STREET LIFE, VALUE AND EXCHANGE IN A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD OF BUCHAREST

by

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Statement

I hereby state that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The dissertation also does not contain any materials previously written or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Gergő Pulay,

Budapest, 30 September

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Introduction: The poverty of poverty research

I am the global crisis/All my wealth is from abroad/Yes, yes, yes, money from America/England and Spain (...) I am the most evil disease/With the financial crisis/ (...) Don't pretend to me that you are great/'Cause yours are only empty words/I give you the financial crisis/Bigger than any disease/ (...)/ I shoved all in crisis/Yes, yes, yes, as you put the plug in/I ate them on bread/So that they will remember me.
Babi Minune: I am the global crisis (2009)[1]

Fieldwork encounters

What is the peculiar power that peripheries and their marginal subjects exert onto centres to which they are subordinated or onto other respectable places from where the process of civilization is supposed to emanate? What are the practices of symbolic and material exchange or mimicry that are mutually constitutive for the agents who belong to these seemingly antagonistic locations? The present dissertation draws on these questions in order to provide an urban ethnography of a marginal neighbourhood of Bucharest which is widely imagined as an ultimate 'ghetto', or 'Gypsyland' (*ţiganie*) not only in town, but also well beyond it, and which is

[1] For the original lyrics, see: http://versmuzica.ro/versuri-muzica/manele/babi-minune-criza-mondiala/

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consistently depicted as a source of fear and threat for social order in Romania's capital city. In less heated terms, however, the neighbourhood can be described as a rural-urban buffer-zone, where the local presence of the state has been sporadic (or uneven, mediated largely by the police) for most part of its history and where Roma and non-Roma Romanian inhabitants have been living together. Thereby, many of them have been sharing not only the territorial stigma attached to the place, but also ways of persistence, livelihoods, and notions of value, in material and non-material terms, that locals and outsiders alike largely associate with this neighbourhood as opposed to other parts of town.

I should admit that when I arrived to Bucharest with the intention of starting a long-term urban ethnographic research on urban marginality and popular culture for my doctoral dissertation, I did not know about the existence of the territorially stigmatized neighbourhood of Ferentari. Apart from the suggestions of a few acquaintances who did voluntary work there as part of an after-school program[2], I was finally convinced about doing fieldwork in the neighbourhood due to a special encounter. At the early period of my research, I was highly interested in the production and consumption *manele* (which is the plural for *manea*) that is the Romanian version of the Oriental or hybrid forms of ethno-pop music form which mostly broke into the emerging markets of South-Eastern European countries in the course of the postsocialist transition (Buchanan ed. 2007), a genre dominated by Roma performers (but largely consumed by non-Roma Romanians as well). Together with its putatively main consumers (whether they were identified as the 'new rich' or as the popular classes and the poor) the genre was the target of prolonged public controversies as a form of 'cultural pollution' in the eyes of many among the cultural elites and the more educated or respectable citizens. In fact, it seemed to be the main symbol of all those anomalies that were brought by the post-socialism in Romania. As I elaborate it in Chapter 1, similarly to many other troubling issues in Romania and Bucharest at that time, *manele* as a form of 'low culture', or *manelişti*, the genre's enthusiasts (and 'folk devils' in the eyes of many[3]) also seemed to be omnipresent – or more precisely, they seemed to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. This experience was very troubling, as I was in a desperate search

[2] I'm grateful to Miruna Tirca and her colleagues back then at the Komunitas Association who brought me to the neighbourhood for the first time.
[3] For the original concept, see: Cohen, (1987 [1972]).

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for a field-site, a place where I can live and do ethnography, as well as handle the general sense of disorientation in Bucharest at the very late 2000s. At this stage, I was keen on meeting Mr. Dan Bursuc, originally a Roma music performer, but primarily known as a leading producer and manager of *manele.* Bursuc invited me one afternoon to the club called 'Million dollars' that he led. At the entrance a car was waiting with a chauffeur who brought me directly to his villa. We had an extended conversation on the origins, the past and the present of the music industry in Romania. At the end of our conversation, I hesitantly asked him for advice regarding my research dilemmas. He told me confidentially that if I really want to understand the genre and all that is behind it, I should move to Ferentari, the infamous neighbourhood in the south-west of Bucharest, since this music "originates from there", and it is also "there" where I will see "the life" that this music was born out of. This urban ethnography on street life, value and exchange – and not on music *per se* – is the product of my effort to follow the advice made by Mr. Bursuc[4].

This Introduction chronicles certain key events and experiences which drew my attention to the topics that provide the bulk of this dissertation, and thus encapsulate some of the main themes that I analyse in the subsequent chapters. Such is the case with an episode which I narrate further, and which I chose to open my dissertation with not only because it provides the general setting for my text, but also because it stands for a main instances of the way in which physical violence and joking relations[5] can be intertwined in everyday forms exchange or transaction – especially when new relations are to be established, and the partners strive to find out the intentions of others that at the same time they might to try to partly hide or cover mutually. The event I narrate represents the most extreme case when some inhabitants reacted with manifest anger and outrage to my local presence (as a foreign student or researcher) during my long-term fieldwork in the neighbourhood. In this respect, the unfolding of this event may be also the subject of as an exercise in engaging with the way the ethnographer can serve as the '>container< for the emotions of interlocutors, that is often a starting point of making connections between emotion and thought and hence learning from field experience (Borneman, 2014). It was argued

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[4] As I return to it in the coming Chapter with reference to a wider array of issues, the media-saturated scandals and public outrage or 'national embarrasment' around manele, the one related to the negihborhood in Bucharest, and to the Gypsies as such shared many patterns in common.
[5] For Mauss' original treatise on joking relations, see: Mauss, 2013.

recently with regards to the sociality of violence (Bahre 2015) that the researcher's dependence on certain informants may influence the account of violence itself. This is exemplified by the frequent analytic tendency to simply delegate the sources of violence somewhere outside the domain of personal relationships with one's informants (which made the ethnographic research possible in the first place), and thereby make these sources 'blind spots' of ethnographic research. Indeed, this sense of unease may be one of the reasons behind the widespread tendency to avoid discussing such instances of violence at the micro level of daily interaction. As an alternative approach, Bahre proposes to consider the ways in which violent acts 'feel at home', or are even central in the formation of mutuality and sociality (*ibid*. 2). So it might seem to go against the grain to start an ethnographic account by introducing a situation that entails an obvious instance of failure on behalf of the researcher and exhibits the limits of the latter's collaboration with interlocutors in the field. It is probably even more so as regards the moments when ethnographers experienced some form of refusal, on behalf of the very people with whom they strove to collaborate. Moreover, to focus on violent incidents or tendencies among people relegated to the fringes of their societies appears to feed on sensationalism or to reinforce stereotypes. This is, in fact, the very issue that I seek to address by narrating this episode.

We are Ferentarists!

At the beginning of my fieldwork in the 'most infamous' (*cel mai rău famat*) neighbourhood of Bucharest, Ferentari, the place had long been a regular supplier of scandalous stories for the public. Being an ultimate 'Gypsyland' (*țigănie*) or 'ghetto' in town, Ferentari was unanimously described to me as being home to some of the most run-down housing stock with the most miserable living-conditions, thieves, criminals, drug-abuse, vote-trafficking and the general ill behaviour attributed to the urban poor. The range of neighbourhood-related 'hot issues' could include almost anything that served as a source of shame and embarrassment to decent citizens who wished to see their city becoming finally more "civilized" (*civilizat*).

The presence of a foreign fieldworker in the city's ultimate "no-go area" turned out to be an intriguing story for journalists in their quest for astonishing reports and I found myself more

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than once in the situation of being sought by media workers from Bucharest, and later also from abroad. In the meantime, violence had become an endemic topic in accounts on Roma settlements in Eastern Europe, ranging from the conflicts between local Roma and non-Roma populations in countries like Hungary, to what came to be known as the "Roma security crisis" (Demossier, 2014; Fassin, 2010), resulting in the expulsion of eastern European Roma migrants from France (and other Western states) to their home countries. Especially in the aftermath of the expulsions of Roma migrants from France – which gave a new impetus to foreign correspondents to report about some of the most spectacularly miserable poor settlements in Romania, as the putative places of departure of those Roma migrants who became visible in the cities of France – the quest was on the rise for relatively well-informed mediators who could speak about these neighbourhoods.

I refused nearly all invitations for media appearances, partly because of concerns with the media approach that seemed to focus on sensationalism and thereby reinforce territorial stigmatization, and partly because of my unease with the prospect of guiding media crews around the neighbourhood as if on an urban safari. Many locals that I had become acquainted with were already saturated with their recurrent exposure to the prying glances of outsiders, whose usual focus lay on the few streets where the area's most deteriorated housing units were located, and which were then taken for a synecdoche of the whole neighbourhood as a zone of spectacular social decay. Some selected aspects were made to stand for the whole of the place, since the 'name of the whole is appropriated for use as a signifier for the part, and the rest is transformed into a blank spot on the mental map of the whole' – as an application of a rule that divides territories of unequivocal 'goodness' from their many opposites (Böröcz 2006: 124-125). Indeed, while these streets and buildings were employed to stand for the whole neighbourhood in media representations, TV-reports or online videos, for local inhabitants they were active reminders of a territorial stigma (Wacquant 2008). In other words, these were edifices that seemed to radiate the disrepute that they all had to cope with, which entangled all of them as potentially 'all the same and equal' in a common dishonoured status, irrespective of their own stance, ethnic belonging or actual habitat in the neighbourhood.

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Yet another part of my refusal to be interviewed stemmed from my own vulnerabilities as a lone foreign fieldworker dealing with topics such as poverty, marginality, and the Roma, that in the meantime were becoming hot issues and apparently getting out of hand in a coalescing European public sphere. In this context, the joining in of an increasing number of voices with various claims for expertise, involvement and legitimacy often resulted in confusions or misunderstandings around the respective issues, as well as cycles of mutual suspicion, blame or attempts at mutual discrediting between the interlocutors.

As it often happens in the debates on poverty or marginalization, the very 'hotness' (such as the sense of urgency in terms of intervention) guarantees that the related debates, whether scholarly ones or not, become heated, passionate and controversial. It may be even more so in times of crises and large-scale political and economic transformations, as it was the case in the postsocialist transition and the emergence of the 'New Europe'. For example, a partner in a dispute might attribute problematic points to another one who claims that these points have never been made. Or perhaps they both use the word 'ideology' or 'ideological' as a pejorative label in order to discredit the other's account because it 'distorts reality'[6]. At the same time, it is because of the very *hotness* of these issues that academic accounts on ghettos and dangerous places, hustlers and down-and-outs, can aspire to success in the non-academic segments of the book market. The mission of 'combating stereotypes' or 'giving voice to the excluded' in the name of engaged work can be used as an excuse for resorting to journalistic, or ethically dubious or simply low standard solutions in the field of social sciences. These topics are conceived as *problems* not only in the academic sense of the word – referring to a set of research questions – but also in vernacular terms, as in the notion of problem-families and in the context of policy making, under labels like social integration. Accordingly, scholars are urged to turn their results into plans for intervention. As it often recurs, the requests to make statements and give recommendations come way before the research process would have arrived at a phase we might define as middle-range theory. In the need to fulfil all requirements, scholars make an urgent

[6] Although its not directly related to my concerns here, but good examples can be found for these tendecies in the debtate provoked by Loïc Wacquant's severe and extensive criticism of American urban ethnography (Wacquant, 2002), but indeed several European examples can be also enumerated, especially since the ongoing 'Europeanization' of Roma issues.

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switch from the scale of their empirical findings to high levels of abstraction labelled by general concepts like poverty, exclusion, the Roma or the Afro-Americans. At this step speculation can become inevitable, which then leaves room for controversies and translates into the criticism of being *ideological*, or else taking part in projects of 'decision-based evidence making, tailored to the needs of policy elites and politicians on the lookout for accessible catchphrases to woo a jaded electorate' (Slater, 2011). These political and moral conditions have a decisive role in the processes that keep many studies of poverty and social marginality at a relatively poor level of theorization.

Still, there was one occasion during my fieldwork when I accepted an interview for a TV-program dedicated to the ethnic Hungarian minority in Romania. I clarified to the crew that I did not want to participate in any video-recordings in the neighbourhood, as I was not going to reveal my acquaintances there to the camera. Apart from filming in some other locations in town, we eventually recorded the bulk of the interview in another district of Bucharest, in and around the block of flats where the journalist lived, as she and the other members of the crew all agreed that this environment could easily be taken for Ferentari. During the interview I was careful to not even utter the name of the neighbourhood, so as to ensure its full anonymity. Our shared assumption with the crew was that the material, broadcasted as part of an early afternoon program dedicated to ethnic Hungarians and with only subtitles in Romanian, is not expected to have a lot of viewers in Bucharest, let alone in the neighbourhood.

A few months before this interview, I had started to hang out with one of the male-dominated "cliques" (*gască*) in Ferentari, organized around Bibi, a middle-aged, divorced, knowledgeable and well-known man of the street in the area where I lived. He could trace back several generations of his family that lived here already, which was otherwise not very common for most inhabitants I got to know later on in the neighbourhood. Still, despite the many days, afternoons and evenings that we spent around the street corner next to a local grocery store with Bibi and the men in his hang-out group, a certain air of suspicion still persisted among us. The sociality that we managed to establish was thus rather vulnerable, permanently exposed to the malicious rumours from within or outside the group that could easily reinvigorate mistrust. However, by the time they were already sufficiently inebriated, Bibi and the other men from the

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hang-out group obligingly entered the role of complaisant local hosts, and took to teaching me famous "proverbs" or "sayings" (*vorbe*) that contained their wisdom concerning the rules of this world or else what we may call local knowledge, such as "life's a bitch, if you don't fuck her, she is going to fuck you", or: "oh so many wretched people, oh so many unfucked pussies" (*câtă lume amărâtă, câtă pizdă nefututată*). In addition to these sayings, they also liked to play on their mobile phones (and occasionally to sing) those popular slow songs known to Romanian speakers as folk melodies for "listening" (*ascultare*), before they went back to lecturing me about the past and the present of the neighbourhood and their own coping strategies for getting by, experiences from prison, or the nature of everyday life in Romania as a "shit country" (*ţară de căcat*), or about issues of national and global politics, such as the fall of America and the rise of China that would give way to a foreseeable war or the impending end of the world. However, the following day this didactic conviviality would fade away, only to be replaced by mutual neglect as if between people who are quasi-unknown and in any case indifferent to each other. Hence, each new encounter with this clique marked a whole new beginning for me, which made it almost impossible to anticipate when and why they would be friendly or hostile to me again, or whether it was all a matter of joke or something to be taken seriously.

Quite contrarily to the earlier assumptions we had with the journalist concerning the viewership of her program destined to the Hungarian minority in Romania, the day after it had been aired I understood that the news about my appearance on TV had spread around the neighbourhood like wildfire. While some of my neighbours in our block of flats were appreciative about it, some of the men from Bibi's hang-out group started to propagate among their peers in the street that I was a secret police agent (possibly paid by Americans), which they claimed I had admitted publicly myself in this interview in Hungarian. In spite of the apparent nonsense of the situation – after all it is hard to imagine a proper spy who goes on TV to disclose his occupation – the rumour was efficient in the sense that for several weeks I could hardly go out and spend time in the streets without someone throwing the same blame at me – similarly to the functioning of stigma, which reduces the whole person to one tainted, discounted attribute and the danger it represents, and which it is impossible to get rid of entirely (Goffman 1990 [1963]). These explanations for the broadcast mushroomed in the street and they were hard, if not impossible to keep under control. The accusation for espionage was also efficient as it fostered

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the most twisted way possible of testing trust: it is a kind of accusation that is impossible to be proven wrong on the basis of facts.

In the face of these developments, I decided not to search for the company of Bibi and his fellows anymore, but only met them very occasionally from then on. In fact, most of the ethnographic material in this dissertation dates back to the times after this incident, and its main protagonists are other than the men from this "clique" (*gasca*) or 'bottle-gang'. This early stage of my fieldwork, with the ambiguous encounters with Bibi's gang and the rumours about me being a secret spy, can be seen, then, as part of a 'pilot' stage of my research, or of its proto-history, but they approximate in a condensed manner many of the topics that I develop in the coming chapters.

It was several months after the initial incident following the scandal because of my interview, that one evening me and my flatmate, a Romanian writer with whom I shared a rented flat in the neighbourhood, found ourselves once more at the same street corner with the grocery store next to the local park which was the usual gathering venue for Bibi and the men who used to hang out with him. Having just returned home after some exploits in Turkey, Bibi now worked as a house painter at renovations on occasions that he arranged with his acquaintances from the neighbourhood, and was just talking about the next day's tasks when we joined him and the others. As an overture to our gathering, he reinstated the principles of equity and mutuality, as more fundamental than any of the differences of status and achievement which separate men from one another:

> I see we drink together; eventually it all goes for the better. If you wait for a beer, I have one, or if you have one, the other way around. If you don't give me to eat, I don't give you to eat. (…) We all live on this earth (*pământ*), the same blood flows in your hands as in the other's, we shit the same way, the idea is to be humans (*ideea e să fim oameni*). You can study for forty years, you can have nothing, the idea is to be a human wherever you go, because God made us equal, all in our bare dicks (*în pula goală*). (…) Man, I don't want anything else from you than respect, like I also respect you.

These assertions were part of the familiar ways in which men in the street accepted each other in brotherly terms, such as those of sharing and mutuality, the oneness of blood or else the

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fact of all being born the same way with a "bare dick" (*pula goală*). As I discuss at length in the chapter about the street economy of the neighbourhood, the prolonged cycles of mutual invitations for drinks were one of the most elementary, but still highly ritualized forms of exchanging respect among the men in the street[7]. In the original Maussian model about the obligatory return of gifts, where the honour of the exchange partners is at stake, in some instances, the objects that are given and returned are of equal value, but in others one exchange partner may strive to conspicuously overbid the other, as a way of installing hierarchy between them. (Mauss, 1990 [1954]) Among the men in the street, to "esteem" or "dignify" (*a face cinste*) each other in this way was a practice regulated by principles of equity, one in which men accepted each other as "brothers" (*frati*), without any need for actual blood-relations. This is why it was so important that during such gatherings each invitation be reciprocated as soon as possible, as in exchange relations where the partners are at pains to get rid of the sense of obligation encoded in the gesture of gift-giving, so as to liberate themselves from the misrecognition and domination that Bourdieu found so central to the functioning of exchange relations (1977). In the present case, the men who took part in such sessions of mutual "honouring" were always very explicit about the rules and principles behind their action. For example, as a constitutive part of their voluntary assembly, partners were recurrently elaborating explanations about the way one call by a person induces the next call by another, and one bestowal should be the exact equivalent of the other, as expressed in Bibi's statement cited above.

This shared ideal was of course violated in various ways in the course of everyday practice, and not only because the men's equality and generosity with each other was in inevitably strained relations with their households and wives[8] (Stewart 1997). Perhaps an even greater threat to the association of equals was embodied by the figure of the "profiteer" (*profitor*), who only pretends to share the principles of mutuality as a form of deception in the pursuit of selfish interests. In other words, the vulnerable forms of sharing and "collaboration" that men strived to achieve through their prolonged sessions of mutual "honouring" were not only to be

[7] In the conceptualization of respect, I build on the work of Bourgois, 2003.

[8] As it was mentioned, Bibi himself was a divorced man, and as he said sometimes he did "not regret anything" about this fact, but the other men from his company were all living in marriage or life partnership, similarly to the great majority of adult men in the neighbourhood.

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protected from the intrusive presence of women or the parsimonious consideration for the economy of the household, but from certain other men just as well.

That evening, a sense of unresolved tension and insecurity was in the air between us from the very beginning, growing all the denser with Bibi's accentuated performance of generosity. Contrary to the rules of equal share and mutuality, that night Bibi was buying two, instead of just one bottle at once for each man present, without allowing for any reciprocation. This was not just as an expression of lavish munificence, or the usual gift that implicitly presumes return after a given time, but rather an assertion of power and control by which he pinned us down by his side around the street corner as if on his own territory, no matter how small or transient. Having thus established himself in a position of domination, he turned against me and my flatmate, as arrogant intruders in the neighbourhood:

> Have I bothered you with something? Maybe verbally. Verbally for sure. But I have nothing against you (*nu am nimic cu tine*). I called you a spy, maybe I was wrong, or maybe I wasn't. I asked you many times, why do you throw the maths book into the fire? So many problems, you went crazy with your problems! It's a suicide. Well, you see you don't know anything, with all your books, because you learnt a lot, but you don't have that thing, from the people (*dar nu ai aia din popor*) and the same goes for the dick (*pula*). You see, you don't know it all, after all the books you read, you see, Harry Potter, you see?

Several points emerge from this peremptory speech that Bibi directed at me (addressing me by a nickname I had in the neighbourhood, among others). Firstly, that he had seen my reaction of withdrawing from his company following their accusations of espionage as a proof of cowardice, similar to the gesture of throwing a math book into fire instead of solving the exercises it in. In fact this behaviour is peculiar for those who lack the "school of life", the practical reason or 'savage science' (Wacquant, 2004: 149), one can only get "from the people" (*din popor*). Secondly, Bibi's denunciation of studying in the formal sense as a form of "suicide" was a straight reversal of the widespread notion outside of Ferentari, namely that this was a place of social (if not physical) death – as a act of exclusion in itself (Bourdieu, 2000: 153; Vigh 2009). In fact, as a foreign student in Bucharest, I often had to clarify to educated acquaintances what I was doing in what they thought was the most horrific part of their town. Once in such a situation

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I referred to ethnographic fieldwork as an attempt to understand the everyday life of such settings as this neighbourhood from within, and a young man replied that such an endeavour was just as utterly hopeless as scrutinizing a cemetery in order to find *life* or anything lively there. Likewise, in most media reports, the neighbourhood was apparently populated by sub-human beings, such as drug-addicts, criminals, and victims of extreme poverty, whose last remaining ways of interacting with the rest of society can only be based on their own sense of shame, complemented by the compassion, regret or fear that they arouse in others. This resembles what Humphrey described in a different postsocialist context with regards to the social distribution of fear as an entitlement, whereby 'in a relational field >having fear< comes to be attached as a property of certain subjects, while >fear-arousal< is a property of certain objects or beings' (Humphrey 2013: 286). The relationship between these two sides can be mediated by magical means, as it is by symbolically consuming others, 'that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing times', as the Comoroffs noted on zombies and occult economies in post-apartheid South Africa (1999: 165). In other words, such encounters may be conceived among the potential ethnographic vantage points where the constitution of the 'post-', as in postsocialist and postcolonial states, is to be discerned through emerging uncertainties as much as through the enduring hierarchies in relations of the centres and margins (eg. Chari and Verdery 2009).

That night at the street corner we found ourselves in a situation in which personal forces are put on a test, that essentially consisted of blurring the distinction between what is said or done for real and what is only mimicked by those who 'arouse' fear. Such challenging games are based on the management of ambiguities through masterful acts of code-switching with a decisive effect on the modality of the (verbal and material) exchange, and therefore also on the persons involved. I have often witnessed such vital forces at play in the street, when violent appearances would finally end up in the affirmation of community and conviviality between those who are "laughing and joking" (*râdem, glumim*) together. In the course of the gathering, the other men from Bibi's company tried to ease the accumulation of tensions by resorting to such code-switching, either by beginning to sing together and doing spontaneous vocal improvisations on well-known songs in order to enhance the mood, or by announcing suddenly that the whole situation in which we were was simply a joke or a "hoax", much like in a candid camera TV-show. In spite of these attempts, however, they could not relieve the tension. Bibi was

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implacable, and he finally burst out in anger, denouncing the profound sense of disrespect that our behaviour or simple presence had triggered. To me it seemed that his anger was based on a misunderstanding between us concerning what I have said on TV, and Bibi also thought that he had found us on a "lie" as to why we had abandoned him and his company in the meantime. Thus, being exposed to his suspicion and already being given evident signs that we were considered worthless, my flat-mate and I tried to say goodbye and leave the place. At this point of the night, Bibi picked up a wooden stick, and started to hit us with it, so as to push us back to our previous places, to make it obvious that we had no way to make our leave against his wish.

> Don't take me as a fool (*sa nu ma luati la misto*) Sit down there (*stai mo acolo jos*), on my money, you stay there! Who the fuck are you? You wanted to leave like a coward! I don't give a fuck about it (*ma doare-n pula*) if I beat you, I did fifteen years in prison, I can do three more. If you were welcome at my place, in this dirty dining room you see here, and accepted by my family, that is, my friends, but hey, you lunatic Harry Potter, I am talking to you mostly, you are fooling me constantly! I drank with you and this evening I break your bones with this stick. Harry Potter, do you want to get beaten? What the fuck are you doing here? May my daughters die [if I lie to you], I will kill these cocksuckers with spanking! (*Sa moara fetele mele de nu-i omor cu bătaie pe bulangii astia*). You laugh, but you will write a book on how you were beaten up in Ferentari, and how you went home lame, Harry Potter!

By this moment, what had initially started out as a consensual gathering of men engaging in mutual exchange in their "little square", as members of the hang-out group liked to call it (*pătrăţica noastră*), had turned into a state of capture. Bibi seemed to be sharing drinks as munificently as he was willing to take more years in prison because of us. Later on he rationalized his anger and gave further reasons for it, such as his suspicion that any endeavour on behalf of persons like us must be ironic and therefore degrading to the neighbourhood and to his kind of people, especially since we could do this all just because of our educated status. This contrast encapsulated the feeling of intrusion and suspicion they have of outsiders as much as decent peoples have of them in better parts of town. While he kept the stick in his hands as a notice to hold us back in the street-corner, he continued his joint presentation about the insult we had brought to his pride.

> What the fuck do you want to show? That you have books and you are cunning? (*şmecheri*) I move your ass to your face, do you believe me? You went to the Hungarians

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> and you laughed at Ferentari (*ai facut de râs de Ferentari*) that they made you (*te au facut*) Harry Potter. I saw you on the screen, with my own thinking (*gândire*), stupid as it is, cause it's not as clever as yours. You spoke there, what do you want to show?

Later on, by labelling us as "parvenus", Bibi assimilated us to a series of interventions from the outside that were threatening to subvert the life of the neighbourhood as it was known so far to men who spent much of their time out on the street like him. Conversely, in the course of the same performance, while waving the stick in his hand threateningly from time to time, Bibi declared himself and his peers as "lawbreakers" or "fools" who have their "wretched" position literally written on them. At a later stage of the night, Bibi called himself and his cronies "lawbreakers of their own".

> These a just some outsiders (*parveniti*) here, hey man, how long have we been drinking together? We got each other's dicks in our mouths, we were bullying each other since we were small children, we played in the sandbox, we played dimples (*ne am jucat gropita*), we kissed, we shitted on ourselves , fuck! We did not learn from the books, as you did, we were brawling (*ne am batut*), we are *Ferentaristi*. You lunatic, I didn't have money for food, for bread, I took it from this one, may my children die [if I lie]. That one maybe does not have bread at home, the other one does not have [something else], we are wretched cause we did not learn from books, we are lawbreakers of our own (*infractorii noştri proprii*). Well, is it difficult what is written on me, that I'm wretched? (*amărât*) Poor me! (*vai de capul meu*). Nay, I am a fool, but this one [the stick] is also ordered by a fool, if I am a fool.

The extraordinary bodily and somewhat obscene rituals that Bibi enumerated marked some of the most intense human experiences of sharing and mutuality between men as they really are, with their "bare dick" (*pula goală*) like at birth and in death – or during those defining life experiences such as the times spent in the army or in prison – when there is no way for any further pretence or acts of camouflage, which are the typical features of "dummies" (*figuranţi*). In this elevated state of communion in the street, men like Bibi and his fellows came to be released from the everyday constraints that arise from and are symbolized by the household, and also from the hierarchy which renders them marginal in their society. And yet, our very presence in their space of liberation served, beyond our intentions, as a reminder of this hierarchy that they strove to escape. By asserting themselves as "Ferentarists", they proudly refuted this hierarchy and reclaimed personal worth for themselves as inhabitants of a territorially stigmatized

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neighbourhood and as "lawbreakers of their own", against the actual "fools" (impersonated here by us as intruders) who think they know the workings of the world just because of their schooling. In effect, the more boastful such an educated individual appears to be, the more ingenious provocations he calls for – typically in the form of riddles or other proverbial forms – that are the true measures of actual vim.

Bibi's passionate enumeration of the common rites that reinforced their sense of belonging to each other and to the neighbourhood was clearly a way to reclaim and defend their intimate space against our intrusion as ignorant outsiders in their setting. As I elaborate in the chapter on urban history and the spatial and social development of the neighbourhood, this is a place of duplicity, both because it is territory stigmatized as a "Gypsyland" (*ţigănie*) that in fact hosts a mixed population Roma and non-Roma Romanian inhabitants, but also because in historical and structural terms it functions as a buffer-zone in Bucharest (rather than a 'ghetto' or 'Gypsy settlement') absorbing populations both from outside and inside of town – as with workers who arrived and settled down here from rural areas of the country during Communism (Marcińczak et al. 2014), or with settlers who moved to the neighbourhood in the postsocialist period because they lost their homes in other parts of town. One practical reverberation of this history is the widely shared local ideology, according to which people judge each other here strictly on the basis of personal qualities, and not in terms of "racism" (*ură de rasă*), or the groups to which they belong. As goes the common proverbial statement that I heard very frequently when it came to group-belonging, "there is no forest without brushwood" (*nu e pădure fără uscături*), meaning that an essentialized group cannot be judged on the basis of the performances of their individual members, or the other way around, and instead individuals must be accountable for their own actions. Inhabitants of the neighbourhood also relied on this popular ideology of 'anti-groupism' in their everyday neighbourly relations – to reiterate Brubaker's famous analytic concept of 'groupism' and to contrast it with a folk concept (Brubaker, 2004)[9].

[9] Brubaker and his colleauges relied on framework associated with the concept in their research on nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in the Transylvanian city of Cluj (Brubaker et al 2006). For a critique of the study see: Poenaru and Pulay 2009.

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Based on their 'anti-groupism', partners strived to find their commonalities – and not their differences – most of the time. Two men (whether Roma or non-Roma Romanians) could have a friendly talk in front of their blocks of flats about their shared passion for fishing and the next time they should go together to some of the lakes around town; after which one of them would immediately share with me in a confidential manner that in fact the other is an unreliable moron or "profiteer" who is to be ignored in any case. Nevertheless, the pretence of conviviality remains intact just as well.

Contrarily to these popular ideologies of anti-groupism, to practices of neighbourliness and to the everyday quest for similarities instead of differences, on that night our ambiguous encounter with Bibi and his hang-out group was one of the more exceptional moments when oppositions between different social standings are openly or even violently confronted. In a previous quote, he emphasized the difference in our social standings by referring to my education, and his own lack thereof, implying that, in order to strive in his world, it would serve me better to possess what he and his peers called 'the school of life' (*şcoala vieţii*), a category to which I return in the Chapter on being "civilized" and the other central forms of social categorization in the neighborhood. Bibi's self-affirmation as a "lawbreaker" was not only opposed to the behaviour of what he called smartarses, but also to the labour market position, jobs and livelihood strategies that many of these men shared. In fact, in less heated moments, and especially while dissociating themselves from certain blameworthy others in the neighbourhood, they would introduce themselves as rather modest or restrained ordinary folks, such as workers or "budgetary persons" (*bugetari*) who just mind their own business. On that same night, one of Bibi's fellows, a Gypsy man in his 30s who at that time worked for one of the greatest companies in town hiring bodyguards elaborated on the ambiguity of their position on the labour market in the following way:

> It's not going well for us; it's half-way to worse (*jumate mai spre rau*). Well, fifty-fifty, it's hard. You pay the gas, there is the light to pay, the children. But it's not bad either. We keep moving yet (*încă ne mişcăm*), so to say. It's a bit more towards the bad (*mai un pic spre rau*). We are somewhere on a barrier. Before it was much better, it cannot be compared; salaries decreased. We are working, not doing other combinations. But with ten millions [1000 RON, approx. 225 EUR] what can you do? You are not doing anything.

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In spite of their actual jobs, or unemployment in official terms, mostly by means of their joking relations, these men could keep on rehearsing with their different subjectivities and their transitions between different spatial and social domains – such as the street and the household, the spaces of "civilization" and "vagabondage", or for that matter what we may call the formal and the informal economy (Hart 1973, 2000). Needless to say, all the opposite elements in these binaries are in an obviously hierarchical relationship in terms of the social value they are attributed by the wider society. However, for many of my interlocutors, the way to secure a viable livelihood, a life that is not just possible but also worth living, was to perform regular shifts between these domains, or stick to the barrier in-between – if not in daily practice, then at least in their temporary forms of excess and performance.

The value that the men affirmed were directly reactive to the experienced threat of denigration or dispraise, and its collateral outcome of shame imposed on them as "wretched" and "foolish" people from the neighbourhood, a public laughing-stock. This is what Bibi sensed from the interview I gave on TV, where I revealed in public the nickname I got from them. As I had to realize, the disclosure of an item from the mutually crafted but still fragile intimacy between us for the sake of developing my public profile as a venturous student living and working in the 'most infamous' neighbourhood of Bucharest, was also an act of trespassing some of the symbolic boundaries that secured these men against an outside world that was notoriously scornful and suspicious towards them. As a response, the assertion of his foolishness in this case was different from the otherwise customary ways of labelling someone a "fool" (*prost*) or a "dupe" (*fraier*) in order to mark the direct opposites of the highly-praised faculty known as "cunning" or "slyness" (*şmecherie*), and instead functioned as an antiphrasis that emphasized how offensive our transgression had been. Hence, this time, his "madness" was of another kind, one that manifested itself in the potential for losing self-control or restraint, therefore being able to act in an unpredictable and possibly violent manner. As I elaborate in the chapter on the street economy in the neighbourhood, the promotion of such potentialities was itself a way of exerting power over one's immediate environment precisely by generating fear and respect in various conjunctions. The same goes for the strategic use of mistrust by men in relation to their female partners, as a ways of exerting control on them, complemented by hints to the imminence and spontaneity of violence. To sum up, in reaction to being depicted as fear-arousing beings, in such

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situations men took hold of their capacity to arouse fear and acted on it in a deliberate manner, thereby turning themselves into subjects, to return to Humphrey's earlier dichotomy. In a sense, it is this deliberateness that makes the difference between fear-arousing beings and subjects, as for the latter the same act is a matter of purpose and strategy, rather than some immanent features beyond control – as it is assigned to them so often by others.

