the area and how such struggles were an important part of the history of the district. Here, although scale remains an important aspect of my enquiry, the organizing principle of my analysis is the dialectic between 'geographical fixity' and 'movement' in space. The reason for interpreting the subject matter through 'movement' in part lies in the major characteristics of the life stories the families themselves shared with me: their narratives were about 'embeddedness' both in space and social relations and the fracturing of such 'embeddedness' by and through movement[120]. As will be seen, in addition to the particular factors that shaped individual family trajectories, the state[121] – through its policy-making – was the most important actor in generating movement, leading to the reorganization of both social relations and space.

Finally, since property relations were important in both linking families to places and in contributing to their movement in space, they continue to remain central to my enquiry throughout this chapter. To this end, I further explore some of the conclusions from Chapter 6. First, I attempt

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[120] Narotzky and Smith argue that, in relation to movement, one should not think of "the existence of two quite different practices – one to stay and one to move; rather, we wish to work through the more difficult idea that buried in the idea of movement is an idea of fixity, both ideas with their own counter-sentiments. To move is to renounce a certain kind of security and local knowledge; to stay fixed is to acknowledge a particular kind of limit to agency. These are not necessarily conscious elements; they reside within the very nature of the way these elements take form in practice." (2006:210).

[121] Throughout the chapter (and the thesis) I do not perceive the state as one homogenous actor. As in previous chapters, I perceive it as an aggregate of different actors positioned at different levels/scales in social and geographical space. The interests of these actors are often in conflict, thus complicating the implementation and outcome of certain policies and events. However, in the context of the national legislative framework, I do refer to the 'state' as a single entity/ actor.

to show that "crystallization" in Verdery's sense of "individual, exclusive private ownership" (1998:180) already existed under communism. Moreover, "private ownership" in many instances overlapped with the property relations that existed prior to communism. Therefore, the existence of "individual, exclusive private ownership" (as Verdery understands it) is not new to Romania's property relations and thus it has not been dependent on the "very specific field of political, social and cultural relations" that "does not (yet) exist in post-1989 Romania" (1998:180), as Verdery suggested. Considering the above, I argue that in exploring urban inequalities it is rather the long-time co-existence of the multiple forms of property relations we should aim better to understand, in conjunction with the ways in which particular constellations empowered and/or disempowered families, influencing their coping strategies and the positions they were able to negotiate in space-time. This leads to my second argument, in part addressed in Chapter 6; that in property relations "exclusive, individual private ownership" – even if and when it "crystallizes" – is never an end in itself but, instead, forms the basis for continued (re)negotiations of positions in social and geographical space among individual, institutional-economic and/or state actors. This approach means, as Hann argues, that "a concern with property relations requires investigations into the total distribution of rights and entitlements within society (…). It requires examination of practical outcomes as well as ideals and moral discourses, and an appreciation of historical processes, both short-term and long-term" (1998:34). Throughout this chapter I endeavor to offer such a comprehensive view of social relations, as they developed over time.

7.2 The Kovacs family

It was a late winter night in 2008. I was sitting in the kitchen of the Kovacs family. I had just arrived after a day of fieldwork in the Iris district. Although I had already recorded their family history some time ago, "Old Mister Pista" (72) – as he asked me to call him – and his wife, Margit (70), told me to visit them whenever I was in the neighborhood. They were retired, loved telling stories, had lots of free time in the evenings, and their house was in the center of the Iris district, on the road I walked along almost every day. So, I stopped by whenever I could. Their friends and relatives were often around as well, as was the case that night: Old Mister Pista's sister, Dora (74), and her best childhood friend Piroska (75), were also sitting with us. After a few minutes Denes (46), Old Mister Pista's son, stopped by as well. Old Mister Pista was laughing as he turned to me and said,

> "The other day, when you weren't around, a man came and asked me whether I would sell him the plot next to our house and garden".

Watching him laugh and not understanding the reason for his exhilaration I asked him cautiously,

> "And so what did you tell the man?"

> "I told him that I couldn't sell him the land because my family already sold it to the Catholic Church, some eighty years ago" – he laughed again as he continued, "But the man insisted that it was still in my name at the land registry so I had the right and should sell it to him."

Old Mister Pista stopped for a moment to explain that at the time his father made that deal, probably in the mid-1930s, people who knew and trusted each other usually did not go to lawyers to make such transactions or register the sale with the city. They just made a deal between themselves, considered that a finished and binding agreement, and started using the land. This practice was so common that the church had never even bothered to register the sale.

> "So, how is it that you <u>had</u> a property document, a title to your land?" I asked him.

> "Because my family's situation was different… my grandparents on my father's side bought all their land directly from the city, when the city opened up this area for urbanization. We were recorded in the City Land Registry as the first owners of that land. This is why we had title to all our land. The City issued that to my grandpa." He paused before continuing, "My father always told me that at the turn of the century, when they moved here, it was all orchards and pasture and vegetable plots. The main roads were here already, but there were only a few small houses in the district. Not many people were willing to move here yet; this area was

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seen as being outside of the city. And because of that the land was not very expensive, at least compared to the rest of the city. Even later, when I was growing up here in the 1940s, I remember that there were still not many buildings around us…"

At the end of the 19th century, when the Kovacs grandparents bought their land, the Iris district was still mainly agricultural. As archival documents indicated[122], a significant part of the meat, dairy, vegetables, and fruit the city's population consumed was produced in this agricultural greenbelt. However, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, when the regional economy was growing, the city's expansion started to encroach upon the greenbelt. The railway was built in this part of the city, with the tracks basically running along the border of the district. The proximity of the river and the long-distance transport links increased the appeal of this area for industrial investors, and very soon several factories opened: a railway carriage repair and manufacturing company (late 1800s), the brick factory (late 1800s), the match factory (late 1800s), the MUCART paper factory (1872), and a sawmill and furniture factory (1870). Shortly thereafter, in the early and mid-1920s, the Iris porcelain factory[123] and the Terapia pharmaceutical company also opened in the district. By the late 1920s the Iris district, according to period newspapers and other contemporary records, was perceived as a booming industrial zone of the city.

Coincident with these developments, in the late 19th and early 20th century, land started to be parceled into smaller plots along the main roads of the district. However, since the rail tracks and the river isolated this area from the rest of the city, the land was less desirable, less valuable and in less demand for residential use. As a consequence, only small houses, usually a room-and-a-kitchen, were built on most of these plots. Building was sometimes done by the owners themselves, as was the case with the Kovacs family, but more often it was private investors who bought up the land and built low-quality rental housing for workers' families, often for those who were the most destitute[124]. Simultaneously, some of the factories also began building housing for their workers; the brick and porcelain factories started this trend[125].

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[122] Laszlo Pillich writes extensively about this; in the State Archives the files of the state agricultural farm Gostat also attest to this.

[123] The district was named after this factory.

[124] Novelists Istvan Nagy and Istvan Asztalos, and ethnographies of Laszlo Pillich attest to this. Local residents' life histories and the church records I examined also confirmed this.

[125] From the State Archives, and the files of the Iris porcelain factory.

A typical old house in the Iris district (2008)

According to church and city records the population of the district was mixed: there were well-to-do farmer and career families, as well as skilled and unskilled workers. There were also many who worked as day laborers in the fields and in factories. The number of divorced and widowed families – often single mothers with several children – was quite high. Church archives indicated that high numbers of children were in need of continuous financial help. The memoir of a Protestant minister who worked with district families during that period reveals the levels of poverty in the area, but also the high levels of prejudice these families faced:

> "In 1937 the kids coming to our children's care unit did not receive breakfast, only a lunch. However, this was already an improvement on what they had in 1935. At the time, with the limited funds we had, we were only able to give them a glass of milk and some bread. All these children were the kids of poor farmer widows, laundresses, unmarried mothers, and other poor workers' families. They were completely uneducated. We had to start with cutting their nails, washing them and combing their hair. We had to teach them how to use a handkerchief, to wash their hands before meals, to use cutlery when eating… In December, as Christmas gifts, we prepared food and clothes parcels for the children and elderly in the district… We took these packages to their homes, to these small, narrow, dark, cold, stinky, mud-houses. Inside, the families were sleeping on straw laid on the ground. All of them were infested with lice." (Protestant church archives, Iris district, Memoirs of a Protestant minister, Manuscript, 1949)

Nevertheless, even with all these changes taking place, throughout the early 20th century the district was still far from losing its agricultural hinterland characteristics. A significant percentage of it still either belonged to the city or was owned by large private landowners who leased the land to be worked by urban farmers. Thus, during Old Mister Pista's childhood, the district was still very sparsely populated. According to a 1948 map I found in the City Archives, the Iris district was composed of four distinct zones at the time (see maps in Appendix I):

1. A light industry zone: the Iris porcelain factory, the Terapia pharmaceutical company, and the MUCART paper factory were already indicated on the map; other, smaller units were not named, but their site was highlighted.

2. A heavy industry zone: the area of the brick factory and the zones beyond were marked as places where heavy industry was located.

3. A mixed zone: many of the churches and some of the schools were already built; a few streets were highlighted as being residential and commercial areas.

4. Agricultural land: most land in the district was still indicated as being arable land, orchards, pasture, and vineyards.

A typical street view in the Iris district. These houses are opposite the Iris porcelain factory (2008)

That night, at Old Mister Pista's house, to bring him back to his original story, I asked him, "The other day, when you were told that you had the right to the neighboring plot, why didn't you sell the land to that man?" Though he cried out in surprise and disbelief at my question, he also looked as if he expected me to ask that question. Watching him tell me what happened, it occurred to me that, for him, the main reason for sharing this story was probably not to talk about that other man or the land, but to let me know he was an honest "old-school" gentleman:

> "What a question you ask?! But, you're right, I could have sold it… Theoretically, indeed… But still, how could I do something like that? A gentleman's agreement is still an agreement, isn't it? And I honor it, no question... Plus the guy would have quickly figured out that I had no right to sell that land, because we didn't build the house that was standing on it. And anyway, if there had been a dispute, everybody in the neighborhood would have borne witness that it was not our land anymore; they all know that the church had used it for decades. However, after I received this offer the church finally started to clarify its ownership rights. They called an engineer from the city yesterday to measure the land and the house, and then they'll ask that the title be transferred to them. And, of course, if needed, I will testify in support of their claim."

Old Mister Pista's story, as it slowly emerged, highlighted how complex the present-day property relations were in the district, and how far back one had to look in order to understand the changes taking place in social relations and the geography of the area. On the one hand, here was Old Mister Pista, with a house and garden that was the property of his family for three generations: a piece of land that was bought from the city by his paternal grandparents more than one hundred years ago; a 'property' that has remained in the family ever since and never was 'nationalized' by the communist state. The Kovacs family had a title to that land, issued at the turn of the century by the city of Cluj, and nobody ever contested their 'right' to that plot. The family has continuously used that land since its original purchase.

On the other hand, there was another piece of land that was still the property of the Kovacs family, also for more than a century. The title to that land – according to law – was still in the Kovacs family's name, issued at the same time and under the very same conditions as the title they had to their house and garden. However, while in the case of their house and garden the title was respected by everybody, even by a communist state that nationalized most private property, the title they held for the neighboring plot was not considered binding by any of the parties involved. Instead, an informal agreement once made between two parties – Old Mister Pista's father and an administrator of the Catholic Church (both of whom had long-since died) – had always been

understood to reflect the true state of affairs. This understanding was so widely shared even during the 1950s and 1960s, when virtually all 'surplus' family-owned land was nationalized by the communist state, that this land was deemed not to be 'owned' by the Kovacs family and therefore not to be nationalized by the state as 'surplus'. In this specific case, the communist city administration respected the 'private' agreement made between individuals, and never requested the church or the Kovacs family to clarify their agreement during the four decades of communist power. In a similar vein, the post-socialist city administration also accepted the 'informal' agreement to have more standing under the law and, accordingly, transferred title without any legal sanctions or extra fees[126]. So, even though in one of the above cases legal rights were seen to be so strong that, for more than a century, they had never been contested, in the other case legal rights were trumped by century-old use rights and an informal agreement with another owner (the Catholic Church).

It is clear from the above that both 'use-rights'[127] and 'legal' rights have been embedded for a long time in the everyday practices of the neighborhood. As seen in the last quote from Old Mister Pista, the reasons he gave for not selling the neighboring plot for a second time were his neighbors who, he assumed, in the case of a 'legal' dispute with the Church would have disregarded the legal status of the land and would have argued for the primacy of the use-rights. In light of this, it is easier to see that the 'morality' of Old Mister Pista's behavior did not actually originate from his (innate) need for justice (as he occasionally presented it), but was rather the result of a binding and strongly held (external) norm in the neighborhood. These shared understandings were so much a part of the fabric of everyday life that Old Mister Pista knew that – even if the 'formal' law had supported him – violating the neighborhood norms would have been severely sanctioned by the people around him.

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[126] When Old Mister Pista was asked why the communist state did not take away that piece of land, he said, "They knew that it wasn't ours". Regarding the issue of state land transfer fees, he and the church administrators argued that the fees were not enforced by the city administration because the actual transfer was seen to have happened a long time ago, and so no transfer fees would have been justified.

[127] In this case 'use rights' were further complicated by the fact that a 'transaction' indeed took place at some point in time – where the land was 'sold' based on a private agreement that was "structured by relations of tust", as Old Mister Pista explained – but nobody had any proof or data (not even the church) about the exact circumstances of the deal, besides some anecdotic evidence.

However, as shown in Chapter 6, such norms and practices could be and were challenged, and the resulting negotiations and contestations of property rights had consequences for the ways in which families developed their coping strategies in relation to housing and (re)negotiated their positions in social space.

7.2.1 Property and the production of social relations

Listening to Old Mister Pista's story about his and his family's land-dealings, I remember thinking at the time that he was talking about this not only to emphasize the morality of his own behavior. Instead, he wished to indicate that once – even if a long time ago – they were a well-to-do family in this area. That they weren't always 'landless' as they felt they were now, having only the house and garden. He wanted to make it clear that there was a time when his family owned a part of this neighborhood. This seemed to be important for him to highlight because many of the long-time residents of the neighborhood I talked to, whose grandparents bought land and moved here in the early 1900s, as the Kovacs's did, recently had their nationalized land returned to them within the framework of the restitution of nationalized property[128]. As a result, and with land and real estate prices going up in the neighborhood, many of these families became extremely well-off, but not Old Mister Pista's family. By the time collectivization started[129] in the late 1940s the family had no excess land to be taken away by the communist state, so now there was nothing to be returned to them in the restitution process initiated by post-communist Romanian governments. And although he said on many occasions how lucky they felt to have everything they needed in their old age, and that they did not want for anything in their lives, still, he seemed to have ambiguous feelings and possibly some regrets for what had happened to their family's land. What Old Mister Pista experienced was very similar to what Michal Buchowski wrote about families living in rural western Poland. Buchowski argued that the changes in ownership relations after the fall of

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[128] Law 18/1991 and Law 1/2000.

[129] According to Chirot, the land reform of 1945 eliminated all large properties, "with lands taken from former large estates, institutional and government holdings, and royal lands." On this nationalized land state farms had been started, where "these farms were to be large, advanced units, and their workers were to be treated like industrial workers." In 1949, "All holdings of over 50 hectares (about 6,000 of them with about 6.5 percent of the land) were confiscated and given to state farms or collectives (Ionescu; Murgescu). (…) Collectives (…) were collections of peasants working their own, expropriated lands, and living in their old villages (Montias; Murgescu)." (Chirot, 1978)

communism unsettled individual identities in communities, and as a result "group identities and differences [had] been redefined according to diversifying prosperity based on private ownership" (Buchowski, 2006:20).

I had already suspected for some time that the restitution of nationalized property to his long-time neighbors and his own family's lack of land (beyond their garden) might have been an issue for Old Mister Pista. On another occasion, not that long before he talked about his father selling their land to the Catholic Church, he also said that somebody made him an offer to buy the upper part of their garden, the section on the top of the local hill, overlooking the city. In that case, he focused his story on the exclusivity of their land, and the likely increase in its future monetary value. The end of that story was that he did not sell the upper section of his garden because they did not need the money, but he emphasized on several occasions that he could have received a good price for it had he sold it, and then he added:

> "My son might decide to sell that part of the garden when we die… It is going to be good money for them; people nowadays are willing to pay a lot for such a view. And my son won't work the land. He is not like that. He likes the idea of living in a house, the fresh air, a terrace, flowers around... even the fruit trees. But he is a driver and an office worker, and his wife is a nurse. They wouldn't want to work the land, even though they know how to do it. Frankly, I don't even work it anymore; I'm already a city person. It is only my wife who cares for it. But she moved to the city from a small village, she still can't bear the idea of land being uncultivated. But things changed."

This quote shows that even in the case of such a relatively small piece of land with 'crystallized' ownership status – a private garden no bigger than 1000 sqm – how many different and often overlapping positions in social space are simultaneously negotiated. The quote from Old Mister Pista illustrates how many layers of 'valuation' can be attached to the same piece of land even by members of the same family. These overlapping valuations, produced over several decades, mirror the positions these people occupy in social space. However, at the same time, because of the decisions and actions they make day-by-day, they constantly reinterpret these valuations and (re)negotiate their individual and households' relative positions in social space.

In this context, as Graeber argues, value can best be understood, "as the way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality – even if in many cases the totality in question exists primarily in the actor's imagination." (2001:xii) Thus,

according to Graeber, it is important to keep in mind that, "systems of categories, or knowledge, are really just one side of a system of action; that society is therefore in a sense always an active project or set of projects; that value is the way actions become meaningful to the actors by being placed in some larger social whole, real or imaginary. To adopt a dialectical approach means to define things not in terms of what one imagines them to be in a certain abstract moment, outside time, but partly by what they have the potential to become" (2001:254). The case of the Kovacs family reflects this point very clearly:

- For Margit, Old Mister Pista's wife, their garden has a practical value since it is a plot to be cultivated to produce food for the family; but working the land is also a way for her to hold onto and continually re-live her 'urban-rural' dual identity (re)constructed throughout the decades[130].

- For Denes, Old Mister Pista's son, this land is one of the primary resources he thinks he needs in order to transition from being a peasant-worker who cultivates his garden and lives off the land to a white-collar individual who only uses his house and land for leisure activities.[131]

- For Old Mister Pista their land is a piece of 'capital' with fluctuating economic and social exchange value, and so he keeps the land's monetary value in mind, even though he is not prepared to sell it. In his 'assessment' process, then, he is also sensitive to the changes that take place in the context in which his land is embedded: for example the amount "people are currently willing to pay for a view". But for him this plot is also the land of his ancestors, land that made it possible for them to become well-to-do 'city' people and then helped them reproduce their family as a social and biological unit, even in times of hardship. Never the less, Old Mister Pista knows that valuations of this plot, other than his

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[130] See more on this in Nagengast's and Lampland's work on 'polybians' where they write about the creation of multiple/circular identities developed during communism by rural people who moved to urban areas (or commuted from rural to urban areas). Further, as seen in the writings of Pine, rural gendered identities – where women (among other things) were responsible for the household's food production – were often preserved during communism. (See more on this topic in: Frances Pine (1993) The cows and the pigs …).

[131] Nevertheless, Denes' attachments and valuations were more complex than this, because he held memories from his youth, when – while many of his friends, who lived in apartment houses, spent their free time playing in the neighborhood – he had no free time and had to help his mother work the land. At the same time, he also talked about how this land made his family comparatively well-to-do duirng the last decade of communism, because they did not experience poverty and food shortages as severely as his friends' families.

own, exist and he sees them as legitimate as well. While for him the only reason for selling land continues to be pressing financial need, he recognizes that his son might want to sell part of their garden not out of need but to be able to live out his dream of upward social mobility.