Eventually, the only way to solve the tense situation between us and Bibi with the members of his hang-out group was to invite them all to our flat and to serve them food and further drinks. This was an effort to reconstitute a spirit of brotherly sharing that is based on the division between the street and the household whereby stepping over from the first to the latter represents a transition to a domain of higher value, where more relaxed, honest and conflict-avoiding interaction is to be expected, as opposed to conflict-seeking, and the feasible performances of violence or simply "bullshit" (*prostie*) that were commonly associated with the street. On our way towards the building, we sought to avoid predictable rebukes on the following day from our neighbours for disrespecting their rest, since it was well past midnight, and tried to lull the men into silence, but this served rather as a further stimulation to Bibi to express his anger at our expense. *"May my children die* [if I lie to you]*, I'm going to beat you up, let's go upstairs!"* – he shouted while we were going up the staircase, but this time already clearly as a joke for us, and maybe just an arousal of the already existing fears of our neighbours regarding the putative encroachments by "vagabonds" and other street predators into their block (I return to this in the Chapter on "civilization" and its several oppositional categories in the neighbourhood). We spent the rest of the night reverently listening to many lamenting songs "for listening" (*ascultare*) by Marin Doru, one of the much appreciated Gypsy performers in the neighbourhood, some of which gave Bibi the occasion to resume his habit of spelling out for us pieces of his wisdom. Thus, towards the end of the night, he had already withdrawn from much of what he had said and done beforehand in the street, in order to dispel the potential stigma of being just some clamorous and "stinking Gypsies" (*ţigani împuţiţi*). His allusion to this unwanted label was crucial also because at least in terms of meaning, it was the tally of the previous affirmation of being *Ferentarists*, men of the neighbourhood with a shared history and a series of rituals that forged out their mutual ties, as well as the markers of their difference against outsiders, and even part of the reason why outsiders imposed these labels onto them. As we have seen, together with

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other forms of excess, the symbolic or physical contact with dirt could be constitutive to these ritual experiences, while at the same time the idea of such a contact is also at work in the stigma of 'stink'. And, while outsiders who disregard the neighbourhood and its inhabitants can only perceive this latter dimension, Bibi spelled out here the former one as well, as a way to mitigate our perception and perhaps to pose us with the choice of being either inside or outside their *Heimat*.

Having argued that Ferentari was a place of duplicity, it must be said that this principle was at work not only in the relations between people, but also in relation to the environment. As I return to it in the Chapter on the management of precarity, "junkies" (*drogaţi*) were the main exponents of a certain 'sub-human' condition, or the 'lowest of the low' in the hierarchy of social value in the neighbourhood, many of whom were also homeless. During the fieldwork, their local presence was on the rise due to the revolutionary changes in the Bucharest drug-market after the appearance of the so-called "legal drugs" (*legale*) that could be freely purchased from specialized shops under the pretext that they are fertilizers. I observed a broader mechanism whereby the state and the authorities 'solve' structurally accumulated social problems by making them invisible in the city centre and relegating all of them towards marginal neighbourhoods. This was the case also with these legal drug-shops which remained open along the main road of the area for a long time after their equivalents were already banned in the centre (or better-off zones of the city). The disparity only attracted more drug-users to the neighbourhood. The situation was similar with Bucharest's notorious stray dog-problem. While at the very beginnings of my fieldwork, stray dogs could be seen also in the central area of the city, later on they completely disappeared from there, but in the neighbourhood stray dogs were present throughout the period of my research. The many stray dogs of the neighbourhood used to stay under cars during the day, but could take over certain spots in the street at night by gathering and barking there in herds. The omnipresence of stray dogs was in fact one of the prime reasons why inhabitants themselves used to label their neighbourhood as a "savage" (*salbatic*) place in some respects, one that "permits dirt" (*lăsa jeg*). I analyze this notion of "permissiveness" and the various practices of "not caring" in the Chapter on social categorization. Cautionary tales and practical advice were shared among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood about how to engage with stray dogs (the same was the case with junkies, as I return to it in the Chapter on precarity). These advices or

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local forms of practical knowledge started from partial domestication (such as allowing some of them to enter the staircase in a block at night, in exchange for their recognition), through the ones about the manifold ways of bundling them off if they are approaching (such as throwing them biscuits that should be in one's pocket at all times). Many stories were about cases when inhabitants of the neighbourhood managed to get away from stray dogs – in some extreme cases maybe even at the price of losing a coat or some other piece of clothing that was already in the dog's mouth. Nevertheless, the relationship of men like Bibi or other regulars out in the street to stray dogs was slightly different than those pieces of advice in the name of creating local social order. These men conceived of the dogs in humanizing terms as their own "children" (*copiii noştri*), caressing them in the street or giving them names. After all, this was another instance of territorial stigmatization: a process that departs from the structural accumulation of social problems in designated areas or 'social wastelands', where the stigma works, on the one hand, as a source of shame, i.e. a disciplinary device to contain its human targets under suspicion and scrutiny in a shared state of dishonour. On the other hand the stigma also exerts its force by ensuring a protective shield to those who are exposed to it and persist by virtue of the ties that bind them together as a 'community of the flawed'. (Goffman, 1990 [1963]; Liebow 2003 [1967]; Wacquant; 2008). As I elaborate in the following section, this enduring 'Janus-faced' nature of (urban) marginalization may orient us towards the question of why such territories provide so fertile grounds for the burgeoning of 'public fictions' and other rumours within and beyond their realms; but it also helps to define the conditions in which certain modes of creating worth or value becomes possible to their inhabitants. In the coming section, I continue to elaborate the outline of the dissertation's main themes.

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Street, household and value

The above cited episode, men's declaration of togetherness in terms of a "family" staying together in their "dirty dining room" – that is the streetcorner – as a communion, together with other scenes of street-life and, the overall local public sphere of in the neighbourhood are altogether reminiscent of what Liebow once described in his classic slum ethnography about the common plight of men who live with the fear, if not the consequences of economic and social

failure as providers in their households, which then direct them towards the domain of the street much like to a last resort:

> The streetcorner is, among other things, a sanctuary for those who can no longer endure the experience or prospect of failure. There, on the streetcorner, public fictions support a system of values which, together with the value system of society at large, make for a world of ambivalence, contradiction and paradox, where failures are rationalized into phantom successes and weaknesses magically transformed into strengths (Liebow 2003 [1967]: 139).

Arguably, these points are part of a longer tradition of thought, familiar especially from ethnographies of the US ghetto, where dichotomies such as the 'mainstream' and the 'ghetto' (Hannerz, 2004 [1969]) were used by the authors in order to grasp an irresolvable duality in the everyday coping strategies and aspirations in conditions of urban marginality. In Liebow's original writing, the street represents a domain of ideals – such as that of brotherly equity or the indulgence in manly delights – that he defined as 'public fictions,' due to their momentary and redeeming qualities. These are pursued *in spite* rather than because of the objective social or economic conditions of these men, including the overwhelming consequences of deprivation in their lives and their chronic lack of resources to facilitate long term planning. Moreover, the fictitious character of such pursuits may be only enforced by the idea of street life as a last, ambiguous refuge for the downtrodden where they are left with few other chances apart from 'reinforcing stereotypes' at the margins of their societies. In fact, the association of stereotypes with something invented, as non-real or 'not true' (Herzfeld, 2004), that is to be replaced by reasonable if not directly benevolent portrayals of a given group is an argument that is often stressed by engaged scholars, social planners or urban activists. Their common approaches usually consider 'stereotypes' merely as fictions in the sense of products of malevolent imaginations, that are to be opposed (and possibly changed) simply by the promotion of more reasonable and dignifying portrayals of the same people. However, such perspectives can lose sight both of the wider conditions and of the micro-situations of exchange in which roles and divisions based on what may seem as stereotypes serve as currencies that acquire validity precisely because of their placement in that setting of actually existing – albeit unequal – social relationships. It is a familiar insight that marginal spaces or peripheries in general play a

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constitutive role in the designation of centres both in spatial terms (as with urban territories) and through the definition of socially distributed ideas of value, worthlessness or dishonour.

However, there are also different ways of relating centres and margins to each other beyond such dichotomies. According to Herzfeld (2004), marginal spaces may occupy rather central positions for the state as they can serve as distinguished 'storehouses' of the symbols and cultural practices which become appropriated by governments and bureaucratic apparatuses in order to secure their legitimacy and to establish intimate connections with their constituencies. In turn, for ordinary citizens such efforts may represent the very proofs of the state's complicity in nurturing some of those practices that are deemed to be corrupt or improper when considered from a strictly formal point of view. This issue is further elaborated and contextualized in the Chapter on crisis. Accordingly, marginal territories are inherently problematic from the point of view of governance, as space where state power has to be constantly expanded, and where it is also regularly challenged or criticized.

Opposed to the common sense idea of 'stereotype', Liebow used the concept of 'public fiction' in a different and much broader sense, in close connection to the social trajectories (as well as various public judgments) that were present in immediate social environment of 'streetcorner men'. Accordingly, even if the values shared and echoed by them in the street are diametrically opposed to some core principles of the household, this in itself does not render the latter more 'real' and the former more 'fictive' by any means. As I return to this in the chapter on the street economy, the relationship between the distinct domains of the household and the street – together with the particular practices that belong to each of them – is a strictly hierarchical one. In other words, we may recognize how in such an opposition as the one between the street and the household here, one item or domain is not only different, but also more valued than the other, in the sense that it represents a greater priority, while the less valued one can still function as a site for the full expression of less valued ideas, or the elaboration of less honourable pursuits that are socially permitted or even encouraged here (Dumont, 1986; Robbins 2007). This is already apparent in the practical distinctions that inhabitants of the neighbourhood made between the home and the street even in casual forms of talk, as already noted. Thus, to reiterate, on the one hand they would typically associate the street, and therefore street-talk with joking relations or

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rather "bullshit" (*prostie*) that should not be given too much credit by anyone. On the other hand, the general principle of the home and the household as the source of a person's or a family's worth and purity also finds an equivalent in this respect, as when it came to serious matters and sincere confessions that were to be made in someone's home space, such as in flats or courtyards. Even when the men found themselves in hang-out groups in the street, it was totally accepted if two of them moved a few meters away from the rest in case they had something important and confidential to discuss, without provoking any objections from the others – who thereby accepted the value difference between distinct subject matters and stakes.

By the same token, when brotherly gatherings of men in the street reached a stage when at least some participants were judged to be disorderly and boisterous, causing contention and animosity to prevail against the spirit of mutuality and equal sharing, a way of reconciliation was if someone from the group shouted out loud: *"each back to his house!" (fiecare la casa lui!).* This could be an obvious command for the acquiescence of all participants who then fled the scene – even if they could strongly resist a similar request for coming home in case it was addressed to them by their wives and not some fellow men. Families living in blocks of flats with hot water connection, and having members who went to make money abroad, could sometimes invest into their bathrooms conspicuously, beautifying it or even installing loud-speakers there so that one could listen to music while having shower – even if in comparative terms the rest of their flats (let alone the buildings themselves) remained in poor conditions. The investment in conspicuous bathrooms in a neighbourhood that otherwise "permits dirt" seemed to me one of the main ways of everyday engagement with marginalization and the territorial stigma. The household is therefore a carrier of greater value in terms of the investments, but together with accumulation it is also a main symbol of self-restraint and decency ("civilization" after all, as I elaborate it in the Chapter on social categorization). Conversely, as I return to it in the chapter on the street economy, this is the reason why the domain of the street represented a constant challenge and indeed a source of resistance towards the domain of the household, a place of engaging in "combinations" (*combinatii*), with sometimes unpredictable losses but also gains, with the associated thrills.

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All these examples suggest some of the practical ways in which the domain of the street and street life (that we may also define in analytic terms as the local *public sphere* of the neighbourhood) was subordinated to the household in terms of value as a space of dishonesty, opposed to obedience (or in local terms being a "vagabond" or "bandit" opposed to being "civilized", as I elaborate it in the Chapter on categorization). However, as suggested before, as a less valued context, the street offered space for the elaboration of ideas and practices that went against the generally accepted modes of self-presentation in 'civilized' terms, but that were also conducive to experiments with men's potentials and inner drives in exchange with others, or those practices they embraced when forging out their practical philosophies of life, such as their trains of thought about how each man has to be a "bandit" sometimes in this world. Accordingly, these were the contexts where men could expose their disparagement of school or education in the formal sense, together with the valuing of the "school of life" that they liked to claim as their own domain of expertise in opposition to the former. In a similar vein, it was this context where they could make confessional statements about the perpetual antagonism between men and women in general and between themselves and their own wives or partners in particular, the latter being commonly represented as impersonators of greed and selfishness to whom men's only affiliation and dependency was maintained by their common offspring.

Indeed, one risk of this approach is the reinforcement of received ideas concerning the 'double-faced' demeanours of the poor, or their notorious tendencies for dissimulation. As I elaborate in the chapter on popular politics and social unrest, I heard such assumptions even from one of the Roma activists who came to the neighbourhood to implement their projects. As a way of counselling me on research and giving preparations for its prospective difficulties, he said with a laugh that in this neighbourhood I could probably get "ten different responses to the same question" even from one single person, be it "as simple" as the number of people sharing the same household. This half-joke given to me as advice brings to mind a point made by Oscar Lewis in his most famous essay, namely that people in persistent poverty are surely (or even painfully) aware of the dominant values of their societies, discuss them and may strive to share them as their own, but they do not live by them due to their relatively alienated position, so 'it is important to distinguish between what they say and what they do' (Lewis 1970: 71). These observations allude to probably one of the most dramatic consequences of poverty and

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marginality, namely the irreconcilability between the powerful, widely promoted regime of value, and the actual means that are available to them or that their shared *de facto* life conditions.[10] Such discrepancies between practices and the milieu may serve as 'a major spring of personal resistance, social innovation' and perhaps also broader transformations (Wacquant, 2016: 69). As I suggest in this dissertation, it is partly this plight (otherwise central to many ethnographies on poverty and marginality from various settings around the world) as well as the concentrated social efforts dedicated to its management in material and non-material terms that invites for closer engagement with anthropological value-theories (Graeber 2000; Skeggs 2011) in a case such as the territorially stigmatized, marginal neighbourhood presented in this account.

The main concepts of the dissertation

The notion of the street and street life are essential in the dissertation. There are two meanings and types of conceptualization that I relied on in this respect. First, the street obviously represents a 'public site' in the neighbourhood with its many boundaries: it is the sphere where residents live and engage with difference – including the moments of conviviality and closure – as they take part in agonistic encounters and negotiations with outcomes that are not always pre-determined (sometimes even violence) from imbalanced positions of power (Watson, 2006). As Watson argues, 'the public is not just about >talk<, it concerns bodies and their micro-movements', therefore 'bodies and public space are mutually constitutive' (ibid. 6). The question of the 'public' brings up a series of others issues. Because of the ongoing flow between public and private domains in the neighbourhood – including the partial privatization of bits and pieces of public territory such as the pavement, the street-corner or the most immediate areas around the household – the practical negotiations and re-negotiations of boundaries were almost continuous between neighbours. Accordingly, as I demonstrate in subsequent Chapters, public-private relations are highly negotiated in an urban context that is characterized by the ongoing 'privatization' or rather 'informalization of lifeworlds' – referring to the active out-door life,

[10] The tensions and conflicts resulting from this plight are also familiar from Fanon's work – which served as one of the otherwise few references that appeared in the writing by Lewis, when it came to the prospects of revolutionary change for the lives of the poor or at least what he called the 'high potential for protest' among them (Lewis 1970: 75.); a likely signal of what sort of a struggle he may have imagined to be joined by the people he wrote about.

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socializing and the forging solidarities beyond the family, but also to the (informal) subsistence and work, which provides another layer to the control of public space and the struggles between the authorities as well as the residents themselves (Bayat, 2012: 114)[11]. In order to avoid the analytic pitfall of finishing the work of interpretation at the point where it should start from – as it is often the case with works that end up with statements about 'porous' boundaries and 'blurred' categories in the place of conclusions – I take a relational approach to the matters of space and scale, as well as the ways in which the margins can obtain central importance in various domains where social order is at stake. All these issues return in the subsequent Chapters.

The issue of the street as public site also brings with itself the confrontation with territorial stigma, its effects and the potential local responses to it – including the ones related to fame, disrepute in collective as well as personal terms. Territorial stigma is an imposed form of collective dishonour which can create a sense of submission, that of being 'all the same and equal' in a shared state of worthlessness and shame at the bottom of the urban hierarchy (Wacquant, 2008; Slater, 2017). However, as critics of the original model already argued, territorial stigmatization do not necessarily lead to the emergence of 'impossible communities where members strive to get rid of collective dishonour by accusing 'micro-differences' in a spiral of mutual accusations, that are part of the attempt to 'throw away' the stigma similarly to a fireball. In our case the vivid scenes of street life, the aforementioned sense of neighbourhood pride or the use of public spaces for a variety of purposes (including forms of exchange at different levels) are already pointing into similar directions. The assumption that the power of territorial stigmatization is omnipresent is similar to the 'developmentalist' understandings of nationalism and nation-building (Brubaker et al, 2006) in so far the two both equates the putative scopes and the practical outcomes of a state-led mechanism or project. Assuming that the homogenizing project of nationalism unanimously achieves its goals in practice, is akin to the

[11] Bayat writes on the basis of experiences from Middle-Eastern cities (especially Cairo), and he argues that 'instead of forming collective protests to demand jobs or housing, poor people simply go ahead and acquire them by themselves through direct action. They succeed in doing so largely because the states under which they operate are the >soft-states,< in that despite their often authoritarian disposition and political omnipresence, they lack the necessary capacity, the hegemony and technological efficacy, to impose full 125 control over society (Bayat, 2012: 124-125).

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suggestion that the disciplinary use of territorial stigmatization is fully effective, shame leads to self-denial, community fragmentation and the desire to escape the discredited places or categories of belonging. Here I refer to a second, narrower concept of street as a public site, relying on the work of Bourgois with regards to the 'street culture of resistance' (Bourgois, 2003)[12].

Accordingly, instead of an endless accumulation of 'negative social capital', residents of the neighbourhoods tend to engage in complex relations of exchange and solidarity, relying on some of the main resources at their disposal – namely each other. In conceptual terms, the issue of these exchange relations provides the link between marginality, as a structural condition, and value-creation in both material as well as non-material terms. Throughout the subsequent chapters I rely on an anthropological understanding of value, both in material and non-material terms that persons enact while surviving and thriving – even in desperate circumstances – with the hope of leading meaningful lives. Although this might appear to be a simple approach, it still leads us to some of the core issues of anthropological (or more broadly, social scientific) thought if we consider how often the study of marginality remains limited to the research of either suffering or resistance, as the two analytic 'options', so to say, that are offered to be filled by the subjects of inquiry. In fact, both the concept of 'resistance' and 'suffering' have been extensively used and overused in a variety of context, which led to the inflation of their analytic currency (Ortner, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2014; Robbins, 2013). As I elaborate it further in the Chapter on the management of precarity, usual understandings of resistance tended to emphasize its 'infra-'or 'pre-political' aspects that are primarily targeted against the state, instead of the cases when 'resistance' rather takes the form of 'gridding' (Jansen, 2014), in other words social ordering in territories that are either abandoned or partially ignored by the state. In the present dissertation another layer of meaning is added to the issue 'resistance', one that rather translates to the 'endurance' or 'perseverance' on behalf of people who exercise 'social navigation' in fields that are also in motion (Vigh, 2009). Most of the protagonists of this account are 'getting by' and 'making do' precisely in such circumstances (Kideckel, 2008; Pine, 2012).

[12] As Bourgois famously argued in his ethnography of Puerto Rican crack dealers in East Harlem, the 'oppositional identities of street culture are both a triumphant rejection of social marginalization and a defensive denial of vulnerability', that emerge 'out of a personal search for dignity and a rejection of racism and subjugation', but as a form of resistance, street culture largely 'becomes an active agent in personal degradation and community ruin' (ibid. 8-9). While the work of Bourgois had a great influence on my research, in the present dissertation I provide a more diversified representation of street life and the trajectories of the people I got to know in the neighbourhood, one that is not focusing solely on social suffering (see: Robbins, 2013).

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Exchange relations are conducive to the way in which social persons generate value and develop their sense of worth or personhood (Graeber, 2006; Skeggs, 2011). The focus on value as a matter of economic achievement and worth in social and personal terms implies a perspective that conceives the endeavour to survive and the pursuit to lead meaningful lives in connection to one another. According to Graeber, value 'emerges in action; it is the process by which a person's invisible >potency< – their capacity to act – is transformed into concrete, perceptible forms'; so the question of value is ultimately about 'the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves ... as reflected in one or another socially recognized form' as well as their 'power to *create* social relations' (Graeber, 2006:45-47). Following a similar line of argument, in her study about British working class communities, Skeggs (2011) suggests a relational approach to the generation of value that focuses on the way 'personhood is produced through public performances that enable the public recognition and delineation between proper and improper selves' in a social environment that is constantly 'subject to mis-recognition by a middle-class gaze' (ibid. 503). Therefore, her interlocutors were 'acutely aware of being positioned as matter out of place', but they 'spent an enormous amount of time attempting to attach value to themselves to defend against misrecognition and devaluation, through the performance of respectability and by reversing dominant symbolic moral values', so repeated attempts to attach value through respectability became central to the production of their personhood' (ibid. 503). It is important to note that this notion of personhood does not necessarily imply merely acquisitive goals, as it involves protection, care, or the passing of useful knowledge, and other forms of exchange. These insights designate the conceptual space in which most of my argument navigates in this dissertation concerning value, respect, exchange and personhood. Moreover, since these concepts are closely connected to conflicting ideas of work and livelihood, this thesis pays particular attention to the various cases when inhabitants who were employed as wageworkers – and in this sense belonged to the neighbourhood's working class – could also recourse to the informal or illicit forms of exchange that either took place in the street in actual terms, or that were symbolized by the street, as a space where manifold forms of "traffic" are taking place. The street economy is an important facet of livelihood practices, as apart from scrap metal trade in the neighbourhood, the extended family of Spoitori Gypsies, the main protagonists of the thesis, made their living by unlicensed street trade in public spots around

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markets, establishing temporary stalls or moving around the city, changing locations and vending strategies according to the conditions of surveillance and police control. In the context of trading, the temporary control of places is a main aspect of livelihood (see. Goldstein, 2016), but as I elaborate it in the ethnographic Chapters, the symbolic ownership of a street corner or an area around a household was also one of the major organizing principles in the public sites of the neighbourhood.

Similarly to the concept of value, I conceive exchange also in a sense that refers to economic and symbolic transactions (as it is with language and social categories) in an interconnected way. As I return to it below, this understanding of exchange also regards imitation and mimesis (Harrison, 2006), when difference is established as 'denied resemblance' instead of a putatively stable hierarchy. This is a crucial matter in the case of a neighbourhood that has been the site of social mixing throughout most of its history, as a buffer zone of a South East European metropolis that regularly hosted both rural migrants from the countryside and the urban poor who had no place anymore in 'better-off' zones of the city. Mixing also refers to the varying conditions in which residents relate to each other by the means of social closure and the exaggeration of differences, or they establish collaboration and combination of the basis of what they have in common. Researchers may lose sight of these encounters if their analytic focus is on ethnicity and difference solely in conflict-ridden contexts.

Towards an urban ethnography of marginality in Bucharest

The overall aim of this dissertation is to provide a contribution to the ethnographically based study of urban marginality at the European postsocialist periphery, inspired by Wacquant's call for making 'comparisons instead of conflations' that so often characterize scholarship on the theme (2008). In other words, the argument of the subsequent chapters are based on the assumption that analytic models concerning the local forms and perceptions of marginality in a country like Romania should take into consideration the peripheral position of the state itself within the relations of the European supra-polity. As the historical development of a given capital city always reflects the trajectories of state-formation, the margins of these metropolitan settings

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are distinguished sites for urban governance by the exclusion and management of subordinated, potentially 'unruly' social categories or 'national abjects' (Tyler, 2013). Drawing on relational models of such different scales – where they mutually inform and oftentimes seem to 'mirror' each other – is a necessary condition for the development of (local and regional) ideal types concerning marginality, which are then suitable for further comparisons. For example, as it is elaborated in Chapter 2, in the case of a South-Eastern European city like Bucharest, the historical development as well as the rich symbolism of the *mahala* – denominating poor neighbourhoods, slums, or rural-urban buffer zones – call for the parallel conceptualization of *urban informality*, as a common feature of survival and coping the marginal spaces; and *urban expansion*, as a scope of central governments and city planners.

Moreover, the accounts of marginality produced by the tradition of urban ethnography have been widely criticized for their 'isolationist' or place-bounded approach, at the expense of more relational perspectives, that would instead focus on 'bonds instead of essences', and point out that in fact most of the forces and processes that constitute urban marginality in its various instances are never located only in neighbourhoods, slums or ghettos themselves (Blokland, 2008). It is especially important to put proper emphasis on these relations in a political environment (as in Europe nowadays) where urban marginality, or the marginal subjects themselves are conceived as 'problem-zones' and 'problem-categories' respectively, both of which entail not only the manifestations, but also the reasons or sources of their current plight, together with the prospects of improvement. Accordingly, most of the governmental and non-governmental interventions for development are also based on similar forms of 'localization', that strive to be as focused as possible, even if this meticulous view in fact leads only to optical illusions, as argued by Bourdieu (2000). To put it differently, my choice of opening this Introduction with a violent episode serves in fact to announce the broader contexts in which the present inquiry is embedded. Moreover, it explains why in the midst of emerging public controversies about Gypsies and other marginal populations – both national and international – my moving into this territorially stigmatized neighbourhood in Bucharest with the intention of making a 'street-corner ethnography' there was exactly the way for me to handle this emerging European crisis.

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I mentioned before that much of the ethnographic reasoning in this thesis is concerned with striving and the creation of value in both material and non-material terms (Pardo 1996;) among the people I got to know in the neighbourhood. As I elaborate in the further chapters, far from being a sign of duplicity or falsehood, for the people who are the main protagonists of this account, the creation and reproduction of their multifaceted and thereby virtuous self is central to their economic and livelihood practices, to their exchange relations, the management of exposure to stigmatization and the everyday sustainment of social order and control. The consideration of this ambiguity in terms of stance or subjectivity is also pivotal for transcending the binary models known from urban ethnographies (predominantly from the US, as mentioned above), such as that of the 'decent' and the 'street', that to come together only in seemingly rare and elusive interactive situations of 'code-switching' (Anderson 2000). One line of criticism against such dichotomies is that they evince an unfortunate blending between certain folk taxonomies or categories of practice and the concepts of analysis (Wacquant 2008), and that as such, they conceal rather than reveal the actual divisions of class between the remnants of the working class and those who are positioned below them in hierarchical terms, whether this refers to the underclass, the notorious *lumpen*, or the sub-proletariat of derelict urban neighbourhoods (Engels 2008 [1854]; Bourdieu 2000). As I elaborate further in the chapter on work and livelihood, the claim of being a "lawbreaker of one's own", just as other proverbial self-assertions – such as that "you have to be a bandit sometimes" – assumed different stages within personal or shared life trajectories, that altogether stand for states or conditions which may seem contradictory or mutually exclusive in a normative sense, such as in the distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.

Apart from these concerns, an urban ethnography located in a territorially stigmatized marginal neighbourhood in the capital city of a postsocialist state from the European periphery levels significant criticism onto the import of US-based analytic models, as it was the case with the spreading idea of the 'underclass' or in many respects with the concept of the 'ghetto' in eastern Europe from the 1990s onwards. My criticism of these tendencies is based on several observations. Firstly, one might argue that the purpose of imposing models and concepts that are primarily embedded in American academic and policy discourses (as well as the changing

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political-economic conditions of the US) in a European – and specifically late-postsocialist eastern European – context is to suggest that governmental or non-governmental interventions in the field of poverty and social exclusion must be the same as on the other side of the Atlantic. Such examples had been conducive to the setting up of academic and policy-oriented discourses that dealt with the problems of poverty and ethnicity – or to put it differently "the Roma" – in post-socialist Eastern Europe[13]. In these conditions the Roma could easily become the victims of *unbalanced comparisons*, based on analogies set up between cases or groupings – minorities or diasporas – which are different in the sense that, as one of them entered the fields of recognition struggles and academic knowledge production earlier, the other is defined as a latecomer in this context. Based on this relationship, unbalanced comparisons treat one of the cases as being a normative model for the other. To give one example, during the last two decades it became a general practice to use the notion of *ghetto* with reference to divergent forms of spatial and social exclusion in eastern Europe. Such an umbrella term might be useful for raising funds and awareness by comparison to established *modi operandi*, but its analytic function is more questionable as it conflates various ethnically mixed and homogenous contexts, as well as rural and urban settings, where poverty can be found. Among others, scholars of urban marginality in Latin America have been pioneers in such ethnographically grounded, comparative approaches by pointing out that ghettoes, inner-cities, *favelas*, *villas*, *comunas*, *colonias* (just to mention few of the terms that describe urban territories of accumulated deprivation in the region) are not representing the same urban forms (Auyero, 2011). For the same reason however, lessons regarding one of such urban formations can be interrogating arrows that point toward new kinds of inquiry, comparison between the mechanisms that reproduce (or extend) the territories of urban relegation. A key element of such an ethnographic inquiry is to engage with what has been traditionally defined as 'the survival question' – referring to the ways in which materially deprived and symbolically dishonoured people manage their livelihoods in the absence of formal jobs or state assistance, rejected by the same political and economic systems that rendered them a marginal position at the first place. Therefore, the questions of livelihood and survival are intimately linked to the depacification or de-civilization (Wacquant 2008) of daily life in

[13] The notion of the underclass was the focal point in a major debate of the period, see Stewart (2002).

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territories abandoned by the state, and the ways in which residents resort to their own personal and private means in the management of structurally accumulated social problems, in self-defence against outside intrusion, and the making and remaking of order at least in those social and spatial environments that they are capable to control.

Secondly, as it is common in many places and societies of the postsocialist world, the paramount association that the inhabitants of the neighbourhood drew to the previous regime of socialism was the strict policy of full employment, together with the imprisonment of those who proved to be work-shy and officially jobless. They may not have been overtly 'nostalgic', as they were definitely capable to identify similarly condemnable aspects of both regimes, but they emphasized that that people "did not die of hunger" in Ceausescu's times, and they could always get foodstuff, at least "under the counter". However, against conflating various instances of urban marginality, this image was complicated by recollections of the way in which the regime had kept people in the derogatory status of "fools", all living the same lives, as opposed to the postsocialist condition in which they could finally "get clever" altogether as a population (*s-a şmecherit populaţia*), which is a process that my interlocutors also liked to describe literally as a sudden "increase" of individual brains (*a crescut creierul*). The ambiguous notion of emerging cleverness or increasing mental capacities due to prospects for getting by and money-making that were unknown or unimaginable beforehand to persons or to society as a whole are of course inseparable from the general blurring or partial overlap between formal and informal economies and the divide between socially acceptable and unacceptable ways of generating wealth, or in other words the processes described as postsocialist informalization and personalization of lifeworlds and of the state, following the latter's retreat from the provisioning of social services, wherein the popular recollections of once existing socialism or people's condemnation of current state officials as Mafia are elements from a moral critique of the present (Rasanayagam 2011; Ries, 2002; Verdery 1996).

Thirdly, at the same time, in Romania, as in many states of postsocialist eastern Europe, the search for local obstacles to the civilizing process took the shape of exposing society's 'dirty laundry' – as a public disciplinary exercise by politicians, the media, as well as by ordinary citizens – and has been conducive to the stigmatization of abject populations (Tyler, 2013;

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Woodcock 2007 and also below). Accordingly, at the time of the beginnings of this research, I could see an emerging relationship of homology between the territorially stigmatized neighbourhood in relation to Bucharest as a whole – a city striving to place itself among the truly 'European' metropolises – and the place of Romania at the postsocialist periphery of Europe and particularly the EU. In principle, the relationship between agents in more valuable or central positions and the rather worthless, backward or marginal ones is prescribed by *moral regulation*, as 'a technology of identity normalization' and social control that 'is co-extensive with and emanates from the state' (Arfire: 2011: 1-2). This process takes place in an international arena on the one hand through policies and interventions – such as anti-corruption measures – and on the other hand by the means of public blaming and shaming of 'dangerous classes', minorities or backwards regions. The myriad ways of negative identity ascription and the calls for their acceptance are constitutive to the making of a morally righteous consent on civility and its discontents on behalf of politicians, public intellectuals or representatives of an aspiring middle-class. The stigmatization of urban territories – as 'social waste dumps' – is one variant of a broader pursuit that aims to seek out and eliminate *local obstacles to the civilizing process* of the city, the nation or the state. Accordingly, in such a case exclusion in material and spatial terms and stigmatization as a continuation or equivalent of the former in the symbolic realm are taking place in a triangular relation whereby local practices of stigmatization gain their impetus from a sense of embarrassment take the form of accusation in front of a third partner as arbiter. One might argue that the incorporation of this third stance – as reflected in the feeling that 'Europe is watching us' – is a common way of claiming privilege at the expense of others in peripheral societies.

Thus, instead of relying on simple dichotomies between the stigmatized and those who stigmatize, the different scales and unequal positions in this entanglement – within the city as much as between the states of Europe – requires us to link the local ethnography of an "infamous" neighbourhood in Bucharest to the marginalization that occurs at the level of the EU superpolity. As it is elaborated in the following chapter on the settings and the different, but intertwined scales of this inquiry, poor neighbourhoods can obtain highly central positions not only as regular suppliers of 'hot issues' for a national public, but also because of the *metonymic power* (Harris 2012; Roy 2011) by which they allude to the overall plight of the city and the

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nation at the European periphery. As I discuss in further details in the next chapter about the settings of this study, the metonymic power closely resembles to what other scholars defined as 'urban charisma', as a cultural repertoire, the working of which may be understood as the opposite mechanism to territorial stigmatization (or its reversal), and as such it also entails the possibility of resistance both in the sense of everyday endurance and social or political unrest (Hansen-Verkaaik 2009).