Finally, as we will see in the following, all the valuations the Kovacs family attached to their property at the same time co-existed and overlapped with many other valuations that deposited around property and land in the space-time of the district and the country.

Just as he claimed, Old Mister Pista was a "city person", especially when compared to his wife and most people in the district who arrived much later than the Kovacs family. He lived in the Iris district all his life, always on the same plot and always in the same house. The land on which their house was built – located right in the center of the district, next to the main square – was bought by his father's parents, in the early 1900s. His grandmother was the daughter of an urban farmer that had lived in Cluj for several generations, while his grandfather – originally from another city – was a famous landscape gardener working for the aristocracy. He came to Cluj in the late 19th century and, soon after he got married in 1884, bought this land using his savings. Although Old Mister Pista's house and garden are sizable even now, family documents and word of mouth among relatives attested to the fact that the land the grandparents held was much larger than their current plot.

> "You never told me what happened to all that land your grandparents had?" I asked him.
>
> "They had to sell it, over the years. So many tragedies happened in the family that they had to sell it. During the First World War my father, 26 at the time, had to go to the front line. He was away for six years, because he was a prisoner of war. Meanwhile, at home, his father – my grandpa – died. The family was without financial support… I think that was the time when my grandma sold the first pieces of land. It was all here, along the main road, not on the hills, as was the land of others. So it wasn't difficult to find buyers. As my father told me that was a time when people were coming to the city from all over the country[132]. There was

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[132] Demographics of Cluj between 1900-1948 (based on census data):

Year	Total population	Increase from period to period (absolute numbers and percentage)
1900	49,295	N/A
1910	60,808	11,513 (23,35 %) (over 10 years, 1900-1910)
1920	83,542	22,734 (37,38 %) (over 10 years, 1910-1920)
1930	100,844	17,302 (20,71 %) (over 10 years, 1920-1930)
1941	110,956	10,112 (10,02 %) (over 11 years, 1930-1941)
1948	117,915	6,959 (6,27 %) (over 7 years, 1941-1948)

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kind of a shortage of urban land and housing in Cluj. And my grandma was short of money. She was working the land and produced food for the family, but, the family also needed money and she had none. So she had no other choice but to sell. (…)

Then, my father returned from the war to the parental house and started working again. He was a well-respected blacksmith. It took them a decade to get back on their feet financially. So, my father was 44 when he finally decided to marry. My mother was an orphan, very poor, and 25 years younger than my father. But the very same year they married, my father's older sister fell ill and died at 47, leaving behind three young children. The kids had no father. He died in an accident; I think a cart hit him. So my father was there with five people to feed: three kids, a wife and a sick and aging mother. Because, you know, my grandma had no pension or health insurance at all… at the time there were no such things. (…)

One year later, in 1933, after being sick for a year, my grandma also died. I think this was the time when my father sold this land to the Catholics, as I told you. He needed money for his mother's treatment and then for the funeral. (…)

Then the last pieces of land, on the opposite side of our house, if I am not mistaken, were sold right before the war. My father wanted to have some money to move his family out of the city, to a nearby village, to get away from the war. And we were born in that village, both my sister and I, where the family spent the war-years. We had a beautiful childhood there... And there we were indeed protected from the war, to a great degree, actually...”

As seen above, the lives of these first- and second-generation family members were very much about the oscillations between 'geographical fixity' and 'movement' both in physical and social space. Old Mister Pista's grandfather, a new migrant to the city, became a landed person whose employment and new family ties, as well as the property he bought, embedded him in the fabric of the city. At that time their family trajectory was one of upward mobility in social space. However, their settled lives were periodically fractured by movement and tragedies. First, Old Mister Pista's father went to fight in the First World War, and so the family lost one of their main breadwinners. Then his grandfather died, and the family lost a second source of income, forcing his grandmother to sell part of the family land in order to be able to secure the (biological) survival of the family. These processes generated downward mobility for the family in social space. Between the wars, by the time the family – through the joint efforts of all members – financially stabilized the household, there were additional tragedies: the grandmother and her adult daughter died, placing additional stress on the still tenuous equilibrium they had reached. Land was sold again. Then, during the Second World War, with the experiences of a First World War behind him, Old Mister Pista's father decided to move his family to the countryside to escape from the horrors of the war. But, in order to be able to do this, he had to sell off all the remaining 'surplus' land the family owned. Once again, caught between the tensions of assuring the survival of their household and

their upward social mobility, Old Mister Pista's father chose the former to the detriment of the latter.

They rented out their house and the garden to a local family and, leaving behind all their belongings they moved to a nearby village. When they returned after the war all their belongings were gone: their furniture, documents, clothes, photographs, everything. The tenants, or somebody else, had stolen the Kovacs family's possessions. They had to start over again. Even though two of his father's sister's children were old enough to move out and start their own families, there were still four children and two adults on one income, his father's. Old Mister Pista's mother worked as well, from home, as a seamstress, but as Old Mister Pista said, "She was always very fair with people, so she did not earn much. For the work she did she always told people to pay the amount they were able to afford. And people couldn't afford much at the time. It was like that after the war."

7.2.2 The Communist paradigm shift: when "land suddenly meant poverty"

By the time the Communists came to power in 1945 the Kovacs family was so poor and post-war shortages were so great that even buying their daily food became a major issue.

> "You know how it was? We grew up with it, with poverty. For us inflation meant nothing. It was what we were used to. But, you see, we all survived, although we were living six in one small room, through all my childhood. And the six of us often had nothing to eat but two kilos of potatoes, for the whole day. Or breadcrumbs that my uncle brought home from the bakery where he worked. Or polenta with a little salt or oil. In summer it was better, we had fruit in the garden, and some vegetables. But the soil in our garden was not great for vegetables. It was mainly grapes and fruit trees what we had.
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> And we had all this hardship even though both my parents worked, can you imagine? My father was a respected blacksmith. He had a job in a local factory and he was also working on his own in his free time, after he finished his shift. And my mother worked at home, as a seamstress, day and night. And my uncle, the son of my father's deceased sister, who was in his twenties, also had a job and earned some money. Our situation didn't get better until the 1960s, until then it was really difficult. But I am 72 and still here, as you can see" – he laughed loudly. "And my wife survived as well... even though she too grew up in a very small house with eleven siblings. They got used to living in crowded conditions, to misery... One of her sisters was telling me that the oil lamp always went out at night because there was so little oxygen left in the room."
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> He turns to his wife, "Wasn't it like that?" "Yes, it was..." Margit answers. "We had only a kitchen and a room... we were laying one next to the other, filling up all the space on the floor. And in the morning my

mother always told us kids – poor her – to fill the big pot with water and put it on the stove, and 'we will see what we can get into it during the day'."

I asked her, "But living in a village, at least you had a garden and agricultural land, didn't you?"

"Yes, there were others who were poorer than we were... But... how should I put this? The land at that time did not mean poverty... and it did not mean wealth either. And later on, after the second war, during communism, it actually meant poverty after a while. Because the more land you had, the more in-kind taxes they made you to pay. Having a bigger piece of land meant that you were forced to hand over tremendous amounts of produce to the state. And they never asked you how big your crop was in a given year, or how many calves or sheep you had, they just told you that for that many acres you have to give the state a certain quota of vegetables and grain and meat. And in most years farmers could not make enough to meet their state quotas. So it was a big problem if you had a lot of land. And you could not get rid of it; there was nobody you could sell it to. So, in our family, although my father resisted collectivization until the 1960s, all the kids – me included – gave up agriculture and came to work in factories in Cluj. Even my father came to work in the porcelain factory for a while, here in the district. And my mother worked as a seamstress until she died, because she had no pension at all. And, in the end, all the land my parents had was taken away by collectivization. We, the kids, had to help them in their old age, from our factory salaries, because they were no longer able to make a living."

The above quotes from Old Mister Pista and Margit highlight that after the Second World War and the institution of communism in Romania, four very important changes happened in the life of their families. The first change Old Mister Pista mentioned was his family suddenly experiencing extreme poverty. Even though there were three adults in their household working full time, and his father committed all his free time taking side-jobs, they still slipped into extreme privation. Old Mister Pista talked about this period as the worst he could remember, and also pointed out that even his father – who had experienced hardship in his youth – saw this as the most difficult time of his life. In previous decades Old Mister Pista's father and grandfather were able to provide for their families on one income, and when bad came to worse, they still had some land to sell. But, all this changed. And although poverty this extreme lasted only a few years – the period when post-war food shortages and spiraling inflation were taking their toll on the life of most families in Romania[133] – still, the Kovacs's continued to struggle with poverty for more than two decades.

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[133] Chirot wrote the following about the period when families such as the Kovacs experienced extreme poverty: "The very rapid rate of industrial growth from 1948 to 1953 (an average yearly growth of 18.2 percent) created severe problems. Urban growth (from 3,747,000 to 4,424,000) raised demand for housing and food, but virtually no new housing was built as all investment funds went into the industrialization drive. As for food, production remained below the 1938 levels, when urban demand was lower. To keep rising demand from increasing prices, the state forced peasants to make compulsory deliveries (about one-quarter of production, in the case of cereals). In 1952, a new monetary reform again confiscated any personal reserves that might have built up, and consumer goods were rationed. The average standard of living, whether measured by supplies of meat, housing, or general merchandise, remained below pre-war levels (Montias). The political struggle and purges of 1952-53 eased the situation. The proportion of

The other important aspect of Old Mister Pista's story was the fact – and this contextualizes his previous point as well – that extreme poverty was so widespread during that period that most people's experience was not dominated by feelings of deprivation. That is to say that during those years everybody they knew or met was as poor as they were. Miss Piroska, their childhood friend, told long stories about the extreme poverty her family experienced, even though – just as in the Kovacs family – both her parents and her grandmother worked in local factories. And the night I was sitting with them they recalled stories of all their neighbors going through similar difficulties. Widespread poverty partly explained why it was relatively easy for Old Mister Pista to talk about his experience of poverty[134]. At one point he said that since everybody around them was equally poor "there was no reason for anybody to be ashamed of eating poorly or being dressed poorly[135]". This statement was in stark contrast to the current situation, in which Old Mister Pista and others in the neighborhood were constantly pondering the value of their holdings in an attempt to deal with their feelings of relative deprivation, even though they had not experienced privation for a long time.

But, the most significant and revealing point was made by Margit Kovacs. She, very succinctly, underscored one of the most important paradigm shifts people experienced after the Communists came to power: The value of the land families owned suddenly changed and, in a few years, what was once an asset became a holding that "meant poverty". That is, without doing anything differently families found themselves in a situation where the context in which they and their land were embedded changed, with land and property radically depreciating. As a result, most households, including Margit's, were forced to change their coping strategies. A major component of this change was that many young people migrated to the city. What people experienced during

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national income invested in industry was lowered, and increased amounts went to agriculture, consumer goods, and housing. The process of forced collectivization was stopped, and forced delivery quotas reduced. (They were virtually eliminated in 1956.) Living standards rose markedly in 1953-55, though average food consumption still did not return to pre-war levels, and the merchandise trade remained below the level of the late 1930s until the 1960s (Montias)." (Chirot, 1978:467-468)

[134] The other reason for the ease with which they talked about poverty was that it was in their past, they all lived in a relative financial security, without fearing what might happen in the days ahead.

[135] Conversely, this implies that under different circumstances poverty was seen as something to be ashamed of.

that period was in a way[136] the reverse of what Old Mister Pista experienced in the years immediately following the collapse of communism, when the price of land and property appreciated. And, while prices skyrocketed in certain urban areas in the 1990s, most families felt that they did not have much influence on what happened around them. This, once again, led to many families radically changing their coping strategies, movement in space (migration, changing houses/selling land) being one of them.

Finally, another important process Margit highlighted was the onset of old-age poverty for an entire generation, a phenomenon that significantly restructured household and kin relations. The elderly lost most of their land, and having no pensions became dependent on their children and extended kin at a much earlier age than had previously been the case. Even though inter-generational transfers from children to parents – when parents reached an age where they were unable to be self-sufficient – was common in earlier decades as well, after collectivization of land, dependency of the elderly began earlier and lasted considerably longer. This change meant a double burden for Margit's and Old Mister Pista's generation: they were providing for two generations; raising their kids and helping their parents to survive.

In relation to the above processes, it is important to understand that collectivization and nationalization of land did not just affect people living in rural areas, as was the case with Margit's family. Since a large part of the Iris district was used as agricultural land by urban peasant families – some of them owning their land as did the Kovacs family, while others rented from big landowners – a significant part of the district's families were affected by these changes. Beginning in 1948, all privately owned farms that were over 50 hectares were nationalized and included in a so-called "state agricultural cooperative" (Gostat). However, contrary to what happened in rural areas, this land was not reserved for the collective use of the local farmers[137], it was instead run as

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[136] In this case it was only the feeling they experienced that was similar, i.e. that the "value" of land changed regardless of what they did, and they had no influence and power to influence the process in any way.

[137] "During the collectivization drive, peasants were forced into associations which were quickly transformed into full collectives, or, as the Romanians call them, cooperatives. (…) Collectives are neither small private enterprises nor large industrial or bureaucratic employers. Rather, as M. Cernea has pointed out, they are something quite unique and virtually unknown outside the Communist countries. They are large state enterprises without a regular salaried labor force. They depend on labor recruited from privately oriented micro-units (families) with outside options. One doesn't "join" a collective like a factory or office, one "lives" in a collective. But living there does not entail necessary

a large agricultural state corporation with employees coming from all over the country[138]. As a result, local farmers either had to give up farming and go to work in factories, or continue agricultural production on their much smaller remaining plots, trying to increase their productivity in an effort to survive.

During the next decade most small farms that escaped nationalization and remained family- owned during the first wave were also nationalized and transferred to the administration of Gostat. According to documents in the City Archives, in 1970 there were already 77 employees at Gostat[139], most of them not urban farmers but rural people who moved to the city from neighboring villages. I met many of these former Gostat workers. Most of them were landless and poor villagers who came to the city during the 1960s and early 1970s hoping for a better life[140].

Finally, the last wave of nationalization started in the early 1970s when some of the big factories were built in the area. In this last wave of forced 'systematization'[141] under communist leadership, everything that stood in the way of the communist mega-developments was demolished. Many family homes and gardens fell victim to this process, causing many long-time residents of the district – all middle-aged and older people – to lose their homes and sources of income. For them it was, practically speaking, impossible to be trained for a new job and start a new employment career. To make matters worse, since they all worked as private farmers they were not entitled to receive a state pension. Their children – as was the case with Margit – no longer having family

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obligations, or even the necessity of working there. (Houses and their courtyards are privately owned.) The collective must therefore attract labor from the village. To do so it offers pay, but this is often low. It also offers use of a private plot (which cannot, however, be inherited or sold)." (Chirot, 1978:478)

[138] Details of this process have been discussed in an earlier footnote.

[139] Data from State Archives, file on the state agricultural farm Gostat.

[140] More on this in the next section where the life history of the Pop family is discussed.

[141] Law 58/1974 on the systematization of surfaces and rural and urban territories: "Systematization is conceived in order to: secure the harmonious organization of the country's [land] surfaces, and of all the administrative-territorial units; to contribute to the rational and balanced distribution of the forces of production, combining in an organic way the criteria for economic and social efficiency; to secure the organization and running according to the plan of cities and villages, in accordance with the general economic and social progress, and by restricting the perimeters used for building in urban areas to the absolute necessary, while at the same time optimizing the use of these surfaces; the transformation of certain rural areas that have the economic and social potential into urban centers; increasing the overall economic, social and cultural activity of the villages, and the catching up of living conditions in villages with that of the cities."

land to make a living, gave up agriculture and went on to become factory workers, or occasionally, office workers and administrators.

Not having their homes anymore, all these families were moved to communist townhouses, often small studio flats on the opposite side of the city. Their compensation in real terms – for the economic value of their house and land, as well as for the loss of their livelihoods – was never taken into account by the communist leadership[142]. The best possible scenario for these elderly people was having children and extended family that were already in a good enough position to be able to support them in their old age, as Margit and her siblings did for their aging parents. During that period, according to some of the local family histories I collected, the rate of suicide might have increased in the district among the elderly. However, due to the death recording practices of some of the local churches where I conducted part of my research this data coming from oral histories could not be confirmed[143]. State records had no dissected data on causes of death by period and/or district.

Because of the poverty in which they lived, and because they had sold off all their land before communism, the Kovacs family was not directly affected by nationalization. In contrast to many of their neighbors who felt that they had been "punished" by this new system – losing their land and former social and economic status – the Kovacs family did not immediately feel that their situation had gotten worse after these changes:

> "Was there any threat that you would lose your garden or house after the Communists came to power in 1945?" I asked Old Mister Pista.

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[142] Law 58/1974 on systematization said: "Citizens whose houses were demolished in accordance with the law, will receive land and other material support, for moving their households, within the regulations set out by the law." However, as I learned from my informants, implementation did not work as outlined in the law. The compensation and support families received was minimal.

[143] During the period of forced nationalization, according to some of the local family histories, the rate of suicide might have increased in the district among the elderly. However, data coming from oral histories could not be confirmed in local archives. State records had no dissected data on causes of death by time period and/or district and, as several of the local priests said, suicide was often not recorded as such in church files in order for priests to be able to give people a religious burial. This was especially so when the person who committed suicide was old and a long-time resident of the neighborhood. In such cases it was more likely to enter "sickness" or "old age" as the cause of death.

"No, not really. We were paupers, barely surviving, so there was no reason to pick on us. We had a kitchen-and-a-room house, and six of us were living in it. They took away one's house, or moved in other families, only if one had extra rooms. But this wasn't the case with us. And I do not know anybody in our neighborhood to whom this would have happened. Houses were small here, only the land on which people worked was of any significant size. Plus, my father was a Communist Party member during the 1930s, when they were still a small, underground movement. He was a factory ironworker, was involved in strikes and workers' movements, and he very much believed in their principles. So most party people knew him quite well."

"Does that mean that communism actually was a good thing for your family and your father?"

"Well, not really. And actually it did affect us negatively, after all. But, only later. Because when the Communists came into power my father became disillusioned with them, so he left the party. Can you imagine? When everybody was crowding into the party, he gave up his membership. But since he withdrew from politics altogether, and he was a very poor but excellent ironworker with a big family they didn't harm him. And as we, the kids, were growing up, he advised us not to join the party either. So when we were grown up, it turned out we were not eligible to receive housing from the communist state, even though we applied for it. I was already married, and we had our son in 1962, and seven of us were living here in this small one-room house. My parents, my siblings, and us… and we waited, and waited, for several years, and we still did not receive anything. And, you know, they didn't tell us directly that it was because we were not party members... So when everybody around us, even those who applied later than we did, had already received a flat, we figured that for us it's not going to happen. This was when we decided that we were going to enlarge this house, and all stay together, the whole family.

We applied for building permission, and after we received it we started construction… It took us two years. We built most of it ourselves, but we finally got it done. We made a flat for my parents and my family on the first floor, and one flat for my sister and brother on the ground floor. Unfortunately my father died in 1963 so he never really got to enjoy the bigger house. My mother lived with us until she died in 1982."