Outline of the dissertation

In order to provide a proper contextual background for the ethnographic material presented in the dissertation, the following chapter departs from the ways in which during the crisis-ridden period following 2008-9, symbolic constructions or imaginaries regarding the Gypsy (*ţigan*) as a social abject got a new impetus in the Romanian case, also as a point of crystallization for a set of wider controversies regarding the redefined position of Romania at the periphery of the European superpolity. The chapter aims to disentangle the paradox that while Gypsies – and the particularly low and marginal features they represent – are in a marked opposition with the ideals that the process of civilization aims for, it is exactly because of this opposition that they are able to represent the very imperfections of those who engage in the process of civilization itself. As a mirror for the unwanted parts of the national self, Gypsies became the object of an *obsession*, which includes a sense of difference and distance but also the fear of resemblance and proximity (Appadurai 2006; Harrison 2006).

The overall stake of the Chapter on urban history is to consider those transformations of which the neighbourhood is 'the material expression and which never find their source and principle in the neighbourhood under examination' (Wacquant 2008: 9.). This is also one of the keys to the formation of categories and ideal types concerning the different regimes and patterns of marginality which then makes it possible to avoid the pitfalls of what I called unbalanced

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comparisons[14]. Accordingly, I propose the concept of the *mahala*[15] as a folk-concept that denotes the local formation of urban marginality, one that can be rather opposed than taken as identical with that of the 'ghetto' in more than one sense. First, while the *ghetto* is a site of institutional closure, where the state – as an all-powerful body – is able to contain a dishonoured ethno-racial category in seclusion; the *mahala* is a zone of constant expansion, as it has historically served primarily as a buffer-zone and a 'rurban' territory in town, therefore it can be rather defined by an imperfect enclosure, continuous expansion (whether it's about streets or the houses themselves, many of them extended in a way or another by inhabitants or nearly always 'under construction').

The following chapters consist of a detailed ethnographic account on the everyday forms of social categorization in the neighbourhood. First, I introduce some of the underlying principles of social distinction as a means of ordering amongst the inhabitants, such as the ideas and actual practices of being a 'civilized' person – a respectable title that all the people I got to know is claiming for himself and tend to refuse from others (especially unrelated people) – that is rooted in the household and it is opposed to street life which is associated with potential disorder, homelessness or 'vagabondage'. However, as already suggested in this Introduction, 'civilization' in itself is hardly a desirable value, as eventually it brings one dangerously close to being a "fool" (*fraier*), exposed to the risk of being absorbed by the surrounding unfavourable conditions, being used and abused according to the whim of others. In order to avoid these unsettling prospects, men in the street regularly attend the '"school of life" (*scoala vietii*) which they conceive in opposition to the realm of formal education and sometimes associate with Gypsy dominance (whether or not they are Roma or non-Roma Romanians).

The next chapter moves to the issue of the street economy in the neighbourhood. Poor neighbourhoods are places of material deprivation and stigmatization, which elicit contradictory imaginaries: they are defined both by enclosure, social stagnation and redundancy, but also by irregular motion and various forms of traffic. The Chapter argues that, as such antinomies

[14] As mentioned above, such an unbalanced comparison was fostered by the hasty import of 'ghetto' as a concept from a predominantly US analytic and policy vocabulary with reference to spatial marginality in postsocialist Eastern Europe.

[15] *Mahala* is sometimes translated as 'neighborhood' or 'slum', but initially concept has been used as an administrative category in south eastern Europe in the Ottoman period.

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become transposed onto the person, it is in their interstices and overlaps that the virtuous self is consolidated. This ethnography of the street economy of a mixed Roma and non-Roma Romanian poor neighbourhood in Bucharest examines some elementary forms of exchange, notions of personhood, as well as the making and breaking of relationships among members of male-dominated hang-out groups striving to create material and non-material value in a highly uncertain environment, where formal/licit and informal/ illicit economic practices collide.

The Chapter on the management of precarity provides an ethnographic analysis by focusing on the economic and entrepreneurial activities of an extended family of Spoitori Gypsy traders, who maintain parallel interests as temporary migrants in Spain, as vendors (or as they put it, 'businessmen') around open-air markets and also as traders dealing with the purchase and sale of scrap metal and plastic waste. The trade in scrap metal and plastic is the dominant mode of involving the homeless drug-addicts of the area into the local economy as street-level collectors. Large-scale scrap-metal trade has become one of the main mediums that involve Romania into the transforming world economy as a sender of this valuable commodity to various target locations that can be reached through the sea cost, including China. Positioning these Spoitori Gypsy traders as middle-men in relation to other actors in these international economic chains help to move beyond the idea that these economic activities are somehow contained and limited to a marginal zone such as this neighbourhood and helps to see the changing relations between formalized and informalized economic layers. At the same time, this analytic strategy also allows us to develop an ethnographically grounded critical approach to the issue of the precariat or precarity (Millar 2014), as a recent academic buzzword that suggest a certain novelty or new challenges in the management of insecurities that an increasing amount of workers are exposed to in the contemporary world. In fact, the management of the unequally shared social suffering (Bourgois 2003) provides a key aspect here.

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Chapter 1. Crisis, stigma and resemblance[16]

"Nowadays, the Romanians' principal obsession is the Gypsies, who make the Romanians feel as if they are living in a castle under siege."

Lucian Boia (Romanian historian)[17]

Introduction

There is one inherent contradiction in ethnography as a genre. On the one hand, as a research practice it is based on the construction of a certain 'ethnographic present', the time when the research was conducted and scholars observed a particular set of patterns, relations and mechanisms at work, which serves then as the empirical basis of their representation. At a textual level, this representation almost inevitably leads to an illusion, as if temporality would be based on repetition, with the same mechanisms, acts or patterns reoccurring that were identified on the basis of the researcher's 'ethnographic present'. On the other hand, it is by necessity that after a while any ethnography becomes a historical account, describing a world that does not exist anymore 'out there' as it was in a one-time ethnographic present. This account is not an exception with respect to the aforementioned ambiguities and in fact, one stake of my analysis – as it is

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[16] I am grateful to Imogen Tyler for the comments and corrections on an earlier version of this text.
[17] Boia, 2001.

discussed in this chapter – is to address the connection between the past and the present of this account, in other words the issue of time and the making of the object of inquiry (Fabian 2014).

In the Introduction of this dissertation I analysed a critical event in the course of my fieldwork that entailed a concrete collision between the 'established and the outsider' around a street corner. In other words, I presented a concrete encounter between agents, who conveyed the 'blemish of the place' in a local setting[18], and the members of a local hang out group, who affirmed themselves and their sense of belonging to this place as well as to each other. The main themes of the current chapter tackle the first part of this relation, namely the historical emergence of social anxieties that the neighbourhood and its people came to embody in Bucharest and beyond, as the sources of urban ills that are threatening to spill over and invade the rest of society. The latter part of the relation will be the topic of the following chapters. The ethnographic engagement with affective relationships of repugnance and fascination – that usually relate between the realms of the centre and the margins – is a risky exercise, as these relations tend to manifest themselves primary in the stories and fantasies that were triggered by them, which then oblige the researcher to rely at least partly on his own imaginative capacities, indeed fantasy, for the sake of interpretation (e.g. Stallybrass and White 1986). In other words, such experiments may lead the ethnographer towards formulating statements that are criticized for their Orientalism (or its many conceptual equivalents), or for the reinforcement of abjection, instead of critically examining the very mechanisms that have created the abject categories at the first place[19].

In order to clarify the dominant profile of the reseach material I work with in this chapter, I resort to Bakhtin's concept of 'speech genre' as a form of a widespread, socially positioned set of utterances and rejoinders that are linked to one another and form a 'speech communion' (Bakhtin 1986 70-72). The concept of the speech genre is relevant here as it provides tools for the ethnographic analysis of speech, writing and other accounts as pieces of a "collectively

[18] As I indicated, this sense of invasion in relation to the neighborhood (or else the Gypsies in general in Romania) were further enhanced by the emerging European distribution of fears following the controversies around the 'Roma security crisis' around the turn of the 2000s and 2010s which I discuss in the following sections in greater length.

[19] I return below to the concept of abject and abjection.

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constructed common sense", that "can contribute to producing the experiences they purport to describe" (Brubaker et al, 2006: 325). In other words, opposed to the common pitfalls of oral history inquiries that search for the exact details of a 'past event', or else the studies that are using excerpts from interviews simply to illustrate certain large scale processes that have been already set up (and in this sense prescribed) in conceptual terms; the concept of speech genre helps to conceive the very constitutive role of utterances in the emergence and spread of shared experiences or states – such as anger, fear or abjection, among others. In fact, the power of such a collective genre lies in the way it renders a decisive role to certain utterances, which then obtain a symbolic status as they are shared, lived through and transmitted by speakers as reflections of their immediate experiences, even if they are not 'their own' in a strict sense. Hence, they help to make certain experiences *common* even if they are not *shared*. As it will be apparent in the coming pages, the speech genre of social anxieties that I introduce is based on an everyday engagement with the state among my Bucharestian interlocutors with diverse social standings, hence it belongs to the variety of political visions that, according to Das and Poole, are depicting the state 'as an always incomplete project that must constantly be spoken of – and imagined – through an invocation of the wilderness, lawlessness, and savagery that not only lies outside its jurisdiction but also threatens it from within' (Das and Poole 2004: 7). Indeed, the selection of utterances I present here cannot be anything else but random – not in the least due to the all-pervasive nature of the speech-genre or debate itself, so instead of a proper discursive-analysis, I rather aim to shed light on some of their recurrent patterns, including the divergent senses of anger, shame (or sometimes irony) they helped to articulate, and their structural conditions. In sum, I use the concept of the speech genre in order to point out common threads between a series of utterances, even if the places of their origins might seem to be remarkably diverse.

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In a castle under siege

The speech genre of social anxieties that this introduced in this Chapter is sharing a lot in common with other public hysterias or moral panics that have accompanied the economic and political transformations from last quarter of the 20th century onwards in many parts of the world. By now, it has been widely argued, that postindustrial and neoliberal restructuring in the Euro-

American world has brought a widespread 'return of the repressed', reflected in the public agitation over scapegoats such as the Black subproletariat as 'underclass' in the US, migrant *banlieue*-dwellers in France (Wacquant 2008, 2009), or the 'unemployed', the 'welfare dependent', the 'benefit cheat' and other folk devils in the UK (Tyler, 2015). The crisis of financial capitalism from 2008 (which is more or less the 'ethnographic present' of my inquiry) only heightened these forms of stigmatization, as increasing competition, growing inequalities and social insecurities became tangible experiences for an increasing faction of the previously well-established or at least aspiring majorities. Among their ranks, a widely shared 'fear of falling', as well as the hope of collective self-defence has led to renewing classificatory struggles and the triumph of new populisms (see: Brubaker, 2017, among others). Accordingly, the current Chapter aims to propose certain ways to conceptualize stigmatization (for the original concept, see: (Goffman, 1990[1963])[20] and abjection in an era that has brought a large scale backlash against the actually existing postsocialist set-up of market economies.

On behalf of some Eastern European commentators as well as some students of the region, many of these developments were perceived though the peculiar 'postsocialist lens', as scenarios somewhat familiar from the social turmoil following 1989. For sure, in many states of postsocialist Eastern Europe, the experiences of the 'actually existing' free market economy and liberal democracy have led to the heighted stigmatization of abject populations (Arfire 2011, Buchowski 2006). To be more precise, the issues of poverty and ethnicity – or in other words the issues of the Roma and the 'underclass' – were primarily discussed among scholars as a 'litmus test' of the Eastern-European transition and its outcomes (see for example: Emigh and Szelenyi 2001 and Stewart, 2002). In a comparison, towards the end of the 2000s the same issues were framed as part of an emerging – although still unequal – set of relations between the states of an enlarged European super-polity[21]. In this context, the public discourses on social security might have targeted the same subordinated and marginal categories, but the resulting statements were

[20] In his original framework, Goffman primarly enganged with stigma as a personal matter, more precisely as a 'discrediting attribute in a relation' that represents inferiority and danger in relation to the anticipated norm which in turn, tends to provoke primarily defensive responses on behalf of the stigmatized (1990[1963]: 13-15).

[21] This broad transformation is definied in the literature as the controversial 'Europeanization of the Roma issues', see: Trehan and Sigona, 2009; van Baar, 2011; Gheorghe és Pulay 2013.

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also commentaries on the principles that bind together the states of the European Union[22]. As Gille argues with regards to the neoliberal politics of (re)distribution and the global politics of recognition in the postsocialist (primarily Hungarian) context, '(n)othing radicalizes identity politics, and in this case, nothing mobilizes exclusivist nationalism more than the threat of marginalization, especially in a time when one has so much to lose by being excluded' (Gille, 2010: 27). Accordingly, in the Hungarian case, the rise of anti-Gypsism and the far-right was among the prime instances of a by-now broader revolt against liberal democracy in its existing form[23]. However, during the same years and within the same international context, the case of Romania seemed to provide a rather different path of development. Perhaps it is not an accident that comparatively speaking, the Romanian case has a much less distinguished position in analytic accounts that search for the sources of contemporary racist, neo-nationalist or ethnicist mobilizations and political party-formations in Eastern-Europe (and beyond)[24]. During the breaks of my fieldwork in the neighbourhood, sometimes I had prolonged discussions on this issue with my Romanian colleagues from Bucharest and elsewhere. Their usual response to my seemingly naive question ("why the far right is missing?") was that indeed racism or ethnicism is "everywhere and nowhere" at the same time, and since these political resources are not exploited by one single political agent or block, nearly anyone can resort to them according to different settings and interests. At the same time, especially around the beginnings of my fieldwork in Bucharest, the contempt for the 'dangerous classes' – whether Gypsies in particular, or the postsocialist sub-proletariat in general (see below) – was part of a broader mechanism than the one commonly described as 'anti-Gypsism', or the stigmatization of a segregated social category. It seemed to me that fear-arousing abject categories possess a power which enables them to relentlessly invade those social and spatial domains where they were supposed to be excluded from. In other words, they were *per definition* 'matters out of place' and in this sense the agents of disorder.

[22] For a broader European outlook on anti-Gypsism, see: Stewart, 2012.

[23] To have a local perspective on these developments, see: Feischmidt-Szombati, 2017.

[24] It is important to note that this does not imply a complete lack of racist campaigns and mobilizations in general, or instances of local evictions and mob violence against Roma communities in particular. In fact, the related conflicts have been well-documented in the recent years both in the scholarly and the policy-oriented literature. My point is rather that in the case of Romania, these local conflicts were followed or backed up by the success of formally established right extremist political party and its mobilizations at the national level.

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In fact, the lack of an established and successful political force on the far right is hardly a proof of a fully inclusive society without social hatred, stigmatization or abjection. On the contrary, the self-stereotype of the 'good hosts' who received and accepted – or heroically endured – their 'foreign visitors' at the crossroads of history is one of the common idioms of nationalism in Eastern Europe[25]. Still, the point I wish to elaborate in this Chapter is that the present case and conflict proposes a slightly different scenario compared to the one in which political entrepreneurs, opinion leaders or else certain factions of the downwardly mobile and insecure middle classes resort to an imminent 'other' defined exclusively in ethnic or racial terms of 'tribalism'. Conversely, I hope that the argument of this Chapter may serve as a meaningful continuation of the criticism once formulated by Gilroy with regards to the *banalization* of anti-racism that isolates the instances of racism from other social and political antagonisms (2002). The 'conundrum' presented here is about a setting where the putative obstacles of social order, purity or development are remarkably 'internal' to the same society. These are the Gypsies and the 'social scum', the postsocialist sub-proletariat, two intermingling categories (or 'floating signifiers') that have been the objects of heightened anxieties in Romania at the time I started my fieldwork.

On a slightly personal note, I should add here that as a doctoral student from Budapest (where I was born and raised up), I started to prepare my research in Bucharest after the series of murderous attacks against random Roma households in the Hungarian countryside in 2008-09[26]. Later on, while I was already on fieldwork in the territorially stigmatized poor neighbourhood of Ferentari, sometimes I went to meet my local acquaintances right after reading the news from home about the emerging details of the deadly attacks, and other striking events that marked an ongoing political crisis in Hungary[27]. Out in the streets of the neighbourhood I got to know male-dominated hang out groups, all of which were mixed in terms of their composition by Roma and non-Roma Romanians – or "Romanians" and "Gypsies", as they put it. If "race" (*rasa*) became a matter in these circles, or if racist slurs were being made, all such interactions seemed to be

[25] For the issue of 'self-stereotypes', see: Herzfeld, 2004..
[26] In my view, the best piece of investigative journalism regarding these events is: Tábori, 2014.
[27] For a comprehensive account on the political and economic roots and outcomes of the crisis in Hungary, see this discussion by a working group of Hungarian social scientists: http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/hungarys-democracy-problem-a-concept-and-its-background/

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contained by the customary joking relations that I got accustomed to in the neighbourhood. Perhaps even more importantly, these early interactions I observed were hardly one-sided, as Roma peers had their fair share in the reviling exchange – most commonly by the accusation of Romanians for being "thieves" (*hoţi*)[28]. Without inclinations to idealize what I observed, but surely with the news from home somewhere in my mind, I kept on searching for the roots, the conditions as well as the further manifestations of such neighbourly practices in the streets[29]. There was a young man in his twenties who lived not far from the block of flats where I stayed, known as Giovanni around the corner[30]. He was a son of a Roma father and a Romanian mother, so as it was common, he usually introduced himself as a "halfie" (*jumi-juma*). He was working as a storekeeper (although he was the most passionate about repairing motorbikes). As he told me once: *"those in the* city *center like to live separately, but it's different here at the margins of town, here people live together and they mix with each other."* He was right in the sense that such practices of mixing – or rather the exposure to being *intermixed* (see below) – seemed to be one of the greatest concerns and hottest issues around the turn of 2009-10, when I started to get accustomed to the idea of a long-term stay in Bucharest. Many of the conversations I caught, the essays and articles I read or the media reports I followed were spinning around a 'national embarrassment' that was threatening Romania's external reputation and advancement in Europe – namely the Gypsies, together with the disgraceful confusions that foreigners were known to make between the Gypsies and the Romanians.

There was a series of events or incidents that marked the beginnings of the period in which my research unfolded from 2009. It was a time that today we would most probably associate with the outbreak of the global crisis, including its manifold economic, political and intellectual reverberations. However, as I return to it in the following sections, the dramatic outcomes or the historical significance of the crisis were not necessarily obvious in Bucharest at the time. To anticipate some parts of my argument here, amongst the ordinary Bucharestians

[28] I return to this in the Chapter that provides a more detailed enthnographic account of street life in the neighborhood.

[29] Perhaps this line of inquiry also appealed to me because of the literature I read in the course of my education, where concepts of 'ethnicity' and 'conflict' were presented as if they would logically and mutually belong to one another.

[30] I use pseudonyms for all protagonists I introduce. I return to Giovanni's case in the Chapter on 'civilization'.

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whom I present in the following pages, the relative indifference towards such a world-changing event as the eruption of the financial crisis around 2008 may be related to the long-drawn or periodically returning – and therefore slightly familiar – states of 'crises' that occurred at least from the early 1990s onwards in Romania as elsewhere in Eastern Europe; opposed to a putatively sudden rupture or virtually unprecedented event at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. It could be equally due to a set of critical events which represented certain 'crises' – such as the 'Roma security crisis' in European states – both as palpable reverberations of an expanding crisis at a global scale, and as a 'smokescreen' between global transformations and the nation state, where social anxieties concerning diminishing sovereignty or integrity are on the rise. Renewed or emerging forms of stigmatization and the growing obsession with society's others – scapegoats or other 'less-than-human creatures' who represent the local obstacles of the civilizing process – eventually justify the public calls and political claims for the necessity of social ordering (Demossier 2014; Fassin 2013). In fact, during the recent decades such calls and yearnings for order and orderliness became globally widespread, often accompanied by the increase of policing among disenfranchised and marginal populations, or even the suspension of law with regards to the threats they represent.

In order to follow this path, I depart from one particular puzzle and a responding thought experiment that have accompanied me during most of my fieldwork in the neighbourhood of Ferentari in Bucharest and then the subsequent times of writing. The famous historian Lucian Boia wrote the following in his guidebook to Romanian history and culture, translated into English in 2001: 'Nowadays, the Romanians' principal obsession is the Gypsies, who make the Romanians feel as if they are living in a castle under siege' (2001: 215). The historian's statement makes part of a rather common and familiar speech genre that I recurrently came across amongst my Bucharestian interlocutors from various social standings, especially around the beginnings of my fieldwork. On the one hand such utterances usually operated with reference to a certain collective Romanian subject, a personification of a shared 'national self' or body, and on the other they usually summoned the presence of foreign (typically Western) observers or listeners – whether in the abstract sense, as it is with Boia and his English-speaking readers, or in experiential terms by alluding to actual encounters or incidents.

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More than a decade and a half after the publication of the historian's guidebook, first we may note that in the light of recurrent domestic and international waves of social anxiety and political controversy regarding the Gypsies in Romania, the historian's present tense remark appears to depict a quite durable state of affairs. However, there is another peculiarity about the historian's utterance beyond the factual level, where the statement about the socially distributed feelings of threat, insecurity or a state of 'siege' turned out to be a prescient one. The idea of a Romanian majority that is 'under siege' (a sense that the historian attributes to the spectacles of undeserved wealth, high rates of crime, birth or migration among certain Gypsies at least) can be familiar today to anyone inside or outside Romania who follows the repetitive Roma-related political or media rituals of blaming, shaming and identity-purification that sweep through the enlarged and increasingly conflict-, and crisis-ridden Europe of the 2000s (see: Fox and Morosanu, 2013; Vamanu and Vamanu, 2013; Woodcock, 2007). However, those who are familiar with classical ethnographies on Gypsies in Eastern Europe (e.g. Stewart 1997), may recognize that the claim of being exposed to a putative 'siege' by the Gypsies is in fact an inversion of a formula that used to describe the uneasy situation of the Gypsies themselves in relation to the more powerful – and typically hostile or dismissive – majority populations (or the *gadje*). More precisely, in their case the notion of a 'stage of siege' refers to the lived experience of subordination (reflected in the common division of a safe inside compared to a dangerous and insecure outside world) during much of the modern period. Most of this time, local and national state powers have made repeated efforts to dissolve the settlements, 'life-styles' or communities of Gypsies to succeed in projects dedicated to social planning that – depending on regions, state-formations and historical periods – were running under headlines of 'civilization', assimilation, annihilation, expulsions or else conversion into the ranks of useful labourers in agriculture, industry and other domains; or else their social integration by the means of education and institutional framing as a transnational 'European ethnic minority' (for the latter see: van Baar, 2011).

In case we go on with the thought experiment, and place the two above cited insights next to one another, the result is a noteworthy paradox, whereby instead of notions about a straightforward hierarchy, actors of a local majority and minority both consider themselves to be

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in similarly vulnerable positions[31], namely under the threats that the other represents to them. In other words, by the means of role reversal, Romanians and Gypsies could find themselves bound together in the plight of those who are exposed to the potential excess of intruders or other impositions from outside and therefore need protection. If we try to accommodate this with common explanatory models regarding the relationship of centres to margins or majorities to minorities, the result is a rather uncertain symbolic, therefore social, setting. On the one hand, it is constituted by a supposed 'margin' that is in fact not marginal, since it is capable to invade the social domains of the centre (nullifying its aspirations for being what it is supposed and strives to be). On the other hand, it is made up by Others, such as 'minorities' that are not minorities since they are capable to assimilate those who occupy more dominant positions, at least in principle. Apparently, in such an ambiguous map of social and symbolic relations, the primary source of anxieties is not some absolute measure of difference between the parties involved, but rather an ambiguous relationship of proximity or 'denied resemblance' (see: Harrison: 2006) – especially when it considered from the perspective of powerful but ignorant strangers. The main scope of the following sections is to disentangle these apparent paradoxes.

What Madonna said

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, it is perhaps common also for other settings in postsocialist Eastern Europe that initially, among ordinary citizens the everyday responses to the crisis from 2008 onwards did not resemble the model of a certain 'shock-wave' or a sudden fall in terms of the sense of security or livelihood in opposition to a putative sense of stability or ongoing progress. The historical significance of this crisis was not necessarily obvious in Bucharest either, because of the highly routinized and in this sense 'non-extraordinary' nature of the word 'crisis', following nearly two decades of postsocialist restructuring which had been

[31] As I return to this later, the history of Romanian national thought (perhaps as elsewhere in Eastern Europe) presents manifold examples of concerns with those unruly minorities that seem to be unwilling to be subservient to the power of the nation state or the centre, especially in local contexts where state power appears to be weak. Based on mimetic appropriation, in such cases the majority is represented in a vulnerable status, similar to that of the minorities (on the issue of the relations between Romanians and minority groups in early modern intellectual history see for example: Mitu, 2001).

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already rich in periods and junctions that came to be defined as 'crises'. In the case of Romania the global economic crisis in 2008 was only about a year after the country's accession to the EU. It was a period that brought improvement in the life situation of many citizens – whether due to migrant remittances, rises in wages and pensions, or politically-driven stimulation of consumption through credits – which together provided a positive contrast to widespread memories of impoverishment, desperation, job-loss and the economic and political uncertainty of the 1990s, or even the early 2000s (Kideckel, 2008). Referring to these conditions, some of my educated young or middle-aged acquaintances in Bucharest used to say in a half-jokingly that especially during the 1990s and early 2000s their whole country felt 'like a ghetto'. For them, this term implied the prolonged state of uncertainty, but also a period of excess and a sense of unconstrained freedom or even 'anarchy', before accession to the EU. As Shevchenko (2008) argues in her ethnography of the everyday management of crisis in Moscow in the late 1990s, this postsocialist urban setting invites an idea of 'crisis' that is opposed to the one of 'sudden rupture', or 'breakdown', an extraordinary event that destroys the 'habitual patterns of existence'. Rather, in postsocialist conditions crisis becomes a chronic and routinized condition. This sense of the ubiquitousness of crisis was evident in Bucharest. Both before and after the global financial crisis, the notion of the 'crisis' appeared in ironic and playful forms in town that had little to do with the devastating consequences of historical events. For example, in Bucharest the word 'crisis' appeared on the side of taxi cabs, or on the windows of kebab-buffets with a marketing purpose in the label of 'crisis-price' (*preţ de criza*) on offer, which was simply a synonym for a mark-down in price to attract more customers.

However, there were specific events that truly scandalised ordinary Bucharestians around the same time. In the summer of 2009 Madonna's open-air concert in Bucharest provoked passionate reactions on the topic of the Gypsies. The *Sticky & Sweet Tour* had a 'Gypsy section', in which the artist and her musicians took on a conspicuous 'Gypsy' appearance[32]. Between two of the songs Madonna delivered a short speech in order to attract her fans' attention to the importance of combating discrimination against "Roma and Gypsies" as well as sexual and other minorities in "eastern Europe", on the grounds that all humans are equal, and worthy of the same

[32] According to some sources, the respective musicians were of Roma origins.

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rights and dignity. For a long awkward moment, instead of the expected applause, the speech was met with whistles and booing. Some of Bucharest's leading human rights activists were quick to condemn what they conceived as another public manifestation of racism in Romania – especially on behalf those relatively better-off citizens of the country who could buy the tickets for such an expensive show. Some of my educated acquaintances in town interpreted the unfavourable reactions of the audience to Madonna's message as a sudden, unexpected eruption of a previously latent or repressed sense of revulsion towards the Roma, as there was hardly any such upheaval in Bucharest beforehand at a highlighted public event such as the concert of a global pop icon. However, the only way to think of the incident at Madonna's show as a manifestation of a 'previously latent' subject-matter is by rendering the mundane and ordinary forms of Gypsy-related curses and blames below the threshold of what counts as anti-Gypsism in Romania. A more plausible explanation for the incident during the Bucharest show is that for the people who erupted in revolt, Madonna's statements represented just another attempt on behalf of ignorant Westerners to lay all the blames that stem from the problems with the Gypsies in Europe solely on the Romanians.

It would be easy to label the collective outburst at Madonna's concert as an expression of deep-seated racism against Gypsies, by Romanians. However, this claim would miss the broader tensions and anxieties which shaped the incident. Around late 2009, early 2010 the issues of the Gypsies fuelled a number of passionate conversations I witnessed and sometimes recorded amongst various groups of Bucharestians. One of the most striking features of these conversations was the similarity of the rhetorical figures that the speakers resorted to – rather regardless of their level of education, occupational or class status – which often gave me the impression that I am in a position akin to that of the ethnographers of yore, who studied the spread of certain folk-tales of the same kind in a given geographical area, in order to compare their variations.

One summer afternoon in 2009 I was sitting in a Bucharest bar with a group of educated Romanian acquaintances, when a young activist-minded woman from our company started to talk enthusiastically about the implementation of some alternative educational methods from the USA by the organization she worked for. The project promised new opportunities for the schooling of

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Roma children. In the light of the previous discussions of the group I thought we were all sharing similar opinions about the social world we live in. However, a man interrupted the woman's comments: "I would rather take my Zippo lighter and set all the Gypsies (ţigani) on fire one by one." Another young man continued: *"Have you ever been raped? If not, than just stop speaking bullshit (prostie) because you don't know anything."* As he went on, *"I travelled a lot in Europe, and I was looked down upon many times, they think there that we are all Gypsies, they don't know what real Romanian culture is."* Soon another participant continued the storming discussion with a comment on a recent issue of *National Geographic* in which a set of eastern European countries were represented by two photos dedicated for each. Both pictures from Romania were portraying Gypsies. Someone else shared an experience from last summer at the Greek border where the border-guards examined the passport of a Romanian university professor with special suspicion. The way to get out of this unpleasant situation was to show the documents that proved his profession and his respectability. Another educated discussion partner at the table recalled her own sense of embarrassment while living in Spain, and as she briefly concluded her passionate account, she stated: *"I wish I didn't have to share the same passport with them!"* The young woman, who initially wanted to speak about a promising intervention in the field of education, was effectively silenced by the wave of anger expressed on behalf of the others at the table. In the end she turned to me – as to the only foreigner who was present – and said with desperation: *"you see, this is what we have to fight against"*. Apparently, the simple allusion to the figure of the Gypsy (in the context of an NGO-intervention) was sufficient to provoke this anger of associations. At the same time, the actual power of the Gypsy stigma was rooted in the fact that its subject seemed to be a moving target between different local and transnational levels, together with the symbolic struggles it incited.

Bucharest taxi drivers, as living libraries of urban rumours and stories, also took part in the large-scale discussion going on in town about Gypsies in those turbulent times. At the time of my fieldwork, there were a series of urban legends about the unwillingness of taxi-drivers to bring clients to Ferentari from the city centre. There were various explanations, for example that it is because local clients used to leave the cabs without paying, that they were harassing the drivers, or simply that it was not beneficial to bring someone there from the centre, as the driver

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would have to wait too long for another client and a return-trip from the neighbourhood[33]. In any case, urban rumour of this kind was in itself an evidence of territorial stigmatization. The following utterance is an excerpt from the account of a taxi driver that he started to elaborate after he understood on our way that Ferentari, the city's 'most infamous Gypsy area' (*ţiganie*) is our point of destination, the place where I lived and did research as a foreign student:

> The Gypsies (*ţiganii*), those miserable and uneducated ones, they embarrassed us (*ne au facut de râs*) also abroad, because those were not the serious people who left from here but all those miserable ones who don't like to work. They all left for begging and for all sorts of cunning tricks (*şmecherii*). Romanians are a very calm and tolerant nation in general. As I heard this phrase (*vorbă*) from someone: if we weren't a tolerant nation, we wouldn't have the most Gypsies in the whole of Europe. This is a migrant population, they came and remained here. And in any village in Romania there are some Gypsy families.

In 2008, a Romanian writer called Ionel Necula published a small volume of passionate social and political commentaries that also contributed to the large-scale social debate on civilization and embarrassment, similarly to the previous utterances[34]. The notion that serves as the title of the book, 'The discomfort of being Romanian', is defined at different places either as an all-pervasive complex of 'provincialism' and 'incompletion', or as a sense of 'futility' (*zădărnicie*) and 'fatality' – all of which make part in a 'general state of public consciousness', that is, according to the author, even harder to improve than to ameliorate the country's economic precarity – for which he primarily blames the politicians and the 'misery' of the actually existing postsocialist party system in Romania. In an indignant short piece that has the same title as the whole book, he states the following:

> Being Romanian (*calitatea de român*) was felt like a stigma with which to parade around the world is not at all honourable. Who didn't feel the attribute (*însuşire*) of being Romanian as a fatality that is better not to keep in sight outside the Romanian borders? I hardly understood why my friend from Stuttgart asks me not to talk Romanian loudly in public places and not to draw attention to ourselves. I was of course injured in my meagre ethnic dignity, but when I found out what monstrosities (*grozăvii*) were committed by my co-citizens in Germany, I accepted that he is right. We have allured on ourselves such a

[33] Once when I asked a female taxi driver at the Unirii square of Bucharest to bring me to the neighborhood, she rather redirected me to one of his male colleauges.
[34] Ionel Necula (2008): *Disconfortul de a fi român*. Bucharest: EuroPress Group.

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> sullen adversity that it was better to hide the fact of being Romanian. (...) The discomfort of being Romanian is real, hard, magmatic, and we have been carrying (*cărăuşim*) it in the world as a sordid and nightmarish burden. (…) You can correct what is wrong in a society when it represents an exception, when it has an accidental character, not when it is a mass phenomenon, accepted unanimously as normality. The Romanian [social] fabric (*ţesutul*) is entirely flooded (*infestat*), but the state institutions and authorities are complicitous with all these moral malignancies, instead of effectively engaging in curative and prophylactic actions. The Romanian evil (*răul romanesc*) has created the mechanisms of its own perpetuation and regeneration. (...) There is not a single uninfected segment, a domain, an institution in this country that may be associated in an action for recovery. (...) Sharks do not have a privileged territory; they are bustling (*colcăie*) everywhere.

According to the pattern of the speech genre, personalized stories of stigmatization are the main vehicles of a putatively common fate or collective suffering. In this case we see that the Romanian stigma (Antohi, 1999) comes in sight as a national embarrassment in case of contact with the foreign (especially Western) world, and it proves to be a moving target again as it expands from mischievous "co-citizens" to the decent traveller who feel the needs to hide his identity in front of others. The expansion of the stigma and its evil forces had taken place in a world that is apparently turned upside down, where the 'normal ones' find themselves in the position of a vulnerable minority in a state that is infected, where the malevolent state-officials appear to be only mimetic copies of the aforementioned mischievous "co-citizens" in a constant predatory movement (akin to sharks).

As part of the same broadly defined speech genre, from the middle of the 2000s, another writer and essayist Ruxandra Cesereanu dedicated a series of edited volumes to analyzing the unsettling manifestations and dreadful embodiments of marginality in postsocialist Romania – including the social world of crime, degraded neighbourhoods, popular culture, or everyday language use[35]. Cesereanu's writings became highly influential and they serve as recurrent references in political and social criticism. Her desperate calls for a "surgical intervention"

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[35] In the following summary I mainly rely on the content of this volume Cesereanu, Ruxandra et al. (2005): *Made in Romania. Subculturi urbane la sfârșit de secol XX și început de secol XXI*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes.

against the symptoms of marginality are echoed until this day[36]. Below I provide a brief summary of her passionate arguments.

> The habitual forms of marginality (such as vulgarity, obscenity, kitsch, and other forms of uncontrolled and shameless emotional expressions) emerged from marginal environments such as poor neighbourhoods (*mahalale*) or the workers' quarters of the Communist regime in Romania, as the home of a dangerous mixture between uprooted rural migrants and the urban poor. Similarly to the social mixture of their inhabitants, these neighbourhoods themselves represented a mix of rural and urban settlements. As the embodiments of an unfinished modernization, they have become the 'lumpen-proletariat' of postsocialism, that have either accepted poverty as a destiny, or else have entered the circuits of delinquency. Therefore, as the author argues, the urban margins became the nests of self-proclaimed "businessmen" (*bisniţari*), lawbreakers, speculators and other parvenus who compensate the experience of poverty by dreaming about rapid enrichment on the bases of illegal trade, deception and swindle (*escrocherie*). Even more startlingly, it seems that "the periphery shifts (*se deplaseaza*) towards the centre", as the manifestations of marginality emanate from their places of origin and invade the more respectable domains of society in the form of a rebellion against civilized people. These "newly-fashioned cowboys of the present" are striving to conquer and control their surroundings (or even the highest positions of state power). As a result, we are facing a social world that turned upside down, one in which criminality comes to define the law and it gets widely accepted as a matter of fact. The destructive outcomes of this invasion are only exacerbated by the neglectful and discredited authorities, but also the shared "predisposition" or "inclination" for marginality among ordinary Romanians, since provincialism and boorishness represent familiar states to many of them (even if they are not among the main agents of decay). Because of the parallel expansion of the margins towards the centre as well as the socially widespread temptations for mischief, the dreadful hybrids of postsocialism came to symbolize a Romania that is assigned to remain in a peripheral status as a "quasi-ghettoized country", or a "slum-Romania" that resembles a prison and a noisy fair at the same time. Decent citizens and the educated elites, as the authors themselves, do share an urgent need to counteract the irritation provoked by the violent intrusion of the margins. However, their sense of duty to "sanction the vices of the nation" – similarly to "pest controllers" – does not necessarily lead to the recovery and purification they initially desired. Instead, their attempt for a "surgical intervention" in social terms can easily run into violent refusal, their own repulsion may trigger counter-repulsion with the further defilement and absorption by marginality.

Although Cesereanu also relies on the speech genre's medicalized construction of a collective violence, injury or infection that requires urgent intervention, her approach already brings us closer to a certain sociological understanding of the causes behind the widespread moral panic of those times. In her account, the figure of the ethnic Gypsy (or the "co-citizens") is

[36] For another analysis of the Cesereanu's writing on marginality and the discourses of Balkanism in Romania, see: Haliliuc, 2014.

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replaced by the postsocialist Romanian sub-proletariat (the "lumpen") [37]. In the original Marxian sense, the 'lumpen-proletariat' is a 'class-fraction' which is outside of the class struggle and the relations of production, a 'whole infinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither', that cannot become a historical actor in itself – akin to the 'non-historic' nations (Munck, 2013: 759). In fact, it would be a challenging task to write a social history of the postsocialist subproletariat and its changing images in Romania[38]. This story would perhaps start with the never fully completed project of industrialization and urbanization under the Communist regime[39], when large segments of industrial workers were in transition from rural to urban areas – including commuters – with fragile roots in both territories (for comparison, see: Szelenyi, 1983). After the dismantling of the former Communist industry, the category was expanding (and as elsewhere, Roma workers were the first to go when the lay-offs got started). In the midst of displacement and impoverishment, for many people only informal or illegal networks were available to make living. Perhaps it can be argued that this social category has always been at the 'margins' of the official state institutions and at odds with them[40]. As the previous excerpt shows, all these factors contributed to the image of a postsocialist 'dangerous class': on the one hand it stands for a 'national embarrassment'[41] the local obstacle to the civilizing process and its fragile achievements in the eyes of decent and aspiring citizens (which necessitates the "surgical intervention" against them); but on the other hand it is also capable to represent a mimetic copy

[37] The notions of the sub-proletariat as well as the 'lumpen' have a complicted history, here I can refer to two titles of the literature I have been engaging with on the subject – representing perhaps the earliest and one of the more recent efforts to theorize the terms: Engels, (2008 [1854]); Bourdieu, 2000. With regards to Bourdieu's account I would argue that it can be read as a peculiar re-conceptualization of Oscar Lewis' original insights, embedded into the broader framework of habitus-theory. Writing about Brazil, Millar notes that '(i)n recent years, the symbolism of "the worker" has taken on added meaning in the context of drug trafficking, violence, and the fear of crime among the middle and upper classes in Brazil's major cities. Rather than associate favelas with the working-class poor, elites have increasingly come to perceive favela residents as *marginais* (marginals), a word now signifying criminals and drug traffickers rather than the poorest of the poor (…) Many scholars have argued that this semiotic shift has justified extreme forms of police violence targeting favela residents and street children (…) as well as the elite's disregard for the everyday struggles of Brazil's lower classes, no longer deemed the hard-working, "deserving" poor.' (2014: 41).

[38] I'm grateful to Florin Poenaru for sharing his insights with me on this subject.

[39] Or even before, see the Chapter on the urban history of marginality.

[40] As I return to this in the subsequent Chapters, during my fieldwork I also encountered powerful discourses on state-abandonment or state-violence (primarily the police, as the main agents who represent the state in the neighbourhood and therefore also in the eyes of many among the inhabitants).

[41] The concept of 'embarrasment' is crucial in Herzfeld's work, as it represents the aspects of cultural intimacy that are supposed to be hidden (or might be conceived as shameful) in front of outsiders (see: Herzfeld, 2004).

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or undesirable mirror-image of a state in the prolonged condition of incompletion or imperfection. As Cesereanu's argument suggests, as the official means of policing are too weak to manage the disorder, the 'civilized' peoples themselves have to pick up the arms to defend their fragile domains, which is a task threatening in itself, as they may only enhance what they fight against, or become akin to their adversaries (on the emerging resemblances between 'partners in war', see: Harrison, 2006). As I elaborate in the following section in comparative terms, all these aspects are crucial for the understanding of the moral panic and abjection that has targeted (and in fact contribution to the making of) a 'dangerous class' in the Romanian case from the 1990s and 2000s onwards. As in many other research domain, the risk of conflation (typically with patterns or accounts from the developed world, in the name of comparison) means that we finish the analytic exercise right at the point where it should have been started (Wacquant, 2008).

Scales, fear and intimacy

As it is well known, stereotypes and other images of outsiders are always in support of articulating the values of any given group. As Simon Harrison notes, once we observe notions of 'difference-as-inferiority' more closely, it becomes more obvious that these notions can express mimetic relations or distorted similarities, in other words they can symbolize what members of the given group depreciate in themselves or would rather like to refuse (2006). The similarity arising this way can be threatening, which makes it necessary to exaggerate and construct differences. Moreover, sometimes the most radical and divisive concepts about others are actually concerning people who are otherwise strongly interconnected, or they are in interdependent relations – even if it is in spite of their intentions or wishes. This mechanism is particularly striking in cases when a majority, looking at others in marginal or minority position, is itself has a low position in another set of relations, or it has its own claims for victimhood.

Brubaker and his colleagues already argued in their research among the residents of the Transylvanian city of Cluj around the late 1990s and early 2000s, that the consequences of westwards migration – as exit – were far from unequivocal to their interlocutors, due to the shared experience of stigmatization in situations (such as when crossing state borders) where one

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'cannot avoid being identified by citizenship', more precisely a 'bad' citizenship opposed to 'good' ones, represented by the Romanian passport as a 'badge of dishonour', whereby the stigmatization of Gypsies is extended, and 'Gypsies are assimilated to Romanians, and Romanians to Gypsies'. (2006: 321-24) Hartman conducted fieldwork in the middle of the 2000s among undocumented Transylvanian labour migrants who worked for sub-standard wages in the Spanish agricultural sector (2007). By relating the previous points to his observations, one might argue that the experience of stigmatization in the course of westwards migration had been accompanied – perhaps even fostered – by the authorities' tacit and rather unofficial approval of the largely illegal status of these labourers, who were still 'tolerated' by the border guards and the police. This approval or 'tolerance' was eventually conducive to the emergence of migration as a 'sphere of non-regulation' at the first place (ibid. 193). For these migrant labourers normality is a constantly deferred utopian object with changing parameters, while the present time constitutes 'an area of moral indeterminacy' or 'open field of possibility' (ibid. 188).

The coping with stigmatization or the attempts at 'whitewashing' remained in the focus of scholars who did research among Romanian (and other Eastern European) migrants in the segmented labour markets of Western states. According to Fox, '(t)he global structured inequalities that induce migration in the first place are reproduced as local structured inequalities between migrant and native in the labour market of the receiving society' (2013: 1874). My approach is different, as I was not studying stigmatization in the context of international migration, but I was focusing on the urban scale of these relations in the case of Bucharest. In fact there were many Roma and non-Roma Romanians inhabitants in the neighbourhood who have spent shorter or longer periods abroad, engaging in various activities for making a living, but stigmatization in our case is not linked to the crossing of state-borders. However, the results might be still comparable as the respective processes seem to be interrelated. According to Brenner, 'the current period of global restructuring is marked by particularly profound transformations of scalar organization' as 'capital mobility, unfettered market relations and intensified commodification' led to 'a massive assault upon established scales of socio-political regulations, producing >scalar struggles<' (2010: 20-21.) Accordingly, the analytic stake is to connect the different relational scales of stigmatization – including the ones concerning social categories, urban zones, and different nations or states at the centre and the periphery – in a way

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that we neither lose sight, nor simplify the initial complexity and sometimes playful nature of stigmatizing relations, as introduced in Goffman's account (primarily on interpersonal relations (1990[1963]).

In this layered context, the exposure to the Gypsy stigma (whether real or just presupposed, direct or indirect) and the successive transmission of stories about such unsettling experiences were different manifestations of social devaluation, as a personal and personalized experience in (late) postsocialist Romania. Beforehand, it was common to put down the issue of anti-Gypsism or ethnic and national strife as mere symptoms of the postsocialist transition and the not-yet integrally formed democratic polities of postsocialist Eastern Europe. Such claims were often accompanied by expectations about the prospective evanescence of these animosities that would vanish with desirable future developments such as the accession to the EU, the expansion of civil society or the elimination of derogatory naming and incorrect representations[42]. Quite on the contrary, the vignettes and utterances introduced above are part of a broader wave of anger and uncertainty that rather seemed to be only amplified in the course of the 2000s, in the aftermath of the EU's expansion towards the continent's postsocialist periphery and with the many reverberations of the economic crisis from 2008 onwards.

'Anti-Gypsism' is a concept which was coined by academic scholars, later it was popularized and transformed into an asset of policy-experts who aimed to grasp one facet of these anxieties (eg. Stewart 2012). However, the all-pervasive speech genre of anxiety, fear or anger in the above cited instances suggest that the role of fear-triggering subjects is rather interchangeable or multipliable (Fassin 2010) as part of broader mimetic conflicts (Harrison 2006). Therefore, since the variations of such scaremongering stories and utterances might be continued endlessly, and any selection of them can be only random, it is a rather hopeless aim to provide a full list about them, especially if we focus on a certain 'ethnicity'. In the instances of this speech genre, I often heard about how Romanians felt insulted after being confused with the Gypsies, being called into question or simply put to shame because of them by foreigners. In most cases, the stories of such incidents and the vernacular forms of anti-Gypsism accompanied each other; at

[42] For a detailed account on the postsocialist trajecories and pitfalls of human rights activism and the making of Roma civil society, see: Gheorghe and Pulay, 2013.

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least the switch from one theme to the other seems to be quite obvious for the speakers. The references to such insults can provide justification for drawing a strict boundary between 'our culture' and the incompatible 'Gypsies'. However, as it is apparent in all the cases, this troubled relationship could trigger highly affective states that are not only marked by disgust or repulsion towards the Gypsies as 'others', but also an intimate sense of shame or derision that the speakers felt they are exposed to. The taxi driver's account adds a further layer, as it presents the deeds of Romanian Gypsies abroad as an actual betrayal of their home country and an abuse of the putative tolerance they were endowed with, which made their en masse settlement possible there in the first place. This questioning of the identity or allegiance of the Gypsies was intertwined with the sense that the speakers' and, by hyperbole, the Romanians' own identity and worthy place amongst the civilized people of Europe was also called in doubt – as it was apparent in the articulations of shame and embarrassment by many of my Bucharestian interlocutors. In other words, one result of these controversies was the open questioning of the relationship between citizenship and the nation or some of its minorities: the question of who are the Gypsies necessarily led to the question of who are then the Romanians.

As I return to this later in the following sections, another recurrent paradox in these utterances is that on the one hand they are aiming to install an appropriate distance and distinction from the Gypsies as inferiors, but on the other hand they aim to achieve this by the evocation of proximity, intimate experience and knowledge that at the same time they deny from those who 'take the side' with the margins of the city and society. *"You don't need to tell me anything about Ferentari, I know very well what's going on there..."* – this was the first comment I got from an acquaintance in Bucharest (otherwise an advanced student of social sciences) as I was introducing my research to her. She continued: *"...although I've never been there".* Like the Gypsies in general or the Westerners' opinions of Romania, my neighbourhood also seemed to be something that many people claimed to know *"very well"* in Bucharest, almost as natural born experts. As with these issues, in most cases this claim of expertise did not require any correlation with actual contact or experience. When I introduced the setting of my fieldwork in the city centre of Bucharest to a young Roma woman who aspired to become a member of the civil society sector and its emerging Roma middle class, her response was that *"you came here to study something we mostly would like to get rid of"*. The puzzle for me regarding such utterances

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was not merely about 'stereotypes' – in the vernacular sense – that can be familiar from numerous campaigns and other initiatives against prejudices both in Romania and elsewhere. A more noteworthy assumption was the presumed *intimacy* that allowed these persons to think that my findings could not surprise them – regardless of empirical investigation. Later on, to my surprise, when other friends came from the city to visit me during fieldwork, they usually concluded that the area reminded them of their childhood and youth in the 1980s and 90s. A place that could be the ultimate 'no-go area' on the one hand, but also a reminder of the childhood world on the other, was a paradox I never could have discovered on my own.

As it becomes obvious from these assertions, the controversial relationship of Romanians and Gypsies – displayed in front of actual or presupposed 'foreigners' as a rather ignorant audience – cannot be understood by sticking to binary oppositions between a majority and a minority, or, in spatial terms, a centre counter to the margins. The relational setting in which the construction of Gypsies and Romanians evolves here is determined by a triangle with a third position occupied by a certain judgmental authority or 'imagined third party' that can potentially make disturbing confusions between the other two[43]. In a similar way, the usual dramatic media accounts on the neighbourhood of Ferentari regularly evoked the same 'third party' at least in an implicit manner, suggesting that the very existence of such a neighbourhood is a general shame of the city and its residents as such. Around the late 2000s and early 2010s, it seemed that for the Bucharestian interlocutors (such as the persons I introduced above) a constitutive feature of Gypsies was the very flux they represented, the capacity of being omnipresent and subverting prescribed hierarchies or to invade and pollute the treasured domains of social respectability and civilization. All of these anxieties could congeal around the evocation of embarrassing incidents when strangers confused or mixed up Romanians and Gypsies. Through repeated reminiscences these stories came to symbolize a collectively shared fate, which may be the reason why during the recollections it often seemed to be random or optional for the speakers whether they claimed that the respective incident actually happened to them, or to someone else. In other words, the stories about these embarrassing incidents could have been recounted more often than the number

[43] In this respect, around the beginnings of my fieldwork I often had the impression as if I would be in a setting that resembles the Serbian town in the early 1990s as described in van de Port's poetic ethnography, where he notes that '(s)ometimes I had a strong impression that this society was engaged in an ongoing dialogue with a strict, disciplined foreman who was situated somewhere in the West. It was as if they felt constantly under European scrutiny and had to justify their actions to Europe all the time' (van de Port 1998: 74).

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of times when the described incidents actually occurred, which was key to the way these reminiscences obtained a partly fictional character.

The catcall of Madonna during her show in Bucharest, the discussion on a bar's terrace downtown, or the account of the taxi driver have all taken place alongside the emerging political struggles between Western and Eastern European states on the one hand, and between them and the institutions of the EU superpolity related to some of the practical outcomes of instituting the entitlement of free movement between the members states, especially after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. In the case of Romania, the related controversies have all taken place in a highly intensified international field of forces or pressures. The preoccupation with 'national abjects' (see: Tyler, 2013) were activated by the European integration of Romania, and the following inter-state conflicts, as broader uncertainties regarding the freedom of movement were projected onto dreadful figures such as the Gypsy beggars or welfare tourists. Therefore, a necessary condition and prime engine of the increasing 'Europeanization' of Roma issues were the need for the – perhaps unsought for but practically inevitable and direct – involvement of Western states into managing parts of the postsocialist poor and marginalized populations of Eastern Europe in their own territories, as migrant-receiving countries. The interstate conflicts and controversies around migration or free movement between countries such as Romania and France or Italy were signalling abreast political crises that states and governments seemed to be hesitant or spectacularly unable to cope with. During an earlier signature-collecting campaign for a referendum initiated by the conservative newspaper *Jurnalul Naţional* under the title 'Romanian or Gypsy' (*rom sau ţigan?*), the main stake was to exercise conceptual purification by returning to the unequivocal use of the Gypsy as a denomination, hence eliminating the confusions between the Roma and the Romanian categories[44]. Before, similar intentions lied behind the decision of changing the ROM country code in the passports of Romanian citizens to the putatively less equivocal ROU abbreviation. Nevertheless, attempts dedicated to the sorting out of embarrassing denominations were largely in vain as a way of getting rid of dishonour because of the very fluid nature of the signifiers that stigmatization operates with in politics and beyond – a mechanism that builds on multiple and changing targets instead of fixed ones, and

[44] For a more detailed analysis of the campaign and its stakes, see: Vamanu & Vamanu 2013.

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whose rhetorical forms can be invested with any symbolic content, such as the names or labels that are momentarily in use to point at problem-categories (Fassin 2010).

It is not my goal to suggest that the written, spoken and perfomative utterances ensue from a homogenous, unitary or unequivocal set of attitudes as properties of a given social unit as such – whether it is about any group of Bucharestians, aspiring members of a local middle-class, non-Roma Romanians, the cultural elites and opinion leaders or other putatively bounded categories. At first sight, the wide variety of the very subjects targeted by these blaming and stigmatizing utterances may seem to be puzzling: once the postsocialist sub-proletariat or 'lumpen', then the Gypsies, or a certain collective flawed self shared by Romanians as such, sometimes the quickly enriched parvenus, corrupt politicians or the businessmen engaging in 'big-time cheats' or else the poor and the uneducated as different instances of the obstacles hindering the collective advancement in the postsocialist civilizing process. As the respective obstacles are sought for and then diagnosed strictly within Romanian society itself, they operate like 'moving targets' that can replace or mutually represent one another as equivalent problem-categories. At the same time, the content of the respective blames do not necessarily changed too much. These utterances seemed to be tied together in a spiral that not only reinforced each of them, but also incited further the sense of fear, stigmatization and embarrassment. Altogether, they depicted an unsettling scene in which the periphery becomes capable to invade the centre both in symbolic in practical terms. Accordingly, the symbolic struggles that such utterances made part of were truly omnipresent: one could find them everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Around the beginnings of my fieldwork in Bucharest, I could record calls for "behaving in a civilized way" or "not being antisocial" as they were uttered in political speeches as much as by the public address systems in Bucharest's busy open air markets, or written on the notices on buses or trains. In all such instances we can see the ways in which wider uncertainties caused by large-scale unemployment, vanishing social security and a rapidly rescaling capitalist economy are eventually localized in spaces and social categories that seem to be the sources and manifestations of these problems, as well as the 'trouble spots' (see: Sampson, 2003) where solutions are to be sought for.

This is the case for example with examining the widespread blames for corruption, 'a disreputable evil, a stain on a country's reputation for moral and cultural purity' (Herzfeld 2015:

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27), that fosters a quest for the causes of a marginal society's backwardness solely in that society itself, such as in certain common character-traits or deep-seated customs, playing down the dynamics of exchange that have bonded these peripheral states and societies to the centres of political and economic power. In fact, these relations were conducive to the practices condemned as 'corrupt' with reference to single sites or locations[45] in the relationship of the state to zones and populations at its local margins. As one of their functions, the politics of moral regulation (Arfire 2011), tied together countries of the 'first' and 'second' Europe in unequal relationships this way. To put it differently, these are further instances of the relationship between states and their margins, as stigmatized places where law and order continually have to be re-established (Das and Poole 2004).

Wacquant attributes the social fears of downfall predominantly to an 'inferior strata of middle class' (2016: 1082). In our case, the aforementioned fears seem to be produced by long-term insecurities with imperfection that are represented by the figure of the Gypsy – or other 'folk devils' – in the eyes of an aspiring middle class 'in the making' at the postsocialist periphery of Europe, that aims to distance itself from a shared past, represented by those who remained socially inferior. These attempts eventually circumscribe the places and social categories that are threatening the domains of civility with invasion. In a similar vein, in our case the social fears and policing are not caused simply by a shift from 'welfare to workfare' and punishment by the neoliberal state (Wacquant, 2009), but rather by a regime change from a system of forced industrialization driven by high debt and austerity policies (on the late Ceauşescu-regime, see: Ban, 2012) to rapid marketization[46] and the discourse of a transforming state-power and an emerging middle class that deploys stigmatization as part of disciplinary exercises to control the 'violent and excessive' lower domains of society. Accordingly, ethnoracial as well as class divisions are not in the need to be 'shored up' or reconstituted, but they are to be obtained or achieved by the affirmation of differences opposed to resemblances.

Tyler defines abjection as 'the disciplinary force of sovereignty, a founding exclusion which constitutes a part of the population as >an excess that threatens from within<, moral

[45] For Bourdieu's concept of 'site-effects' see: Bourdieu et al., 1999.
[46] At least from the middle of the 1990s.

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outcasts who intrude into public life as >objects of disgust<, fascination and repulsion (Tyler 2013 19-20). As she suggests, the inherent ambiguity of prohibitions is that they must be continuously transgressed in order to function; the abject surplus cannot be fully expelled as it constitutes the boundaries of the state and legitimizes the prevailing order in the status of a perpetual danger (ibid. 19-20). Social or 'national abjects' are therefore conveyors of a moral crisis, designed to reinforce certain ideals of the self on behalf of the dominant (or those who aspire to be dominant). If we accept that socially created fear or repulsion and fascination are two sides of the same coin in terms of the relationship to abject categories, then we may also assume that the predominance of the former or the latter dispositions also depends on the actually achieved social distance (or relative class difference) between the ones who stigmatize and the ones who are stigmatized. In other words, repulsion may be a sign of the very lack of such a social distance that leads to social insecurity and the heightened fears concerning the potential invasion from the margins towards the centre. On the one hand, this can be performed spatially – as in the relationship between the downtown and the outskirts, or the city and the country (for the latter see: Williams, 1973). On the other hand, it can be also performed socially – as it is the case with the unsettling prospects of a 'reversed assimilation' whereby minorities or other inferior groups assimilate those who are supposed to assimilate them, because of their formidable power with which they can potentially absorb others who otherwise represent a putatively higher value (cf. Dumont, 1986).

Romanians and Gypsies: civilization and its discontents

As I elaborate it further in the Chapter on urban history, the problem of time and temporality deserves careful investigation here. The exercise of tagging certain epochs as distinct ones from others and pointing at a phenomenon in order to present it as a hallmark of a certain new era has been a usual enterprise of social scientists. Times of crisis have been typified this way as marking a new beginning of vanishing economic (and by that political) state sovereignties, that all in all served as new engines behind conflicts between states and their margins, or minorities and majorities. However, their relations of reciprocity and animosity might have much longer histories. Periodization of this kind are established on the basis of

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presumptions about certain features of social life that became more predominant after a certain threshold in time – a postulate based on vision and division that nevertheless may be as arbitrary in its essence and foundation as any of the classificatory schemes analyzed by Bourdieu (2000). Even if the forms of stigmatization that I identify here through the speech genre of anxiety became prominent as part of an ongoing 'Europeanization' of the Romanian public sphere, this doesn't mean that it is solely the 'brand new' effect of an era we may define by the concept of late-postsocialism, or the nascent of actually existing neoliberalism at the periphery of the 'New Europe'. Even if these transformations are conducive to the 'last rise' of preoccupations with the stigma as a device of social classification, the struggle itself has a much longer history in terms of Romania's integration to the international circuits of economy and power.

Based on this line of thought, we may argue that in the Romanian case (perhaps akin to other instances in peripheral regions within or beyond Europe), in historical terms 'national abjection' and stigmatization were constitutive to the experience of modernity itself. Therefore they represent a durable or returning state of affairs, rather than a recent challenge brought by globalization or recently vanishing national sovereignties (for example, as argued by Appadurai, 2006). Drace-Francis (2013) argues that in the case of the Romanian lands, the 'capitalization' of the peasantry have reached its momentum around the 1860s, which also gave an impetus to the quest for defining the peasant – as constitutive or central to the idea of the nation – in relation to temporarily distinguished states of earlier (or 'primitive') and later (such as 'industrial') societies[47]. Located in a marginal and contested space of Europe, such ideas of the 'people' in and of the Romanian territories emerged in a literary discourse positioned in an ongoing exchange with Western audiences, since 'the nineteenth-century Romanian writer's discovery of the peasant went hand in hand with their discovery of >Europe<; and their encounter with the latter (...) decisively influenced their conceptualization of the former' (ibid 16).

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[47] The author provides a detailed analysis of the conceptual abiguities of different definitions provided for the notion of the peasant (*ţaran*) in 19th century Romanian academic dictionaries, starting from civic conceptions based on political membership, mode of production, place of residence, until moralizing and normative ones – representing the ways in which dominant attitudes were going through dramatic alterations in the given period.

This point already brings us closer to the actual ways in which, as part of formally unequal relations, a subordinated partner, or the exponents of less valued domains may feel obliged to enact what the more powerful holds about them, or use and manipulate it for their own purposes. In such cases, stigma is the necessary point of departure, much like the given 'currency' that is available in a certain exchange relation. Another historical layer of unequal exchange relations conducive to the making of categories is the one that bounded Gypsies and Romanians to one another. Sorin Mitu argues that collective self-defamations form a familiar genre in Romanian intellectual history from the period of early modernity – mostly based on concerns for insults coming from foreigners (especially Westerners) because of the backwardness of Romanians compared to others, or even the worries for their inclinations for lawbreaking (2001). In these sources, we already meet the Gypsies as unwanted mirror images of Romanians as in their own terms they also occupy low status – they are represented as living under oppression, they are fragmented, they refuse the values of enlightenment, rigorously lead their traditional lifestyle. In other words they represent those motifs that Romanians were to get rid of the most urgently in the hope of advancement in the civilizing process.

In fact, Gypsies in Romanian lands were slaves, handled as chattel property in historical, social and juridical terms until the middle of the 19th century. This codification of social inferiority and segregation[48] reached its peak around the end of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century when the notions of Gypsy (*ţigan*) and slave (*rob*) clearly became each other's equivalents (Gheorghe-Pulay, 2013). It was the time, when the Romanian principalities entered the European wheat and cattle markets which have led to an increasing need to make an additional labour force productive under harsh domination (cf. Chirot 1976). Nevertheless, according to Gheorghe's argument, if the Gypsy or *ţigan* category was originally not an 'ethnic' denomination, but one that codified a historically evolved mode of subjugation as slaves; the same can be said about the legal origins of the category of *romîn* – as the initial form of 'Romanian', designating 'peasant serfs' in a social sense – as another low position in feudal

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[48] The concept of segregation here both refers to the legal divisions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies – including the division between slaves opposed to peasant serfs – and also the ones between Gypsies belonging to different owners.

social hierarchy – before becoming a term of ethnicity or nationhood in the modern sense[49]. I believe that the analytic potential of this insight lies in the way it can help to us to move beyond the common binary approaches to ethno-national majorities and minorities, or the states and their margins. It means to focus on the 'stigmatized' and the 'normal' (or the one who stigmatizes) not only as 'marked' and 'unmarked' categories. In addition, the two categories may both operate as 'marked' categories of subordination, albeit in historically changing contexts, and not simply in relation to each other but also to external referents beyond the nation-state – which nevertheless also affect their local configurations – at the (postsocialist) European periphery. In turn, this can assist the understanding of the stigmatization and anxieties articulated in the widespread speech genre that I analyzed in this Chapter. I return to these points in the Chapter on the urban history of marginality and marginalization in Bucharest.

Conclusions

One dominant way of exercising power in peripheral settings is by the means of *localization*, that is, the quest for territorial zones and social categories designated as prime sources of problems. We can see this reflected in popular concepts like 'problem-families' or 'problem-zones' that are feared as 'no-go areas', or which are imagined as encroaching on better parts of town, or more respectable domains of society, due to porous or not sufficiently protected boundaries. It is this sense of insecurity that surfaces when 'civilized' citizens of Bucharest express their disgust regarding the presence of people from marginal neighbourhoods in the city centre – a beautified zone otherwise dedicated to middle-class consumption and night life – or whenever local majorities indulge in the frightening visions of *reversed assimilation*, in which minorities are imagined as taking over the place of the majority. Apparently these are the concerns at stake whenever ordinary non-Roma Romanians express their complaints regarding

[49] The difference between the two was that while the *romîn* was bound to the land, the *ţigan* belonged directly to their owners as chattel property, and were transferred as such. The late Romanian Roma sociologist and civil leader, Nicolae Gheorghe's preoccupation with this point of historical resemblance was to establish a similar 'zero point' in the process of Roma emancipation or 'ethno-genesis' (even if comparatively speaking it is a belated one for the Roma or Gypsies), and to find a basis for political claim making. Here I would like to draw more on the analytic potentials of the original insight.

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those embarrassing situations in which ignorant foreigners supposedly confused them (or their likeminded co-ethnics) with the Gypsies. In these shifting contexts, those who stigmatize the Gypsies as unwanted others in national terms, or consider a poor neighbourhood as the blemish of the city, may find themselves in stigmatized positions in different geopolitical contexts, this time in the position of belonging to a notoriously 'backward' and racist society. Consequently, it is also a society that is repeatedly called to expose itself with its 'dirty laundry' to acts of moral regulation and purification which are then repeated within the same peripheral society towards places and peoples located at its own margins. These mechanisms still provide ample evidence for the ways in which stigmatization preserves an extraordinary power as a disciplinary device in the unequal relations that bind together centres and peripheries in a single town, or at the level of the nation state as well as the EU superpolity. Accordingly, on the basis of an urban ethnography in Bucharest, the aim of this Chapter was to upgrade those perspectives on the stigma that tend to limit the scope of the inquiry to the interpersonal (or solely psychological) scale, and to extend the original model in spatial terms, to orient the scope of inquiry towards the interconnected layers of stigmatization as a relational process.

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Chapter 2. A history of urban marginality in Bucharest

Communist policy brought about big changes, sociologically speaking, in Romania by putting people from different backgrounds into the same apartment blocks and neighbourhoods. Many of such areas were later described as Roma neighbourhoods, but in fact they were and have remained ethnically mixed, with Roma and Romanians engaged in wedding rituals according to the Roma tradition and vice versa. The kids played together. The teenagers went to the same sport clubs. The mixing was very strong. But the way to homogenize that mixed reality from the outside was to call it a Gypsy neighbourhood[50].

Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to set up the socio-historical background for the ethnography of urban marginality in Bucharest that this thesis analyses. In the previous Chapter I have shown that the pursuit to identify local obstacles to the civilization process in Romania has been conducive to the resurgence of stigmatization. In this respect, the straight forms of anti-Gypsism, or the social fears concerning the 'backward masses' share the same pattern, as both categories seem to share the power which enables them to invade the still fragile domains of civility. Goffman's original essay on stigma already suggested a relation model by pointing out that the

[50] Excrept from one of the last interviews with the late Roma civic leader and former sociologist, Nicolae Gheorge, see: http://www.johnfeffer.com/toward-a-roma-cosmopolitanism/

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stigma assumes contact: it is never a 'thing in itself', but rather a concern with the possibility of contagion. Moreover, stigmatization becomes all the more prevalent with social integration that leaves less and less space to maintain 'separate systems of honour' against the anticipated norms (1990: 13-17). As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, when it comes to territorial stigmatization, the case of modern Romanian nation-building and the urban development of Bucharest as a south-east European capital (hence a distinguished site of state-formation) call for an analytic exercise that aims to incorporate different scales of analysis.