The above quote illustrates a surprising turn in the life of the Kovacs family. Even though they fit all the criteria – poor, working class, many children, the father member of the underground communist movement – which could have helped the family at the beginning of communism to quickly regain the social status they lost, the individual dispositions and the resulting actions of Old Mister Pista's father shifted the family trajectory in an unintended direction. Even with all the 'right descriptors' the family possessed, because they were no longer Communist Party members, they remained 'fixed' in geographical and social space for decades. And this happened coincidentally with trying to follow the collective coping strategies others around them followed: they all became factory workers and they all applied to their factories for flats. They wanted to move out of their parents' house and hoped to be able to live the lives of families who received housing from the Communists. At the time, although a significant number of these families only rented their flats from the state/factory (and did not own them) these steps were still perceived as an upward movement in one's social and economic status, because with every new flat the joint

wealth of the extended family increased. That is, moving to a new flat meant control of more resources by the extended kin network and the increased possibility for a family's upward mobility.

However, for the Kovacs family it took almost fifteen years to stabilize their family finances. It was only from the early 1970s, after they finished enlarging their house and all three adults in the household (Old Mister Pista, his wife, his sister) earned enough to pay for his mother's and his son's expenses, as well as for the costs of his wife's parents, that life became better and easier for them. It was then that they could afford to buy a motorbike and during their summer holidays travelled all around the country.

Remembering that period Old Mister Pista's voice was filled with satisfaction when he said that after several decades "life finally rewarded them", and that "remaining on the family land" paid off. In the 1980s, when the food shortages became more widespread in Romania, thanks to their garden they were doing much better than most of their friends and factory colleagues. They produced all their fruit and vegetables, and kept poultry and a pig each year. As Old Mister Pista said, "During those years land became valuable again, even if not in the sense that we could sell it for good money. But, since we had this land, we were able to save a lot of money from our salaries because we did not have to spend very much on food."

7.2.3 A Kovacs 'on the move': the first generation to leave the family home

Denes, Old Mister Pista's son, dreamed of becoming an engineer and applied to university in 1980. Old Mister Pista wasn't opposed to his son making the application, but he was not fully supportive either. Old Mister Pista was very proud of his father's exceptional skills as a blacksmith, and also thought that he too was a very talented ironworker. As he put it, "I turned the trade into art" making iron objects that were so beautifully ornamented, that everybody in the neighborhood praised them. So, he always assumed that Denes would follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather.

"I told him, my son, if he does not study well enough to be admitted to university on his first try, he should continue the family tradition and be an ironworker. He knew very well – I was always very clear about this – that although he was welcome to remain at home, I would not continue to feed him just so he could try over and over again to pass some bloody university exam. He was a grown man; he had to take responsibility for himself. And he didn't pass the exam, so I took him to the factory in 1980. There he learned the trade and worked for 13 years until the factory closed in the early 1990s."

Hareven argues in her book on Amoskeag workers that, in the life of her informants, work and self-esteem/identity were closely linked: "a complex and demanding job was essential for the self-esteem of many workers" and for many of her informants work was an "almost all-encompassing experience" (1982:79-81) where, other than work, people felt little other justification existed for one's life. Old Mister Pista's feelings towards his status as an ironworker were very similar to that described by Hareven for Amoskeag workers: for Old Mister Pista identity and self-esteem was also intertwined with (iron) work. In fact, his whole male kinship lineage built their lives and identities around this trade. In addition to Old Mister Pista and his father, many of their uncles, cousins and other close male relatives "worked with iron" and prospered in this field. Old Mister Pista, when he talked about why he liked iron, explained that while he highly valued the combination of creativity and precision that were possible on the job, he also loved the trade because it secured financial independence from factory work for his family (i.e. he was doing after-hours, on-side iron work in the neighborhood and in the district). Old Mister Pista often talked about how engineers in the factory were less skilled and knowledgeable than he was. In this context he implied that his son becoming an engineer would have meant that Denes betrayed their family's "identity" and the values transmitted through the male lineage from one generation to the next.

Szelenyi's work on "socialist entrepreneurs" (1988) highlights another important aspect of Old Mister Pista's attitudes. Szelenyi argues that the introduction of socialism for many families meant that their trajectory of "embourgeoisement" was interrupted, leading to the appearance of alternative employment histories in these families. However, parents often pushed children towards trajectories which they imagined would, in the future, make possible the family's return to these interrupted paths of embourgeoisement. Thus, in such cases, claims Szelenyi, families were often willing to choose "parking orbits" in terms of employment just to be able to maintain the hope that they could quickly return to their "original" path of embourgeoisement when structural

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factors made that possible. Becoming a highly educated professional or state administrator were not seen as "parking orbits", they were perceived as threats to the family's future and integrity, because they were seen as jobs that would draw youngsters away from the family. Szelenyi's findings also highlighted that in many of these families, life history became – as was the case in Old Mister Pista's family – the most important mediator in the transmission of the entrepreneurial spirit from one generation to the next (1988:65). However, for Denes, this family identity meant that he was not able to fulfill his dreams of pursuing a higher education and getting a white collar job. It was only after the factory – where he worked with his father for more than a decade – closed in the early 1990s and the communist system collapsed that Denes was able to become a white collar employee: the well-paid chauffeur and personal assistant of the Unitarian bishop, the highest-ranking official in that denomination.

Denes, four years after he failed his university exam, got married and moved to a studio flat his wife received from her factory. Old Mister Pista told me with a mixture of contempt and laughter, "Finally we received something from the communists as well."[144] But the flat his son and daughter-in-law received was very small (20 sqm) and in another part of the city. The Kovacs parents wanted their only son to live in a bigger flat that was closer to them. Thus, they started looking for ways to move the young couple over to their own neighborhood. Soon, they found a widow in an apartment block opposite their house. She wanted to move from her one bedroom flat to a smaller apartment:

> "So we put the widow and my son in contact, and they agreed to the exchange. And then they arranged it with their factories and switched flats. Because this is how it worked at the time: on most occasions you did not own your flat, you were renting it from the state through your factory. So you were not allowed to sell it. But if the factory agreed to a change, and both tenants involved in the exchange were happy, you were eventually allowed to exchange flats. In the end the whole process was very smooth. And we did this for our son, to be close to us."
>
> I asked him, "But how was it that somebody who had a bigger flat was willing to move to a smaller one? Why would she do that?"

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[144] At the time Denes's wife was an assembly line worker at the Clujana shoe factory. After spending 16 years there, in 1999 she decided to become a trained nurse. She was eligible to receive a flat, because she was a member of the communist party. But, as Old Mister Pista said, somewhat apologetically, "by that time party membership meant something different than what it meant in our youth. In a way it became a formality that people used in order to get what they wanted". Although nobody in their family joined the party, their disadvantages from not being members were no longer that pronounced.

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"Well, you had to pay the person some money, obviously. And we did pay the widow."

"But how did you know how much to pay? There was no set price for which she advertised it, was there? In fact, she could not advertise it at all, isn't it?"

"Well, she did send word around among our trusted friends and acquaintances. This is how we learned about this possibility in the first place. And as for the price, I don't know, people just knew somehow. For the extra room she had we paid a price equivalent to a Dacia car[145]. If I remember correctly this was the going rate at the time for an extra room, in cases when there was no big difference between the districts. And in this case there wasn't. My daughter-in-law's studio flat was in one of the better neighborhoods of the city."

"But this wasn't legal, was it?" I asked.

"Well, of course you didn't tell the factory administration that you paid or received extra money, but they knew. People in the administration also exchanged their flats, so they were aware."

"And did your son and his wife ever move to another flat after the exchange?"

"No, they remained in that flat and bought it from the state after 1989 when that became possible. We gave them the money for that. So that's their flat now, they own it."

The above conversation demonstrates how deeply engrained certain practices related to housing became under communism and how many norms that regulated property relations co-existed, structuring people's lives and their coping mechanisms. There are several layers of this process that were revealed in the quote from Old Mister Pista, and they deserve to be explored.

First, it is important to clarify that, owing to the dominant presence of the state in housing, all transactions were strictly regulated by the *Law on selling, buying and renting apartments and houses*[146]. Thus, while the right to private property was recognized under certain conditions and selling or buying such property was accepted within certain limits[147], people were not allowed to freely dispose of their flats (e.g. sell them for profit) or to use them for anything else (e.g. renting) other than housing their own families[148]. Further, while renting out a room was allowed under certain conditions, the state still attempted to maintain its monopoly over the rental market through

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[145] "Dacia" is a Romanian car manufacturer that was established in 1966. During communism it was among the very few types of automobiles that were available to the Romanian public. There were restrictions as to who could buy a car and years-long waiting lists to receive one.

[146] Laws 10/1968 and 4/1973.

[147] There were serious restrictions on how many properties a family was allowed to have (usually one), and buying apartments/houses in order to rent them for a profit was forbidden. However, people were allowed to buy or build apartments/houses for the use of their own families, and under certain conditions they were allowed to rent out one room of their own property.

[148] Law 10/1968 and 4/1973: The regulations specified one flat per family, no building for anything other than individual use, no selling for profit, no renting for profit, etc.

legislation and by building huge numbers of rental properties each year[149]. Thus, there was no 'free' housing market as understood in western economics and law. However, as seen in the Kovacs quote where the widow did make a 'profit' by moving to a smaller flat, there was still a 'market' for housing shaped by both the state and the instituted social practices that were subject to periodic reinterpretations and individual negotiations. That meant that what actually moved around people and housing were the co-existing and overlapping 'formal' and 'informal' practices that had developed over decades.

More concretely, there was a housing system regulated by a law that spelled out the rules for building, selling, and renting a house[150]. It stated that national/local state bodies and workplaces were the main actors entitled to build housing. The housing they created could be rented out at subsidized rates to certain – mainly disadvantaged – categories of people. According to the law, those entitled to rent under such advantageous conditions were the elderly, those with many children, and those on low incomes. People who were re-located by their employers from one city to another also enjoyed priority in receiving state rental housing. While these aspects of housing distribution were formally regulated and the rules made public, the practical distribution of this same housing was, never the less, placed in the hands of individual administrators at the local councils and workplaces. This transfer made the process partly informal and located it within the private domains of people's lives.

That is to say that, although these local entities prioritized families based on their housing conditions and socio-economic status, categories of 'need' always remained open to interpretations of particular decision makers. And, since the distribution process itself involved face-to-face relations between the applicants and the people who were responsible for assessing their actual living conditions, outcomes were always influenced by individual human relationships and the negotiating power of the families involved.

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[149] In Cluj, starting in the early 1970s, there were five to six thousand flats built each year, the number going up to 9000 in the late 1970. Beginning in the 1980s, the numbers decreased significantly.
[150] Laws 10/1968 and 4/1973.

A great many of my informants talked about the strategies they employed to increase their chances of receiving housing. Some of them, before inspectors came to assess their living conditions, moved in with their family members who lived in the worst, most dilapidated conditions. Others paid bribes to administrators that were going to make the decisions on their files; they used their friendships with such people to secure advantages, and befriended people solely because they were in decision-making positions. Yet others talked about how they provided medical documents claiming to have serious health conditions, while in reality these were fake certificates they received from doctors and nurses, in exchange for favors/services/gifts/money[151]. Another strategy employed was for couples to divorce and, based on divorce documents, apply for a second flat for the husband or the wife[152]. Further, people explained that the negotiating power of the administrators responsible for their files was also extremely important for success. Since the number of flats to be distributed was limited, administrators competed with each other in order to secure housing for the families for whom they were responsible. All these factors played a significant part in how successful someone was in getting a flat, the quality and size of the flat, and how long it took to receive it.

In addition to these negotiations that were carried out informally, but were organized along formal and public rules, there was another – informal – dimension of housing that was partially hidden from the public eye and the state. As mentioned above and reiterated here, it was the 'market' in which people who lived in state rental accommodations searched for others with whom they could exchange flats, just as the Kovacs family did. This option allowed people to improve the odds against being 'fixed' in space and left open the possibility of being able to search for options that better met their housing needs and lifestyles. However, this option was still inextricably linked to the formal laws and the public domain. On the one hand, people had to receive officially a flat from the state in order to have something with which to bargain. For example, the Kovacs family was able to benefit only after their daughter-in-law received a studio flat. On the other hand, the state/workplace had to give final consent to these privately negotiated exchanges, as was the case with Denes Kovacs's apartment switch.

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[151] See more on bribes and other informal practices in communism for example in works of Ledeneva and Humphrey.

[152] In Chapter 3, Anca talked about this strategy and the fact that they wanted to use it, but by the time her parents filed for divorce the communist system collapsed and they were not eligible to receive a second flat, and so they did not divorce.

However, as highlighted by our conversation, Old Mister Pista – as was the case with most other people – considered the widespread practice of informal negotiations to take precedence over legal restrictions. As revealed in the quote, Old Mister Pista neither agreed nor denied that the practice was illegal; he just said that it had to be all right, because even those in positions of greater power (supervisors, administrators, bosses) did the same thing on a regular basis. Never the less, these one-to-one negotiations and 'deals' were regulated by "relations of trust" and were only possible owing to the existence of an 'in-between' space – established by people's everyday practices – that opened up new opportunity structures at the intersections of the formal and informal, private and public domains. Narotzky argues that in economic relations "concepts such as *trust*, emerging from concepts of identity and propinquity (kin, community), of reciprocal knowledge and participation in the others' interpretations of and decisions about reality, can become useful ideological instruments." (1997:211) In this context, where there were no clear rules and regulations and no 'public market' existed for housing and related services, 'trust' became this ideological instrument: it both enabled and limited peoples' practices, maintaining existing inequalities and at the same time creating new ones. At the same time, it both reflected and shaped the embedded social practices of people's networks and that of the state's institutions.

Another layer of the conversation with Old Mister Pista that needs to be explored is how such practices affected inequalities in housing, but also inequalities more broadly. I will go into a more detailed discussion of such issues in the next sections of the chapter, but before going further, it is important to note that because of the fragmentation and contradictions that existed in the system, there was a huge discrepancy between the goals declared at the discursive level (housing for all disadvantaged) and the actual results of implementation of these provisions. In reality, many of the disadvantaged families (as defined by the communist law quoted above) were completely unable to benefit from these provisions. But, even those who had some measure of success in negotiating this system were frequently housed in poorer quality and smaller flats.

Many of my informants were commuting from villages that were considered to be close enough to make a commute feasible suffered because they were not entitled to receive flats in the city. These families often waited for decades for a flat, and some of them never received one. Thus, some moved in with relatives that lived in the city and stayed with them in overcrowded conditions.

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Others continued commuting, only to discover after the collapse of communism that they were permanently excluded from living in the city because rising prices made housing unaffordable. Some families had to live in workers' halls even after they married and had children. Others only found private rental accommodations (usually a room in some family's flat) that cost them a significant percentage of their incomes. This left little money for other necessities and made them vulnerable to abusive practices of private landlords[153]. For many couples, living space became extremely overcrowded in flats they originally received before they had children. This often further disadvantaged children, for example in their education, as was the case with Anca (Chapter 4, 5). Even though living conditions for many became untenable, there were usually very long delays between the time families submitted requests for larger flats and administrators revisited those requests.

The above, in many ways, also applies to the Kovacs family. In the 1950s and 1960s, even though they were poor and disadvantaged (and, eligible for state housing), they were still excluded for decades from the state housing system because, as mentioned earlier, they were not Communist Party members. When Denes and his wife received a studio flat, the young couple had no savings yet. Upgrading to a bigger flat required help that they received from Denes' parents. Both financially and by mobilizing their networks, Old Mister Pista and Margit Kovacs used their contacts to find the widow with a bigger flat and informally paid her a price for the extra room[154]. After the collapse of communism the Kovacs parents once again used their savings and bought the flat from the state, making clear how important intragenerational transfers were both in communism and after. Their case highlights the importance of being well embedded in a place and a network of people. Making the system 'work' for them required more than money. They also needed people who – as they said – they 'trusted' and who 'trusted' them and were willing to engage in these informal exchanges.

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[153] Law 10/1968: "Regarding private property, in accordance with the regulations in place, apartments in private ownership that are used by their owners and their families are not subject to state allocation and (re)distribution. The owner has a right to rent out part of his/her property, in the form of a furnished room."

[154] The parents of Denes's wife were poor peasants from a nearby village and therefore unable to assist.

7.2.4 Closing remarks

Viewed in the larger societal context, the Kovacs family's history becomes a lens through which better to understand that what is discussed here is not only about the production and reproduction of poverty and inequalities. It is also about the strategies people developed that made it possible to overcome some of their disadvantages over the long term. There were many important structural factors – some of which have been discussed earlier in this chapter and will be further discussed in the conclusions section – that helped improve or led to the deterioration of many families' position in social space. However, there were many individual factors as well, most importantly the balances (and imbalances) in the relationships that were negotiated within a household.

By the time Denes, the Kovacs's son moved out, Old Mister Pista and his wife, Margit no longer had elderly parents to support. Both had advanced into positions in their factories that paid higher salaries than they had in their youth. They saved money by producing food in their garden. Dora, Old Mister Pista's sister, never married and so was able to contribute part of her income and labor to the household. Denes was their only child, so there was no need for the Kovacs's to divide their savings among several children. And, as Denes and his wife, Kata decided not to have children the significant costs associated with child-rearing were not an issue. Taken together, these factors made it possible for the household to improve its economic standing and pay for Denes' and his wife's flat. That is to say that, over the generations, one of the coping strategies of household members was to postpone, limit or completely sacrifice the biological reproduction of the family in order to improve members' standing in social (economic) space: Old Mister Pista's father was forced by family circumstances to get married at an advanced age (well over 40); Old Mister Pista and his wife had only one child, Dora never married or had children; and Denes and Kata, by choice, had no children.

Another important coping strategy was to remain 'fixed' in geographical space (on the same land/in the same house), embedded in networks and relations that had developed and become established for well over a century. This strategy – influenced by state policy making – will be further discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 8.

In addition, there were further processes that shaped coping strategies and relationships: Some of the ideologically loaded concepts that were used to structure power relations within households, and between households and the larger surrounding environment were "trust" and "family/kinship" (e.g. trust/fairness/support/loyalty towards others in the family/kinship network). One of the fields where the complex workings of these ideologies appeared most clearly – exposing the power relations at work both within and outside the family – were in household members' approaches towards land and housing. As Bourdieu argues,

> "The purchase of a house, being connected with the family as household, and with its permanence over time, which it presupposes and also aims to guarantee, is both an economic investment – or at least a form of accumulation of capital as an element of a lasting, transmissible patrimony – and a social one, in so far as it contains within it a wager on the future or, more exactly, a biological and social reproduction project. The house is inextricably linked with the family as a social unit oriented towards its own biological reproduction: it is an element, as a necessary, but not sufficient condition, in child-rearing plans; and as a unit oriented also towards its social reproduction: it is one of the chief means by which the domestic unit ensures that a certain transmissible heritage is accumulated and preserved." (2005:2)

The way resources were joined, shared, distributed and circulated among household members, coupled with flexible understandings of 'rights', 'entitlements' and 'liabilities' in relation to land and housing, reflected well the 'micro' and 'macro' conditions that shaped the social and geographical space in which the biological and economic (re)production of the household took place over the decades. In the case of the Kovacs family, just as Bourdieu argues, the house (and the land on which it stood) became the basis of the family identity; it was both the guarantee and a precondition of their biological, social and economic reproduction for over a century.

As the Kovacs's history highlights, ideologically loaded concepts such as 'trust' and 'family/kinship' were already influencing their lives at the turn of the 20th century, enabling and/or restricting household members' practices. While instituted social practices were changing during communism, such concepts continued to remain important, as illustrated when the Kovacs's – after being refused a communist-built flat – decided that several generations should remain together and continue to share the land and the house of their "ancestors" ("trusting each other" and "keeping the family together"), thereby eliminating the need for negotiations about how to divide their land into smaller, less viable, and less valuable plots. These concepts were no less important in structuring social relations when the household joined forces to exchange the

apartment Denes's wife, Kata received from the communist state. And finally, such concepts continued to shape household relations even after the collapse of communism, when Denes's parents – once again – mobilized household resources enabling them to buy the apartment for the young couple. Further, these concepts also guided the actions of Old Mister Pista when he decided to honor an agreement (with the Catholic Church) that had been made one hundred years earlier by his father, and when he decided not to sell/divide his "ancestors" land, even though he was offered a substantial amount of money. And, as interviews with household members revealed, these ideological instruments were not only binding and/or enabling people within the household, they quite often reflected practices of their wider social environment, contributing to production and reproduction of inequalities.

In all these consumption/production/circulation/distribution processes that occurred in and around household relations it should also be noted how flexible and complex household members' understandings of "ownership", "entitlement" and "liabilities" to land/house/apartment (property) were. They saw the land on which their house stood as "the land of their ancestors" and as such, the 'property' of the extended household – a shared resource to which, as a matter of family practice, everybody was entitled even though, in the legal sense, the title was in Old Mister Pista's name, and the house/land was used by only three people: Old Mister Pista, his wife, and his sister (still, entitlement was seen to exist through 'blood/kinship' ties). They considered the land used by the Catholic Church as the 'property' of the church even though that title was also in Old Mister Pista's name (entitlement was seen to come primarily through use rights, not legal rights). They saw the flat Old Mister Pista's daughter-in-law received from the communist state as the 'property' of the young couple even though it was a state-owned flat leased in Kata's name. The flat exchanged for Kata's small studio flat was also seen as the 'property' of the young couple, even though that too was a state flat leased in Kata's name, and the 'informal price' for the exchange was paid by Old Mister Pista and his wife. Finally, after communism, everybody considered the flat as the 'property' of the young couple (in legal terms they had the title to it), although the purchase price was paid for by Denes' parents who thus felt they "retained the right to influence Denes' and Kata's decisions as to whether or not sell the flat and move to another place". Based on the above, it is important to reiterate two things: On the one hand, this flexibility towards 'property relations' made a positive contribution to the multiplicity of coping strategies

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and the complex negotiation processes that allowed for households' adaptation in changing social, political, and economic circumstances. On the other hand, the concept of 'family/kinship' was repeatedly used as an ideological tool to regulate distribution and circulation of resources and to cover up other types of unequal relations in households and beyond.

These ideologically loaded concepts of 'trust' and 'mutual support in the family/kinships', hid the gendered and age-dependent power relations that structured household practices and the reproduction of the labor force. For example, Old Mister Pista's unmarried sister greatly contributed to asset accumulation for Old Mister Pista's son (and the household in general); Old Mister Pista's wife – through her work both in industry and the subsistence economy – made possible the accumulation of other assets for the household (even though, as she married into the family, she was not seen as an 'owner' of the 'family' land/house); Old Mister Pista's youngest brother was seen as renouncing his share in the land and the house when he moved to a flat his wife received from the communist state (even though, theoretically speaking, he was seen to have entitlement to these assets).

At the same time Old Mister Pista, with little or no consultation, made major life decisions for his son, Denes: he decided his son's employment track; at what age (18, the state's age of majority) it was time for him to start 'producing' for his own 'consumption'; and what Denes and his wife should and were allowed to do with their flat. Further, Old Mister Pista – thanks to the communist state's policies that supported heavy industry work and made it one of the highest paid sectors – was the highest single earner in the household and thus felt – aided by gendered/work related state ideological support – he had the right to control the distribution of most resources in his family (even though, when taking joint resources into account, his share was less than half of the combined income of remaining members of the household).

As documented in this case, and supporting the point made in the theoretical chapter referring to an argument made by Narotzky, households were never homogenous and stable 'units' and thus can more accurately be described as bundles of relations organized along practices of consumption, production, and reproduction that are simultaneously negotiated in the wider economic context of a society. As such, "consumption processes, then, are intertwined with

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relations of power which are forged and reproduced in the daily struggle to make a living."
(Narotzky, 1997:139, 143) Moreover, having taken an in-depth look into household relations in
the Kovacs's case, it also becomes clearer how the state's policies shaped such internal power
relations, deconstructing or supporting social relations and interfering with ideological concepts
such as trust/family/kinship. In a related process, one can also gain insight into how and why
households endeavored and were often able to successfully develop coping strategies that
circumvented or balanced these policies. A more detailed discussion of effects of state policies
will be in the conclusions section of the chapter, after the Pop family's case is presented.

In the next section of the chapter the life history of the Pop family will be discussed. In contrast to
families that were 'long time residents' in Cluj and already had roots in the city before
communism (pre-1945), the Pop family had moved to Cluj in the early 1970s (post-1945) and was
often described by long time residents as 'new migrants'. The Pop family's experiences and
perceptions of the city – as was the case with most 'new migrants' – were different from that of
the 'long time residents'. However, many of the major processes that made the Pop's 'move' or
kept them 'fixed' in social and geographical space, were those that shaped the life of the Kovacs
family as well. A comparative analysis of such processes and their outcomes for the two (and
many other) families will be discussed in the conclusions section of this chapter.

However, before going further in the chapter, it is important to understand that neither of these two
'groups' – the 'long time residents' and 'new migrants' – are homogenous, nor can the boundaries
between them be clearly delineated. Even in the case of the Kovacs family: Old Mister Pista's
grandfather was a migrant to the city in the late 19th century, but Old Mister Pista's grandmother
was born into a family that lived in the city for several generations. Old Mister Pista's father was a
native of Cluj but his wife – Old Mister Pista's mother – was a migrant who came to the city in the
early 20th century. Old Mister Pista was a native of Cluj, but his wife Margit was a 'new migrant'
who moved to Cluj in the late 1950s. Denes, their son, was a native of Cluj but his wife was a
'new migrant' who came to the city in the mid-1980s. Thus, although I describe the Kovacs family
as 'long time residents' because the family had roots in Cluj dating well before 1945, still, several
members of the family would count as 'new migrants', because they moved to the city after 1945.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging this complexity in family trajectories, I still think that making a loose distinction between families that already had roots in the city before 1945 (as the Kovacs family did) and the families that came after 1945 (as the Pop family did) is important. The reason is that certain processes that shaped the life of people in the past decades affected families differently, depending on when and how they arrived to the city, and how embedded they had been in the networks of the city.

7.3 The Pop family

"There was nothing else we could do. There wasn't much work in the village. We had to go. And it was better to do it sooner than later" Ion Pop said as we slowly and cautiously walked around the courtyard of the six-story apartment block in which they lived. His words were carefully rounded; I could feel the effort it took to get them out properly. The sound of his voice was underscored by the shuffling rhythmic sound of the slipper on his left foot. His leg dragged behind him. One of his hands clasped his wife's arm. With his weaker hand he held my hand. As we walked around, he was telling me about their life in the city. But, as it was the tenth round of the yard for the day we felt he deserved some rest.

It had been a year since Ion Pop had a stroke that completely paralyzed him. He was 59 years old and the doctors thought his chances for survival were very small. His wife, Maria (52), spent day and night at the hospital taking care of him and praying for his life. They had been married for more than 37 years and, all their working lives they had been looking forward to their retirement years when they would finally have more time to spend together.

They met in the city of Cluj in the summer of 1972. When Maria was just 16, she traveled from her village to pick cherries as a day laborer at Gostat, Cluj's large agricultural state farm. She could not find work at home and, as one of seven orphaned siblings, they needed money. Ion, 23 at the time, also worked at Gostat as a tractor driver. He had come to the city the previous year, also to escape rural poverty. His father died when Ion was 5 years old and his stepfather did not like him and wanted him out of his way. At 15 he was sent to work as a "servant"[155] for a peasant family, and soon thereafter, against his will, he was moved to shepherding. At the age of 22 and fed up tending sheep, he ran away. He came to Cluj in an effort to make a better life. When he arrived, the city's public transport company was looking for young people to be trained as bus drivers. He applied, got a driver's license, and began driving. He rented a room from an urban farmer family at the border of the city and the Iris district, commuting three to four hours a day to

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[155] Ion Pop said this about the job he was given in the peasants' household.

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get to his workplace in the city center[156]. After eight months, he discovered that there was an opening for a tractor driver at Gostat, so he requested to be transferred there. Although the pay was the same he had the added benefit of receiving housing in one of Gostat's workers' halls. This saved him a lot in rent and also cut his commuting time to minutes.

Ion and Maria spotted each other and fell in love during Maria's first few days at Gostat. A few weeks later they were married. They have cared deeply for each other ever since. Maria has never been able to imagine a life without her husband. Never the less, in late 2006, after Ion's stroke, that is exactly what hospital personnel told her to prepare for. Doctors said that Ion's health was so fragile that they soon anticipated a second or third stroke that was likely to kill him. At the time, Ion could not speak, could not move most of his body, and was only able to ingest fluids and strained foods that Maria slowly and carefully fed him. However, Ion had a strong will to live. He was undeterred by what the doctors said. As soon as they were permitted to do so, Maria and their three children took Ion home, determined to get him back on his feet.

Early in 2007, Maria was made redundant at the Iris porcelain factory, where she worked as a glazer for 23 years. Under different circumstances this would have caused her anxiety, but at the time she was happy that she had more free time to spend with Ion. She received unemployment benefits for a year, and thus she was able to stay at home all day and care for her husband. Ion was granted a disability pension. Their three children each had their own salaries, so they did not have to worry about money. After three months of home care Ion was able to sit up and say a few sentences. And, after a few more months, with help he was already regaining his strength by walking around the courtyard.

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[156] At the time, transport links from the Iris district to the city were not developed, no tramline was built yet and the few bus lines that were in place had services running only once an hour. As Ion Pop explained, on average, his total daily commuting time was three hours. In winter, commuting time increased, occasionally reaching even four hours a day.

7.3.1 Urbanization and rural-urban migration during communism

On sunny days Ion and Maria Pop spent most of their time outside, in the courtyard of their complex of three apartment blocks, socializing with their neighbors, all former Gostat co-workers, who moved there together when Gostat had the apartments built in 1982. But these families, approximately 200 people in all, had known each other much longer. They were all new migrants to the city who came in the early 1970s, and – because of the housing shortage in the city – they all lived together for more than a decade in Gostat's long, one-story workers' halls. There, each family had just one small room, so they spent much of their days outside, in the courtyard.

> "We liked living there", Maria Pop said. "All of us were young, we all just moved to Cluj from nearby villages. Most of us met and fell in love there, and we all became good friends. We were proud to be 'city' people, but we still lived our lives as we did at home, in our villages. We never went to the city, not even on weekends, we had no reason to. While all our husbands worked on the farm, often 20 hours a day, six or seven days a week, we women worked for the house[157]. We kept poultry and pigs. Gostat allowed us to. They even let us have small vegetable plots, one for each family. We set them up in the orchards, between the lines of fruit trees. We had our children at around the same time, so they had their own company as they were growing up. I had three kids, and most of the other women also had three or four. And we were happy because we hoped that our kids would have a better and easier life than we had."

The Pop family and their co-workers came to the city during the rural-urban migration wave that started after 1945 and was generated by the communist state's policies of urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural restructuring. During the first three decades of communism the population in the city of Cluj increased by 123%, faster than ever before. According to census data, in the 29 years following the Second World War – from 1948 to 1977 – the city's population increased from 117,915 inhabitants (in 1948) to 262,858 inhabitants (in 1977). The biggest increase – 42% – was recorded between 1967 and 1977 (77,195 people in 10 years)[158]. In the

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[157] She means working at home, not being employed in any salaried job. It was not until 1983 that she obtained employment at the Iris factory, after she had her third child and after they moved to their current apartment that was close to the district center and the Iris porcelain factory.

[158] Some part of this increase was a result of a sudden increase in birth rates due to the strongly pro-natal policies imposed by the state, which in 1966 changed the abortion laws, making it illegal. This resulted in a 93% increase in the number of births in 1967 over the previous year. It took almost a decade for the numbers to decrease and normalize again. As Gail Kligman highlighted, the effect of this policy was a transition from a birth rate of 14.3 per 1000 in 1966 to 27.4 per 1000 in 1967. However, even without changes to the law, as families developed adaptive strategies, by 1972 the numbers fell back to 18,8 and by 1983 to 14.3. See more on this topic in Kligman, Gail. "Political Demography: The Banning of Abortion in Ceausescu's Romania". In Ginsburg, Faye D.; Rapp, Rayna, eds.

following years, from 1977 to 1992 (the year of the first post-communist census), although migration to Cluj remained high, it slowed somewhat compared to the previous decade. The population increase in the last fifteen years of communism was only 25% (65,744 people), and part of this was the result of an increase in urban birth rates, because the many young migrants of the 1970s were having children during this period.

Such a huge increase in the urban population, as Daniel Chirot highlighted in a study on Romanian communist urbanization and industrialization, greatly overwhelmed the infrastructure of most cities:

> "Massive migration to the cities in the 1950s and 1960s created severe strains for an economy that emphasized investment in heavy industry rather than consumer goods and housing. (…) [It] was not until the late 1960s that enough new apartments were built each year to keep up with urban growth, and not until the 1970s that the accumulated, unsatisfied backlog began to diminish." (Chirot 1978:474)

However, the housing situation was worse than it might have looked based on Chirot's 1978 study. Although Chirot wrote that a decades-long backlog started to diminish by the late 1970s, the reality was that the economic slowdown of the 1980s put a brake on the housing boom, and once again postponed the adequate housing of tens of thousands of people. The numbers for Cluj are telling in this respect: building started in 1950 with 100 flats a year[159] and by the early 1970s this number gradually increased to 5-6000 flats a year[160]. By the late 1970s building reached 9000 flats a year[161]. However, as the economic situation started to deteriorate in the early 1980s, the number of flats that were built yearly gradually decreased[162] and by the late-1980s most building

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Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995 :234-255.

[159] During this period some of the Iris district's one-story apartment blocks were built and the area of the Railway Station (Horea street) was rebuilt. Additions were added to many houses that increased their square footage and number of flats/rooms.

[160] In the 1960s the Gheorgheni and Grigorescu housing districts were developed. In the early 1970s the building of the Mănăştur area was started; this was to become the largest apartment block district of Cluj, housing more than 100,000 people.

[161] By the late 1970s the Mănăştur district reached its limits and a new area, the Mărăşti area, was opened for development.

[162] The Mărăşti district, although still large enough, had fewer flats than the Mănăştur. After finishing the Mărăşti area in the mid-1980s, no other developments commensurate in size were started. The Zorilor district – the last to be built in Cluj during communism – was much smaller in size. Also, the scale and number of the blocks of flats that were built in the Iris district during the 1980s was nowhere near the scale of the earlier developments.

projects came to a halt[163]. But, as seen in the census data above, the population of the city continued to expand during the 1980s, putting further stresses on the existing housing stock[164].

The architects that were responsible for building these communist housing developments in Cluj Napoca[165] drew attention to the fact that, even during the years of the building boom, the doubling of the city's population created great problems. First, the number of flats party executives ordered architects to build was increased each year, but the amount of materials allocated to build these flats was kept constant or decreased. Over the years, this forced architects to produce much lower quality housing.

Second, as the urban space that had adequate infrastructure for building new apartments started to run out, architects were rarely allowed to develop new sites for building. Instead, to keep building cheap and quick, they were pushed by party executives to first increase the density of the flats on the old parcels that were once considered 'fully utilized' and closed for further developments[166]. This led to deterioration in life quality, overcrowding in many urban areas, and to a slowdown in the building of new housing from the early1980s onwards.

Finally, during the years when rural-urban migration was at its highest, to make building faster and more efficient, a scaling system measuring the 'comfort' of the flats was introduced. On this new scale the best and most spacious flats – consisting of several rooms, two bathrooms and one or two balconies – were graded as 'Comfort I', while the lowest quality flats – usually 7-10 sqm in size, consisting of a tiny room-and-bathroom – were categorized as 'Comfort IV'. The building

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[163] This information on housing in Cluj is courtesy of Norbert Petrovici who gave me access to all the interviews he conducted with the architects that were responsible for designing and implementing these communist housing projects. His PhD (manuscript) is an excellent discussion of communist and post-communist urbanization processes, with ample research data on the city of Cluj.

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[165] Norbert Petrovici's interviews with architects E. Tudose, G. Elkan, T. Raicu, S. Ţigănaş, A. Matei, and G. Păiş. For a detailed discussion of the highest level politico-administrative and economic negotiations that took place around the building of the communist housing projects both nationaly and in Cluj refer to Petrovici's PhD (manuscript).

[166] This had already happened to some degree in the Grigorescu district, but it was the Mănăştur area that was affected most by state administrators 'densification' policies.

plans allowed only a small number of the best quality flats to be produced each year, while the numbers of the lowest quality flats were greatly increased. Thus, while in state statistics the number of families housed in newly built apartment houses increased, the conditions in which many of these families lived did not improve over the years, but rather deteriorated. Under such circumstances many of the new migrants – those who had few if any contacts in the city and knew no people in decision making positions, lived on low salaries or had only one income in a family, and/or who were employed in "non-strategic" sectors (heavy-industry was one of the strategic sectors) – were excluded from state rental housing for a long time. But, even in cases when they were able to obtain state rental housing, many of them were only able to get a place at the 'bottom': in workers' halls and Comfort III and IV flats.

Typical Iris district apartment houses built in the 1980s (Comfort II, III and IV apartments)

And this is exactly what happened to the Pop family and their co-workers: they were left to live in 10 sqm housing for more than a decade, in single rooms with only enough space for their beds and a table. Their situation was aggravated by the fact that agriculture, the domain of their employer – Gostat, the state agricultural farm – was seen by decision makers as being marginal to the priorities of the state. As a result, the negotiating power of Gostat leadership to arrange housing

for their employees was weak. Since expansion of heavy industry was considered to be the highest priority of the state, housing those who were employed in these quickly expanding sectors was seen as the most urgent task. Given this, while the average waiting time to receive a flat in the 1970s and 1980s was between three to five years, the waiting time for the Pop family and their colleagues was more than double this average. Moreover, by the time Ion and Maria Pop and their three children received their first flat in 1982, a Category III one-bedroom apartment, many of those who worked in 'prioritized' sectors such as heavy industry or other high profile fields, were already beginning to upgrade to bigger and better flats.

The process experienced by the Pop family very much reflected the logic described by Ivan Szelenyi in his book on communist housing estates in Hungary. Szelenyi argued that their investigations during the 1960s and early 1970s of the allocation of newly-built flats in communist Hungary "proved that new state housing is indeed allocated systematically to the higher income groups. That suggested two conclusions: *housing inequalities are being created now*, as those with higher incomes get the better housing; and *these inequalities are being created by administrative allocation*, i.e. by the distinctively socialist mechanism which was supposed to replace the capitalist market method of allocation." (1983:6) However, according to Szelényi, this was a more or less logical consequence of the socialist housing distribution system, because "if there is no market and all housing is 'social', it is practically unavoidable that housing must become a positive part of the reward system, so that administrative distribution will be 'from the top down', will add further to income inequalities, and will rarely reach to the poorest at all." (1983:78)

That explains that even though Ion Pop followed all the usual paths that most new migrants followed – he got a job as soon as he arrived to the city, rented a room in a family's house, then as soon as he could he moved into a workers' hall and applied for a flat through his employer – most families that were better positioned in social space received their flats earlier than Ion Pop[167]. What Ion Pop did not know upon his arrival in Cluj – and nobody warned him or advised him at the time he was making decisions about his choice of trade and skills – was that in choosing to

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[167] There were other categories as well – state functionaries, managers, 'intellectuals' loyal to the party, etc. – that were also 'prioritized' when it came to housing. However, most people who migrated to the city in the 1960s and 1970s did not belong to any of these occupational groups.

become a professional driver for a state agricultural farm (and not a heavy industry worker, for example) would disadvantage him and his family for years to come. And by the time he understood this there was no possibility to get the training needed for another profession [168]. As a consequence, the Pop family remained 'fixed' in social and geographical space for more than a decade. And, for them, living at the margins of the city and the communist economy brought about other disadvantages as well.