Romanian preoccupations with a shared stigma are neither the traits of a timeless national exceptionality, nor just the putatively new outcomes of EU-enlargement and the international exposure to political and media attention. As the historical record suggests, rising preoccupations with local causes of backwardness are concomitant to periods of integration – or re-integration – into broader economic and political systems at the European periphery. This was the case with the cycles of Romania's involvement in the unequal exchange relations of the world economy during the second half of the 19th century, and from the late 20th century onwards (Antohi 1999). If stigmatizing relationships unfold and intensify as part of these broader cycles of integration, one might assume that their permutations – as well as the social responses they incite at different scales – follow a similar dynamics.

This chapter deals with the urban scale of these relations, as it reconstructs the historical patterns of marginalization in Bucharest. Indeed, my account has neither the ambition nor the space to provide a comprehensive account on urban history, or the history of a set of marginal zones, but it does intend to sketch the long-term dynamics of the relations between the urban centre and the margins of Bucharest. The argument partly relies on primary sources that were available in the Municipal Archives of the city[51], partly on secondary sources – especially some of the more recent pieces of the literature that covers different aspects of Bucharest's history[52]. I

[51] I am grateful for the help of Silvia Costiuc for her help in accessing and systhetizing the relevant materials that were available in the Municipal Archives of Bucharest.

[52] The chapter provides a systethized narrative that focuses on the aspects of urban history (with a primary focus on the development of Bucharest's city structure) that are the most relevant to the case of the neighborhood where I did my fieldwork. Moreover, due to certain biases of the writings about Bucharest, sometimes I had to treat the secondary sources with some criticism. For these reasons, I provide a list of the major volumes I relied on

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have to admit that I have kept on reading this literature both with fascination and puzzlement. One remarkable feature of this interdisciplinary field of writing (entailing the work of geographers, architects, social scientists and cultural critics) is the movement between time-scales or different periods. As I observed at an early stage of my work, individual contributors to this body of literature often start their accounts by evoking a certain era in the history of the city – whether it is about the medieval, early modern, or interwar and Communist period. However, soon after these evocations the same authors can easily switch to commentaries about another period, or even the present, giving the impression of an urban history that is a perpetual struggle with the same ills or challenges. The urban margins have a very distinguished role in this framework of temporality. Consequently, writing about the history of urban margins in Bucharest has to depart from the critical reflection on the meanings of this marginality, including the metonymic processes representing certain parts of the city as either equivalent to each other or they can be the equivalents of the whole city. Beyond the questions of historiography and rhetoric, the case of Bucharest provides fruitful material for the anthropological engagement with marginal zones and peripheries as they play a crucial role in the constitution of modern urbanism, and by that, of the state. Moreover, the margins also contain some of the original models or resources of state-building that bureaucracies and governments strive to appropriate (Herzfeld 2004).

The development of marginal zones in and around the city has been accompanied by recurrent efforts to stabilize the changing modes of urban governance in these territories. As it was mentioned in the Introduction and as I elaborate further on, *mahala* as a folk-concept is sometimes translated to English as 'slum', or even 'ghetto', and it has been associated with the dreadful images of areas dominated by the 'dangerous classes', especially in the postsocialist condition. As it was noted with regard to urban research in postsocialist Europe (Ferencuhová 2013), this scholarship often focused on themes such as gentrification, gated communities or the formation of urban 'ghettos' in order to emphasize the putative or partial parallels with the urban situation as depicted in western literature, while playing down instead the partial, and sometimes crucial differences from the proposed models. In order to avoid the pitfalls of accepting the

here: Cina, 2010; Majuru, 2008; Mihailescu, 2003; Suditu, 2016; Tudora, 2009; among others. Further items of the literature I used is referenced at the related points.

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received notions in this manner, it should be specified that in ideal typical terms, the *mahala* may be even an opposite of segregated or enclosed urban space; indeed, for the purposes of the present analysis, it represents a buffer-zone between the city and its rural hinterland, a territory where the city is in state of expansion. In the historical context of the South-East European periphery, such marginal neighbourhoods serve as distinguished sites for everyday reflection on urban development and local state-formation because of this transitory status – as they can be also the main settings for critical analysis of them (cf. Chirot, 1976).

Perhaps this is the chapter which engages the most closely with Wacquant's methodological program, starting from his suggestion to develop ideal types for comparative analysis, based on the historical formation of urban marginality and the careful distinctions between folk concepts and analytic terms (2008). The need for a diachronic perspective is inherent to the relational mode of reasoning: symbolic space (including cognitive categories), social space (with an unequal distribution of resources) and physical space (referring to the built environment and its infrastructures) are mutually connected. In other words, the position of the urban margins is defined by the hierarchical structure of urban space in terms of both material and symbolic value, and their history, location as well as social composition are the result of the particular functions they fulfil in the city, together with the changing degree and form of state penetration in these areas (see also: Wacquant 2016).

The metonymic *mahala* and the urban margins in a "city of contrasts"

Bucharest is often defined as a "city of contrasts" in urban writings as well as in popular discourse[53]. The phrase may refer to any of the oppositions between its 'rural' and the 'urban' character, the central zone and the margins, or – as it is the case with many other South East European cities – its ambiguous position at the crossroads between the 'East' and the 'West'. Moreover, the differences between the centres and the margins of Bucharest are also measured by

[53] During the period of my fieldwork, "the city of contrasts" became prominent in urban marketing, in order to attract tourists to Bucharest as a remarkably diverse city. For example, it was a major slogan that reappeared on the open-top double-deckers that offered sightseeing tours.

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the practical results of central planning and the uneven effects of urban governance[54]. According to this historical pattern, city centres have been constructed with the aim to meet the requirements of urban planning – typically derived from Occidental cities – while the margins largely consist of informal zones, 'neighbourhoods without history', where state presence is either weak or rather limited to interventions of law enforcement. Urban literature on Bucharest also describes the scales between these opposites in the temporal terms of a 'rural past' and an 'urban future' (especially with regard to the pre-Communist past), whereby the margins represent earlier settlement patterns with winding streets and vernacular architecture – the starting point of modern, systematic urban development. However, the tropes of disorganization do not appear only in relation to the infamous 'problem-zones' of the city, but they are recurrently deployed with reference to the whole city, when it comes to the fragmentation of the urban texture, and the ongoing interaction – or even struggle – between attempts for centralized development, and the spontaneous or self-initiated practices of dwellers with which they resolve their housing problems or develop their living conditions. At this point, the aforementioned oppositions often seem to fall apart in the discourses about Bucharest, and the urban margins come to represent the overall plight of Bucharest as a city at the European periphery[55].

In this respect, the notion of 'grey zone' might be useful, with reference to those transitory spaces where socio-spatial change has become a 'permanent state of being' (Frederiksen and Harboe Knudsen, 2015). Grey zones include those nether regions of space and society where people often resort to semi-autonomous coping strategies in order to reach a certain sense of security they are deprived of in the strictly formal sense of the word, that eventually confines distinctions such as the one between 'public' and 'private' worlds, as well as the experiences of mutuality, care or collaboration on the one hand and deception, indifference or duplicity on the other (see the final section of this Chapter). The concept of the grey zone might be useful for a historical ethnography of the urban margins in a city such as Bucharest, as its helps to grasp the

[54] For some of the ideal typical cases of Latin American cities in this respect, see for example: Caldeira, 2000; Goldstein 2016.

[55] The 'Bucharest paradox' is a phrase in urban writings about the city when it comes to the incongruence between rational urban planning in a rapidly evolving modern city and the "implacable stagnation" and "immutable mud" of an ever-expanding rural settlement (Tudora, 2009: 33.)

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paradoxical processes by which urbanization of rural territories and the ongoing 'ruralization' of urban space came to represent two different sides of the same coin[56].

Therefore, similarly to other cases of peripheral cities in and outside Europe, the urban margins are a 'constitutive outside' of the centre and the dominant norms of urbanism (see: Roy, 2011). According to Duijzings, the rural-urban division in South Eastern Europe is characterized by the 'salience of conflicting cultural hierarchies', as the countryside represents a 'repository of traditional national values', but at the same time 'peasants are treated with disdain by the educated urban elites and middle classes' (2010). The relationship of the urban centre and the margins can be described by a similar ambiguity. As the chapter points out, these social and spatial relations are based on the crucial function of the urban margins as frontlines of urban growth and expansion which renders them problematic but also essential for the state.

In correlation to the historical path and changing geopolitical orientation of the Romanian Principalities (and later on the unified and greater Romania), the history of Bucharest is commonly divided into periods of predominantly Byzantine, Ottoman and from the 19th century onwards Occidental (especially Parisian) models of urban development. The foundation of the city can be traced back to the enlarging seasonal fairs organized by a set of neighbouring villages from the 15th century. The ruler of Wallachia decided to get taxes for the defence of the conglomerate and he established a stronghold that became his regular place of residence. During the period of Ottoman suzerainty the city was functioning under the tutelage of the reign and the church. Around the dual centre of the reign's court and the commercial zone, neighbourhoods of traders, craftsmen and various occupational groups were emerging in a successive and unregulated manner along the principal commercial roads. After a new settlement was established beyond the limits of the existing ones[57], it was then officialised with the contribution of abbots as local bosses, who were paid by the dwellers to mediate their demand for a place in the reign's record of taxpayers. Apart from the interests of the church to extract money from the residents of newly established neighbourhoods after the older ones, the other reason of the sustained

[56] For a detailed anthropological study on this controversial process in the context of Communist Romania, see: Sampson, 1982.
[57] These lands formally belonged to monasteries.

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expansion and 'vernacular development' of the city was the lack of a surrounding fortification[58]. On a more anecdotic note, some authors suggest that unregulated expansion was also due to the interests of innkeepers who were serving the travellers at the city limits. In order to escape their tax-paying duties, they recurrently moved their taverns beyond the existing barriers which then also had to be modified[59]. Apart from the spontaneous occupation of lands, new neighbourhoods kept on emerging and expanding throughout the centuries also because of the ongoing inclusion of villages from the vicinity of Bucharest. The radial model remained the basic principle of spatial development in Bucharest; later on it was diversified with the multiple centres of the residential districts around the central zone[60].

In general terms, the neighbourhoods of medieval and early modern Bucharest were made up by rather enclosed and self-sufficient communities of occupation or ethnicity (as in the case of Jews and Armenians), that, however, were not necessarily of homogenous social standing, since boyar families could be found in many areas. Their buildings – sometimes luxurious ones according to the standards of Ottoman architecture – usually stood next to the main roads which connected Bucharest with other townships and the surrounding regions or countries. The rest of the houses stood along the smaller winding streets inside the neighbourhoods, or they were scattered between empty plots (*maidane*), vineyards, farmlands, mills, or orchards. Because of the weakness of the common building materials in town (such as wood and adobe[61]), as well as the long series of cataclysms throughout the centuries – such as floods, fires, earthquakes, pestilence, locust invasions or military attacks – some authors refer to a 'lack of urban history' at least until the 18th century. Following these crises, numerous buildings and sometimes whole areas had to be remade from scratch. As the calamities returned from time to time, similar reconstructions were needed also after the introduction of organized urban planning, dedicated to goals such as the paving of main streets, the draining of wetlands and the construction of sewers.

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[58] In the literature I am familiar with concerning the urban history of Bucharest, the lack of fortication is attributed to the conditions set up by a treaty with the Ottomans.
[59] See: Stahl, 2002. The story had been taken over by some other authors as well.
[60] The city limits were officially marked off for the first time in 1830.
[61] Brickmaking was an occupation largely dominated by Gypsies in Bucharest, at least until the official standardization of building materials for use.

As an element of the Ottoman Turkish influence in the Romanian context, *mahala* (or *mahalla* in an earlier form) was both an administrative and a folk concept that defined a *neighbourhood* of town organized around a church and on the basis of taxation, regardless of its more central or marginal place. As I discuss later, after the industrial mode of production started to become the main engine of urban growth opposed to crafts-based production[62] and city leaders oriented themselves towards western models of urban planning and style from the middle of the 19th century, aspiring middle class professionals and urbanizing boyars have gradually taken over the central zones from merchants and craftsmen. The first factories were established at the urban margins or outside the city.

Reflecting the overall transformation, the folk-concept of the *mahala* obtained rather disparaging (but in some context culturally intimate and nostalgic) connotations, this time alluding to the urban margins, the figure of the "slum-dweller" (*mahalagiu*[63]) and his surliness. The *mahala*, as an indistinct label for marginal territories, came to stand for a dual burden for the officials and the aspiring elites, on the one hand as a direct opposite of modern urbanism, and on the other hand as a vital reminder to its local imperfections as well as a device of accusation[64] with regards to the conditions of an ever-expanding loose "conglomerate of villages" filled with mud[65] or dust somewhere between the rural to urban domains. Therefore, the *mahala* is also persistent point of reference in writings about Bucharest, when it comes to a onetime "Oriental city" (or an "Ottoman" or "Byzantine Bucharest") as a point of departure for the projects of modern development and statecraft.

From the 19th century onwards, during the political reorientation of Romanian lands towards the western centres of power (under Russian inspection), Bucharest became the capital of

[62] In fact, the switch to an industrial mode of production already started before the end of the Phanariot rule in 1821.

[63] More precisely, the figure of 'slum-dwellers' in this sense represent a social equivalent of the transitory 'rural-urban' spaces they inhabit, as former peasants who became the "cads" (*mitocani*) of the city. As an meaningful instance of 'marginalization within the margins', I may recall that according to certain inhabitants of Ferentari, the concept of the *mahala* defines only those parts of streets of their neighborhood that are directly located next to waste-dumps.

[64] For this term, see: Slater, 2013.

[65] For the symbolism of mud in a Serbian town, see: Port, 1998.

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a new state. As Bucharest became the capital of the independent Romanian state in 1881, the pace of modernization and industrial development further accelerated, together with the growth of urban population and the influx of new dwellers[66]. Consequently, city leaders made recurrent attempts in the coming decades for centralized planning and law enforcement in order to handle a series of matters, such as urban hygiene and the need for densification; the limitation of the city's spontaneous growth; the transformation of agricultural fields into urban territories; the regulation of building materials; the obligatory heightening of buildings in the central zone or the fencing of courtyards (not in the least to reduce the usage of gardens in the city for agricultural purposes). As repeated acts of urban legislation were dedicated to the same or at least similar purposes, it is presumable that the actual growth and development of the city kept on following a parallel trajectory to the one prescribed by the incentives – especially at the urban margins[67]. Uneven urban development was reflected in the relative density in the central zone, opposed to the urban margins as spaces of social relegation that are dominated by improvised housing solutions in constant remaking. Apart from the relation between the local metropolitan centre and margins, another dynamics of polarization developed between the north and the south of the city early on. Because of the growing profitability of land, the official attempts dedicated to parcelling were largely in favour of the emerging bourgeoisie and the wealthy boyars who established residential or green belt areas especially towards the north of the city[68]. At the same time, collective housing remained practically absent in Bucharest throughout the whole period (also in the form of social housing), and the family house represented the most widespread form of dwelling. In this respect, the main difference between the better-off or more respectable and the poor households was that in the latter typically more families have been sharing the same living space.

The end of the First World War brought a new wave of industrial development to Bucharest as the capital of greater Romania, together with the further growth of urban population

[66] The population of Bucharest has doubled only between 1838 and 1860 from 63 644 to 121 734, out of which 9000 persons were registered in the census as Gypsies. Between 1878 and 1916, the population of Bucharest has doubled once again.

[67] Reading the modern urban history of Bucharest sometimes gives the sensation that one is following a chronicle of failed or just partly realized exercises in centralized urban planning, instead of the history of an actually existing metropolis in South-Eastern European.

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and marginal neighbourhoods[69]. However, Bucharest maintained a relative low density because of the ongoing territorial expansion and absorption of villages beyond the former city limits.[70] The famous "golden age" of the interwar era has brought plans dedicated to systematization and future urban restructuring that were the most comprehensive and ambitious so far, but their objectives have never become fully materialized by the time of the Second World War. Akin to the spatial patterns of earlier periods, the objective of streamlining has culminated in the construction of new boulevards, which were like 'urban facades' in a rather literal sense compared to the lack of profound changes in the adjacent neighbourhoods.

In this respect, the installation of the Soviet-type Communist regime led to the continuation of slightly similar trends in the capital, as the construction of industrial platforms paced up the influx of rural populations throughout the 1950s, including those who were dislocated due to the effects of collectivization in agriculture. In the meantime, the rates of industrial growth and employment were not matched by the development of urban housing (as elsewhere in Communist eastern-Europe, see among others: Szelenyi, 1983). As a policy solution, the state partly relied on the institution of flat-share in the existing but nationalized urban housing stock (see: Chelcea, 2012) and partly on the prevention of settlement for those who originated from the closer areas around the capital (by issuing ID cards for those who were allowed to stay permanently). Beyond these measures, a large part of the evolving workers' quarters from this period were still dominated by rural types of low quality dwellings. As an old Romanian ethnographer recalled to me once, in the 1950s she could observe almost all the different regional folk-dances (*hore*) of Romania performed in the streets of these neighborhoods. People came to work in Bucharest from different rural areas of the country and they all brought their particular traditions to the capital. As an image, the different regional folk-dances appearing in the proximity of a Bucharest mahala represent a form of mixing that was definitely desirable from the point of view of the ongoing state project of nationalization.

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[69] According to census data, between 1929 and 1928 the population of Bucharest has grown from 389 078 to 569 885. By the end of the 1930s, the population of Bucharest almost reached the number of 900 000.

[70] For example, the comparison of census data between 1930 and 1940 suggests that the urban margins have shown the highest proportions in the population growth in Bucharest.

In the following decades, the gradual expansion of neighbourhoods made up by the assemblies of collective housing blocks provided access to single-family households with running water and central heating to a further increasing population from backgrounds all over the country. The quality as well as the symbolic and material value of these blocks of flats were degrading according to the social and professional ranking of the original recipients in the Communist regime (the higher the better), but also according to the time of their construction (the later the construction was, the lower its quality compared to the initial plans). A basic principle behind the plans for the systematization of Bucharest was the separation of the city into sleeping districts that include the homes and the workplaces of the residents together with parks and the additional institutions dedicated to education culture, health and administration. In 1971, Bucharest had 330 000 worker-residents and the expectation was to achieve a 50% growth in the following five years. Until 1970 the majority of housing projects were constructed on free lands, but later also on territories with low density of buildings that were expropriated and demolished.

According to the dominant narrative of the literature about Bucharest, the Communist policy of social integration and mixing produced a generalized state of anomy in which putative townspeople remained trapped between rural and urban life-worlds, maintaining their rural family networks not in the least because of the scarcity of foodstuff and resources in urban centres. For old urbanites from homes that were demolished or nationalized, life in the new apartment blocks remained an alienating experience (on this topic, see: Mihailescu et al, 2009). Towards the final period of Ceausescu's regime, the old commercial centre of Bucharest was in a process of severe degradation because of state abandonment, and many of its housing units became the squatting sites of the urban poor. While previously the newly built collective housing units were expanding in areas that had been the city's rural peripheries beforehand, the shock of the 1977 earthquake in Bucharest represent a turning point in urban governance, as it created an occasion for an even more intensified restructuring that was aimed at the erasure of the older urban fabric. However, in spite of the radical forms of urban restructuring and the rapid expansion of the districts with the assemblies of concrete blocks especially under late Communism, some observers recognize patterns from the earlier periods of spatial and social relations in Bucharest. The further developing great axes of the city were surrounded by new blocks of flats, while previous neighbourhoods behind them often remained nearly intact.

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Moreover, the expanding zones of collective housing units as sleeping districts – the 'melting pots' developed by the Communist regime – preserved an orientation inwards with a certain sense of autonomy, in an enduring disconnection from the city centre.

To briefly announce the analysis that follows, the postsocialist transition has brought a resurgence of disparate local tactics in the domain of housing – either as a response to growing impoverishment and inefficient urban policies, or because of hasty adaptations to the pressures exerted by powerful investors – with continuing disputes around ownership and the appropriation of public space. Bucharest became the centre of investment a booming capitalist economy, and the monetary value of land often surpasses that of the buildings and the housing stock located there (regardless of their conditions). The value of land became the main engine of property development and the further restructuring of the urban landscape, which is still expected to result in the further displacement of the urban poor. The following section presents a particular history of these displacements. Just like in the previous section, my aim is to accentuate the long-term historical dynamics of social and spatial relations that are constitutive of the urban margins. This time I do so by reconstructing one specific line of movement which explains the place and the development of Ferentari, the neighbourhood where I did my ethnographic fieldwork.

The relegations of the dispossessed

The southern parts of Bucharest were historically less populated because of their swampy fields and frequent floods, as well as their exposure to military encroachments under Ottoman domination. The main road from the centre towards the south-western margins was crossing through territories that have been inhabited by the poorest of the poor for centuries. Their territories were in a constant motion together with the overall expansion of the city. The "neighbourhood of the paupers" (*mahalaua calicilor*) was populated by various categories of the marginalized, including the desperately poor, beggars, outlaws, vagabonds, or the physically or mentally handicapped, people with contagious illnesses, or former soldiers with incurable injuries. Under the protection of the reign and the church, exempted from paying tributes, the paupers were allowed to subsist by begging in town. Moreover, they were also helping the

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merchants and the wealthy who passed by the area by loading their baggage, or to climb the steep slopes in bad weather for a charge or payment. Together with the growth of the urban market and the surrounding neighbourhoods, the number of huts populated by beggars also kept growing throughout the 16th century mainly along the road which connected the reign's court in Bucharest to other markets and urban centres on a North-South axis. In other words, the growth and the expansion of the city were paralleled by the increasing population of paupers. Nevertheless, from the late 17th century onwards, a series of measures were introduced, first to remove the paupers and their dwelling spaces further away from the city towards south-western pastures and vineyards; and second, to regulate their contact with the rest of urban society[71].

As elsewhere in the Romanian lands, the neighbourhood of the paupers was neighbouring that of enslaved Gypsies (*ţigani*) who were living in shanties on the southern coast of the Dambovita River. The two zones sometimes merged with one another, as there were also fights between their inhabitants until the city or the church reconciled them. At the same time the meaning of the pauper as a social category was also in transformation, expanding from disabled beggars to poor people (*oameni sarmani*) in general, including the Gypsies. As already mentioned, especially in the period between the end of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th century, the region of Bucharest went through a difficult period marked by famines, locust invasions, plague epidemics, wars, and bandit-attacks in short and irregular intervals that led to mass impoverishment. In 1780 the reign prohibited begging, as it became so widespread, and a later decision aimed to prohibit giving away alms (*pomana*) for the inhabitants of Bucharest due to the assumption that many beggars would be capable to perform productive work. The neighbourhood of paupers was officially eliminated at the beginning of the 19th century in order to provide space for Carol Park (*Parcul Carol*) designed after French model, and the former 'Road of the Paupers' (*Podul Calicilor*) went through re-naming several times. The name changes were needed by the boyars and merchants who lived along the road, as it was inconvenient for them to be associated with the poor in town. On the first detailed plan of the city

[71] These regulations partly aimed to set up the moral codes of begging (also to distinguish it from theft) and partly by bringing their guild under the administration of the metropolitan church. The reign Constantin Brancoveanu made an effort to distribute them among monasteries; their communities were still persisting in town.

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from 1852, one can find the zone populated by the Gypsies who were in the property of the church located further down south from Podul Calicilor, in a territory with randomly scattered small houses.

The urban governance of poverty began to transform during the second half of the 19th century due to the emerging institutionalization (such as the establishment of mental asylums and sanatoriums), and also a disciplinary turn in policies that were seeking the origins of poverty in moral decay. However, the practical reach of these changes was limited, and the actual scope of modernist incentives was rather to eliminate the spaces of misery as well as to keep the dispossessed at bay from the rest of the social body. For instance, in 1869 the Filaret railway station was opened in the South West of Bucharest in order to serve industrial and freight transportation, and later on it became a point of concentration for some of the industrial plants of the era. Following these developments, there was an increasing need for the work and accommodation of qualified labour force.

In administrative terms, the neighbourhood of Ferentari was incorporated into Bucharest after the end of the First World War. The interwar period brought a new wave of cheap housing construction in the peripheral zones of Bucharest. During the same period the northern part of today's Ferentari neighbourhood became of bohemian district with a large number of registered pubs, based on the vineyards in its surroundings. According to the documents, the first church of the neighbourhood was consecrated in 1936, also as an intervention in a zone that was associated with high rates of crime as well as children with unknown fathers and unmarried couples with children. In the interwar period the neighbourhood was categorized as a second ranking peripheral zone of passage with some 10 000 residents, it was devoid of street light, medical units or pharmacies, and the entire water supply was provided by one public fountain.

As it was mentioned before, the urban margins maintained a rather rural-like social and spatial environment during the interwar era, with adobe and brick houses that were inhabited by unqualified workers, small clerks, or farmer-merchants. The first collective housing projects appeared after 1940, as new waves of rural migrants entered the southern territories of the city due to the continuous need for unskilled labour supply. In this era and also in the coming

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decades, most inhabitants in the neighbourhood were working on the industrial plants of the southern zone. In this context, Ferentari was registered as an industrial area populated by the working poor or the "needy" (*nevoiaşi*) According to the Communist plans for industrialization and systematization, further housing units were to be constructed at the urban margins.

In this context, the ambitious plan for the neighbourhood of Ferentari was to construct altogether 5500 housing units until 1971, and 9000 until 1975. However, based on the comparison between the plans from the local governmental archives and actual cadastre, it is apparent that after 1971 the plan was not followed anymore. New blocks of flats were still erected after 1971, but the social and commercial centres and the other facilities from the initial plan were to be added in a second phase. In other words, the realization of collective housing projects at the urban margins was a partial achievement, in spite of the further waves of incoming migration as a response to the continuing industrial development. In the municipal archives there is no available information about the provenance of those 5000-10000 persons who moved into the collective housing units located in the centre of today's Ferentari, the most degraded and infamous zone within the neighbourhood that nowadays local residents themselves label as "ghettos" (*ghetouri*). Otherwise, when it comes to the different kinds of blocks in the neighbourhood, residents still rely on distinctions based on the categories of their initial recipients under Communism. Hence, during my fieldwork it was still common to refer to the dilapidated housing units (with the lowest level of comfort) as places of *nefamilişti*, i.e. the single workers who came in town to work in the industrial plants and development projects such as the construction of the subway. In a similar way, the blocks with the better equipped two-room apartments and hot water were still identified with the army (*armată*) – their initial beneficiaries. Although the blocks of *nefamilişti* were erased from the property registers after 1989 and they were waiting to be demolished, but in fact new residents moved in to the evacuated buildings and the rooms and flats become an object of informal 'free trade' (Mionel-Negut, 2011: 204-208.). As I return to this in Chapter 3, the streets with these dilapidated buildings became the negative symbols of overall decay in the area for local residents (as the "heart of the neighbourhood"), and their images are widely circulated in the usual dramatic media reports on extreme poverty in

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Ferentari as such[72]. As a result of both, inhabitants from the surrounding territories strive to distinguish these "ghettoes" from their own places of residence by the everyday policing of local boundaries.

Beyond the poor-quality blocks and workers' dormitories that were erected as a response to housing shortages and the migration of workers to the city under Communism, the landscape of the neighbourhood is dominated by sub-standard rural-type housing to this day (Marcinczak et al. 2014). In general, throughout the first decade of the postsocialist transition, this became one of the neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of unskilled and (officially) unemployed workers in the city (ibid.: 11). Moreover, this period brought to the neighbourhood new waves of settlers who had lost their homes in other areas of the city due to demolitions, property restitution or overall impoverishment.

Similarly to other zones with disadvantaged or substandard housing conditions in the south of Bucharest, municipal interventions in the neighbourhood were not absent during the recent years. The existing initiatives are focusing predominantly on infrastructural and technical development, such as sewage, the paving of the streets, or changing the old vehicles of public transportation (see: Berescu 2011). As I return to this below, several new multi-storey apartment blocks have been created during the last few years, some of which are located and wait for new residents right next to zones the with the most dilapidated housing stock[73]. At the time of my fieldwork, rumours were already circulating about the demolition of these degraded buildings and the evacuation of their dwellers. Nevertheless, until the time of writing, these events did not happen yet. In broad terms, the 'trope of disorganization' is still a recurrent motif in writings about Bucharest and its 'chaotic' urban evolution. Nevertheless, according to some authors a major structuring force during the last two decades has been the uneven development of new residential areas dedicated to the urban elites (typically in the north or nearby areas), and the

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[72] Because of the widespread association of the whole neighbourhood with these buildings, I should clarify that I was not living in this zone, although I regularly visited it. Apart from the fact that I needed a place for long-term residence, and the coincidence that we found an available apartment with my colleague in another street, I was already aware of the high media exposure of these streets back then.

[73] Around 2012, the prices of apartments in these new buildings usually started from 20-22 thousand euros.

persistence of 'poverty-bags' with the marginalized populations of the city (Mionel-Negut, 2011: 215).

In the following section, I am going to present a couple of ethnographic instances related to urban history and housing that I came across in the neighbourhood. The main protagonists of my account are members from an extended family of Spoitori Gypsies, but I also present other actors I became familiar with. Nevertheless, it is important to add that the stories, recollections or "sayings" (see below) of these inhabitants of Ferentari are far from being specific for their extended families of kin, even less so for the poor or the Roma in Bucharest as such. Instead, I use their example in order to introduce the ways in which some of the major themes of Bucharest urban history – and particularly a history of urban marginality – are reflected in the local knowledge and the housing stories shared by a handful of people who live in and around the Romanian capital at the beginning of the 21st century.

"It was a field"

Among the inhabitants of this poor neighbourhood – perhaps similarly to the popular classes elsewhere – much of the local knowledge with regard to the social world as well as history or memory is typically expressed and transmitted in proverbial forms – as the protagonists themselves would put it, in "sayings" (*vorbe*) that deserve special ethnographic attention as 'folk concepts' or taxonomies about space and society[74]. Whenever I asked the elderly inhabitants I knew in Ferentari about the "old times" in the neighbourhood, their most usual assertion was that "it was a field!" (*era un câmp!*).This laconic expression implied a wide array of meanings with regard to the past and the present, the spatial position of the neighbourhood in the city as well as the social position of its inhabitants in a 'grey zone'. First of all, the notion of a one-time field, meadow, or a set of empty plots and orchards represented an imaginary zero point of local history, the initial state of a marginal buffer zone with shifting limits, as a territory where the city was expanding. In fact, this idea of a "field" also refers to a place that is still in motion, as a site

[74] In his ethnography about the Neapolitan *popolino*, Italo Pardo (1996) relies on a similar approach to proverbial expressions in poor urban neighbourhoods.

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of an ongoing flux of people, instead of being a territory of closure in social or ethnoracial terms (Wacquant 2008).

Second, the symbolism of the "field" also implies the ongoing struggles of local residents to acquire and retain a sense of being urbanites in opposition to people of the disparaged "countryside" (*la țară*), including their own relatives and perhaps also some earlier stages of their lives. People I knew in the neighbourhood were keen on highlighting the difference between themselves as urban dwellers and the folks who lived in the countryside (*la țară*). In such cases they depicted rural life and people as unbearably dull and boring (*plictisitor*) that they cannot bear for too long, even if in domains such as food-supply they were often depending on them. Before events like Christmas, their rural connections could provide them with the amount of pork meat that was appropriate for the celebrations. Moreover, besides the fact that many city dwellers actually lived in rural-type households, sometimes their rural kin were living in much better or spacious housing conditions in comparative terms. Still, rural-urban distinctions were reflected in regular oppositions between the "boredom" of village life, and the livelihood practices and everyday challenges in a neighbourhood that is a "wild" (*sălbatic*) place in some respects. Therefore, as I elaborate in the following chapter, the "field" is also a space of mutual negotiations between residents as neighbours[75], since their pursuit to survive and thrive is deeply interconnected with the everyday making and remaking of the terms that are regulating their cohabitation[76]. Accordingly, the "field" as a folk-concept depicts the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in a role that is similar to that of colonial settlers, who moved to a previously uncharted territory in subsequent waves. Some of them may have been migrants from rural areas; others lost their homes in different zones of the city. As a female resident put it in a recent journalistic account:

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[75]The best illustration I can provide for the meaning and practice of neighbourliness is that in common everyday interactions out in the street, residents often addressed each other simply as "neighbour" (*vecin*), even if they were not familiar with each other, did not live in the same street or in adjacent buildings.

[76] Importantly, this sense of cohabitation was also in opposition to the way residents conceived other areas of Bucharest that were filled with apartment blocks, and in the lack of conviviality between the rural-type of households, neighbours "do not know each other" anymore.

> Ferentari has been home for poor people, for tricked ones, for ex prisoners, for all the marginalized ones. Only God seems to remember this place even exists but even he forgets about us from time to time.[77]

The neighbourhood is depicted here as a place where nobody came voluntarily ("no one is here by choice, only by necessity"), which recall initial acts of violence – such as evictions, demolitions, overall impoverishment or the postsocialist privatization of state-owned public housing units in other parts of town. Nevertheless, the analytic division of putatively 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' settlement or segregation may turn out to be a futile exercise on a closer inspection of housing stories. In fact, many residents could recall the way in which their families were deprived of their homes elsewhere in town. However, the same persons could also share an unambiguous sense of belonging to their current habitat. Such articulations of local pride could work as a refusal of the territorial stigma imposed on the neighbourhood. For example, this was the case when Lucian, a talented Spoitori Gypsy trader, recalled his one-time acquaintances who already left the neighbourhood. Wherever they went, from his point of view their departure could be taken as a sign of irredeemable weaknesses, the inability to endure or abide by (*rezista*) the various challenges of surviving and thriving in the neighbourhood that he conceived to be a storehouse of potential strengths, and also a home that should not be abandoned.

Even if a large majority of dwellers could be regarded as 'newcomers' in one way or another – sharing different histories of migration within Bucharest or between the city and the countryside – a certain minority of residents had claims for an 'established' status against 'outsiders' (see: Elias-Scotson 1994). They part of families that have been living here for several generations; some of them could trace back their local presence even until the speaker's great-grandparents. However, as a reversed version of the usual pattern of majority-minority relations, all such families I got to know in the neighbourhood were of Roma origins. Their claims for the title of the 'established' have added a certain historical layer to the local ideology of Gypsy dominance – in spite of the highly mixed composition of Roma and non-Roma Romanians in the local population. As I return to this in the chapter on social unrest and popular politics, certain members of these 'established' families strove to convert their status into positions of leadership

[77] Source: http://ferentari.dela0.ro/index.php/2016/11/07/great-expectations/

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either in local politics[78] or else in the dynamically changing field of non-governmental organizations that have been competing for the funding and legitimacy to run local interventions. Iulius, a 42 years old Rom man from a family of cobblers (*cizmari*) was such a well-known person in the area of the neighbourhood where I lived. Once I asked him once about the "old times" in the neighbourhood, which he understood as a reference to the period before the 1970s. He started to respond by saying that "it was a field":

> It was a field. There were no buses, no trams; we used to go on foot 3-4-5 kilometers from here until the first bus or tram stop… until it became more developed. Compared to what was before, now it's like luxury. Those times were different, there were no blocks [of flats], no sewage, no running water, and it was rare to have electricity (*lumină*)… It was obligatory to have 5-7-9 children; that was the law (*lege*), you rarely met women who gave birth in a hospital. By now it became a mixed zone but before the blocks [of flats] there were only courtyards with no fences around and only Roma[79] lived here. At that time under Communism my parents had legal documents [of landownership], they didn't want to make a house otherwise, but [initially] many others didn't have any. They just found a place and made a house without any problems, because the state couldn't give them any, and then they made a demand (*cerere*) or announcement (*anunț*) for an address and a house number. Whole streets were formed this way; this is how it was back then. After the blocks were constructed, all kinds of people came one after the other, the factories gave them apartments, a Rom hooked up (*cuplat*) with a Romanian girl and they made children who are half Romanian and half Gypsy, so they arrived to something mixed.

As I mentioned before, the symbolism of the "field" refers to a buffer zone or a previously uninhabited space of urban expansion, occupied by subsequent waves of settlers who started cultivating their environment by the means available to them. Later they were followed by the members of the Communist working class with rural origins and hopes for urban employment, as well as the dispossessed of postsocialism, who found a last refuge in this neighbourhood. However, apart from such historical referents, the idea of the "field" could also return and

[78] Usually such persons belonged to the Roma Party (*Partida Romilor*) or the Social Democratic Party (PSD). As I return to it later, this was the case with Marius, who was running a body building centre in the neighbourhood, a place he introduced to me as also the local "headquarters" from which he organized "the mobilization of voters" during the times of elections.

[79] I should add that apart from local residents like Iulius, who were already familiar with the vocabulary of civil society organiztations, both Roma and non-Roma Romanian inhabitants of the neighborhood were commonly using the term "Gypsy" (*țigan*) as a denominator – except the cases when native speakers of Romani were adressing each other in their mother tongue.

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resuscitate in a very contemporary sense, as an asset of popular claim-making. In this respect, the notion of the field also represented the 'everyday uses of history' in the neighbourhood, as an elementary form of popular politics.

In 2013 it turned out that an entrepreneur successfully managed to reclaim a large plot in the neighbourhood in the controversial framework of land restitution[80] (*retrocedare*). According to local rumours, in the end the mayor's office barely prevented the entrepreneur to vindicate a whole piece of land as his family property, including even a public park with a playground for children. In the end, he obtained only a former parking lot. Soon after, a whole new block of flats was erected here with apartments for rent and sale. Inhabitants of the area followed these events with great discontent, and many were arguing that such a transaction must have been the result of bribing relations around the mayor's office. As Vasile, the head of the extended family of Spoitori Gypsies, told me indignantly, "Bullshit (*pula*), it was a field!" In this case, the notion of the "field" re-emerged as a critical tool against the injustices of expropriation of the entrepreneur's alleged inheritance. At such a moment, inhabitants of the neighbourhood could again recall the urban expansion and the times before the 1970s when the limits of the neighbourhood's built environment were much closer to the city centre. The land reclaimed by the entrepreneur could not be anyone's private property, since it was used for military exercises, or perhaps it was an agricultural zone with flowers, fruits and vegetables. Accordingly, this time the notion of the "field" served as a reminder of the essentially arbitrary or dubious nature of claims for primacy and property over a land that could belong to everyone and to no one at the same time. Hence, the memory of the one-time "field" – and the original state of equality between settlers – was evoked even in the midst of the most contemporary political struggles around local property claims.

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Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to create a dialogue between the comparative study of urban marginality, and the history of marginalization in the case of Bucharest, as a metropolis at the

[80] On the issue of property in the context of postsocialist Romania, see: Verdery, 1996.

South Eastern periphery of Europe. First, if the analytic concept of the *ghetto* assumes closure and containment as the two of its constitutive features, in our case the urban formation of the *mahala* represents a rural-urban buffer zone, in terms of the 'village-like features' of the social and built environment, the infrastructure as well as the recruitment and flux of its inhabitants. Second, opposed to a fully contained space, these territories have been representing a major challenge, indeed the grey zones and the 'tests of strength' for urban governance and central planning in the city history. Throughout its modern history Bucharest kept on expanding due to recurrent efforts by the state for urban development especially in the central areas, which meant the elimination of previous neighbourhoods or *mahala*s, and the relocation of their inhabitants. In other words, the margins were in constant motion throughout urban history. The flux of population from rural areas was added to this movement, as a response to the demands for industrial labour force. The southern peripheries of Bucharest had been historically associated with the lower classes, as part of the broader uneven development of the city. The conflicts between the principles of central planning and the unregulated expansion at the margins presented the municipality with a persistent contradiction between the spatial expansion of the city, and the need for 'densification' as a scope of urban planning. In other words, urban expansion or urbanization was practically obtained largely by the gradual inclusion of more and more settlements that beforehand represented a hinterland made of former villages around the city. The process led to an urbanization that translates as an ongoing expansion into rural territories, and a series of governmental efforts for spatial cleansing and the restructuring of an urban space in continuous expansion. This phenomenon provides one of the reasons why in the history-writing of Bucharest, the trope of disorganization is often expanded to the whole of the city, and the state is described in re-active terms, in other words, one that merely reacts to otherwise spontaneous and already unfolding processes, instead of initiating them at the first place. In the Communist era, the ongoing project of industrialization was accompanied by a prolonged housing crisis in terms of the state's ability to accommodate those who arrived to the city.

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Figure on the following page: The development of the city and the zones of poverty

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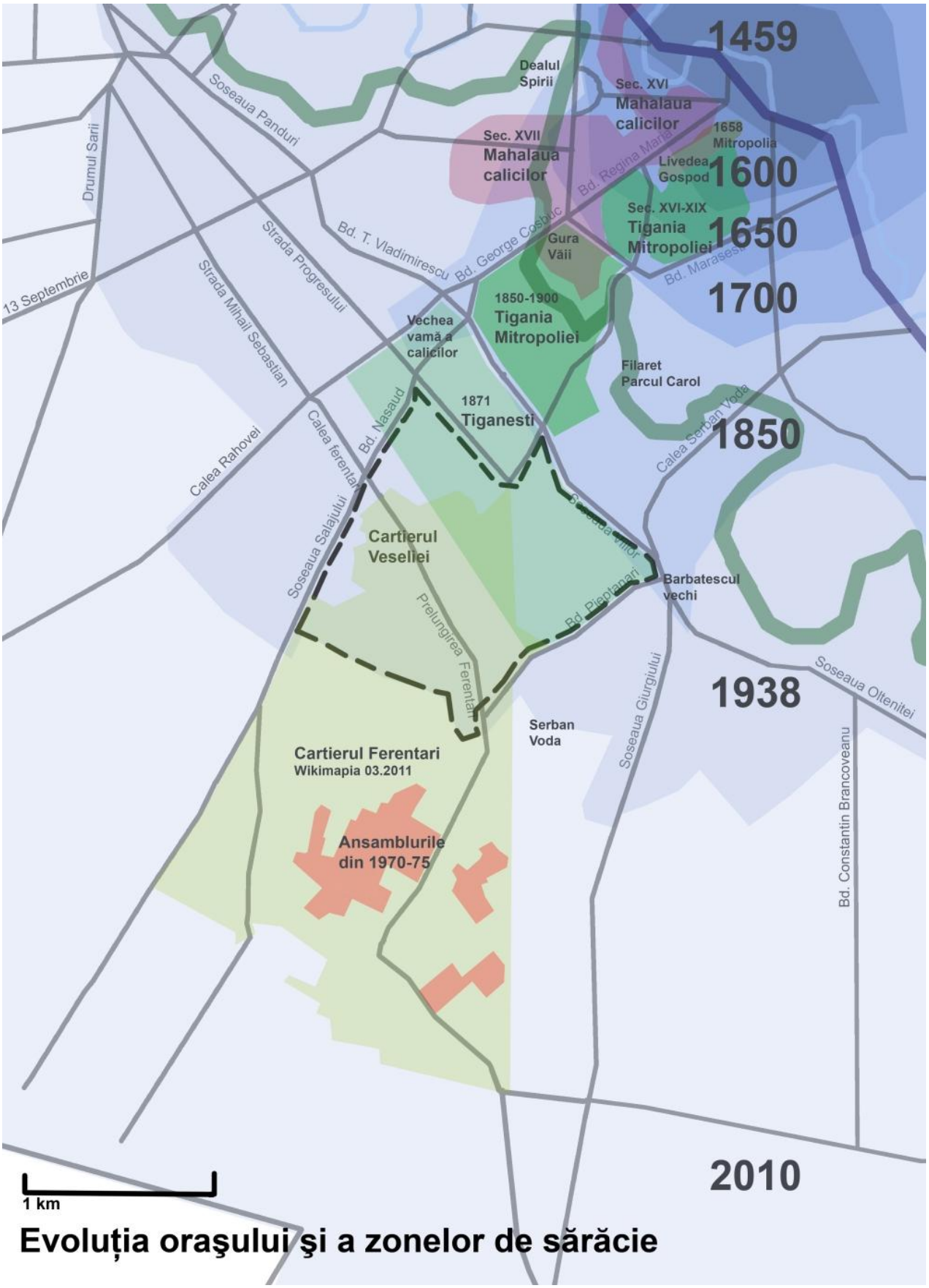

Evoluția orașului și a zonelor de sărăcie

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Chapter 3. The Civilized, the Vagabond, the Player and the Fool

Introduction

> All over society, organizations are trying to determine for people what they ought to be in order to serve their purposes, and just about all over people respond in part, collectively or individually, by creating an underlife. This is to the organization, Goffman suggests, what the underworld is to a city.
>
> Ulf Hannerz[81]

The aim of this chapter is to introduce some of the underlying principles and elementary forms of social distinctions in the neighbourhood of Ferentari. In conditions of concentrated poverty and drug-abuse, territorial stigmatization, the weakness of local state institutions and the widespread reliance on informality, inhabitants resort to a complex set of categories in their endeavour to organize their social worlds and to prove their own "value" (valoare). The claim of being "civilized" (*civilizat*) refers to the idea of an obedient citizen and it is rooted in the household (including its most immediate environments) opposed to street life that is associated with interpersonal risks and metaphors of homelessness. If they take this ideal "civilized" stance, the necessary conclusion for inhabitants is that theirs is the most "ill-famed" (*cel mai rău famat*) neighbourhood in the capital of a "shit country" (*țară de căcat*). In order to avoid the unsettling prospect of being absorbed by this space, and hence becoming a "fool" (*fraier*), one necessarily has to attend the "school of life" (*şcoala vieţii*) which is defined in opposition to the realm of formal education. Following the analytic methods of classical urban ethnographies of marginality (such as Hannerz, 2004 [1969]; and Liebow, 2003 [1967], just to mention two among the most influential ones) the chapter introduces these categories of practice from a perspective oriented towards a street-corner and seeks to connect them to the categories of analysis from this angle.

[81] See: Hannerz, 1980.

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As the Chapter points out, these elementary categories have a crucial role in organizing the social world of the neighbourhood, but they inform the ways in which inhabitants relate their own plight to other places and peoples in the world. Before the presentation of the ethnographic data, I dedicate a section to the historical and epistemological conditions in which urban ethnographies of marginality have been produced, as part of the exercise that Bourdieu defined as 'participant objectivation' (2003). Unexpected encounters, difficult and changing personal alliances or deviations from previously settled principles, concepts and theories are inevitable parts of fieldwork as a process. Ethnographers who claim that the distinct character of their work is due to the navigation in these shifting circumstances are often criticized for imposing a biased, subjective and personal agenda on their readers. According to this criticism, for them it is just a set of sentimental stories and moral tales that stand for professional achievements. The lengthy descriptions or quotations from interviews are presented as scientific evidence but their analysis might be deficient – especially when the author fails to convince us that a preferred interpretation must be the valid one over others. In this case, what is introduced as ethnographic is just another aspect of self-appraisal since it has little to convey besides the repeated statement of *being there*. One way of avoiding these pitfalls is to take on a reflexive exercise and to consider what Venkatesh calls the *social production of the ethnographer*: it means to investigate the conditions that made the completion of a certain study possible, including the question of how researchers are viewed by informants (Venkatesh, 2002).

Texas, Bronx, Romania

In a rather peculiar way, while the problems of Eastern European poverty came to be described by academic concepts imported from the US in the course of the postsocialist transition, the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods in the region – such as Ferentari in Bucharest – also identified their areas by American concepts at the local level[82]. Continuing the previous

[82] At least on the basis of anecdotic evidence we may argue that the poorest, most desolate and ill-famed urban or rural zones of various Central and Eastern European countries (territories that are also identified with the

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ethnographic argument about the folk-concept of the "field", this Chapter provides a more complicated picture of social and spatial relations in the neighbourhood. During my fieldwork in the neighbourhood, I regularly came across the strategic usage of social and spatial distinctions. On the one hand, inhabitants often depicted their neighbourhood as local equivalent of world famous 'dangerous places' (*Harlem* or *Bronx*); also as the land of free trade and unrestricted material gains, or as a laboratory that models all the malfunctions that features *Romania* as a state in general. By the usage of these spatial categories inhabitants symbolically expand the space of their neighbourhood and refuse the external claims for its negatively valuated specificity. As local residents recurrently told me, after all there is "nothing special" about Ferentari and the people who live here, as such places can be found in every big city of Europe or the world. On the other hand, residents divided their community by behavioural codes such as "civilized" (*civilizat*) and "vagabond", "player" (*şmecher*) and "fool" (*fraier*). These concepts have a crucial role in their negotiations of worth and their quest for social distinction on the basis of value or morality, and they can be used in parallel or alternatively to the common notions of ethnicity ("Romanians" and "Gypsies"). Designating social roles as well as organizational principles of everyday practice, these categories transgress ethnic boundaries, especially since they are not taken as prerequisites of given groups, but of individual persons[83]. The analysis of interactions and forms of exchange that are based on these categories may be conducive to moving beyond the assumption (shared by media accounts as well as academic reports) that ethnic difference is the most dominant and it can absorb all other distinctions in areas inhabited by mixed populations.

In general terms, the categories that people employ in organizing their social worlds are based on the resources at their disposal in order to deal with the distinctions between categories of inside and outside in terms of urban areas, regions or ethnic belonging (Back, 1996.). As Wacquant suggests with regard to the cités of the French urban periphery, a powerful marker of

omnipresence of Roma) tend to have names that explicitly, although somewhat ironically, refer to famous places in the United States.

[83] According to my early intuition during fieldwork, these categories of social distinction were way more important to my acquaintances in the neighborhood than to the categories of ethnicity. Compared to ethnic labels (including that of the "Gypsy") the negative pairs from the aforementioned oppositions could be used in much more powerful way for the sake of insulting a person.

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the negative public image that associates these areas with deprivation and insecurity is that they are baptized with names such as 'little Chicago', 'Harlem' or 'Le Bronx' both by their residents and by outsiders (2008: 170). The popular custom of giving American names to marginal and stigmatized territories suggests that these spaces can be seen as tilted mirrors of the US. In other words, he considers the American naming of such districts as nothing but one instance of the ways in which, similarly to journalistic or even academic accounts, the perceptions of urban marginality in Europe came to be assimilated to the hegemonic models – indeed 'folk-concepts' in their initial context – imported or imposed from the US, altogether leading to the misrecognition of the actual composition of such zones, as well as their function within the urban fabric. However, in the case of Ferentari, the custom of giving American names to the neighbourhood seemed to be a more complex matter, as these names represented crystallized forms of local knowledge, or 'everyday mythologies' which attributed a particular 'urban charisma' (Hansen-Verkaaik, 2009) to the neighbourhood[84]. Such forms of meaning-making were apparent when (typically male) inhabitants introduced themselves persons who *"know how to be a bandit sometimes"*, or when they were celebrating their brotherly solidarities, comradeship and the ties that bind them to the neighbourhood in the company of musicians (*lăutari*) during street-weddings, the greatest rituals of neighbourhood life. To quote one popular song from the ethno-pop genre of *manele*, the most popular form of music in the area, a *"neighbourhood of Americans/right here in Ferentari"*[85] was constructed in such moments[86].

Contrary to the images of Eastern European urban margins with endless lines of concrete blocks, a large part of the neighbourhood resembled a village, both in terms of the built environment and people's everyday practices. Besides these parts, two major housing types were reminiscent of the Communist era when the neighbourhood was intended to become a workers' quarter – in other words an urban melting pot of predominantly lower-class people. As it was mentioned in the previous Chapter, one of the ways to identify these two housing types was still

[84] The preoccupation with America was also reflected in one of the most persistent local rumors regarding myself, namely that I am from the United States, because I was teaching English to some of the youngsters.

[85] Florin Salam: Cartier de americani chiar aici pe Ferentari.Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzUSBxf6M0o

[86] For a recent and comprehensive volume on the social meaning of manele in the context of other popular music genres in the Balkans, see: Beissinger-Radulescu-Giurchescu, 2016.

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to refer to the initial recipients of the flats. The first were the better-off blocks with two room apartments, hot water and heating which were once destined for members of the army. The second were the impoverished blocks with studio apartments which have no heating and hot water inside. These were once built for those workers under Communism who came to Bucharest without a family (*nefamilişti*). The streets with this second type of buildings were sometimes also labelled as "ghettos" (*ghetouri*) by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. However, the most common way of identifying these buildings was to refer to the "junkies" (*drogaţi*) who were known to be concentrated in these blocks. The area that was known as "Harlem", "Bronx" or "our Bronx" (*Bronxul nostru*) consisted such low quality blocks. Some inhabitants called these streets ironically *"the heart of the neighbourhood"*, others just said that this is *"presidential zone"* where one can find just *everything*, such as mobile phones, contraband cigarettes, drugs or prostitutes. Inhabitants described their neighbourhood (or even Romania) as a land of *"all possibilities"*, or as they said from time to time: *"Just like in Bronx, you can find here everything you want."* One of the initial things I've been taught by my male acquaintances was to be able to judge who is a junkie, based on personal appearance. In fact, these dilapidated buildings were hardly the only places where one could coincide with junkies and illegal substances and designating the actual boundaries or limits of such a zone or an activity was impossible. It was rather a personal task for almost everyone to prove that they themselves – or their most direct environments – are somewhat different from the overall moral and social decay attributed to the spaces and peoples identified as "junkie" (*drogaţi*).

As I mentioned, labels such as Bronx or Harlem were typically reserved for the streets and buildings that represented the 'lowest of the low' in the eyes of local residents. For the neighbourhood as a whole they used a different name: *Texas* or *Ferentexas*. In such a marginalized urban zone, what seems to be 'neighbourhood-specific' from the outside or even the inside – in our case loud music-listening without respect to the hour of the day; high alcohol-consumption and wasting time outside one's home; single-parent families or the high occurrence of criminal records and imprisonment mainly amongst the men – are far from being overall features of all inhabitants. In fact, such features of marginality or social deviance can turn out to be rather 'marginal' also within the areas considered as ultimate containers of these peculiarities. However, those are striving to develop a more respectable life might be less visible out in the

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streets, as they tend to retreat into the limited spaces of their households and surroundings. Hence, to a certain degree public spaces of the neighbourhood can be taken over by those practices which are often celebrated by some inhabitants as neighbourhood-specific forms of freedoms and liberties – in this case summarized by the locally popular idiom designating the area as *Texas*.

I collected a wide array of popular etymological explanations concerning this denomination, most of which traced back its origins to the early postsocialist plight of the 1990s, when the TV series Dallas enjoyed great success among local dwellers, who conceived themselves to be similar to the protagonists of the soap opera: *"nobody was working, but everybody was making business"* in both cases. When unemployment rates reached their peak, many of the local inhabitants resorted to informal and small-scale commerce between countries such as Turkey and Hungary, trading with clothes, soaps and deodorants, video players or second hand cars[87]. The idiom of *Texas* also re-appeared with reference to the exchange of commodities such as cell-phones, watches, clothes or cars were in a constant fluctuation in the neighbourhood. Beyond the strict reference to informal trade or "business" (*bişniţă*), the denomination of Texas also alludes to figures like "cowboys" or other pioneers who take the responsibility of enforcing order by the means at their disposal, which leads us back to the rich symbolism of "the field" (*câmp*) as a folk concept. Therefore, while American denominations are partly the outcomes of material deprivation and territorial stigmatization (as its accompanying mechanism at the symbolic level), they also entail some of the elementary forms of meaning-making with regard to livelihood practices, and the creation of value and social order in environments that may seem to be 'impossible' to manage. From this point of view, the notion of the "field" could also refer to a territory at the edges of urban existence and civility where the exercise of power – including the power of the local state – becomes perceptible through the manifestations of ignorance instead of overt violence; a territory where each has to rely largely on private and personal means in the everyday ordering of the social and spatial environment. These social roles and everyday myths can be easily downplayed as mere ideologies that have nothing to do with the actual deprivation

[87] In the early postsocialist era, many of the middle-aged residents were travelling to Budapest in order to buy and sell merchandise at a market near to the Keleti railway station. As they got to know that I'm from Hungary, usually their first reaction was to recollect their stories about informal trading trips.

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and misery that go with the locally given life-conditions. However, by neglecting such ideologies we might fail to comprehend the actual usage of those resources that are available for pride, respect or dignity in conditions urban marginality (Bourgois, 2003). For example, such resources were used when some of the inhabitants were boasting to me about their courage to pass through even the *"most dangerous streets"* at night, or when they were proudly telling me that the stray dogs that populated local streets were their personal *"friends"*.

In general terms, such an ambivalence characterized street-life, as the local public sphere of the neighbourhood: while inhabitants tended to associate the street with interpersonal dangers and risks, as well as unpredictable predators, junkies and stray-dogs, the street was also the place of socialization, gossiping, a source of excitement and perhaps even economic profit. The neighbourly relations in the street or between households were also important references for the inhabitants when they compared their zone to other, 'better-off' parts of Bucharest where people live alienated lives and neighbours perhaps *"don't know each other"* anymore. By comparison, the neighbourhood was characterized as a permissive environment where *"no one cares"* about what the others are doing. Accordingly, instead of open confrontations, residents could engage with the everyday management of space and relations by the seeming indifference towards each other, together with the tolerance for temporary excess. An expressive example for the everyday operation of this is perhaps the common acceptance of listening to loud music. For example, when I was in a desperate quest for a place to live in the neighbourhood, a self-proclaimed broker of local apartments ardently tried to convince me about renting out a studio in deteriorated block of flats. In order to tell me something positive about the place, he just said that I can listen to music as loud as I want there any time of the day, and "no one will care" about it (*nimănui nu-i pasă*). During afternoons or evenings especially in the summer, certain blocks of flats could resemble a monumental set of loudspeakers with different windows broadcasting their own music show as part of a cacophonous soundscape. Listening to music aloud could also be a way to guarantee that immediate neighbours or others in the street are not able to follow an ongoing quarrel in a household. In some rare and extreme cases loud music could be heard from certain houses or courtyards also at night during weekdays. I have rarely ever witnessed any intervention on behalf of neighbours in such situations, who rather endured the disturbance, in order to avoid the prospect of a subsequent conflict with the disturbers. As it is apparent in this case of

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residents' seeming lack of concern for the 'everyday noise' of street-life, the categories of respect, tolerance, indifference and fear could be almost synonymous in the everyday practice of cohabitation. A further aspect of "not caring" was apparent in the relationships between the different male-dominated hang-out groups (*gaşcă* or *anturaj*) in the streets. When they were gathering around a certain street-corner, men often said that they *"don't know"* the other men who were doing more or less the same as them some tens or hundred meters away – or they simply defined them as "dummies" (*figuranţi*) who do not deserve any attention. As the seeming indifference of residents to the blusters close to their dwellings was a way to avoid conflicts, men's pretence of not knowing others from a hang-out group around the next corner was part of their attempt to stop the undesirable spread of gossip and information in the streets. These attempts were reflected in the recurrent statements among group-members, such as "*stay with us here, don't speak with the others because they'll only try to fool you",* or *"if anyone stops you on your way home just tell them that you are with us, so they'll know that they will have a problem with us if they offend you"*.

As I will return to this in the Chapter on work and labour, the scrap-metal traders of neighbourhood were known to be highly secretive towards one another with regard to the actual prices they pay to the individual collectors who gathered the scrap at the street-level. If it turned out that a group or a family of traders are able to pay more to the collectors, the immediate suspicion of other traders was that it is because of the favourable bribing-arrangements they could set up with the policemen. In fact, such bribing arrangements were crucial for an enterprise like scrap-metal trade, which was increasingly exposed to policing as well as bureaucratic control with its related costs. Therefore, individual traders and their families strived to block the flow of information on their business in the direction of parties with potentially conflicting interests, who could report each other to the police. After all it was nearly impossible to do everything in this enterprise by following the legal means, which opened the way for a variety of assaults.

Beyond such specific business-related risks, my acquaintances in the neighbourhood were generally sharing a suspicion towards those who seemed to be in good terms with many people, or who have *"too many friends"*, which they considered to be overtly risky in any case, if not

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simply an impossibility. At the same time, a person's reputation and value could not be divided from the often implicit knowledge about who is "behind his back" or "who are backing him", referring to the circle and power of those (whether family members or peers) with whom one shares some basic interests and who can be potentially mobilized in conflicts or other quarrels. Nevertheless, inhabitants did not consider physical violence as the main risk of street-life in the neighbourhood[88], but they were usually more concerned of risks such as rip offs or deceptions. In a social environment where unpredictable predators were thought to be omnipresent, the skills of figuring out other peoples' intentions – or *"what they really have in their minds"* – was much more valued than pure physical force. For similar reasons, being physically violent or aggressive – without allowing any space for ironic understandings and reactions – could be easily taken as signs of weakness. Obviously, joking is one of the best ways of proving competence in any social environment. Pretty much the same ways as it was with smaller beatings or pretended scuffles as part of friendly interactions, it was often not obvious if a certain comment or gesture is made in order to pick on somebody or whether it was just the parody of that[89]. The reference to joking could also be a way to avoid conflicts between people or different groups. Compared to those respectable inhabitants who strived to reduce their public interactions to the possible minimum (see below), the men who were regularly hanging out in the street had a different relationship to the drug addicts of the neighbourhood. Junkies were often selling various objects in the street – be it mobile phones or weapons. Once a junkie was showing a gun to us and a negotiation started about the price. As the discussion was going on, he held the gun to my head – only *"as a joke"*. A friend of mine pushed the gun away from my head saying that we are brothers (*fraţi*) and therefore I shouldn't be harmed. The others knew that I was still uneasy about always treating such jokes in the right way.

The male-dominated hang-out groups in the streets were based on certain principles of secrecy and brotherly solidarity, as members could provide access for each other to resources such as information about opportunities to make money or exchanging services in the form of barter by getting food and drinks. Apart from the group-members, a salesclerk from a certain

[88] For example, 'stripping' – stealing someone's clothes by coercion to get undressed in the street – as a direct form of expropriation was considered to be something of the past that is not practiced in the neighborhood anymore.
[89] Based on an earlier fieldwork in a different part of the neighborhood, Tirca made a similar point with regards to joking and violence (2009).

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grocery store could also take part in these forms of exchange for example by giving out products and money for cleaning the shop or providing some other kind of help around the place. Trust and debt had a particularly important role in all these relationships. Although it was hardly possible to establish a whole livelihood on these resources available in the street, these opportunities were still important especially for those who were moving back and forth between temporary work and unemployment. Having trustful relations and being visible on a daily basis around a corner or another similar public location meant having a share in the symbolic ownership of that place. In the limited spaces of everyday activities both in terms of income-generation and leisure (although the two were hard to distinguish in the informal or largely informalized economic domains where most of my acquaintances made their living, see: Hart, 1973), the 'owners' of a spot were cultivating each others' good reputation much like 'promoters' who stand up against the omnipresent risk of given a bad name to one of them by others.

Accordingly, the 'public sphere' of street-life was like a mosaic of extensions arising from the background of private spaces. This was manifest in the unsaid, but still well-known entitlements of certain individuals, families or hang-out groups to use the spaces around locations of their private interests (such as houses, street-corners and stores) as the continuations of 'their own' spaces. In this sense, a large part of public spaces 'belonged' to someone in the neighbourhood. Areas around houses, shops or other businesses were thus constantly in the process of privatization, such as in those cases when inhabitants fenced off the immediate zone in front their apartment blocks by their own initiative to develop small pergolas or gardens, or use it as their parking plot[90]. The private or 'semi-private' use of public spaces and the family-like organization of relations outside the actual families or households rendered a sense of intimacy to neighbourhood life, but they also designated the limits of solidarity that one could expect from others. In this respect, the actually existing or 'positive' social relationships in the neighbourhood were slightly similar to the operation of 'secret societies', where the mutual share of knowledge and the denial of access to it by outsiders – in other words the creation of parallel worlds – is a dominant way of boundary-maintenance and control. As Katherine Verdery noted in a recent

[90] Ironically, while these gardens and pergolas were among the main symbols of being "civilized" persons in the neighbourhood, they were also informally arranged by neighbours, just like many other forms of business and exchange taking place in the streets.

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account on the State Security in Communist Romania (2014), collective secrecy provides some of the few opportunities to build trust in uncertain times and circumstances. Membership assumes dependence between more experienced members and their clients, as well as providing the strategies of surveillance. Moreover, the relation between the very content of the secret – that is hidden on the one hand but absolutely everywhere at the same time – and the structures where it is embedded is always ambiguous. As with the practices of secrecy and concealment in peasant societies, the content of the secret is not the point but the contexts and techniques in which it is maintained or used for making grounds for intimidation. In this regard – rather similarly to what Taussig defines as implicit social knowledge (1987) – secrets might be known by everyone, but still, the moments when they can be expressed and the locations where they are stored are highly limited. In fact, the common belief of inhabitants was that in this neighbourhood others always know and gossip more about a person than he or she would presuppose.

As I return to it in the last Chapter, at the time of my fieldwork, it was a widespread assumption of NGO-workers and civil activists who came to work in Ferentari that among other forms of deprivation, the neighbourhood suffers from a "lack of community" or social cohesion, which makes it necessary to implement projects dedicated to community-building. Based on the experiences outlined above, my sensation was that the everyday forms of dissociation, the fragmentation of households or the seeming indifference of inhabitants were rather the responses to the 'above standard' neighbourly relations that characterized the area at the first place. As I return to it below, the overall disengagement with other people in the street could be even a main prerequisite of residents who claimed to be respectable or "civilized" (*civilizat*) persons.

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Being civilized

In the light of the widespread obsession with civilization (*civilizaţie*) in Romanian intellectual history, politics and the media, it is not a surprise that the same concept was a central one also for the inhabitants of this poor Bucharest neighbourhood. It had been deployed regularly

in the negotiation of space, and the private and public domains of everyday life. Inhabitants expressed their own understandings of what is and what is not to be "civilized" in these contexts. After moving in to the neighbourhood, many of my neighbours suggested I accept their common wisdom and not make friendships, don't socialize with anyone in the street. As they were telling me, people might abuse my trust just to exploit me. When I asked why anyone would do so, the usual answer was that *"because they are vagabonds"*. This approach to street-life was summed up by the common phrase "hi, hi" (*salut, salut*), which meant that the ideal way to avoid risk in public space is to exchange only greetings with neighbours – we cannot choose them anyways. This way the minimal respect is paid to other people but one should not go with them further than that. Uncle Ion[91] was an old man who lost one of his legs due to an accident that happened some decades ago when he was working as a stevedore. As many others in the neighbourhood, he liked to spend his time sitting on a bench in front his block of flats, chatting with people and watching the street. He saw what I was doing in the neighbourhood day by day, and he shared his concerns with me once:

> It's better if you stay here and not stroll around; it's not like in your town. These are junkies and nuts (*nebuni*). They ask for a cigarette and if you say you don't have any, they will make a squabble and you are alone. That's why I'm telling you; I know what I've seen. You are a stranger; you have no father, no mother here, you have no relatives. You have nothing. You shouldn't trust anyone these days, especially here in this zone with all these nuts and junkies. They don't know why you came here. You are a clever boy, intelligent; you are not a fool (*fraier*), you don't want to be beaten up, right? Don't go where they are playing music because there are always drunkards. Here's some money, bring me a beer, and buy one for you as well if you want.

Exaggerations of personal righteousness are one of the recurrent forms of a general quest for respect and dignity in territorially stigmatized areas. Some neighbours told me recurrently, *"you just walk a hundred meters here and you are in another world"*. This statement was rather a typical example of the spatial distinctions with which the inhabitants divided their everyday surroundings – sometimes even two different sides of the same street – in a meticulous manner, hence creating complicated moral cartographies of the places and people around. As I mentioned above, the carefully nurtured indifference between residents and households was part of an

[91] I changed the original names of all the characters in this text.