Maria Pop often talked about how she and the other 'Gostat wives' wished they could have found a job in one of the city's factories. However, for a long time this was not feasible. Living at the border of the Iris district and the city placed them far away from everything. In addition, they would have had to structure their lives around weekly schedule changes as most factories operated on three round-the-clock shifts. As Maria explained:

> "From where we lived there was no public transport to the factories. You had to walk all the way down to the factory. And walking to your workplace for almost two hours, at dawn or in the middle of the night, on a dirt road – because there was no proper road either – in rain, or freezing weather, that would have been impossible. Especially while the kids were alone at home. Plus the poultry and the garden were also there... Our husbands worked 10-15 hours a day, depending on the agricultural season; they could not help out with all this… that wasn't feasible at all. The other option, to take the kids to kindergarten, down the hill, on foot, each and every day, and then go to the factory, do your shift, then come out in time to pick them up… nobody was able to do that. We just had to stay at home and do what we could do there... we had our gardens and in summer we worked as day laborers for Gostat, when there was enough work for us."

Although Ion and Maria felt that their lives improved when compared to the life they would have had in their native villages, they were also aware that they had limited options for further advancement. Beyond taking the first 'big leap' in an attempt to improve their situation – migrating to the city and finding employment for Ion – they discovered they were unable to further change their circumstances for a long time to come. They found themselves in a situation where Ion's meager salary was their only income. The only possibility for them to supplement Ion's income and 'use' Maria's labor was to take the opportunity offered by Gostat: set up a vegetable

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[168] As Ion Pop told me "I learned my lessons and by the time my sons were to make their training choices in the late 1980s I advised both of them to go to a vocational school that prepared them to be skilled workers in heavy industry". Nevertheless, as will be seen later in this section, and Ion Pop could not have known this at the time, his advice was incorrect. By then, going into heavy industry was a bad choice and by the time his two sons graduated in the early 1990s, communism had collapsed and with it heavy industry. Currently both of his sons have insecure jobs, unrelated to their original training.

plot in the orchards and keep animals on the plot of land around their house. However, the size of the plot they were given and the number of animals they were allowed to keep did not make it possible for them to produce any surplus. There was only enough to meet the needs of their family. There was not enough to save for a down-payment and take out a state subsidized mortgage to buy a flat. And since Maria could not take employment in a factory she also was unable to become eligible for a state rental flat in her own right. As a result, it was impossible for them to move away from the outskirts of Cluj and into the city.

7.3.2 No right to the city

The accelerated urbanization of the 1960s and 1970s and the communist state's industrialization and systematization policies created problems beyond housing. As architects[169] pointed out, the expansion of the city and the steady inflow of new migrants led to shortages and tensions in Cluj. Because urbanization and industrialization shrunk the agricultural greenbelt around the city and redirected financial resources away from agriculture, provisioning the city with enough fresh meat, dairy and vegetables became increasingly difficult. The very high numbers of commuters – the rural residents of nearby villages that came to work in the morning and returned home in the evenings – also caused supply shortages. Since the provisioning of rural areas was extremely poor, commuters bought most of their non-food supplies in the city, continuing to overstretch a system that was not working properly anyway[170].

Further, since most financial resources were channeled into construction and industrial development, the formerly thriving cultural and educational life of Cluj greatly suffered (Chirot 1978). And even though new migrants were not responsible for these state-orchestrated redistributions between economic and cultural fields, many long time residents of Cluj blamed new migrants and their "lifestyle" for the changes in the fabric of the city. Several of the interviewed architects argued that in the first wave of migration, in the 1950s and early 1960s,

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[169] Based on Norbert Petrovici's interviews with architects E. Tudose, G. Elkan, T. Raicu, S. Ţigănaş, A. Matei, and G. Păiş.

[170] For more information on the communist "shortage economies" see, for example, the works of Janos Kornai, Ivan Szelenyi, Katherine Verdery.

when migration numbers were lower, people that moved to the city "blended in" and became "city people". However, when migration was at its peak in the late-1960s and 1970s, new migrants "no longer accepted the rules and customs of the urban environment", instead they imposed their own rules and "took over the city"[171]. And although the relationships among long time residents and new migrants were more complex than this, none the less, architects highlighted well the nature of some of the tensions that appeared due to the changes that were taking place in the space of the city.

However proud Maria, Ion, and their co-workers at Gostat might have been of becoming city people, they were not seen as such by many of the long-time residents of Cluj. Just like the children of the poor Iris district workers' families in the 1930s, who were portrayed as dirty, primitive and uncivilized in the Protestant minister's memoirs (referred to earlier in the chapter), these new migrants to the city were also perceived by many long-time residents as "not fit" for urban living and therefore having "no right to take over the city"[172]. Differences in lifestyle and living conditions between 'long time residents' and 'new migrants' (the two 'groups' defined earlier in this chapter) were seen as detrimental by those with long-established local networks and interests, and the resulting changes in social dynamics and competing interests led to conflicts among people.

In the Iris district many of the long time residents[173], especially those whose land was nationalized by the communist state, argued along similar lines when they talked about the mass-migration of

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[171] From the interviews with E. Tudose, T. Raicu, G. Păiş.

[172] These are phrases many of my informants used in relation to people that moved to the city starting in the mid-1960s.

[173] According to a report on the Iris district written by the Communist Party on December 24, 1949, at that time the district had "24,923 inhabitants, of which 50% were skilled and unskilled workers; 18% administrators and intellectuals; 16% urban farmers, 8% artisans and craftsmen, 2% tradesmen and shopkeepers; 1% self-employed; 5% schoolchildren and students." In comparison, according to the 1930 census data (courtesy of Norbert Petrovici), the number of unskilled workers was the highest in the district, followed by urban farmers and skilled workers. The numbers most likely changed somewhat in the almost two decades between 1930 and 1949. However, based on church and other archival data I examined, as well as life history interviews and family trees I made, there is still reason to believe that Communist Party documents were biased towards workers at the expense of the other categories, especially urban farmers, artisans and craftsmen. Family trees also revealed that it was already very common during the period following the Second World War that, in many families, farming and industrial work were

the communist period. They said that they felt frustrated when they saw that "these new migrants were welcomed to the city and were given jobs and housing":

> "We were angry and bitter, because all this happened to the detriment of our families. The state was generous with new migrants using the land it took away from us. Because when the communists came to power they nationalized most of our family land; and many of our houses were nationalized and demolished as well… On some of this land the state built factories and apartment houses, and the rest was transferred to the state agricultural farm Gostat. And it was ironic and sad that while the state pushed Gostat to achieve agricultural self-sufficiency[174] for Cluj's population, [the state agricultural farms] were still much less efficient than we used to be when land and horticulture were still in our hands[175]. Because, you know, these new migrants were completely unskilled for large scale, labor-intensive farming." (Istvan, 55, descendant of a long time resident family)

Disregarding the fact that most new migrants to the city left their villages for the very same reasons (losing their family land to collectivization), that they came from rural backgrounds and had a vast knowledge of agriculture, and they were not the ones making decisions about Gostat's management, never the less long time residents talked about new migrants as "backward individuals" who were "ignorant" of all the knowledge that was needed to "properly" work the land[176]. "It was the most barbaric thing we have ever seen, what these new migrants did with our former orchards. No proper farmer would do that, ever. Setting up vegetable gardens among fruit trees and keeping poultry and pigs there? What kind of thing is that?" long time residents asked me.

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combined (women worked the land and men went to work in factories), that being the only way many families had to deal with widespread poverty.

[174] Law 58/1974 on systematization addressed this: it was the aim of the national administration to make available to agriculture all suitable land in the cities and, where possible and appropriate, allow urban dwellers to have small plots – vegetable gardens for the use of a household – in their immediate neighborhoods.

[175] It is difficult to know the reality of productivity-issues because there is no proper data based on which I could compare the two different periods. The information included in the Gostat documents might contain fake statistics with unrealistically high production numbers (as often was the case in communist enterprises), while any numbers from the previous decades are embedded in the contexts of the two world wars and a much smaller population of the city. In addition, communist state farms were already using agricultural farm machinery, a technology that was previously only rarely or not at all available to urban farmers. Urban farmers relied on the manpower of the household and practiced a highly labor-intensive agriculture. However, Chirot claims based on data he collected in the late 1970s, that the productivity of collective farms and farmer associations increased after communist reorganization of property, but productivity in agricultural state farms (as was the structure of Gostat) was much lower than the potential of the land or the levels previous owners of that land were able to achieve (Chirot 1978:?)

[176] Several of my long-time resident interviewees talked about new migrants using these terms.

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This last point highlights well that all the things Maria Pop (a new migrant herself) described as coping strategies that aided their survival in an urban environment that was new to them, were labeled by long-time residents as "backward" living habits. The practical value of these strategies to the life of new migrants was completely ignored by long time residents. And, although many new migrants who moved to the city during this period – leaving kin, friends and homes behind in their native villages – were often victims of the very same policies of collectivization, systematization[177] and urbanization, in the space of the city they were still perceived by long time residents as the beneficiaries of the new system. This approach shows well how the adaptive strategies people chose in response to processes that were set in motion by the communist state's policies, were often misinterpreted by others and led to the development of factions and conflicts among people who perceived themselves as having differing interests.

Clearly, this was a situation in which a change in property relations in the district – nationalization of land and other holdings of long time residents (e.g. farm buildings, cow sheds, etc.), as well as demolishing their family homes without real compensation[178] – led to a visible reorganization in the geographical and social space of the district. While there were many instances when the communist state did not contest individuals' rights to property – as was the case with the Kovacs family and many other long-time residents of the district – 'surplus' land was among the first things to be monopolized by the state. In these cases neither legal nor use-rights to the land were respected. The state's 'claims' superseded all other claims on the grounds that it served the larger good of the population of the country. However, from the point of view of the long-time residents, not only had 'legal' rights to the land been transferred to state jurisdiction, and the products extracted from the land been used at the discretion of the state, but the 'use rights' had also been taken away from them (the long-time residents) and given to the new migrants.

All these changes translated to and were highly visible in the geographical space of the district and the city. New migrants, as we know from Maria Pop's account, set up their homes on that land and in addition to working it on behalf of the state they also used it for their family needs: they kept

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[177] Systematization affected villages as much as it affected cities, because of the redrawing of village boundaries, distribution of employment possibilities, moving of population, influencing livelihoods of many rural families.

[178] I wrote extensively about this in the Kovacs life history (see previous section).

their own poultry and livestock and cultivated vegetables. Nevertheless, as Maria's account indicates, in this context the meaning of 'use rights' was different than it had been before communism. Prior to communism, having 'use rights' to a piece of land meant that people with such rights were entitled to all products that came from that land. Some were required to pay either a fixed affordable amount of rent or make in-kind contributions. Others, such as those who had use rights to the city's pastures, often paid nothing at all because the city council recognized the benefit of having these urban farmer households sell their products in the city's markets, thereby securing the provisioning of urban residents[179]. After 1945, under communism, 'use rights' meant only that Gostat employees were entitled to work a small section of the agricultural farm's land on behalf of their families, and use what they produced solely for the purpose of sustaining themselves.

And although long time residents of Cluj were aware of these differences, in their eyes the changes in property relations still meant that the state – using the land it took away from them – actually turned new migrants from 'landless' villagers into 'landed' residents. In this context, long time residents questioned the legitimacy of the state in the actions it took, and – seeing new migrants as agents of the state – refused to accept their legitimacy in using the land, and more generally, the city. Long time residents' perception of holding 'rights' in the land that the state took away from them was so deeply embedded in their thinking that even after nationalization of the land they made references to it as "theirs" and cared deeply about what happened to it and on it. This led to situations in which – even if long time residents had no legal say in or influence over the things that happened on the land – they still felt entitled to judge what others did on their former plots[180]. As it emerged from our discussions, their resistance and aversion was fueled by their feelings of injustice and loss. Sandor, a long-time resident of the city, whose land was nationalized in the 1950s, said:

> "At the time when our ancestors had come to the city in the 18th, 19th and early 20th century they had to work hard to achieve all the things that were now simply handed over to these new migrants. So all the efforts of

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[179] See for example works of Laszlo Pillich on urban farmers (1984).

[180] This feeling was so strong that even in 2007-2008, when I was doing my fieldwork, during our walks through the neighborhood, many of these families – seemingly in denial of the actual state of affairs in large parts of the district – still made reference to "our land" or "our neighbors' and relatives' land", explaining what they used to do on that land four or five decades ago. Interviews from the 1970s and 1980s conducted by Laszlo Pillich also attest to this fact.

our ancestors had been in vain because we ended up in a situation where all they had built up over the decades was taken away and destroyed in these badly managed state farms by incompetent new migrants." (Sandor, 80, long time resident in the Iris district)

In what he says, Sandor reflects the thinking of many long-time residents who felt that the positions in social space for which they had worked so hard, and therefore deserved, had been erased by the actions of the state and, as a result, they had moved down in social space. Adding to their anger and frustration, the long-time residents felt that, the "undeserving"[181] new migrants – aided by the state's policies and not "hard work" – had 'jumped up' in social space. Thus, for many years thereafter, long-time residents – mainly in a symbolic and private discursive space[182] – contested the 'right to the city' of new migrants.

Listening to the stories of long-time residents about the special skills they possessed and the skills new migrants lacked to "properly" work the land I asked long-time residents why they thought Gostat management employed the new migrants instead of them. As it emerged, the issue of not being employed by Gostat was more complex than just a simple story of exclusion and discrimination, as they originally framed it. As one of the elderly long-time residents explained, the question was not how many people Gostat would have been willing to employ from among the long-time residents. The problem was rather why most young people from the long-time resident families no longer wanted to work in agriculture, and so did not apply for jobs at Gostat. Emma (75), a long time resident, said:

> "The situation was that for most of our families the land we had was not enough to live on, not even before its nationalization. Because, at the turn of the 20th century, families still had many children. My father, for example, born in 1901, was the oldest among six siblings. His family lived in Cluj and was an urban farmer family for several generations. But the custom in their family was, in order not to divide up land into impractically small plots, that all the kids were educated in a profession, and they had to move out and become workers in local factories. The exception was the youngest child, who – although he was also skilled in a trade – remained with the parents, worked both in a factory and on the land, and took over the land from the elderly when they became too old to work it. In the families where land was large enough, the other kids also helped the parents, but at the same time they continued to work in factories.

[181] In this context "undeserving" meant that long-time residents thought new migrants had not worked hard enough to earn these advances and benefits.

[182] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, based on residents' recollections, as the population of the city increased and the economic situation deteriorated, tensions among long-time residents and new migrants intensified, leading to the formation of several competing gangs of youngsters who occasionally engaged in violent clashes with each other. (Information obtained from former gang members and older residents.)

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So by the time communists came into power and nationalized all our excess land, all families already had several members that worked in local factories. We all had friends and kin there, and they helped us get jobs in industry. And, you know, once people started working in factories, in the 1950s, they realized that it was better than being in agriculture. Because in agriculture you had no possibilities to really advance, especially during communism. In factories you were promoted quite often, your salary increased, after some years you received housing as well. And these new apartments, especially the ones built in the 1950s and 1960s, were much better than our small, overcrowded houses. At the time houses weren't what they are now: We had no water and toilets inside. We had no central heating. We had only a kitchen and a room, and there was mud everywhere… so we had to go in and out, get water, make the fire, feed the animals, clean mud off our shoes and clothes ... Once you moved away, you were partly freed from these daily tasks; you still went back and helped your parents occasionally but you suddenly had a more comfortable life.

Plus, you know, in agriculture you were at the mercy of the weather: if it was bad, it destroyed your produce for the whole year. When the weather was good, then everybody else also produced in abundance… in those years the prices went down at the local market leaving us with almost no profit at all. So I think that most of us just didn't want to go and work for Gostat and in agriculture, even though we did not necessarily say so to our parents and grandparents, because that wasn't something they wanted to hear from us[183]."

Seen from the above perspective, although the nationalization of privately owned land dispossessed these long-time resident families and disrupted their settled life patterns and coping strategies, still, it did not create the radical change in the life of the whole kin network as it might have seemed from some of the narratives of loss and trauma[184]. As it emerged, losing most of the family land did not necessitate completely new coping strategies, instead, it strengthened certain practices that had been in place for decades locally. That is to say, that because of the long-time embeddedness of the identity narratives built around the relationship that existed between humans, nature and land in these families, there was little or no discursive space for young family members to reframe their identities differently from that of their families. The policies of the communist state – intersecting with and cutting through these dominant narratives – opened up a discursive space that aided the restructuring of identities in keeping with some of the previously suppressed and hidden narratives[185].

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[183] Similar processes can be identified in the ethnographies and newspaper articles written by Laszlo Pillich, who conducted research on urban farmers in the city of Cluj over several decades.

[184] In no way is this meant to understate the tragedies these families experienced during and after that period, and as I highlighted earlier in the chapter, I am aware that for many middle-aged and older people these changes led to suicide. What needs to be highlighted here is that there were coping strategies in the district that had been in place for a long time, and these strategies actually made possible the 'survival' and movement in social space of most long-time resident families.

[185] However, the fact that a discursive space was opened up in which identities different from those of the grandparents and parents' generation could also be narrated and acted upon, did not mean a radical break with old/local identities, not even among the young. Rather, it just became more commonly accepted among district inhabitants to more openly (and selectively) mobilize their multiple and situational identities: while many informants

However, listening to long-time residents, it became clear that talking about the trauma of losing their family land and houses in the 1950s and 1960s was also an outlet and a pretext to express another trauma that occurred much later, in the 1970s and 1980s: Most of these long-time resident families, by the time they recovered from nationalization, once again had to find ways of dealing with the anxieties of losing their livelihoods and positions in social space. But, this latter trauma and the anxieties it caused, seemed to be more difficult to talk about, because the forces at play in these events were much more diffuse than and not as easy to identify as they were during nationalization. In addition, the issue of 'skills' that was so strongly emphasized in relation to Gostat and agriculture – and which after nationalization of the land had only symbolic value – became more real, pressing and important as people dealt with the threat of a repeated loss of livelihood and position in social space. As Gero, an elderly (72), long-time resident explained:

> "For us, starting with the late 1970s, it was more and more difficult to find jobs. In the old factories, where we had relations, all positions filled up. New openings were very rare, only when somebody retired or died. And there was less and less work. I remember that often we were just sitting and doing nothing[186], or we were trying to come up with creative ideas about what to do in all that spare time we had. And after a while factories started to make people redundant. Nobody talked about it, it was not public, people did not talk about it outside the factory, but this is what happened. And so you always had to prove to everybody that you were the best at what you did. Only than could you feel that you would be the last one to be sent away if it came to that.