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attempt to live up to certain norms of the "civilized" way of living. Especially during the times when heroin was still the major substance that was used and traded in the neighbourhood, the police recurrently performed noisy raids in search for dealers and the drugs in their possession. On a summer day during such a raid I witnessed the way local families were having a barbecue (*grătar*)[92] in front of their block of flats at the same time while their street was gradually filled up with policemen, their cars, vans and the sound of stream-sirens. At this juncture, neighbours at the barbeque manifestly invested their efforts into remaining *careless* about the drama unfolding in front of them on the other side of the street[93]. Opposite to such instances, the very personalized and vocal obsession with the maintenance of social order could be another form of engaging with the vulnerable and always defensive local project of civilization in the neighbourhood. A major exponent of this project in our street was in fact the administrator of our block of flats, a hard-pressed middle-aged ethnic Romanian lady, who regularly made scandals with neighbours because of certain misdemeanours (accusing them for staining the staircase, bringing "vagabonds" inside the block, consuming drugs or hosting more people in the apartments than they declared) that have actually never taken place: these were produced only by her imagination. Still, the causeless performances of ordering were serving as the actual proofs of her commitment to maintain a "civilized block" (*bloc civilizat*) under her scrutiny.

The meaning of the practical and symbolic work that my neighbours invested into their "civilized" environment became particularly clear to me on a summer day. That afternoon a drug addict died right in front of our block after an overdose. My neighbours were keen on distinguishing our block and its most immediate environment from the general decay of the neighbourhood and particularly from the area a few corners away that was commonly identified as nest of "the junkies" (*drogaţi*). As a matter of fact, the plot right in front of our block, behind a neighbourhood heating house, was a usual location for the homeless to make campfires and for the junkies to consume drugs. The death we witnessed was already the third case over that year which happened on the very same plot. After they were interrogated by the policemen and the

[92] Having an outdoor *gratar* is a main popular ritual, also a symbol of general well-being in Romania.

[93] Apart from the music I referred to above, the sirens of the police or the ambulance provided another hallmark of the soundscape in the neighborhood. As some of my acquintances used to exclaim in the street during these visits: *"this is the worst place in Bucharest!"*

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ambulance took the dead body away, my neighbours moved back to the small garden around our block, went on cultivating the flowers and chatting about how Ceauşescu's times were better. After all of this, they began to reproduce the sense of their immediate space as being civilized. That night, I met an older neighbour known as Uncle Titi, who was sitting on a bench at the entrance of the block of flats, still under the influence of the death he witnessed. This is what he told me:

> A junkie was hiding there with his pouch[94] and he had an overdose. He was not a junkie from here, he was from somewhere else. I found him right next to that column, I went to see him, he didn't have pulse anymore, but his body was still warm, so I called the ambulance. Perhaps they were somewhere around, because they arrived in three minutes. They were trying to resuscitate him for about two hours, but they couldn't do anything, he could not breathe, he was over. I could not stand there with the police, but they didn't even ask about who called them. And more people died here, there was also a beautiful girl who came with two thugs (*golani*), they stood on the grass, they had fun, it looked nice, but they were using drugs and they gave some to her as well. The two of them could stand up on their feet but she couldn't, I was standing here for two hours, thinking whether I should call the police or not. A black car arrived; they tried to help her to stand up, but she couldn't, and then they took her away. She was a nice, tall woman. Many of them died here, and they'll continue to die, because they are using drugs. It's really the white death, they use drugs until they don't feel the effect of it, and then … To drink and fall into your bed is better than dying. And who cares here? We have to help ourselves, to make it nice somehow.

For Uncle Titi, the need for personal solutions to structurally accumulated problems – such as the processes that turned the neighbourhood into a conspicuous drug-market of Bucharest – entailed the management of recurrent causalities due to substance abuse in the immediate surroundings of his home. State institutions in the neighbourhood seemed to be in the conditions of an ongoing 'desertification' (Wacquant, 2008), represented by the indifference of its agents towards the local residents. To put it differently, state power itself was largely practiced by the means of official ignorance. If the police was one of the main exponents of state power in the eyes of inhabitants in the neighbourhood, another institution that represented the displeasing face of officialdom to them was the hospital or the health care system in general. Similarly to other

[94] Although the most widespread substance was heroin in the neighbourhood, certain addicts were also sniffing glue from pouches. As I return to it in the Chapter on work, the local drug-market transformed with the appearance of the so-called "legal drugs" (also known as *etnobotanice*) that were available in specialized shops with the pretext of being pesticides.

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acquaintances I had in the neighbourhood, the Spoitori Gypsy traders had a whole series of rather traumatic recollections about their illnesses or accidents which made it inevitable to go to hospitals, depicted like a battle-ground full of actors who are negligent or have openly conflicting interests, where the only means to 'lubricate the wheels' is represented by the payment of tremendous bribes (*şpagă*; see: Stan 2012). It was widely held in the neighbourhood that in case of an emergency call one should expect huge delays from the ambulance, so as long as they could rely on the help of relatives or neighbours who had cars, patients preferred to go to the hospital by themselves. Hospitals and doctors also served as one of the main pretexts whenever my acquaintances wished to prove that theirs is a country which is lacking some of the most elementary forms of "civilization" (*civilizaţie*). Accordingly, rather akin to the aforementioned tactics of ordering one's spatial and social environment, in case of various illnesses the Spoitori Gypsy men and women – just like many others in the neighbourhood – tried to rely on the wisdom and advice of relatives or neighbours concerning the potential cures as long as it was sufficient, instead of seeking professional help[95].

Also as a form of resistance against territorial stigmatization, my acquaintances from the neighbourhood consequently refused the idea that any of these malfunctions of the state and its institutions would be specific for Ferentari. On the contrary, in their usual heated political debates they depicted their neighbourhood as small-scale equivalent or mirror-image of Romania in general, as a "shit country" (*ţară de căcat*). The girlfriend of a local salesclerk once paid a visit to the neighbourhood. Such visits of outsiders (and especially young women) were always received with great enthusiasm on behalf of the men from the hang-out groups around the street-corner. However, as the conversation developed, at a certain point the girl began to scold the *"Indians from Ferentari"* for Romania's bad international reputation. The men were quick to respond that the responsibility for this bad reputation belongs to the "fools" (*proşti*) who govern the country, and not the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. With regard to similar disputes, a young man called Lorenzo (see below), told me the following:

[95] The Spoitori Gypsies (with whom I had the closest relations in the neighborhood) shared similar beliefs with regards to the local primary school where their children were pupils. They thought the theachers are irresponsible, fail to perform their pedagogic duties, or else they expose the children to dubious medical 'experiments' without consulting the parents. As an outcome of territorial stigmatization, the fluctuation of teachers in this school was high throughout the period of my fieldwork.

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> Ferentari is the black sheep of Bucharest, but the whole of Romania is like Ferentari. This is how Romanians are, they are crazy (*nebuni*), they are thieves, violators, criminals, paedophiles. Maybe it's better, less dangerous now compared to the way it was before, but this is just the surface, [in reality] they are still selling and stealing whatever they can. I can have a lot of friends, but if I'm in trouble, they are not really my friends anymore; we are friends only in need (*prieteni la nevoie*), when we have [some stuff], when we don't have, they say "I'm busy" (*am treabă*). And what do you think why all those [foreigners] come here, like the Chinese and all? To make money, because people are stupid (*proşti*) and backward (*înapoiaţi*), not like in other countries. For example, a mobile phone can pass the hands of twenty people [although] it should be a personal object, something intimate. They just put their hands on it, it all moves around like money.

The fact of living in a neighbourhood that is widely conceived as an ultimate 'social waste-dump' leads to an unsettling sense of unity amongst the inhabitants: they are 'all the same and equal' as the most unworthy ones or the ultimate "fools" of their society. As I mentioned in relation to the casualties due to substance-abuse, in this situation the structural problems are turning into personal problems and insecurities, faced on a daily basis in exaggerated ways, as urban society and the state relegates its unresolved matters to such marginal territories at a convenient distance from the city centre or the domains of more respectable citizens. Accordingly, residents of a neighbourhood like Ferentari have few opportunities to ignore these dramatic and personalized disguise of structural problems (regardless of what they wish to see or to have in their vicinity) which is reflected in their proverbial statement, *"you cannot choose your neighbours"*.

As I return to this in the Chapter on the street economy, the concerns with unpredictable predators (who pretend to be friendly folks only to abuse the trust that a person naively invested in them) were constantly echoed by inhabitants of the neighbourhood who struggled to lead a "civilized" life. In fact, a major consequence of being civilized in the ideal sense was the shrinkage of the space that was available for any kind of manoeuvring in the neighbourhood. To follow this ideal civilized way meant to use public spaces in the narrowest mode possible, such as for transportation, not to enter into any conversations or exchange in the street, and to have limited personal networks. One of my neighbours drew a very small square to me with her fingers in the air, as a way to show me the extreme limitations of her contacts and activities in the area.

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Residents like her truly lived in a 'neighbourhood of strangers'. For the same reasons those people who followed the civilized way could be also considered as utterly weak, unequipped with the assets of managing even the most ordinary challenges of neighbourhood life. In the midst of seemingly omnipresent risks due to "rip-offs", honourable forms of exchange were defined by immediate forms of mutuality. Remaining a person of "good soul" (*suflet bun*) in the eyes of others – without giving room to exploitation by them – was among the most challenging exercises of street-life. The story about the 'rise and fall' of a corner shop may serve as an illustration of these ambiguities.

Bogdan was a young non-Roma Romanian salesclerk for many years in one of the small grocery stores around a corner that served as a regular spot for the gathering of hang-out groups. As a non-resident of the neighbourhood, he worked in the store to finance his university studies, but his high level of education was not an obstacle for him to cultivate friendly relations with the men from the area, and to be proud of the knowledge and stories he gathered throughout the years in such a 'dangerous zone' of Bucharest. In this sense, similarly to the others he also subscribed to the ideology of the "school of life" (see below) as a parallel institution that can be attended in the streets. During the workdays of the other salesclerk, the rigorous Mrs Ioana, the area around the shop was desolate, but on the days of Bogdan, whole hang-out groups were rallying around the corner and listening to *manele* music from mobile phones (or someone's car) until late. These days, the store took the role of a centre for men's discussion and debate, while some of them were helping Bogdan in cleaning the shop, ordering and loading the merchandise in exchange for drinks, some money or other items. The Spoitori Gypsy traders used the corner store as an office that they visited just to borrow the calculator and do some quick 'counting' (*socotealã*) before rushing back to their own business. On such evenings after closing time, Bogdan and his fellows did the cleaning, got rid of the remaining garbage and put things in order around the store together. Apart from the exchange of items or services, Bogdan was willing to give out products on credit to acquaintances, who were allowed to pay their debt once they recovered financially.

In the summer of 2012 the main news around the corner was about Bogdan's disappearance, after he was fired under the accusation of stealing on behalf of the boss. None of the local commentators mentioned that "theft" covered an array of problems in this case from the

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outbound traffic of products with little control and the outstanding debt amassed by neighbours. Instead, my acquaintances accused Bogdan for being a too "soft-hearted" (*sufletist*) person, resulting in the loss of his job (even if back in the days indeed many of them benefited from his generosity). In this case, a "soft-hearted" person was eventually turned into a "fool" who is unable to contain his exchange practices within the strict limits of mutuality and who ends up taking over other people's blame. After Bogdan's departure, the shop was not anymore the same busy spot of hang-out groups, as the corner was occupied by growing numbers of largely homeless drug-addicts, after the so-called "legal" substances (*legale* or *etnobotanice*) revolutionized the local drug-market[96]. The men who were regularly hanging out in the streets were not able anymore to keep a record of the junkies who appeared in the area, and they didn't even wish to approach the street corner they 'owned' once in symbolic terms. Soon after, the corner shop closed down completely. After its demolition, all the ironwork of its edifice ended up at the collecting site of the Spoitori Gypsy traders as scrap metal.

Being a player

In addition to the notions introduced in the previous section, there were different understandings of civilization amongst the youngsters who were regularly hanging out. Giovanni – as his friends called him – was a young man in his twenties who worked as a storekeeper (although he was much more passionate about repairing cars and motorbikes). His father was from a family of Gypsy musicians (*lăutari*). During Communism he played the double bass at weddings and other celebrations to earn additional income to his wage labour in a factory and later as a construction site worker. It was during his times in the factory that the father met his future Romanian wife, Giovanni's mother, who was hired later as a cleaning lady. Giovanni had a brother, who was known as Lorenzo amongst friends. He had been a worker in a printing house for many years, although before that he had a short career in pimping as part of an entourage in

[96] As I return to it in the Chapter on work, the massive growth of drug-addicts in the neighbourhood was due to the peak of these "legal" substances that were not available anymore in shops from the city centre or better-off areas, while in Ferentari still several shops along the main road which were selling them freely. I have witnessed a few cases when security guards were defending these shops against the policemen on patrol. Hence, the neighbourhood attracted even more users than before.

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town. He liked to recall his memories from those times, when he lived the *"real life"* of the ones who are not toiling but only *"stay and wait for the money"* brought to them by women. Later he became a "good boy" (*băiat cuminte*) partly because of continuing quarrels with his worried parents, but also his own anxieties with performing in a dangerous enterprise where actors are bonded together by fear instead of respect. When recalling his times as a pimp, he often complained because of his current boredom and loneliness, his meagre salary (that became even less due to the crisis) and the boss at his workplace who refuses to increase their wage or improve their working conditions by claiming that new applicants are already queuing for their existing jobs[97].

The brothers both considered themselves to be Gypsies, though sometimes they added that actually they are "halfies" (*jumi-juma*). Nevertheless, certain experiences and aspirations were much more important for them then these ethnic labels. As with many others, they considered the neighbourhood as probably the worst possible place to live in Bucharest. They often recalled the nice and spacious house where they lived before they had to move here more than a decade ago, when their previous building was privatized. The memories of this earlier home still provided a source of distinction for them opposed to their actual living environment. By contrast to most of the young men from our street they did not socialize with neighbours too often but cultivating friendships with peers living in other parts of town. They were listening to rap and hip-hop instead of Romanian manele, the most common musical genre in the neighbourhood. When they had money and spare time, they went to one of the largest pubic parks in Bucharest (far from the neighbourhood) to smoke marijuana with their friends. No other thing could make the boys so excited as these trips. The journey from home to other friends' places and then to the park had its own ritual. They dressed up in their coolest clothes, they were listening to music aloud from their mobile phones on the bus, while singing and clowning around. Last but not least, they were trying to enter into dialogue with the appealing young women who got in their way. Their usual strategy was to choose a girl, stand or sit as close to her as possible, and then start staring at her – without saying a word – until she responds, or just becomes embarrassed. It was exactly this that happened one summer day on the metro, when a security

[97] For a recent study on boredom in the context of downward mobility and homelessness in Bucharest, see: O'Neill, 2014.

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guard intervened and called for civilized behaviour (*comportament civilizat*). The boys felt offended. The guard's scolding provoked a debate on the nature of civilization. Lorenzo turned to the security guard: *"we are very civilized, ok? My name is Lorenzo."* Following the general custom of youngsters in the neighbourhood, he used English words to support his point with some additional emphasis: *"I am a civilization man, yes?"* Later we got off the metro but the discussion went on about the incident. Lorenzo addressed me by one of the names I had in the neighbourhood and said:

> You will see Grigore, you will go home to Hungary, but you'll remain as insane (nebun) with this civilization thing as these people here in Romania. What does civilization mean to them? At least if we would have injured or beaten up that girl … but we didn't. We were just staying on the seat and we tried to speak with a girl, a kind of 'how are you doing', wasn't it civilized?"

As a conclusion, Giovanni said: *"I think this guard was drunk. I will beat him up if I see him around tomorrow".* The scolding made by the security guard touched upon the boys' sense of respect in a moment when they were just about to reach a state that they associated with the diverse and multiple ways to be cunning, a player (*şmecher*). This included certain forms of hyperactivity, the body being in a stylish but constant motion, as well as certain forms of self-expression – speaking, singing or dancing – that are powerful enough to provoke and then preserve other people's attention, as a highly valuated symbolic good. In ordinary situations of hanging out or wasting time in the streets, moments of boredom could easily turn into symbolic competitions for the attention of the others. Such situations provided the interactive frames for learning some of the skills associated with cunningness (*şmecherie*). In its elementary forms, youngsters could present the related skills when they spoke in various different ways, once "like a fool" and then "as the television", while complex forms were presented during street-weddings, the most important ritual events of the neighbourhood. Altogether, these practices rely on a vision of the social world in which one has to navigate in highly unpredictable circumstances as it is impossible to be fully aware of the intentions and future action of others, and the codes of conduct are constantly redefined (see: Di Nunzio, 2012; Vigh, 2010). Accordingly, the way to get a good position is to provoke attention and then preserve it as long as possible, mainly if the

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relationships of respect are not fully settled. This implied the capacity to define the rules of a certain situations or *games* instead of only playing them according to already given prescriptions.

Amongst the men who are regularly hanging out in the streets, speakers of standard Romanian were criticized sometimes for following the standard version without too many slang formulas. According to this criticism, speaking the standard form of language means to show obvious signs of one's weakness, even homosexuality. The problem with the standard language was not only due to the lack of slang formulas. Above all, it was an evidence of being educated in the regular sense, in other words not having the "school of life". In spite of its advantages, education in the regular sense makes people speak only one kind of language and deprives them of the skill to speak in various ways – according to different situations, interests and interlocutors. Linguistic devices play a great part in the performances of toughness, but relying only on rude or aggressive verbal formulas is insufficient, as it is more important to be recognized as a master of code-switching. In fact, linguistic forms of code-switching are parts of a wider set of practices that are transgressing categories such as civilized or vagabond that are deployed in the organization of the social world in the neighbourhood. According to the widespread belief amongst the inhabitants, God made a fundamental injustice in the world which predetermines the failure of the good ones and the victory of the bad. Lucian, the Spoitori Gypsy trader in his 30s often complained to me about the hardships of supporting his family, the pain he suffers from and the thoughts that are chasing him during sleepless nights. As he said,

> Only God knows what he wants with me. The good man is a fool (*fraier*) because God crucifies those who are good. And he doesn't even look at the bad ones, who are committing crimes. They are healthy, they are not having any problems but the good people die.

Others also shared the idea of such an initial injustice by God who maybe exists and gave life to humans, but he doesn't help them anymore, which is the core reason for poverty and inequalities between those who are toiling and hardly manage to get by, and those who create fortunes as criminals (including the notorious *mafioți* of the neighbourhood). The recognition of such injustices was an essential source of the shared quest to refuse their subordination and to achieve a sense of autonomy among these men, represented by self-understandings as "players"

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or "bandits" sometimes[98]. Not unlike the classical forms of banditry (see: Hobsbawm, 2000), these notions emerged as an attempt to reject inferiority and obedience in the context of extreme inequalities and the widespread questioning of state power in the maintenance of 'law and order'. With regards to the neighbourhood as a setting of social unrest, we may recall Sampson's concept of the 'trouble spot', referring to territories where local political units do not have sufficient legitimacy, and they are contested by certain 'parallel institutions', including vernacular claims for sovereignty as well as humanitarian assistance or concerns for human rights (see the final Chapter on local interventions in the neighbourhood). However, as I point it out in the coming section, the social aspects of unrest (or the quest for self-determination) can intermingle with criminal or illicit activities also among the 'small fry' that most protagonists represent in my account.

For my acquaintances in the neighbourhood, certain understandings of cunningness (*şmecherie*) were certainly negative, especially when they referred to the misdemeanours of high-level officials and criminals. Nevertheless, many other meanings of the same concept defined positive – if not indispensible – values and skills to them in terms of self-sufficiency and artfulness in the handling of changing contexts and relations[99]. These are constitutive to the "school of life" that is by definition located outside the realm of formal education, as it prepares one for getting by in shifting and unpredictable circumstances[100]. As I return to it in the coming Chapter, the idea of the "school of life" is both associated with social learning in peer-groups, as well as the passionate quest to avoid becoming a "fool", like a "horse who is ridden by others", or a "slave" (*sclav*) who lives with the routine of doing what others told him to do. The fact that these terms escape formal definitions is inherent to its nature as corporeal practice, or a form of

[98] On the discourse about 'honest bandits' in postsocialist Russia, see: Ries, 2002.

[99] The ambiguities of cunningness were manifest in the different meanings of the term in Romanian, since as an adjective form, it has a wider meaning referring to various forms of inventiveness, entrepreneurialism, and the skills of succeeding in ordinary situations, while the substantive form has a much narrower scope, labeling tricksters, highbinders and other characters from the shady zones of business or politics.

[100] According to the definition by the late Roma civil leader and former sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe in our co-written text, *şmecherie* is technique that makes part of the ambiguous relations between service providers and the clients they exploit, including deception and swindle. In a broader sense, it can be also the response of subordinated groupings to the experience of exclusion and oppression (2013: 58-59.) *Şmecherie* is also comparable to the concept of *metis*, as described by Scott (1998) or that of tactics, elaborated by de Certeau (1984).

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'savage science' (Bourdieu, 2000; Wacquant, 2004). Sources of this social creativity tend to be surrounded by secrets and other restrictions in order to keep the totality of the related processes at work hidden for outsiders. Hence, as a category of practice, it also refers to those 'nameless, invisible spirits' that are hard to locate as they can be everywhere and nowhere at the same time, since "it's this very lack of definition that makes spirits pure, abstract embodiments of power". (Graeber, 2001: 235.)

According to the "school of life" as a model, due to its marginality, the neighbourhood is precisely that kind of place where this 'savage science' is cultivated in its highest forms. As I suggested, the "school of life" is defined in opposition to formal education, but that doesn't mean a total devaluation of achievements in the latter. My younger acquaintances in the neighbourhood often made comparisons between each other according to the number of classes they had (meaning, the years they have spent in school, the most usual number being 10 or below). Such comparisons usually resulted in giving credit (or at least silent recognition) to those who had more. Sometimes they were wondering that if they had more patience at school back then (or if they haven't been dropped out) maybe today they would it would be possible for them to aspire for better jobs than the physical ones which were typically accessible to them in the labour market. Sometimes I also heard young men speaking about the prospects of returning to school in order to get the necessary qualification to enter some further specializations they found appealing. Nevertheless, these discussions were rather from the abstract, 'moony' kind that tended to take place in periods of free time, "boredom" (*plictiseala*) or other occasions when they were not doing anything else. Otherwise, the much celebrated skills, the forms of intelligence-plus-power that actually enabled their possessors to act in the world and to succeed in practice were delegated to the realm of the "school of life".

As this school is not mediated by formal institutions of education, investment in it assumes greater personal risks with a constant need for alertness, but at the same time it is also characterized by a pervasive sense of equality, since access to it is not blocked by social or economic barriers, merely the lack of aptitude. In a clear and often exaggerated opposition to persons "with many books" (*multe carţi*), prentices from this school claim to have a conspicuously non-partial and universalistic knowledge that is valid almost everywhere in spite

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of the particular place and time of the original learning process. As I indicated before, the unruly nature of *şmecherie* already manifested itself in the way it was impossible to define its proper place in strict binary oppositions, as it was an opposite to "civilization" – in terms of the ideal conduct of decent and law-abiding citizens – and the state of the "fool" or the "miserable" (*amărât*) – those who give but do not receive anything in return, or who believe that the world's workings follows one single scenario. For someone like Lorenzo, a practical way of disregarding his scarce opportunities for mobility was to dispraise the actual requirements of 'real' jobs as something he can fulfil any time as its only "bullshit" (*vrejeala*) he needs to master – much like a hotel servant who only has to open and close doors while continuously smiling to his customers. Accordingly, most of the protagonists in my account were constantly preoccupied with the design of their livelihood strategies, while navigating between the poles of these different of binaries. The sudden switch between the seemingly opposite perspectives was an artful tactic of everyday talk and action – indeed, in itself a form of *şmecherie* – but also a practical recognition of some main contradictions characterizing the social world in which these people found themselves from day to day. With reference to his own deals, Lucian, the Spoitori Gypsy trader introduced me *şmecherie* this way:

> I can make many tricks (*multe şmecherii*), I produced 50 cents and I give it on to you for 1 lei. So I won something. I take this cell phone for 10 lei and give it further for 15, and I have won something again. You don't have this bargaining (*bişniță*) in your blood. I am a businessman (*bişniţar*) this is how you call me, a person who doubles the money! I buy something and I sell it for another price ... and I win. You put money in and you make a gain (*bagi in bani, castigi in bani*) ... It matters to have at least four classes (*până încă patru clase conteaza*), but I have the school of life ... I know what to do, I know how to get it going, I know where to get it and how to return, how to get it and how not to take it, that is slyness (*asta e şmecheria*)! ... The school of life is the most important, it's better than the actual school (*şcoala şcoala*), you have to know what is in the mind of a person, what would he want (*ce ar vrea*), what point he wants to reach (*unde vrea sa ajunga*), true? ... I do all sorts of things without them being risky or illegal, without seizing by force (*nu sa iau una cu japcă*), I have a family, I don't want to get in jail. ... If you have money, you can manage (*te poţi descurca*), if you don't have, you just sit and watch, cause you don't know [anything], it's in vain to have your head (*degeaba ai capul, ca nu ai cu ce*). You are clever in your own way, but if you have no money, I am smarter than you. Why? Because I have money, this is what means to be smart (*deştept*) ... if you have no money, you are not smart, you are a fool (*prost*). You can be cleverer than me, but if you have no money, you aren't, this is the most important thing, money. I like to be an

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inventor man (*om inventator*), to invent businesses, tricks (*şmecherii*), I make money out of mere nothing (*din nimica toata fac bani*).

In his ethnography about the protagonists of the *neomelodici* music scene of Naples, Pine argues that the practice of 'making do' means more than simply 'getting by', as it requires manoeuvring in precarious 'contact zones' of potentialities (where formal, informal and illicit economies overlap and the moral rules of engagement are under negotiation) that require constant alertness for resources that can lead to a sense of personal sovereignty and a better life beyond mere survival and indeterminacy (2012). However, at the edges of the same 'contact zone', the creative tactics can also merge into violence and the domination by crime affiliates. Beyond the realms of the aforementioned 'games' and forms of exchange in the streets of the neighbourhood, there were some well-known protagonists that my acquaintances used to discuss extensively when it came to some of the essential properties of "players" or "cunning ones". As my acquaintances sometimes described it to me, in a 'hard' sense of the word, besides the prospect of remaining a "player", the potential stakes of *şmecherie* were not less than death, or imprisonment. In the neighbourhood probably the most famous one was 'Mike the Moneylender' (*Nuţu Cămătaru*), who was a recurrent actor of neighbourhood gossip (not in the least since his mansion was located close by) as well as the Romanian tabloid press. His release after 6 years in prison got particularly great media coverage since he left on his favourite horse that was brought to him right to the prison gate, so that he could ride home all the way through the city. According to rumours, after his prison sentence he could never gain back his previous influence and power in the underworld, he could still employ several people I knew as vendors of firewood or domestic helpers. As it often occurred, his personality was present in a certain indirect manner also in that encounter I reconstruct below. Once I met Marius around the corner, a young, blond-haired and smart non-Roma Romanian man[101]. By that time I was already used to the way in which members of certain hang-out groups are insisting to me about the unworthiness of others or the various additional risks to which I can expose myself in their company. Accordingly, I ignored the usual warnings that other acquaintances made also with regard to Marius, and (as I

[101] His hair colour was such a rarity in the neighbourhood that his nickname was also simply "the blond one" (Blondu').

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often did at that stage of my fieldwork) I asked him to describe to me what *şmecherie* is after all. He started this way:

> In a real sense, to be a player means to be an apt man, who really thinks about what he is doing. You have money, you have a car and that you continuously make some big business. And you have people behind you that are coming if something happens... The greatest players do it like this, just putting the banknotes on one another, building villas and buying cars, you've seen them all around here. Do you think if you work day by day you'll make that fortune? Are you ever going to arrive to the point to have a car or a house from that kind? Of course not, mainly now that the salaries are decreasing. A house of this kind costs 40-50 thousand Euros, how the hell would you make that money? Players do it with their heads, not by work with their hands. For example, you have a lot of guys around you, now what to do with them? Let's go abroad, and steal from the cash machines, just draw all the money from the cards of people or steal their cars and then sell them. This is the definition of a player, if you ask me.

His father died, his mother was a pensioner, and Marius was in a desperate quest for work at the time. As many other young men from the neighbourhood, he was also a waiter by his original training, but beyond bars and restaurants he also tried to get employed in construction-sites. None of the offers really fitted him as he was supposed to perform "non-stop work" (with maximum two free days in a month); other employers didn't respond or already found their applicants. At that time Romania was already going through the austerities installed by the Băsescu government, and my acquaintances in the neighbourhood started to discuss the issue of a coming "revolution" more and more often[102]. As we departed from his own plight, Marius became enraged and he started to detail his own scenarios of the events that he and many others expected to come in the neighbourhood.

> I've heard that the miners will take the trains and come to Bucharest for a strike or a revolution. It would be worth doing in this crisis because we are not getting by. Now they are cutting down the wages to pay the debts to the IMF, but nobody knows where did all this money go? If only they'd have done something good for the country, but they only made stupid stuff that's not useful for the people and community (*în folosul comunităţii*), only for their own pockets. People are starving, everybody is collecting scrap metal. The police say that people are stealing, but why they do it? Why Romania is like this? Why

[102] I should add that many of the men I knew in the neighborhood were echoing the forecast that the government's austerity measures are going to provoke a "revolution" in the country – months before the street revolts in Bucharest and other towns kicked off in 2012.

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> people are stealing? Why people are dying? Why people have no business? Because of the low wages, it's not enough even for daily survival, to eat and to put some clothes on, you just can't make it (*nu se ajunge*) and now they also deduct more. But you can still do some stuff with your head, you see, this is it. And then you say: leave me, I go and steal something and it's still more money. When they hear about Romania in other countries, they say Romanians come to steal, but it's the fault of those who are governing. To put it like this, the state has pushed the people from behind to make such things, steal cars from the people or a gold necklace from a lady. The man has to find an escape to survive, everyone with his own charge (*fiecare cu ce se ocupă*) to steal a telephone, or something, although he wouldn't do it if he has a decent life and job. Now you understand what's going on here?

As I understood later, Marius' passionate account had another layer beyond the issues of crisis, poverty and social unrest that might culminate in the outbreak of a new revolution in Romania. As a matter of fact, at the time of our encounter he was already in contact with an Algerian businessman who offered him sums from 3 to 5 thousand Euros in periods of 2 to 3 days, for engaging in long-distance drug-trade. He was already searching for others among his peers in the neighbourhood to satisfy the labour demand in the sector. Long-distance drug-trading offered otherwise unimaginable opportunities for these youths both in terms of income and the trips to countries ranging from South-Africa through Peru, Japan to Turkey and many others locations. Later on Marius completely disappeared from the place around the corner, and it was several months later when one of his peers finally told me that he was imprisoned in South-Korea for eight years.

Conclusions

Studies of poverty and social exclusion are often criticized because of their poor level of theorization. This is largely due to the politicized nature of the debates into which they are embedded. The research topics of scholars from these fields tend to be *hot issues* regardless of historical moments, political and economical circumstances. Due to these conditions researchers often face much higher expectations regarding their results than the ones they can actually live up to. Being asked to provide general conclusions regarding disadvantaged peoples, scholars often enter into speculations. Later on, while debating each other's work, they reflect upon these

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conditions by using the label of *ideology* in order to question or even discredit the opponents. Categories like *community*, *respectability* or *antisocial* provide resources also for the residents themselves in poor areas. As the scholars, they use such terms strategically while making distinctions between "inside" or "outside" in terms of space and belonging. Dealing with the dichotomies deployed by the inhabitants of poor settings in order to differentiate behavioural codes or value-orientations – such as that of the 'decent' and 'street' – is a risky analytic exercise, if scholarly accounts do not manage to make a proper distance between the categories of everyday practice and those of the analysis. Residents use these oppositions according to their actual interests both with reference to themselves and others. Hence, we can grasp such distinctions through the social division of space – such as the negotiation of the public and the private domains – as it is expressed in the regular debates and conflicts between realms of the household, wives and families and the male-dominated hang-out groups that socialize in public.

In conditions of urban marginality inhabitants struggle to pull themselves out of their unfavourable circumstances. One of the few available resources for this is to show the proof of value, worth or the quality of immediate spaces – such as the household – they inhabit and strive to control. These strategies are crucial in situations where structural problems accumulated by the wider society are turning into personal problems and practical challenges faced on a daily basis. Long term fieldwork in a territorially stigmatized area of Bucharest allowed me to grasp these struggles in their immediate forms. The common forms of exchange in the street worked at the same time as practices of contributing to one's livelihood, ordering social and physical space, and also gaining worth as a person in an environment where dignity or trust appear to be scarce resources that are hard to gain and easy to lose in front of others. When the men occupied a certain outdoor spot in the neighbourhood as their hangout place, it equalled to taking a stance towards their environment and exerting some form of control on the flows of street-life, including objects, information and persons. In this context, categories such as "civilized" and "vagabond" or "cunning" and "fool" are central to the ways in which inhabitants organize their perceptions of the social world. Entering this space in the role of an ethnographer implies that one's own activities are also categorized by such concepts on behalf of the informants. As might be apparent with regard to the categories and distinctions introduced in this chapter, their power in organizing the social world is due to their flexibility and the multiple contexts in which they can be deployed, without becoming meaningless or inconsistent. It's possible to differentiate at least two

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different levels of their reference: first, their initial or 'core' referents, and second, their potential extensions and extended meanings. For example, the initial referents of players were the famous and rich law breakers from the area or elsewhere. The category concerns them first and foremost, especially if I asked for explicit definitions. In such cases cunningness was presented to me exclusively as something reprehensible that belongs to the world of those who have "a lot of money and cars", that is, dubious sources of income. Still, the scale of everyday practices associated with cunning is much wider than the initial reference, including various forms of lucrative activities which are based on the discovery of a new niche, or at a more abstract level the skills of finding one's way of getting by and maintaining a power-position in unsettled circumstances where it is impossible to be fully aware of others' inclinations. This broader understanding of cunningness can be appealing to many, including those who have nothing to do with any involvement in criminal activities. In a similar way, the category of vagabond initially refers to people who either do not have a household or fail to bring their money home but drinking and gambling it away, hence not worth being trusted. Still, a broader understanding of the notion was often deployed even by some of those inhabitants who were striving to maintain civilized and respectable households. The virtues of civilization could be also conceived in such different ways, as the cleanliness and obedience that can be found in Western countries or the weaknesses due to being educated in the regular sense, speaking only one kind of language instead of many and being exposed to situations in which one proves to be nothing but a fool.