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had identities that were rooted in the work they performed, they also maintained their local (district) and kin identities (e.g. traditional occupation(s) of the extended kinship network, religion, ethnicity, etc.). These attitudes, I would argue, were adaptation mechanisms to the most recent structural changes in their social worlds and might have facilitated the development of more open and flexible networking skills among these individuals and families. As my ethnographic data revealed, many of these younger generation families had more links beyond the borders of the district and across different groups than their parents and grandparents had. That said, oral history and family genealogies suggested that very similar mechanisms existed at the turn of the century and earlier (i.e. mobilization of multiple and situational identities depending on context). Finally, there were of course many families that moved away from the Iris district. Communist housing distribution policies facilitated such movements across the space of the city and as a result these families gradually loosened and/or lost their contacts with old district friends and even with some of their kin. For a good analysis of how situational (ethnic and other) identities were mobilized and implemented in everyday interactions in the city of Cluj, see the book written by Brubaker et all., Part Two - Everyday Ethnicity (2006:167-357).

[186] Verdery argues that factory managers were "hoarding labor" during communism – kept more people on their payrolls than were actually needed – because the provisioning of factories with raw materials was ad hoc and unpredictable. Thus, for these managers the only way to reliably fulfill the orders and the yearly plans of the communist state was to hoard labor so as to able to fulfill the plan on a moment's notice, if it came to that. This also makes clear that the very low levels of unemployment were not the result of the "efficiency" of the Communist Party, but rather the result of labor hoarding.

And parallel to this, the state started building new factories. The largest was the Heavy Equipment Works[187] (CUG), but Sinterom and Technofrig were also quite new and big. And in these newer places they hired new migrants, often people who were brought to the city specifically for these positions. And they gave flats to these new migrants, as soon as they arrived, based on new laws[188]. And because of that our situation, and especially the situation of our children, started to become extremely difficult. The jobs and flats we could get were worse and worse."

That is, as the economic environment became increasingly difficult in the later stages of Communism, and the city's population continued to expand, long-time resident families found themselves in a situation where the traditional status quo was called into question as the competition for employment, housing and material goods became increasingly difficult.

But, the situation was far from being as straightforward and engineered from the top-down as long-time residents perceived it. The reality was that only a small percentage of the city's new migrants enjoyed the advantages Gero and others talked about.

The migration process and the settling of new migrant families in the city – as seen in the case of the Pop family and their co-workers – was more complicated and fragmented than that. In addition, by the late 1970s and early 1980s many of the new migrants Gero referred to were actually not workers but teenagers (usually 14-15 years old). They moved to Cluj from both nearby and far away villages and towns to study in the industrial vocational schools of local factories, such as Sinterom, Technofrig, Clujana, and the Heavy Equipment Works. After graduation, these factories placed some students in jobs for which they had been trained. Even then, many of the young graduates could not find work in their field and struggled to remain in the city.

In terms of housing, long time residents – because of their embeddedness and networks in the city – still had much better chances of receiving good quality apartments. Thus, the cause of some of their problems had nothing to do with the new migrants being given priority in housing, but to the fact that higher quality and more comfortable housing became scarcer (as pointed out earlier in the

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[187] The Heavy Equipment Works factory was funded in 1970 and opened in 1976. Although it was one of the largest factories in the city, by 1985, the number of its employees reached only 8000. So even if all HEW's employees were new migrants, specifically moved to the city as a workforce for the factory, they could not have generated the kind of problems Gero talked about.

[188] He makes a reference to the *Law on housing relocated employees,* Decree 68/1976.

chapter). Moreover, many young new migrants, being single or newlywed with no children, received housing in student and worker halls, or in Category IV flats (7-10 sqm) (as was the case with the family of Anca, presented in Chapter 4 and 5).

Nevertheless, as life was becoming increasingly hard for everybody, even though most new migrants also struggled (just as the Pop family did), long-time residents tended to view and portray new migrants as being responsible for all the things that "went wrong in the city". And although the negotiating power of long-time residents had indeed weakened over time – as migrants of the 1950s,1960s, and 1970s settled in the city and developed their own support networks and areas of influence – part of the discourse used by long-time residents was developed in order to construct difference and create justificatory strategies that would legitimize and preserve the advantages long-time residents previously held: they felt they were losing *their* right to the city and, in this context, they concluded that 'Others' – the post-1945 new migrants – should have no (or less) rights to the city.

And, while many long-time residents – because of the narrowing of their opportunities and networks of influence – experienced the space of the city as closing in upon them, some of the new migrants – as was the case of the Pop family and their co-workers – experienced the 1980s as a time when urban space started to gradually open up for them. In 1982 three blocks of flats were built for Gostat employees, and all families that lived in Gostat's worker halls were moved to a more central place in the Iris district. After receiving their very first state rental flat, a Comfort III one bedroom apartment[189], many families – including the Pops – soon discovered that this one change in their lives resulted in increased access to more segments of the urban space.

As Maria Pop recalled, having their first apartment affected not only their housing situation, but changed all other aspects of their lives. Most importantly, they were excited by the comforts that came with the flat: for the first time they had a kitchen with a gas cook stove; a bathroom with a toilet, a bathtub, and hot running water; and central heating in the winter. After decades of living on the margins of the city they were, at long last, in proximity of everything they needed. Shops

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[189] The approximately 33 sqm flat was on the raised ground floor of a six-story apartment house. It had two connected rooms of 14 and 8 sqm, a 5 sqm kitchen, a 3 sqm bathroom and a 3 sqm hallway.

and a small market, kindergartens and schools, and several factories were all in walking distance. Buses and the tram line were all ran in front of their house. And, as an additional benefit, because the land behind their blocks of flats was under Gostat's jurisdiction as agricultural land, all families were allowed to continue to have their small vegetable gardens as well as keep poultry and pigs next to their apartment blocks. While these plots of land were not big enough to provide for all their needs, they were still enough to contribute significantly to the food necessities of these families[190]. "Moving here changed everything, and for the good" Maria said.

While Ion continued working for Gostat, Maria enrolled their children in kindergarten and started looking for a job. After a few months she found employment as an unskilled worker at the Iris porcelain factory. She was a fast learner and was soon promoted to the position of a skilled glazer. She worked there for 23 years, in the same position, until she was made redundant in early 2007. Maria told me: "Finally having two salaries meant that we were able to save some money. Our life became easier. And after communism, when it became possible to buy our flat, we used these savings to buy this apartment. So this is ours now, we own it."

Vegetable gardens and poultry next to the apartment blocks

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[190] By the 1980s doing gardening next to ones block of flats became such a widespread practice all over Romania that even the Law on systematization addressed this issue (see previous footnotes). However, keeping animals as livestock in an urban environment, especially pigs, was not common.

After the collapse of communism, when the state agricultural farm Gostat was dismantled and most of the land was returned to its former owners, Ion Pop was transferred to a maintenance company that was under city jurisdiction. They were responsible for the preservation of the parks and other green areas of the city. Ion was working there when he had the stroke in late 2006.

7.3.3 "Nobody needs us anymore"

After Ion's stroke, on days when it was cold and rainy and they could not go out and walk around in the courtyard, Ion and Maria Pop stayed in their flat, watching TV. Ion's favorite channel was Animal Planet. He was fascinated by the wild animals he saw, especially lions, sharks and other predators. But, since he only traveled for work purposes and never for pleasure, he had never been to a city that had a zoo, and he never saw such animals live and close up. When he heard that I had been to zoos, and that there was a sizable one in my hometown, he always asked: "You can see their strength and vitality, can't you? I think I have the same kind of strength and vitality in me. I worked my health away, 20 hours a day on the job. But, you'll see that I'll be healthy again." Ion and Maria's eyes were sparkling with happiness when they looked at each other. And, indeed, Ion was still making progress towards recovery when I left in 2009.

However, on many of these rainy afternoons, when Ion took a brief nap in their living room and Maria and I went to the kitchen, our conversations weren't that cheerful and optimistic as they were when Ion was present. Maria's unemployment benefit ran out in early 2008 and she started looking for jobs to get back to work as soon as possible. We were sometimes sitting together at her kitchen table and reading through the 'Piaţa de la A la Z' (Market from A to Z), a thick weekly jobs and real estate advertisement magazine, trying to find the positions that she thought she would be able to fill. While in the first few weeks she remained optimistic, applying for many jobs, as time passed with no success, she frequently cried as she continued her search, finally closing the magazine concluding she would never find employment:

> "Shop assistant" – Maria read out loud the positions and categories of jobs. She was talking to me nonstop as she was searching. She often did that when she was nervous and wanted to control and hide her feelings of distress. "I applied for several of these positions but I was told everywhere that I am too old for the job. They were looking for young and good looking women and that's something I'm not anymore. Cleaning. I went to

several of these. You remember. They employed me in one or two places, but sent me away after a week. They told me I worked well but was too slow. But how could I be faster after all those years in agriculture and factory work? I'm 52 years old. My back hurts, I can't just bend down like that. My legs and hands hurt. I have rheumatism. But, I still don't understand why I needed to be that much faster. What difference does it make if I finish half an hour later? They didn't pay me by the hour anyway and I cleaned the office afterhours. They humiliated me so much…" Maria turned the page and scanned through the positions on the next page. "Factory work. Office work. Jobs in bars. Jobs in real estate offices. Service jobs. I applied for jobs in all these places, you know that… in the hope that they would give me something. But, I was constantly told that I am too old, too ugly, too slow, and have no education for most of these positions. I only went through six grades and ten is the minimum they want… Too bad that there are no jobs in agriculture anymore. I could do that. Or jobs in porcelain factories. I was very good at that" – she was crying quietly, while listening to noises coming from the living room. She did not want Ion to know about her concerns. "I'm good for nothing, that's the truth."[191]

Not finding work and the consequent loss of her self-esteem was only one of Maria's concerns. Another problem was that, after 36 years of always having a small vegetable garden and poultry, they had recently lost their right to continue to have these small plots next to their blocks of flats. Maria was no longer able to produce food for her family, and so their household expenses increased significantly. This loss of their gardens was an unexpected blow not only for Maria, but for all former Gostat worker families. For a long time it seemed that, even though Gostat was closed down in the early 1990s and its land was returned to its previous, long-time resident owners, the area of Maria's apartment house would remain a no-man's land to which nobody could claim rights. And although there had been no new developments on that land for the last few years, as the geographical space of the district changed, with it changed the power relations among people.

Part of the reason for this change was that most of the land that had been nationalized during communism was returned to the long-time resident families. Since most long-time resident families no longer worked in agriculture and urban land became more valuable for use as building sites, most of these families either built houses on this land for themselves, their children and their extended kin, or sold it off to other district families and property developers. As a result, starting

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[191] This quote suggests, just as the work of other anthropologists does (e.g. Pine 2000), that the effects of deconstructing socialist industrial economies has taken much more time than was originally thought. Maria was only 34 years old when socialism ended, and at the time it was believed that her generation would quickly and easily adapt to the changing economic circumstances, thereby escaping long-term unemployment. However, more recent data suggests that women in middle- and late middle age remain the "throw away generation", thus indicating that structural adjustments had consequences lasting far longer than five to ten years.

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in the late 1990s more and more villas were built in the district, many of them on land that was behind the apartment blocks of the former Gostat workers. And, although a significant distance was kept between the villas and the blocks of flats, the residents of the villas were annoyed that these small, ad-hoc vegetable gardens spoiled their panorama: were an "ugly eyesore"; "created smells that were unpleasant"; and "the noise that came from the animals (poultry and pigs) disrupted the silence" of their secluded lives[192]. It did not take long, according to Gostat wives, before these rich neighbors complained to the city council and – in the end – succeeded in forcing Maria and the other 'Gostat wives' to give up most of their plots, pigs, and poultry[193].

Vegetable gardens as they looked after the families had to abandon them

Thus, as life became harder for Maria's family and she felt that there were less and less things she was able to do, her anxieties increased with each passing day. She said that she was often unable

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[192] The quotes are from conversations with some of the owners of these villas who complained about these issues. They also said that they requested the city council to do something to stop people keeping poultry and pigs in their neighborhood.

[193] What happened was that controllers from the city administration began to regularly check on the courtyards in Maria Pop's neighborhood, telling people that, in a timely manner (usually 6 months to a year), they needed to eliminate their gardens, poultry and pigs. Because city council checkups and the complaints of the influential neighbors and city council investigations happened very close in time, Maria and the other Gostat wives believed that these controls were the direct result of the complaints. However, I have no direct proof that this link indeed existed. Another factor that might have sped up this process was that a roof extension had recently been built on Maria Pop's apartment block and the loft was converted into several flats. The new owners/tenants – all well to do families who had no history with Gostat – might also have complained, contributing to these controls and shut downs.

to sleep through the night so she lay in bed quietly, "feeling a tremendous inner fear grasping my heart and taking my breath away, suffocating me". She obsessively thought about what she could do to find a way out. "During the day I am better, it is easier" she told me. "The days usually pass by quickly. I just do all the routines of the household, cook and shop for all of us, and take care of Ion. By the time I'm done with all that, my oldest son gets home from work, so we talk about his day and ours. The days have their rhythm. But not the nights."

Villas built in the Pop family's neighborhood

Vasile (31), their oldest son, started work at five o'clock in the morning in a metal recycling plant and usually got home by early afternoon. He often joined us in the kitchen to take part in the conversation. Seeing his mother so tense and scared, Vasile told Maria not to worry because "things will work out somehow in the end". He always brought up as an example his sister, Ileana (26), for whom Maria previously was so concerned, but whose life, according to Vasile, seemed eventually to work out for the better. Ileana, who worked as a shop assistant, had just recently gotten married and moved out of her parent's flat. She now lived with her husband and her husband's parents. The husband's parents had a two bedroom flat in the Mănăştur district, and they gave their spare room to the young couple.

After Ileana moved out, Vasile and his brother Florin (29), continued to share the smaller room in the Pop family's flat, while Ion and Maria occupied the living room – which, for the first time was

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just for the two of them. Vasile told Maria that their three incomes – Ion's disability pension and the income of her two sons – were enough for the four of them to live on, even with Maria's unemployment benefits running out and she not finding work. But she continued to be very concerned about their future. She said:

"I know that we are not at the brink yet. Others struggle even harder. But things can change quickly for the worse. We have no savings at all anymore. What we accumulated in the last years of communism we used up to buy our flat. And although we made quite good money with Caritas in 1993-1994 [a Ponzi-style pyramid scheme in Cluj, Romania, that operated from April 1992 to August 1994][194] that money is gone now. We used that money to buy a color TV, a washing machine, a new fridge, and an old Dacia car for Florin [Maria's younger son] to start his business as a freelance taxi driver[195]. Because this was what he wanted to do after the factories closed and he couldn't find a job in industry. And we still had some money left after all these payments, but we had to spend it last year, when the apartment block voted to disconnect from the city's central heating system and set up a gas heating system for each flat, individually. So we installed the gas central heating system, changed the old windows for thermal insulated ones to make heating efficient,

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[194] Caritas was a Ponzi-style pyramid scheme that promised an eightfold profit (800%) after only three months. It began in April 1992 in Brasov and after two months was moved to Cluj. In its first year it was only open to Cluj residents and the amounts one person was allowed to pay in were between 100 USD and 800 USD (20,000-160,000 old Romanian Lei). In 1993 the initiator Caritas, Ion Stoica, opened the scheme to all Romanians. By the time it collapsed in August 1994 Romanian newspapers and the New York Times estimated that it might have pulled in the equivalent of $1 to $5 billion dollars' in Romanian currency [http://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/13 /business/pyramid-scheme-a-trap-for-many-romanians.html?sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all; Last accessed on February 22, 2013]. Caritas was able to run for so long and become so widespread because it had strong political backing. Among others, the then-mayor of Cluj, Gherghe Funar, threw his full political support behind the scheme. It is important to highlight that by the time it ended, and for years after its collapse, the scheme – because of its scale – had significant effects on the distribution of wealth in the city of Cluj. Estimates say that while the vast majority of the wealth went to a handful of the elites, part of Caritas' money went to low-wage families, as was the case with the Pop family and their neighbors, who were able to afford things they could not have afforded were it not for Caritas.

[195] In the Iris district most families claimed that they never participated in the scheme. Some families joined Caritas just before it failed and lost quite significant amounts of money. A few families I interviewed were so badly affected that some of the men committed suicide, leaving their wives and children with huge debts. (The cause of suicide was that people invested and lost huge sums that were borrowed from loan sharks.) However, in this respect Gostat worker families stood apart from the many others. They joined the scheme quite early and most of them did make money. As they explained, they convinced each other to participate, but only with small amounts of money. Most of them were able to make reasonably good money because they always took out part of the profits and kept only a small percentage of the money in Caritas at any one time. The most common practice was that of the Pop family: they made some money (much more than they could have ever saved from their salaries) and used it to buy household appliances and a car, and eventually refurbish their flat. Nevertheless, while most Gostat families followed this pattern, a few of them invested all of their savings and made really big amounts. Most of these families had moved away from the neighborhood by the time I started my research. However, there were two families that were still living there, in their same old flats, as neighbors of the Pop family. These two families made so much money that they bought large flats for all four of their children, and also helped them to start their own businesses. But, since the parents liked living in the district and visiting with their old friends, they never seriously considered leaving the neighborhood. [Katherine Verdery has a study that deals with the effects of Caritas on the reconceptualization of money in Romania (1995).]

and all the money we still had from Caritas, was gone. And we were not able to save any money since Caritas collapsed. Nothing. Our incomes are not enough to save. Vasile earns just enough to pay for his food and part of our utility bills. Ion's pension hardly covers the costs of his living expenses and care. And Florin's taxi business is not going well, it never really did. The Dacia car is very old, so Florin spends most of the money he makes on repairs, replacements and gas. He said that once the car breaks down completely, he wants to go to Spain or Italy and find something there. Because, as Florin always argues, there is no point in doing what Vasile does, working such a physically hard job, destroying ones health, for money that does not even cover one's living expenses. Plus Florin would like to move out from us, to buy a flat of his own, to start his own family. And that is impossible from here, working in Cluj, with the small amount of money he's able make."

An old Dacia car on one of Iris' main roads (2008)

The Pop family's situation is one example among many drawing attention to the fact that, after the collapse of communism, new processes emerged that affected the economic and social position of many families. In the Pop family, even with five salaries in the household, their incomes were so low and the circumstances of their employment so unstable that it was impossible for them to improve their economic standing. This situation was very similar to that experienced by the Kovacs family in the 1950s, when they were unable to improve their economic standing for decades, even though several adults in the household were wage earners. The Pop's, with all the unforeseen events they experienced – Ion's stroke, Maria's unemployment (which she believed would be temporary) becoming long-term, Florin's taxi business struggling and the condition of his car deteriorating – most of the family's energy went into just maintaining their present

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standard of living. The only significant improvements in their financial situation were the result of making money from Caritas: Even though they did not understand the economic logic behind the scheme, they still "trusted the public figures and state officials that backed Caritas", and decided to "put in"[196] part of their money. In addition to their 'trust' in public figures, another important factor that helps to explain why Caritas worked for the Pop family (when it did not work for so many other Iris district families) was that they always took part of the money they received as "interest". As they said, "We did not want to become rich" and "Becoming rich would have been impossible anyway, because we did not have much money to put in." They used the money they received from Caritas to cover some necessities they were unable to afford using only their basic salaries, while keeping the remaining part as savings for future necessities.

However, besides the Caritas money, the fact that the household stayed together for all those years – even though they often felt this as a limitation on their lives – was at the same time the condition and guarantee for the "flexibility" and "movement" of the household's members: This made it possible for Maria to remain at home with Ion after his stroke; it gave their daughter, Ileana, time to find a partner which, in turn, made it possible for her to establish her own household; and made it possible for Florin to explore flexible employment structures and take the risk of establishing his own taxi business. Without the support and backing of the rest of the household, individual members would not have been able to survive the uncertainties and extra expenses that came with the "flexibility" afforded to them by the household/family network. In this "construction", however, the more or less stable employment situation of Ion Pop and his son, Vasile, were also crucial. It is in this context, this combination of stability/fixity and movement/flexibility within the family, that it was possible for Florin's migration to Italy or Spain to even be considered. For Florin to be able to start planning migration it was essential for the entire family network to combine/pool their resources.

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[196] Verdery argues in her article on Caritas that at the time the pyramid scheme was running in Romania people's knowledge of the western-type concepts of investment, profit, interest and of the processes behind such terms was very basic, often even non-existent.

7.4 Conclusion

The problems and issues the Pop family experienced in many respects are similar to those of many other families in the district. During privatization of the state housing stock in post-communism, it became increasingly common for several generations of a family to live together in the small flats they received during communism and, when it became possible, bought with the family's savings (or loans from kin and/or banks). As the case of the Pop family illustrates, with the economic restructurings of the post-communist period, even the earnings of five adults were often barely sufficient to keep the family afloat[197]. Precarious jobs that paid extremely low wages made saving money nearly impossible, especially as state subsidized housing and rents almost completely disappeared. This meant that – as the case of Maria Pop's children highlighted – for young adults, the prospect of moving out, renting or buying flats, and establishing their own families became increasingly out of reach. In contrast to long-time resident families that established themselves in the Iris district and the city at the turn of the 20th century, as the families of new migrants grew – the Pops being one example – very few lived in houses situated on plots of land that made the building of additional rooms a viable strategy. To the contrary, as seen from Maria's narrative, space was actually closing in on many of these families: It wasn't just that their old flats were overcrowded; they were also losing control of their small garden plots. The experience of the members of the Pop household reflected the ways in which the power relations that shaped the space around them changed the ways in which space was accessible and controllable for these and many other families.

The detailed discussion of the Pop family's life history highlights that the situation in which they found themselves was not confined to "new" inequalities, but was the result of a complex set of factors that were rooted in economic and social processes that had been set in motion well before 1989.

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[197] As seen in their family life history, the Pops experienced similar situations during communism as well. However at the time they lived only on Ion Pop's salary, when Maria was unable to take a job because of their housing circumstances. The situation after 1989 was different in the sense that during the 1990s and 2000s even though both adults and the three children worked, their incomes were so low that accumulating savings became almost impossible. Thus, when Maria lost her job, their daughter moved out, and the income of one of their sons decreased, the family's financial situation became tenuous once again.

The Kovacs's case reveals how 'trust' and 'family/kinship' were important ideological instruments that shaped their relationships within and beyond the household. These concepts played an important role in the Pop's life as well, but they operated in slightly different ways. In comparison to the Kovacs's, in the Pop's narratives there was almost no mention of parents and earlier generations: Brief, matter-of-fact references were used only to provide a context for childhood experiences, and to explain how Ion and Maria's parents and grandparents provided reasons that influenced their migration decision (e.g. extreme poverty, employing child-labor from a very early age, becoming orphaned, etc.). 'Forbearers' never figured in the Pop's stories about their adult lives in Cluj. Similarly, siblings (even though both Ion and Maria Pop came from large families) were only rarely mentioned, and only included those who eventually moved to Cluj, following in Ion and Maria's footsteps. Thus, while 'family values', 'reciprocal (and trust) relationships' were emphasized quite often in the Pop's narratives, the prominent aspects of their stories were constructed around 'parenthood' and the roles, tasks and responsibilities they ascribed to parenthood. That is, 'family' was an important concept shaping their life, but it operated through the framework of fatherhood and motherhood and, as the children became adults (but only then), the responsibilities of reciprocal support and inter-generational transfers[198]. These conditions characterized the narratives of most of the Pop's colleagues, neighbors and friends.

However, a discrepancy existed between the ways in which their narrative accounts reflected their existing kin relations and the more general ideals they said they had about kinship. On the one hand, both their narratives and their observed everyday encounters suggested that their contacts with relatives – except one or two siblings – were extremely rare. On the other hand, their perception of how kin support networks should work implied that they put a significant emphasis on such relations and highly valued the feelings of security and belonging they claimed came from such a reciprocal network. Clearly, then, since they did not reject or actively seek to avoid (ideal-typical) family values as such, one of the reasons for this discrepancy lay in the practicalities of their everyday lives during communism: As they implied on many occasions, because everyone in their kinship network was very poor, neither Maria and Ion nor their families had enough money

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[198] Gendered relations were quite pronounced in the household with Ion Pop being seen as the 'head' of the household. However, since resources were limited and there were longstanding gendered divisions of labor in the household (i.e. the wife produced most of the food for the household and thus controlled its distribution) the negotiation and sharing of most basic resources within the household was more or less equitable.

or free time to travel back and forth to maintain close kin relations[199]. Since this was the case for many of their village compatriots who moved to Cluj at around the same time as Maria and Ion, it was not possible to join forces with other families in an attempt to find a way to travel more frequently between Cluj and their respective villages[200]. Yet, it is important to understand that the lack of close and frequent relations with their kin – combined with the ideal-typical categories about family which they discursively reproduced – resulted in the development of new coping mechanisms that helped families such as the Pops compensate for their lack of extended kinship networks.

To substitute for the lack of more extended 'family' networks, 'kinship' relations among these households were often loosely created, not limited to blood ties, but rather rooted in relationships that emerged from physical/social proximity (colleagues, neighbors), from the shared experience of migration and the feeling of proximity that emerged from the fact that they often had come from the same (or neighboring) villages and regions, and from the shared experiences of urban adaptation after their arrival in Cluj. Many of the everyday practices these families collectively developed were employed to establish symbolic kinship ties: Some practices were church related, such as celebrating children's christenings or saint-related name-days, while others were based on sharing resources and services in a mutual and reciprocal cycle of support. In this context, the rural/urban division – and the attached descriptors such as 'uncivilized' and 'un-skilled' 'rural' people – that were often used to stigmatize (and sometimes marginalize/exclude) new migrants, became ideological tools that often limited their lives, but also enabled them to establish 'meaningful and trust based' relationships among those that had similar experiences[201]. And although over time and with the ever-increasing number of 'new migrants' to the city these links became less prominent and less significant, the 'kinship' ties they established continued to be the

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[199] This was so even though the distances were not huge, both Maria and Ion originated from villages that were only 70-80 kilometers from Cluj. Complications arose, however from the fact that their villages were not on main transport routes, and so further away from principal highways. Thus, public transport was not well developed to these places.

[200] These structural and financial constraints in the case of the Pop family were then even further magnified by the fact that Ion did not have a good relationship with his stepfather and that both Ion and Maria lost their parents at a relatively young age.

[201] Ethnicity was often an additional organizing principle in these relationships; however, it seemed that it was not necessarily the most prominent among these factors. Proximity in geographical and socio-economic space, in age, and in shared migration and employment experiences were equally important.

primary sites of 'trust' relations. Erik Harms, discovering similar patterns in Saigon, reaches similar conclusions: "[his informants'] oscillation between alternative models [of family and kinship] produces a sense of power that enables social actors to extend their influence outward across social space without relinquishing the ability to consolidate it in a spatially bounded unit" (2011:224).

Such differences in the constitution of kinship networks among district inhabitants often led to their differing approaches towards the varied stages of social life. Thus, for example, while embeddedness of the Kovacs's in well-established urban networks made dissentient coping strategies more likely and possible for them, the Pop's lack of such embeddedness in networks that consisted of people coming from a wider range of positions in social space, necessitated a stronger reliance on and trust in institutional networks offered by the state. As seen from their life history, the Kovacs's network was established over decades and included a larger circle of actors from a wide range of positions in social and geographical space that extended beyond the district's borders. In contrast, the networks of families such as the Pop's were not as deeply embedded and were confined to a narrower geographical and social space within the borders of the city. In part, this limitation was 'passed on' to the Pop's children as well, since most of them befriended children from their neighborhood, went to neighborhood schools, and then continued their studies in vocational schools that were organized and structured by and around one profession and/or factory, often within the Iris district (this is further illustrated by Anca's situation, described in Chapters 4 and 5, as she talked about the severe limitations of choice she experienced).

Finally, although it is not the aim of this thesis to explore relationships between memory and kinship, or memory and space/place/landscape, there is one aspect of this relationship that needs to be highlighted here as it has direct relevance for the production and reproduction of poverty and inequalities. Frances Pine argues in her study about memory and kinship in the Polish Highlands (2007) that in the Podhale region, where she conducted her research, it is impossible to imagine kinship without memory and that "kinship always seems almost inseparable from place and space". Thus, Pine continues, "I am assuming kinship and memory to be interwoven so intricately that disentanglement is impossible, and I am arguing that for Gorale [the people living in the Podhale region], they are similarly entangled with place and concerned with space." (2007:104)

Based on her findings, Pine claims that in this region (and more broadly) three different forms of "remembering" operate in an alternating and complementary simultaneity: "encompassing or generalized remembering: memories of hunger, of war, of work, of rituals, of communism", the "very personal memories, of major life crises, such as the death of a parent or child, marriage, or emigration", and finally the "personal memory, individual memory, which is of course always relational but which is experienced and understood as something integral to the person, a way of looking, or seeing, through the individual body and experience." (2007:123) While, according to Pine, during communism, personal, "everyday memory" was particularly well developed and located primarily in the intimate spaces of the household and kinship, the more encompassing remembering was often linked to the landscape, in the places and spaces in which people spent their lives.

Taking Pine's argument as a starting point, and comparing the 'memories' evoked by both the Kovacs's and the Pop's, reveals how their different family trajectories resulted in very different ways of remembering, often leading to very different coping strategies. The Kovacs's, just as the Gorale families described by Frances Pine, were deeply embedded both in place and in their multigenerational kinship ties. For them, the 'landscape' of the Iris district was an evocative space of past memories that were often traumatic – war, hunger, death, communist oppression and appropriation. Over the decades, their well-established and closely knit kinship network endured as a locus to remember, frame, and relive these broader (social) memories while at the same time interweaving them with the very particular life-events of the family 'unit' and of individual people. At the same time these complex processes of remembering certain events regularly evoked and helped to maintain the coping mechanisms that parents, grandparents and even great grandparents developed in response to certain conditions, both aiding and determining, and often limiting, household member's choices and life trajectories. This was reflected most clearly in Denes Kovacs's life.

In contrast, the Pop family's memories seemed to be more fragmented, non-linear, sometimes bordering on incoherent, and less embedded in place or multigenerational kinship ties and 'histories'. Thus, in their case, it is useful to complement Pine's argument with Sophie Day's work on memory. Day claims that because we tend to attribute largely positive emotions/feelings to

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kinship and therefore view kinship as "a source of history and continuity in our lives" (2007:190) we often impose ideological constraints and biographical conventions on the ways life events can be remembered and (re)told. Thus, lives that are hard to comprehend because they do not fit these patterns nor easily reveal a sense of integration of past events, are often omitted and/or marginalized, making difficult the understanding of both the past and present. In such cases, Day argues, referring to an argument made by Holland and Lave in 2001, it is important to allow for an examination of time, place and circumstances with a focus on a "practice perspective" where a person is "historicized alongside other practices so as to avoid an ahistorical, asocial, essentialist perspective on identity" (2007:191). The Pop's life, as examined through both their fragmented memories and their social practices, highlights well how people who have only few kinship memories they wish to remember and to draw upon – memories that could give continuity and coherence to their lives – might develop coping strategies that reorganize genealogical ties and create elective kinship networks, in which people are able to create (new) individual and shared identities (Anca's life from Chapters 4 and 5 is also a good example to such processes of remembering).

Further, this approach also suggests that when memories of earlier migration in a family are passed on to the next generation as positive life events they have the potential to become resources and coping strategies for succeeding generations. These memories – when coupled with the experiences and practices of elective kinship ties and new networks – can strengthen support networks and thereby enable/facilitate family mobility (as was the case of the Pop's youngest son, Florin, who was planning his migration abroad at the time of this research).

PART FOUR

POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES IN

POST-SOCIALIST URBAN SETTINGS

Chapter 8

Conclusions: (Re)production of poverty and inequalities in space and time

The family histories included in this thesis clearly illustrate two arguments: First, in order to understand responses to poverty and inequalities it is important and necessary to extend the concept of capital beyond 'objective resources' of families (economic, cultural, social capital) to incorporate more subjective resources and specific biographical experiences. The Kovacs and the Pop family histories from **Chapter** 7 highlight particularly well how specific biographical experiences of earlier generations of a family – as they are situated in particular place(s) and in shared (kinship) memory – can become 'assets' for later generations, helping family/household members to cope in more complex and productive ways with poverty and inequalities in their own lives. Thus, experiences of migration, ways to create 'symbolic' kinship ties, differing understandings of what 'family' is and how it should operate, 'trust' relations as they evolve over time and among people, and experiences of how urban/rural ideological divisions influence local peoples' lives all contribute to the specific biographical experiences that often become assets in households. Anca's family history from **Chapters 4** and **5** emphasize another aspect of this same process: Even negative biographical experiences – memories of abuse and violence from childhood, or of extreme poverty – can be turned into 'subjective resources' that in later life help people to take more control of their bodies and lives, and make it less likely they will repeat similar behaviors in their everyday encounters.

Second, it is important to observe how large-scale restructurings in a society can lead to the reassessment of the value of certain types of capital and then, in turn, how people and their social practices adapt to such changes. Thus, this thesis – and **Chapter 7** in particular – has endeavored to make clear that large scale economic, political, and social changes in Romania greatly influenced the ways in which certain types of capital were 'valued' in society (e.g. land, housing, skills), and examined the ways in which changes in the value of assets and capital were linked to

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the reorganization of social relations and households' positions in social space. What follows focuses on this second aspect, and further explores how the state(s)' actions and regulations intervened in local peoples' lives, prompting them to radically change or adapt their coping mechanisms.

During the past century in Romania, pre-communist, communist, and post-communist governments and state administrations were among the most influential actors in '(re)valuing' assets such as land and housing. However, the primary aim of state regulations was not always to (re)value such assets (although they often did), but to shape the processes that impact the reproduction of the labor force and to eventually bring about and/or contribute to labor market reforms. One of the primary goals in such 'interventions' was to create and attract a low-wage, abundant labor force to urban areas: On some occasions this was done to promote and support industrialization, and on other occasions to facilitate the production of other resources, for example agricultural goods. Such regulations were always initiated in keeping with immediate priorities and structural needs as determined by governments in power. While these processes were always initiated from beyond the borders of the Iris district, their effects on the lives of current and future district inhabitants became localized and were reflected in the geographical and social space of the area.

Prior to communism, at the turn of the 20th century, during the early years of industrialization in the city of Cluj, two – somewhat contradictory – needs emerged: On the one hand, a quickly growing city population made necessary the production of ever-increasing amounts of food. On the other hand, industry and this growing city population needed more physical space in order to be able to continue expanding. The dilemma then became how to provide for and balance the space requirements of agriculture, people, and industry. At the time, the local city council addressed these competing needs with several new policies: first, they extended the administrative borders of the city and used these newly incorporated areas to build additional industrial units and parcel out land to better address the housing needs of the population (see details in the section on the Kovacs family in **Chapter 7,** and also the city's and the Iris district's history in **Chapter 2**). However, by expanding the city they reduced the surrounding agricultural space that was traditionally used to feed the city's inhabitants. To address the resulting problems and avoid food

shortages, the city council made several changes in policies and legislation: they changed local taxation practices in ways that supported agriculture and farm families, by reducing their financial burdens and risks; put in place educational programs that supported learning skills needed for intensive gardening, enabling local farmers to increase their yields even though they were cultivating smaller plots; the city and the banks worked together to design and implement support schemes and loans that helped urban farmers develop vegetable irrigation systems for their gardens; designated new areas for orchards and new pastures for herding animals; and opened new local farmers' markets and extended the old ones (Pillich, Vetési, Vincze 1985, Pillich 2005). All these changes led to a significant increase in efficiency in local agriculture, an increase in the number of families that earned a living from agriculture, and to a reorganization of the space of the city. Another effect of these processes and policies was that the price of land increased significantly, and urban plots got smaller. This, in turn, forced an increasing number of urban farm families to move out of their more centrally located neighborhoods and closer to the newly established city borders (Pillich, Vetési, Vincze 1985). As seen in the previous chapters, these processes had significant and long-lasting effects on the ways the space of the Iris district and the composition of its population developed.

The institution of communism brought about many radical changes. Of these, four sets of national level policies were among the most relevant to the (re)production of poverty and inequalities in the life of Iris district inhabitants. In the first set of policy changes, the overwhelming majority of big land holdings were nationalized. In addition, the land that remained for private holding was subject to extreme taxation (Margit Kovacs talked about this in **Chapter 7**). One of the most direct effects of these policies was the drastic and immediate devaluation of land: As Margit Kovacs put it, "land suddenly meant poverty" and "there was nothing people could do because there was nobody you could sell your land to". Another almost immediate effect of the policy – and this was very much in keeping with the government's intentions – was that many young people, especially from rural areas that were close to large urban centers, gave up agriculture and migrated to nearby cities to find industrial work. In Cluj Napoca – and the Iris district – this set in motion the first wave of post-Second-World-War migration; the time when, for example, Margit Kovacs and her siblings moved to the city/district.

Collectivization of (almost) all privately held land was implemented in a second wave when the effects of previous policies on the production of a new industrial labor force started to fade, and additional industrial workers were needed to sustain accelerated industrialization and continue the urbanization goals of the communist state. Only a few mountain villages and small plots around privately owned houses were exempt from nationalization. This shift towards complete collectivization of agricultural land was coupled with the use of communist party agitators who traveled around rural areas to convince young people to move to cities and be trained as industrial workers (many of my informants talked about this). These policies were generating a second migration wave of rural families. This was the time in the early 1960s when Margit Kovacs's father was forced (essentially blackmailed) into giving up his land to the local collective farm having been told that by resisting collectivization he was risking the future of his children. In response, he abandoned agriculture and moved to the Iris district to work in the porcelain factory where he remained until reaching retirement age. This was also the period when families such as the Pop's (see **Chapter 7**) – in the late 1960s and early 1970s – gave up hope that they would be able to have a decent life in their villages and moved to the city looking for work in sectors such as services, industry, and large scale collective agriculture.

The immediate effects of these policies – in addition to the restructuring of property relations – were an increase in urban labor market competition, and a restructuring of the urban population and space. Land reform policies were coupled with strict control on the rental market and state orchestrated housing development. This placed further burdens on the country's population by contributing to and maintaining a constant flow of minimum-wage workers into the city where their labor was strictly regulated.

At the same time, in another attempt to determine the course of the reproduction of the labor force, the state introduced a second set of policies that harshly punished abortion and all other forms of birth control, and imposed extra taxes on individuals and families who did not have children (see in the Pop family's history in **Chapter 7**). The result of these policies was an exponential increase in the number of births. As discussed in earlier chapters, it took almost a decade for households to adjust to and circumvent these policies. The number of births did not begin to decrease to pre-policy levels until the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, because it took many years before

these children reached working age, the effects of these policies on the urban labor market did not become evident until the early and mid-1980s. In fact, the children – called "decreţei" in Romanian, meaning decree-babies – became part of the last wave of communist migration. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, at the age of 14 or15 many of these young people moved to Cluj Napoca and the Iris district to attend vocational schools set up around the various local factories (Anca's husband, **Chapters 4** and **5,** moved to Cluj for this reason). After graduation from vocational school, almost all of these young people looked for employment in an effort to remain in the city.

By this time, with an ever deepening economic crisis in the country, a third wave of policies were instituted that greatly restricted mobility to urban areas. These policies made it almost impossible to receive urban residency permits. Even so, many young people decided to remain in the city and establish families. A majority of them worked in temporary and low-wage jobs and lived in precarious accommodations that did not fit their families' needs. These conditions caused them to be among the most vulnerable to economic restructuring after the 1989 regime change (this is illustrated in Anca and her husband's life history, **Chapters 4** and **5**).

Finally, in the mid- and late l970s, a fourth wave of communist policies was instituted that included laws on rural and urban systematization (discussed in detail in **Chapter 7**). These laws attempted to both determine the course of the reproduction of the labor force and also restructure rural and urban space. Once again, families from all over the country were uprooted. These policies continued to cause (and force) the migration of the workforce from agriculture towards industry and from rural to urban areas. In the Iris district these policies also resulted in a new wave of transfers of remaining private wealth into communist state assets. During this period – from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s – the land and the houses of many urban families were nationalized and demolished, while households were moved to small, often inadequate, state-owned flats in apartment blocks all over the city. Land and houses were appropriated, and many previously valuable skills (e.g. knowledge of intensive gardening, animal husbandry, small-scale food production, etc.) were rendered useless as a result of new circumstances. Many households also lost their livelihoods: Most people were middle aged or older and had never been employed by the state. Therefore, they were not entitled to pensions or other benefits that could have supported

them. This caused an additional financial burden for the extended kin of the elderly: In a complete reversal of circumstances, younger family members suddenly found it necessary to provide financial support for their parents and grandparents – people from whom they had previously received support in the form of food and other household-produced goods.

After 1989, with the collapse of communism, economic and political restructuring resulted in new policies that impacted the lives of district inhabitants. As seen throughout this thesis (**Chapters 6** and **7** in particular), privatization of communist state housing stock and restitution of formerly nationalized property (land and other assets) once again reorganized the local landscape and social relations. Due to newly instituted state policies some previous inequalities were erased as land restitution resulted in the improvement of the financial status of many long-time district residents. Other inequalities, formerly perceived by local residents as temporary, became permanent. The sale of state housing stock, after regime change in the early 1990s, 'froze' the housing conditions of families in the district, many of whom described their situation as being 'trapped' in time and space: Those who, after 1989, were allowed to buy a communist state-allocated flat often had insufficient financial means to relocate when their individual or family situation changed (see the case of the Pop family in **Chapter 7**). Those who missed or never had the opportunity to obtain a communist state subsidized rental property or were, for a variety of reasons, not permitted to buy their former flats (see more on this in **Chapter 6**, and the situation of Anca in **Chapters 4** and **5**), often struggled in temporary and precarious accommodations, and/or were displaced from the city. Finally, new inequalities were created by additional factors in the reorganization of property relations: When the state withdrew from housing, new and powerful actors – many of whom were large firms with international finance capital – began competing for land and real estate in the area (see **Chapter 6**).

Over the decades, policy changes that involved land and housing had immediate effects on the labor markets in these urban areas by making it necessary for some households to migrate, and sell land and real estate. For many households, increases in land and real estate prices coupled with state regulations specifically restricting mobility made it impossible to improve their position in social and geographical space and resulted in 'fixity.' Others, as seen in previous chapters, had

been 'pushed out' of urban into rural areas. Their chances of ever returning to the city bordered on the impossible.

However, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, these state regulations impacted on more than 'objective' capital relations. They also impacted on personhood and understandings of the self and others. This created divisions and unequal relations not only between individuals and the actors situated in institutions, but also among district inhabitants. As argued in **Chapter 2,** when addressing ethnic relations in the Iris district, such differentiations have often been identified by researchers, policy makers, and local people as emerging from 'cultural differences.' However, as Narotzky and Smith point out in their work on Spain, "this quick resort to 'culture' obscures the extent to which these differences are produced out of dynamic relationships of class" (2006:212). The two authors show convincingly that in cases where researchers misread these relationships they "achieve the clarity of their arguments through an exclusion – not just of very real processes of cultural differentiation and socioeconomic polarization, but of the way they work on each other." (2006:213)

In this context it is crucial to understand that focusing only on the ways 'locality' is produced out of exclusively 'cultural relations' "completely misses the tensions of power versus powerlessness that arise within individual agents as well as within more collective senses of identity, tensions that are in an important way determined by the ability to control mobility." (Narotzky and Smith 2006:213) If 'family histories' in the Iris district are observed from this perspective, it becomes clear that "the constitution of a region – filled with sentient human beings – arises out of a history of the regulation of movement through the uses of various expressions of power." (2006:213) As seen both in this chapter and throughout the thesis, controlling peoples' ability to move and using this as a means to regulate the (re)production of the labor force both in households and beyond, was one of the most important measures by which various governments in power influenced production and consumption processes and labor-capital relations.

In closing, the issue still remains as of whether the processes that produced inequalities and poverty could have generated a more or less homogenous experience from which class-like

relations might emerge. Narotzky's work in economic anthropology offers a reasonable starting point that might help to solve this conundrum. She argues that,

> "It is not the separation from the means of production that forces people into exploitative relations with capital but the *separation from the means of reproduction of their livelihood*, irrespective of the actual 'ownership' status toward certain means of production they might hold." (1997:217)

Looking at relationships in the Iris district and beyond from this perspective, it is easier to see that examining cultural particularities that developed over a century – ethnic relations included – is important in order to transcend fragmentation and find the commonalities that link various forms of inequalities. However, focusing only on these aspects can often obscure seeing more clearly the unequal relations that are rooted in production and consumption practices, and in the necessities that leave people with no choice other than to offer their labor in order to be able to (re)produce their livelihoods. Thus, to take the analysis a step further one needs to attempt to find "*real* fragmentation within a specific oppositional structure*" (Naroztky 1997:217) that leads to (among other things) socioeconomic differentiation. In this thesis, looking into relationships that formed around land and housing – as they played out in space and time – offered the best entry point to unveil such fragmentation, and understand the formation of class-like relations that influenced the production and reproduction of poverty and inequalities.

Based on my findings it is reasonable to posit that the contribution social sciences have to make is first, to document the systemic failures of successive governments in helping the poor, and then to acknowledge the resilience and resourcefulness of the families that were at the receiving end of discriminatory and misguided policies over the decades. There is reason to believe that interpretations of "entitlement" can radically change, and a much wider understanding of issues surrounding poverty and inequalities – as well as public acceptance of targeted welfare policies – can be achieved, if and when focus shifts from "individual failures" to the decades-long discrepancies that exist between discourse and practice, and to the ways in which the focus on "present day/new poverty" covered up the many layers of inequalities that were superimposed on places and on successive generations of families.

I do not claim that this thesis is a comprehensive picture of all the processes that have shaped such long-standing unequal relationships in Romanian society. That said, the path I chose in addressing

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these issues is a conscious and reasoned attempt to reduce the fragmented, and often misleading, data that result from research methods that make it difficult or impossible to understand and link integrally related issues in all their complexity. If I have succeeded to some small degree than I believe I have brought a new, more nuanced and integrated perspective to the subject of this thesis, (re)production of poverty and inequalities in space and over time.
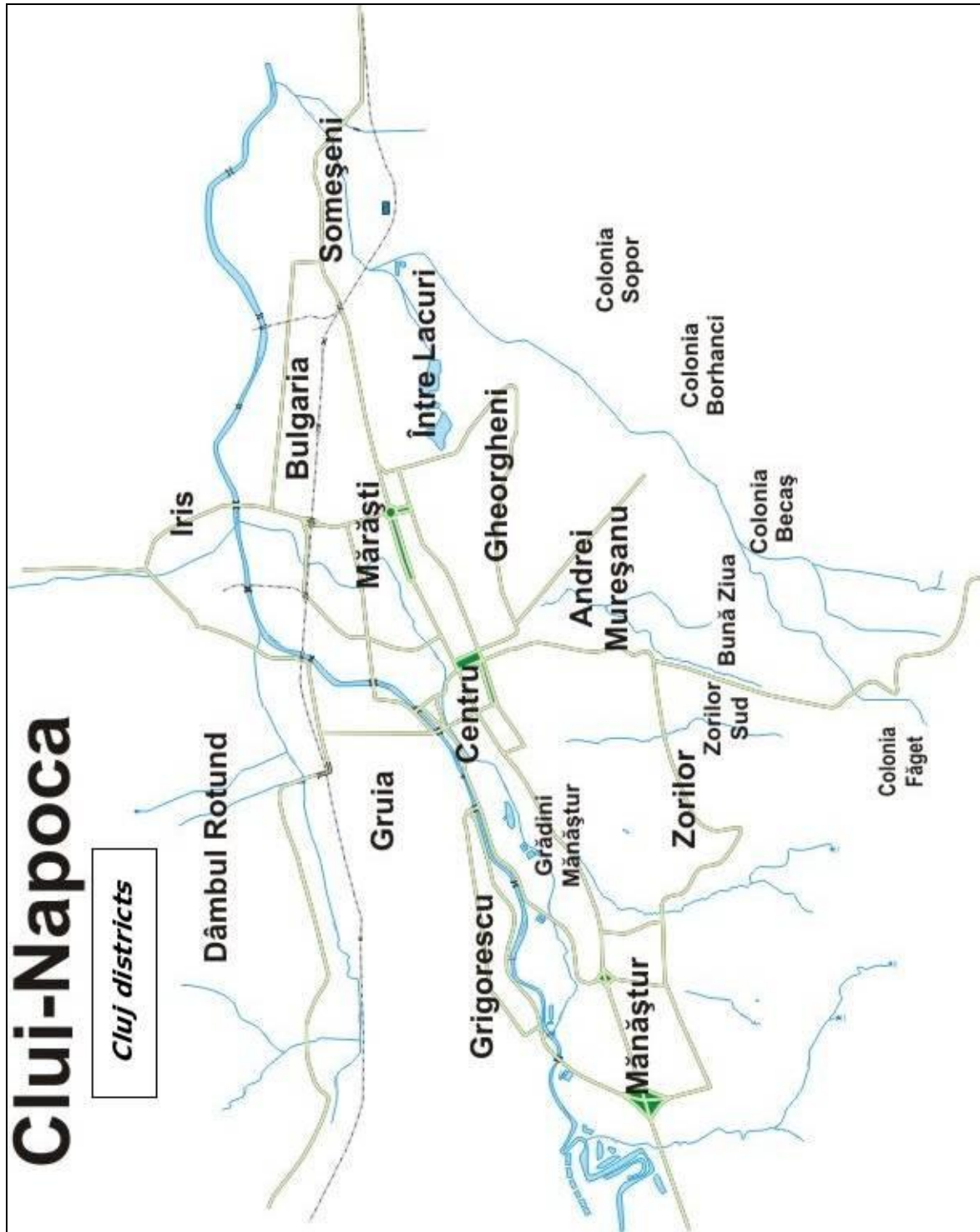
APPENDIX I
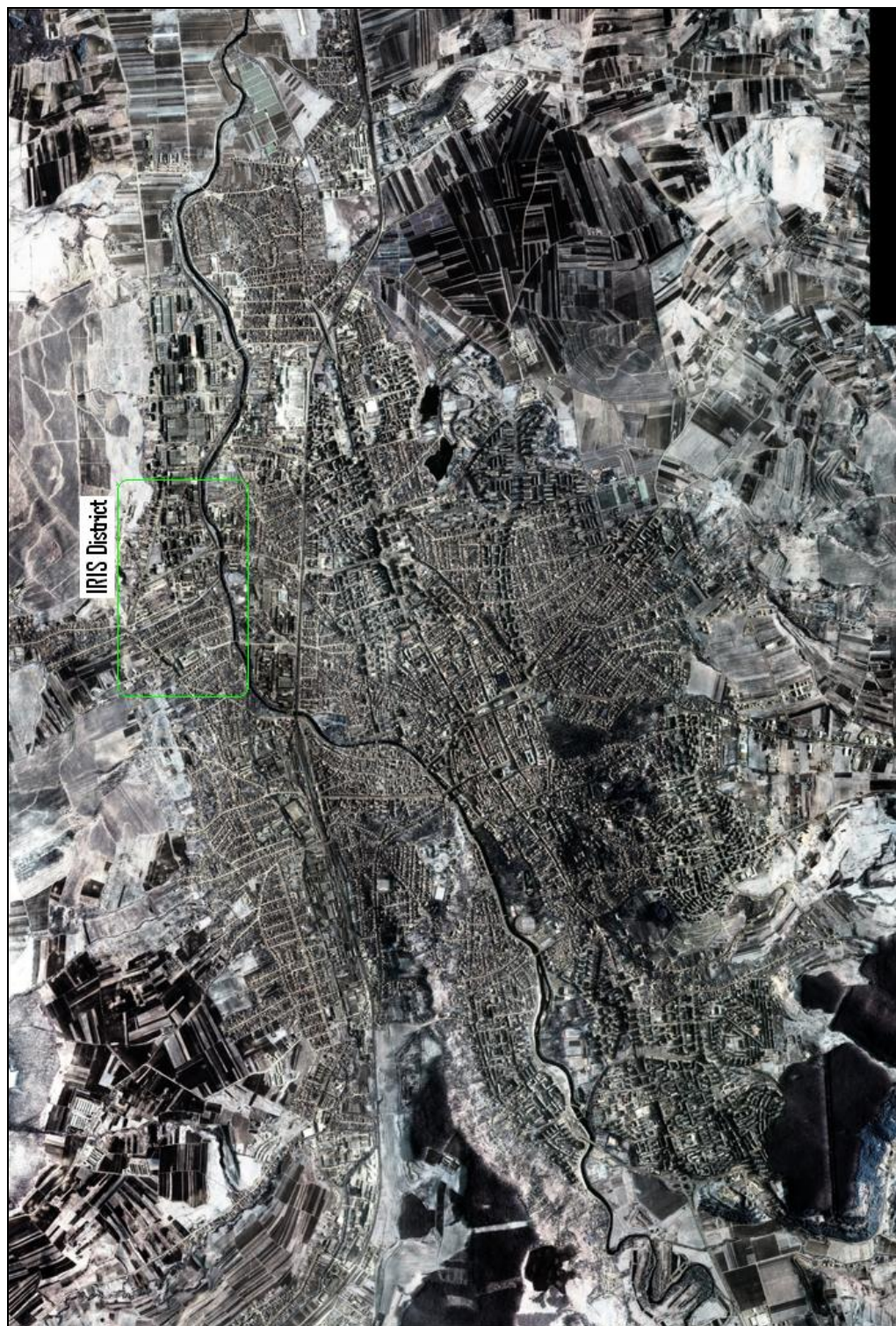
MAPS

Map 1. Romania

(The city of Cluj Napoca is in the north-west area of the country)

Map 2. Cluj Napoca (2008)
(with all the districts identified)

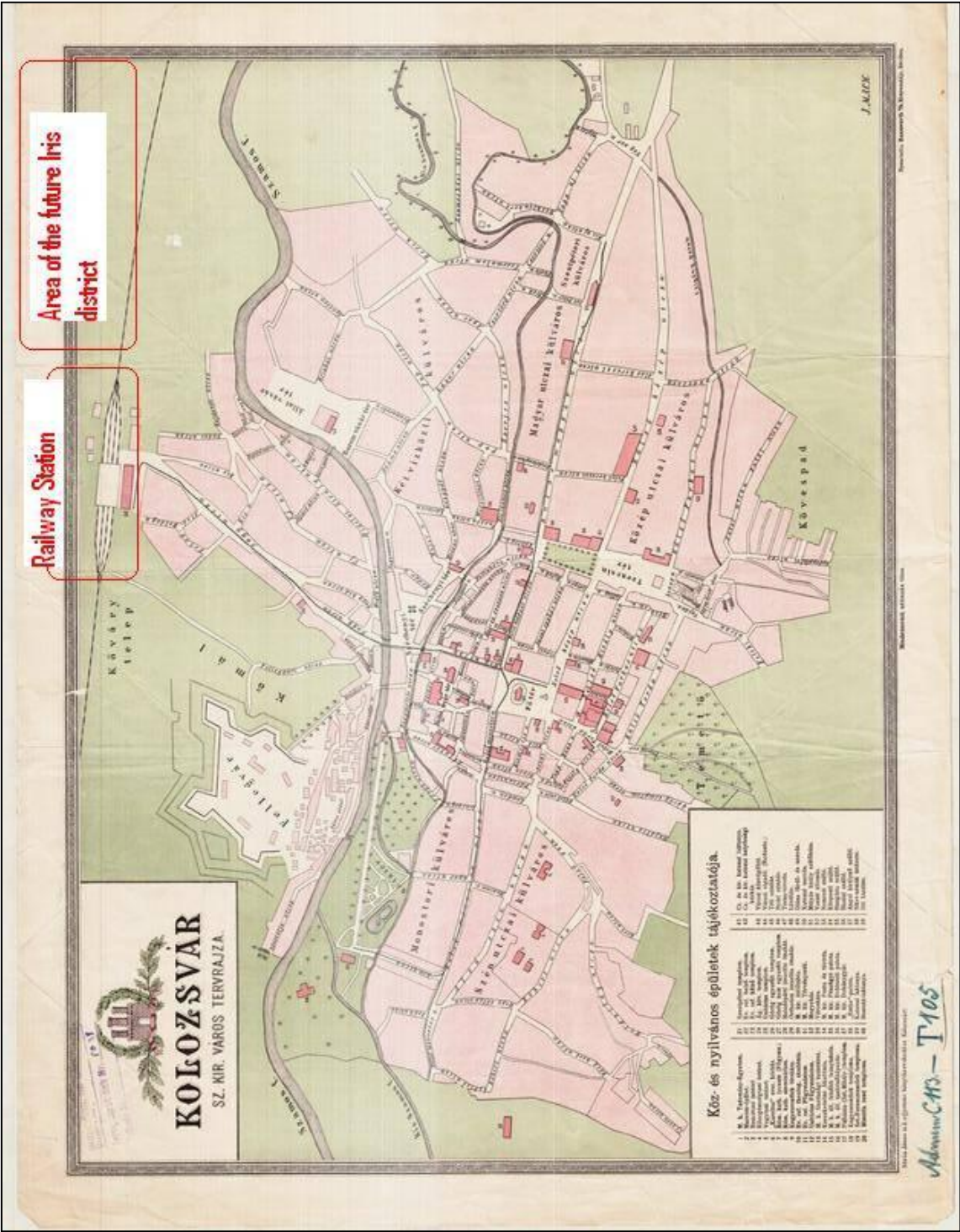**Map 3. Satellite image of Cluj Napoca (2007)**
(Iris district indicated)

Map 4. The Iris district (rough, indicative map)

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Map 5. Map of Cluj Napoca and surroundings (1873)
(The Iris district's area in relation to the city center)

Map 6. City map of Cluj Napoca (1895)
(On the map the city ends at the railway)

Area of the future Iris district

Railway Station

KOLOZSVÁR
SZ. KIR. VÁROS TERVRAJZA.

Köz- és nyilvános épületek tájékoztatója.

Map 7. City map of Cluj Napoca (1948)
(The Iris district's area in relation to the city center)

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