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Chapter 4. 'I'm good but also mad': The street economy in a poor Neighbourhood of Bucharest[103]

Mahala and Gypsyland, since I entered you,
There is no meat left on my bones; there is no meat left on my bones,
The little that is left, oh, ah, all is burnt and all is roasted.
If I try to weight it; I don't even find a little bit,
Not a little bit, not one gram; because enemies ate it up.
Popular Romanian Gypsy song

Introduction

Generally speaking, poor neighbourhoods or slums are places of material deprivation and stigmatization, which elicit contradictory imaginaries: they are defined both by enclosure, social stagnation and redundancy, but also by irregular motion and various forms of traffic. The present Chapter argues that, as such antinomies become transposed onto the person, it is in their interstices and overlaps that the virtuous self is consolidated. This Chapter tackles the street economy of the mixed Roma and non-Roma Romanian poor neighbourhood in Bucharest and examines some elementary forms of exchange, notions of personhood, as well as the making and breaking of relationships among members of male-dominated hang-out groups striving to create material and non-material value in a highly uncertain environment, where formal/licit and informal/ illicit economic practices collide. The main protagonists of the Chapter are members of an extended family of Spoitori Gypsy[104] traders, who are not relying on a single source of income and they are not dealing in solely one kind of 'merchandise' (*marfă*). Instead, they combine a

[103] An earlier version of this text was published in Brazzabeni *et al.*, 2016.

[104] Gypsy (*Ţigan*) is a widely accepted denomination both among Roma and non-Roma Romanian inhabitants in this neighbourhood. At the time of my fieldwork, whenever the denomination 'Roma' was used there by someone in everyday Romanian speech, it was almost invariably a person with some relationship to NGOs. Spoitori (Spoitor in singular) is the denomination for a group of Roma in Romania who traditionally worked as coppersmiths and animal traders, living predominantly in the south of the country. The people I have been working with no longer practise these occupations. The Spoitori Gypsies themselves used the denomination of Rom or Roma only when they spoke Romani language, as native speakers. I gave pseudonyms to all the protagonists of this chapter.

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variety of livelihood strategies, including scrap metal trade and plastic recycling, informal vending around outdoor markets, temporary migration, and in some cases also wage-work (as cleaners of markets). Understanding their combinations of livelihood strategies can help to further elucidate some of the themes that were opened up in the previous Chapter, such as the relationship between the street and the household, and the creation of value as well as the virtuous person in the precarious living conditions of the neighbourhood. As the Chapter points out, the street economy is constituted by forms of exchange that are based on a complex evolution of objects and the transacting subjects, connecting material value to personal worth and vice-versa.

The lines below the title of the Chapter are taken from an old gem of Romanian urban Gypsy folksong, or alternatively the music of the *mahala*, the neighbourhood or the slum, as it is sometimes translated[105]. The song depicts these legendary spaces of melodramatic social imaginary and their unfavourable, destructive conditions and adversarial social relations, which made them capable of absorbing anyone who entered them and lived there. Although its name does not appear in this song, it is hard to imagine a neighbourhood in Bucharest that is more exposed to such infernal myths than Ferentari, an ultimate 'Gypsy area' (*ţigănie*) in town, a projected container of urban ills like poverty, crime and drug abuse that threaten better parts of the city with invasion in the eyes of respectable citizens, a dangerous place and a ghetto, or else an internal Orient in continuous need of development and taming by the forces of civilization.

As it was elaborated in the Chapter on the urban history of marginality in Bucharest, such images can easily be contrasted with observations that would show a rural–urban buffer-zone instead of a ghetto, or a mixed area of Roma and non-Roma Romanian inhabitants instead of a fully enclosed Gypsy settlement. When writing about such places, the simple critique of misleading appearances, unjustified urban legends or actors who reinforce stereotypes runs the risk of relegating the whole analysis to the realm of representations or mere fiction. Moreover, we

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[105] In Romanian, the lyrics are: Mahala si ţiganie, de când am întrat in tine, / N-a ramas carne pe mine, n-a ramas carne pe mine, / Puţinica ce-a ramas, of, of, tot s-a fript si tot s-a ars. / Dacă stau s-o cântăresc, nici o litră nu găsesc / Nicio litră, niciun gram, că-i mâncată de duşmani. Among the many existing versions of the song, I quote here the one by the late Florică Roşioru. Source: Florică Roşioru, Mahala şi ţiganie, Cintece lăutăreşti. Eurostar 2007.

should also keep in mind that such powerful myths surrounding a place are far from being simple fictions that emerge from the outside, since they provide the very raw material to work with, not in the least for residents, whenever they wish to talk about themselves and their fate in connection with their habitat. Historically, the southern peripheries of Bucharest have been associated with the prevalence of lower classes, especially Sector 5, where the neighbourhood of Ferentari is located. Beyond the previous influx of residents, the postsocialist period brought new waves of settlers to the Ferentari who had lost their homes in other areas of the city due to demolitions, property restitution or overall impoverishment. This movement has been perhaps the most conducive to the contemporary territorial stigmatization of the neighbourhood.

Being aware that they live in the 'most infamous' (*cel mai rău famat*) neighbourhood in town, the inhabitants of Ferentari that I came to know are striving to manage their disadvantageous situation. Some of the available assets for this pursuit are the proofs of personal worth or the quality of the immediate spaces – such as the household or the street corner – that they strive to control. As it was mentioned in the previous Chapter, these are crucial resources for getting by in an environment where, due to the malfunctions of the local state, the structural problems of the wider society turn into personal problems to be faced on a daily basis. Furthermore, these problems often give rise to widespread suspicion concerning the unreliability of others. In order to avoid the unsettling prospect of getting absorbed by this space and hence becoming a 'fool' or a 'dupe' (*fraier*), many people strive to create value both in material and non-material terms as entrepreneurs or 'businessmen' (*bişniţari*) in the midst of an unpredictable and constantly changing environment that seems to offer little but deprivation (when considered from a systemic point of view). Their creation of value defines an 'interstitial domain' with a moral framework that helps to distinguish activities that are not strictly legal but are nonetheless socially acceptable from obviously criminal and illegitimate ones (Pardo 1996). This domain allows for a constant balancing between formal (or licit) and informal (or illicit) activities: people potentially rely on the resources of both, whilst trying not to fall into the traps of either of them.

The main protagonists of this Chapter belong to an extended family of Spoitori Gypsies. Several members of this family partly work as street vendors around some open-air markets close to the neighbourhood, selling goods such as melons, potatoes and flip-flops during the summer,

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and clothes and hats (purchased from a Chinese wholesale market) in winter. Without renting an official stall, they can constantly keep their prices below the ones available in the marketplace. Apart from this business, and the occasional trips of the men to Spain to perform as street musicians with their accordions, the family established an officially registered scrap-collecting site in the neighbourhood. Here they buy scrap metal and plastic from collectors who work at the street level that they later sell in larger quantities and for a higher price to firms that handle scrap metal at industrial level, and that organise its transportation to a port where it is sold to foreign agents[106].

Since the main purpose of this chapter is to present some of the norms and principles behind these activities – which are significant aspects of the livelihood strategies of many other inhabitants I got to know in the streets of the neighbourhood (Roma and non-Roma Romanians alike) – I also include several other actors in my account. These identify the street, sometimes being represented as a space of Gypsy dominance, with the notion of the 'school of life' (*şcoala vieţii*) and its lessons of getting by, as opposed to the realm of formal education. Nevertheless, this does not imply the exclusivity of Gypsies amongst those who regularly hang out and make deals in the street – even if they are in dominant positions in various niches (including flower trade, apart from the other instances I enlist).. In order to highlight this process, my analysis starts from some of the elementary forms of exchange that are part of the street economy, especially amongst the younger male inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood with the greatest traffic

Whatever I said to my acquaintances in the neighbourhood to justify my sustained presence, they kept on searching for their own explanations as to why I had moved to the area as a foreign student writing about Romania or Bucharest. As Lucian, a talented Spoitor Gypsy trader

[106] Other sources suggest that at least some parts of the locally collected scrap metal were processed in Romania, without leaving the country. According to Millar, the ' global trade in recyclables has greatly expanded in the last two decades; the single largest export from the Unites States to China in the first decade of the 21th century, for example, was scrap'. (2014: 37)

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told me sometimes, *'You are here because this is the neighbourhood where the greatest traffic is going on!'* This notion alluded to the manifold relations of exchange, trade and barter between inhabitants in the neighbourhood's public spaces and with outsiders at the nearby marketplaces. The topic of traffic could arise with reference to the exchange of mobile phones in the street or to the trading of votes during elections[107], arranged by a network of vote traffickers (*traficanţi de voturi*), or to the activities of the area's drug dealers (*traficanţi de droguri*). Apart from these cases, traffic could be also going on with second-hand cars from Bulgaria, contraband cigarettes from Moldova or driving licences that could be purchased without an exam more easily from Hungary than elsewhere. In fact, some forms of 'traffic' referred to the general movement and exchange, others were of an illegal kind (in the sense of legal categorization), while they were socially accepted, and there were also illicit modes of traffic that were conceived as socially or morally unacceptable or problematic in some contexts, such as drug-trade or trafficking in women (for the analytic division between these categories, see: Abraham and van Schendel, 2005). However, as I explain below, the social or 'popular' categorization of illicitness was more complicated, as a certain illicit activity could provide indirect benefits to actors who were not directly involved in them and who also condemned it in moral terms. For example, as I discuss in the following Chapter, this was exactly the case with the interconnection between drug-trade and scrap metal trade. Similarly to many other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the Spoitori Gypsy traders heavily condemned drug-trafficking, and they saw 'junkies' as the most deplorable subhuman beings or the 'living dead'. At the same time, traders had to engage with junkies on a daily basis since they were the main providers of scrap metal in the role of street-level collectors. For the same reason, relative growth and decline in the sector of scrap-metal trade were in correlation with the changes in the local drug-market and the number of consumers who were around in the neighbourhood[108]. From the circle of their regular suppliers, certain junkies were

[107] To quote the words of two Romanian georgraphers, 'instead of being diminished as it is normal, in Bucharest the state of social >vegetation< from the ghettos is rather maintained. The poor crowd from the ghettos can thus be easily manipulated in an electoral goal through different >presents<' (Mionel-Negut, 2011: 215.)

[108] In the period around 2011-12, when the local drug-market was revolutionized by the "legal drugs" (*legale* or *etnobotanice*), the majority of street-level collectors or providers were (largely homeless) junkies. In the following years, when the shops of legal drugs were officially closed down in the neighbourhood (as it happened in the city centre several years before), a growing number of providers were coming from the circles of the poor elderly.

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accepted by the crowd in clown-like roles during the street weddings held by the Spoitori Gypsies.

Apart from the trafficking of commodities or "merchandise" (*marfă*), many of my acquaintances had an extensive record of trips abroad to countries such as Turkey, Spain and Italy. In the early stages of my fieldwork I could make my acquaintances laugh at my naivety, when I sadly noted during a farewell celebration that a person's decision to migrate might mean that we would not see each other for quite some time. But in fact, these people could return to the neighbourhood almost as quickly as the preparations were made for their departure. Personal experiences, stories or even speculations about foreign countries were highlighted topics of everyday talk also among those inhabitants of the neighbourhood who were immobile or who had been abroad only in the distant past. In some respects, the local preoccupation with 'traffic' and movement was akin to the 'cosmopolitanism of the urban poor' that Appadurai described as the 'raw material' of hope and aspiration (2011). For example, the Spoitori Gypsies, with whom I had the closest relations in the neighbourhood, were proud of their *"*traditions" (as they put it) as the guarantees of their distinctiveness. Perhaps these "traditions" derived from the past, but in fact, all their instances were related to an international present and future. A main form of these traditions was Romani, a truly *"international language"* that they could use in any of the countries they travelled to (such as Italy, Spain or Hungary for that matter) and that was also a living proof of their Indian ancestry[109]. After the closing hour of their scrap metal collecting site, certain family members stayed there in a shack to keep an eye on the heaps of merchandise in order to prevent night time thefts. During these evenings, family members on the lookout were watching DVDs as a way to get rid of boredom. If the men were not opting for the films of Bruce Lee or Jean-Claude Van Damme, and if there weren't any new wedding videos to watch from their broader network of kin, Bollywood movies were their ultimate favourites. During the scenes in which large groups of actors were singing and dancing together, family members noted with an unmistakable sense of pride, that *"you see, these are all Gypsies!"* It was similarly related to tradition when they described themselves as "migratory people" (*popor migrator*) – even if their contemporary practices of migration were highly selective according to gender and age in terms of who left and who stayed behind. In sum, rather on the contrary to the image of a 'hidden',

[109] For them, the most common way to prove this was to refer to the numbers in their Romani dialect which they considered to be the same as in "Indian".

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peripheral zone populated by victims of social exclusion in need of salvation – as it is promoted in the discourse of NGOs and certain sociologists of the underclass – these forms of trafficking suggested that the neighbourhood can be understood as an extremely busy intersection between diverse local and transnational networks. As with other actors in these networks, the Spoitori Gypsy traders in the neighbourhood seem to rely more on the freedoms and liberties of local life – in other words, the malfunctions of the local state – than the residents of other parts of town.

The vivid scenes of street economies as well as the entrepreneurial activities enacted by the inhabitants of peripheral zones have been haunting the imagination of scholars and the broader public for many years. Some authors tend to attribute a relative autonomy to these places or discover a certain 'magnetic attraction' in their everyday life, where the reliance on informal livelihood strategies or their combination with formal employment can have empowering and also redistributive effects; for others, this freedom of engaging in informal labour translates to increasingly exploitative relations, traversing the boundaries of the domestic realm, family and neighbourhood (Mollona, 2005). The family and the household (Smith and Stenning, 2006), as well as marginal and stigmatised urban territories (Wacquant, 2008) have been prominent locations where researchers and policy experts alike have sought instances of such self-organised economic activities. At the same time, ideas of unregulated trade as boundary crossing or as a form of profiteering that violates the sense of order among ordinary citizens, where traders appear as small-scale followers of state officials who paved the way with their 'gigantic rip-offs', have been widely discussed in connection to the postsocialist world (Humphrey, 2002; Konstantinov, 1996).

The contribution of urban ethnographers and economic anthropologists to these debates seeks to reconcile contradictions between accumulation and social equity or production and circulation (Hart, 2000: 99-103). Understanding everyday economic engagements in local settings requires consideration of the moral frameworks in which the pursuit of material and non-material goals and the creation of value and virtue interact with one another (Lambek, 2008). In other words, I suggest a view of entrepreneurialism and trading activities as acts that create social persons and relationships in which the issues of trust and distrust play a crucial role. It is precisely in these acts that we can identify the creation of value as it 'emerges in action' or as a

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process in which the capacity of persons to act 'is transformed into concrete, perceptible forms' (Graeber, 2001: 45). This Chapter is dedicated to understanding this process through a focus on economic action amongst the inhabitants of the streets of a poor neighbourhood in Bucharest.

The concept of the street is essential here, as it sets the scene for most of the male-dominated activities I discuss in the Chapter. As we learn from accounts about the US inner city at the end of the twentieth century (e.g. Wacquant, 2004), spaces of 'protected sociability' as islands of stability and order form a binary opposition to the street with its 'predatory economy' and unpredictable forms of physical violence. At first sight it is appealing to rely on similar assumptions in the case of this Bucharest neighbourhood, where inhabitants also associate the street[110] with the interpersonal risks and challenges that make everyday life in the neighbourhood 'wild' (*sălbatic*) in some respects. In the case of the stray dogs gathering and barking in the street or the largely homeless drug users lying around on street corners, the strategy of the authorities seemed to follow the logic of leaving urban ills to accumulate in such a marginal zone, where they were to be dealt with mostly by the locals themselves. It is precisely their continuous engagement with the street and their social environment that renders the dichotomies such as that between a 'protected sociability' and a 'predatory economy' rather simplistic. While oppositions between the street and the household are indeed central to the way inhabitants talk about their everyday lives, these can obscure rather than reveal the interstitial domain where the protagonists of this account manage their livelihoods and strive to obtain value in material as well as non-material terms.

Madness and silent armament

During one of my returns to the neighbourhood, my wallet disappeared on a bus. I had no idea how it happened exactly; all I could see was that my bag was open at the station where I got off. Such incidents can provoke long and heated discussions amongst the inhabitants of the neigh-

[110] Notably, the imaginary of 'the street', as used in English in such contexts, does not overlap entirely with the Romanian usage of the word *stradă* in the situations I describe here. Instead, several other expressions are used, such as "outside" (*afară*) or "around the corner" (*la colţ*).

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bourhood, in which everyone feels obliged to take a stance on whether or not they witnessed anything or were involved in any way.

"God may help you!" said the lady sitting in the ticket booth at the bus station, where I returned in the hope that maybe I had left my wallet there. *"Beware!"* she continued. *"This is a neighbourhood of thieves, junkies and criminals!"* Although it contained only a small amount of money, the loss of my wallet also provoked passionate reactions among members of the extended family of Spoitori Gypsies with whom I had the closest relation in the neighbourhood. After similar calls for God's help and subtle references to my own inattention, one of their first comments was that the thief who took my wallet must have been an ethnic Romanian. As they said, the Gypsies who have done such things left the neighbourhood a long time ago and went abroad or to prison, and the ones who remained are *"civilized"* – in other words, the latter no longer engage in such minor affairs but have more serious businesses, such as their own, with scrap-metal. In order to show his solidarity and willingness to help me in my plight, Vasile, the head of the extended family, went to his house and then came back to the street with a gun that he concealed under his shirt. *"Tell me, who was it? We'll find the guy and get back your wallet with even more money than you've lost!"*

However small and haphazard, such an incident can evoke the whole territorial stigma that is imposed on the neighbourhood (as a place of 'thieves, junkies and criminals') and potentially threatens all inhabitants with the possibility of being part of the same dishonoured categories, which requires immediate acts of separation (Wacquant, 2008). All of this happens in a zone characterised by the weakness of the local state, whose main agents – the police – are seen by inhabitants as either corrupt and practically absent or as simply inefficient players. In the winter of 2010, an empty house along the main road of the neighbourhood began to burn after a group of homeless people made a fire inside. Inhabitants gathered in the street to follow the fire fighting and to discuss the event. They blamed it all on the policemen who would only have inspected such buildings if they had received bribes. On the other hand, during their hasty patrols when they were looking for drugs and drug dealers in the neighbourhood, policemen regularly stopped people in the streets and carried out identity checks on those who had nothing to do with drug trafficking. Such unpleasant incidents of unwarranted police suspicion were part of the context in which inhabitants expressed their everyday indignation towards the police and the

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state. Moreover, the possession of a gun suggests a sense of alertness in terms of being ready to resolve everyday troubles by personal means. Some of my acquaintances in the neighbourhood liked to boast to each other about the weapons or other violent assets they owned. These objects were part of the constant flux of commodities that were sold and bought on the street. Their possessors sometimes depicted themselves as collectors of and great experts on these items in ways similar to those with a reputation as collectors of and great experts on porn videos. However, it is important to add that this was a silent armament and that I have never seen these assets being used in accordance with their intended purpose. As a matter of fact, the primary function of these assets was to mock others, or else to test someone's interactive skills and proper reactions in the seemingly ambiguous situations when they are openly displayed. Even among the members of male-dominated groups, the actual proof of power and control over the immediate environment was the absence of violence or physical force. This non-violence could be possible, for example, because of the reputation of having an extended network of kin and "brothers" (*fraţi*) as a backup (the latter term of course not implying actual blood relations in any sense). One might argue that within this field of relationships an act such as showing up with a gun is in itself a symbol of trust, based on the mutually shared assumption that ultimately no one will pull the trigger.

To quote a common phrase with which men like to present themselves in the neighbourhood, "I'm good but also mad" (*sunt bun dar şi nebun*). As is usually the case with some of the most powerful phrases we learn during fieldwork, this laconicism is hard to translate, since it is inscribed with many of the mores and practices associated with street life[111]. First of all, it suggests that the speaker is endowed with values that are generally associated with goodness among ordinary Romanians, such as that of being 'nice' (*cuminte*) or, perhaps more importantly, of being "civilized" (*civilizat*)[112]. As I already indicated in the previous Chapter, I never met anyone in the neighbourhood who did not claim these respectable titles in one way or another, or who did not attribute the opposite to others. Beyond this, as the second part of the

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[111] To complicate things further, the term *nebun* can have another sense when used in a different context, meaning literally 'not good'. In this instance, *ne-* (not-) is a prefix negating *bun* (good).

[112] My approach to the ambiguous relationship of "civilization" to its conceptual opposites among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood was influenced by van de Port's account (1998).

saying continues, such qualities of goodness are not enough for the successful management of the self and of one's livelihood: a certain element of 'madness' is necessary to gain the reputation associated with fully valuable personhood.

Madness in itself represents the direct opposite of all those values that civilization or obedience stand for, and from this point of view it belongs to those unwanted others who can be held responsible for the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. In this sense, madness is a prerequisite for persons who are unreliable and unpredictable, which is why it is located outside the realm of social relations that can be governed by the principles of trust, equality and collaboration. The main exponents of this kind of madness in the neighbourhood are the "junkies" (*drogaţi*) and especially the "homeless" (*boschetari* or *vagabonzi*), the lowest of the low in the local hierarchy of social value. As a matter of fact, those who are labelled with such a dishonourable title do not have to be homeless in a literal sense, nor do they have to be inclined towards violence. The actual threat posed by these unwanted others has more to do with their unpredictability as well as their mastery of mimicry, which they use to conceal their predatory intentions. Aurel, a middle-aged non-Roma Romanian chauffeur who grew up in the area, introduced "savages" (*sălbatici*) to me in this way:

> There are no friends here – just forget this idea. They are hanging out only to make some profit. You have to be afraid here. You think they are your friends, but once you let them into your house, they'll rush you (*tăbărî*) and you won't get rid of them; they'll take all your stuff, and only your bare ass will remain.

A former local Roma politician expressed similar views concerning street life:

> You never know who is with whom. You are talking to someone one moment and you don't know whom you are talking to, because you don't know what games they play behind your back. You are with X, and you talk to Y, or you fight against Y and maybe X and Y are friends and they collaborate. It's hard.

I kept hearing these anxious comments about distrust throughout my fieldwork, regardless of the amount of time I spent in the neighbourhood or the number of people I became familiar with. It would be logical to conclude that if there is a society in which each member claims the

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status of the "civilised" for himself and considers most others to be lacking this value, then antitheses to being civilised, such as being mad or a vagabond, must be ascribed strictly to these others, who must be kept at a safe distance from the self with its secure spaces and relationships. However, this is not the case. Madness was apparently not the exclusive domain of those who do not share the respectability that comes with having a home or a household. No matter how much a man liked to insist on my good luck in coming into contact with him instead of with the wrong ones in the neighbourhood, I hardly knew anyone who could not recall certain periods of "madness" or "vagabondage" (*vagabonzeală*) in his own past. Note how the initial distinction between 'us' and 'others' vanishes in the following recollection of Radu, a Gypsy man in his mid thirties who was married and had a daughter. Radu worked as a courier but was also one of the regulars on the street corner:

> Let me tell you something: you found us, the good boys, the nice ones, but if you had met others [laughs] … you don't want to see that other nature! May my family die [if I lie to you], but if you came some years ago, when we all gathered here, you would have run away! [Laughs] It was big-time vagabondage; it drove us crazy. Drinks, shouting, roaring music non-stop from the morning until the evening, with just the brothers. We also did a few wrong things, as kids do.

Indeed, the division between the obedient and civilised self of the present and the madness of the past is a common way of assuming both as part of the same personality. Moreover, this temporal division at the level of the person corresponds to a common view about changes over time in the neighbourhood. As my acquaintances often pointed out, those times when the neighbourhood was a truly dangerous place, with 'fights all over the place', are long gone; now, it's only 'the name' – in other words, the bad reputation of the area – that persists[113].

Nevertheless, such a distinction between the past and the present is not the only way in which the different 'natures' of madness and obedience are incorporated by the same person. While the opposites of what is understood as a civilised status – such as unpredictability, the inclination to violence or disrespect towards the primacy of the family and the household in terms of one's expenditure of time and money – might have been dominant only in a person's past or

[113] My acquaintances in the neighbourhood liked to emphasise that the whole venture of moving there would have been impossible for me in the past, in the 1990s or just 'some years ago' because of the probability of assaults and petty theft that were then customary, especially against outsiders

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previously in the neighbourhood, these customs and inclinations have never fully disappeared, and neither does it seem desirable to lose them completely. In order to obtain the material and personal properties that are joined together in the idea of owning "value" (*valoare*) and gaining recognition in the context of street life, men have had to preserve at least some parts of their madness as qualities that they keep under control but that can potentially burst out if the circumstances or other parties demand it. After all, this is similar to the idea that the name and reputation of the neighbourhood is still in circulation in spite of the fact that it is a "quiet" (*liniştit*) place at present. During the evenings we spent on the street corner, Lucian, the Spoitor Gypsy trader, liked to recall the times when he established his fame as 'the greatest devil of this zone', thanks to his reprisals against those who wanted to outwit him. He saw this as the source of the respect that he still enjoyed from many of his neighbours, even though he had stayed clear of trouble since having children.

The division of the different sides of a person's reputation was most clearly articulated in those highly ritualised moments when men accepted each other as friends or bestowed the title of brother on each other. Shortly after making his cautionary comments about the prevalence of predatory wilds in the neighbourhood, Aurel stated the following:

> If you are my friend, we remain like that until we die. I do for you whatever you want. For me friendship matters the most. But if someone upsets me – it can be an outsider – then I don't care about anything anymore (*nu ţin cont*). If he picks a quarrel with you and I see it, I go and kick his ass (*îi dau în cap*). You might think I'm mad, but I'm not. We are friends until you put your knife to my throat, then I go out of my mind, and I will kill you before you kill me.

Self-affirmations of this kind may recall observations of Bourgois and his colleagues about the moral economy of violence that is 'based on a disposition to sociality and generosity' but 'requires a facility for rage and an anxiety over insult that exacerbates community insecurity' (Bourgois et al. 2014: 10). Nevertheless, in our setting it is crucial to see how such ostentatious acts can verge on the domain of joking relations, recreating the everyday terms of conviviality rather than pushing for further violence. The threat of violence may be present even in those situations that mark the beginning of (or later, the reinforcement of) an existing collaboration between peers.

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Like others, Aurel could prove his value by showing that he could keep his 'madness' under control, as a potency that he retained in practice and maintained as part of his reputation, which allowed him to remain in control of his social environment and hence avoid becoming a "fool". As a practice and a potency, madness was most commonly identified as "not caring" (*nu ţine cont*), or in terms of generosity and other forms of temporary excess. One's 'madness' and one's ambition to become a great man were nearly impossible to distinguish, which explains why occasional personal and financial losses were inherent to this pursuit. As my acquaintances sometimes put it when recalling their previous losses from either gambling or some other unsuccessful investment, *"I know I have lost a lot, because I have my ambitions and my madness, as any man has some kind of a madness*". In relation to these losses, the role of the wives of these men was to defend the priorities of the household. This was the case during men's prolonged cycles of "honouring" each other through mutual calls for drinks in the street near to a grocery store. In some of these cases a woman's silent protest strategy was to go to the place of 'honouring' together with her children to parade them in front of her husband in order to remind him of his domestic obligations. In these terms, women not only represented the household, as terrain of their dominance in opposition to the street as a masculine domain, but they were the practical combatants of household priorities if they witnessed that their male partners were in the state of not caring. However, as I elaborate it below, in spite of their role as guardians of the household, from the men's point of view they were rather akin to their business-partners in certain respects.

In male-dominated forms of socialization the presence of women was not only infrequent, but largely unwanted or undesirable[114]. According to Monterescu, ideas and everyday practices of masculinity conflict with each among Palestinian men in Jaffa[115], as they have to cope with rapid

[114] Just to recall two classical ethnographic cases: among Vlach Gypsy horse-traders in Hungary, men's success in market-deals was linked to their available sexual potency (Stewart, 1997); and according to boxers in the black ghetto of Chicago, men shouldn't be with women before the games (Wacquant, 2004). I should admit that the apparent 'male bias' of my account is due to the fact that I did most part of my fieldwork as a single man. I could interact with women in the neighborhood primarily as the wives, partners, mothers or daughters of my male acquaintances, and gendered worlds are highly separated in the neighborhood most of the time (especially in 'public space').

[115] For example, the Palestinian men in Monterescu's study consider women to be both dangerous and powerful, while they see themselves as (potential) victims, even in cases like infidelity. Gutmann argues in a similar vein with

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social changes and a series of forces (including those of the women themselves), that are threatening to undermine their control (2007). Men's attempts to preserve the ideology of masculinity are reflected in their 'constant preoccupation with sexual borders in general and with boundaries of masculinity in particular', in the midst of threatening 'others' (ibid. 184). According to the Spoitori Gypsy men I knew (but also other men in the neighbourhood), female partners and wives should never be trusted entirely, and their devotion to the men should be always in doubt. Maintaining this uncertainty offered a way to preserve male control over women by the limitation of their 'conceit', as well as their sexual instincts they cannot control by themselves. Women could also turn out to be 'profiteers', who abuse men's trust, affection or the simple fact that they were allowed to enter their homes[116]. In the ideal case, extra-marital sexual exploits were to be kept at the level of a one night stand without allowing the female partner to manipulate the man, by taking their money or other resources which were supposed to serve the interests of the household. As women in such relationships were conceived by the men as "bitches" (*curve*), men saw themselves as "pimps" if they wittingly coupled themselves with better-off women in order to access their savings. In general terms, young men often depicted the girls from the neighbourhood as simple bitches (who want only material gains without real affection) mainly in comparison to the apparently "beautiful girls" in the city centre; which was a peculiar transfer of the territorial stigma onto local gender relations[117].

In fact, men's suspicion and distrust towards women were comparable to the uncertainties of their business-deals. Similarly to the economic ones, men's sexual relations could offer some of the greatest victories that they could hope for, but also the greatest possible failures, so they were equally cautious when entering any of the two. In other words, the similarity of business-

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regards to machimo as a form of 'contradictory consciousness' in terms of dominant understandings, identities and everyday practices among Mexican working class men (1996).

[116] For example, Lucian, the Spoitiori Gypsy trader, had several unsuccessful relations with women who turned out to be "profiteers", before he met his current partner, who was underage at the time.

[117] Some of the most powerful experiences I had in terms of the relationship between the city centre and the neighborhood were from those events when groups of curious and emphatic youngsters – many of them young women – came to visit the neighborhood for cultural events or programs organized by NGOs. In such cases, some of the young men came to me in such cases to transmit certain messages to one or another female visitor, as they were hesitant or insecure about what they are expected to do in make a contact. In local terms, the same men could be among the most self-confident (or even high-minded) persons, such as the renown football-players from the local park.

relations and the ones between men and women was due to the potentially disastrous effects on men's sense of integrity, in case they failed to control the motions and sudden switches that could be part of both forms of contact. As I return to this later, similarly the undercover policemen who could disguise themselves perhaps as street-cleaners in the neighbourhood, business-partners (and indeed women, especially in extra-marital relations) were also feared to hide their real intentions or interests behind friendly appearances. Therefore, the timely detection of hidden intents was the key to succeed in all these domains. Moreover, just like their business-histories, the histories of men's relations with women were typically arranged between the poles of great losses and lucrative deals, or sexual victories and cases when they were – or at least they could have become – the victims of fraud. Similarly to this very personal sense of victimhood, unsuccessful businesses could also make a "fool" out of a man. After an unsuccessful day around the market, when his bribing tricks with the policemen or his negotiations with the security-guards failed to work, or when it turned out that his calculation was wrong – so he had to carry home the unsold merchandise in his red Dacia, as a burden in a literal sense – Lucian, the Spoitori Gypsy trader was in a desperate state of mind. In such cases he never missed the chance to blame the increasing restrictions on street trade, the arbitrary rules or the policemen who got "free hands" by the government, and they started to demand a "fine" (*amendă*) instead of the "bribe" (*spagă*). However, he also accused himself for not being able to perform properly. Contrarily to his usual self-appraisal as a talented "businessman" (*bişniţar* or *om de afaceri*), "speculator" (*speculant*) or "peddler" (*ambulant*) with a good reputation in the neighbourhood, such evenings he was satirizing himself in the street as a clown, uttering random words in various languages to express his profound disorientation. On such days, he truly looked like a stranger in his own land.

Another force behind making and breaking social connections (or entering some forms of exchange) was due to the influence that persons could exert on each other in conditions of proximity. Therefore, men in despair or sorrow were expected to leave the usual scenes of street-life, as their states could be contagious, hence risked being emulated by the others around. After all, each person had his or her own failures or 'shame' and others should not invoke – including by the public immersion in their own problems and moaning. For example, once a man found himself in the mood of singing a moaning song – or song 'for listening' (*ascultare*) – in the street, but others asked him to do it in his courtyard instead. He invited his closest comrades, but the

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song was finally interrupted also there, as one of the guests started to cry[118]. The presence of a "cocksucker" (*bulangiu*) or "fag" (*poponar*) could be disgusting for these men because of slightly similar reasons. For example, when men suspected (or just assumed) the presence of a gay person, sometimes they cried out loud: *"I cannot stand cocksuckers in my company!"* The exclamation was not just a matter of refusal, but also a way to keep one's masculinity intact and free of adverse effects[119]. I knew only one person in the neighbourhood at the time of my fieldwork, who openly assumed his gay identity was Florin, a middle aged man in poor health conditions, who was engaging in international petty trade in the past (as many others in the neighbourhood), but went bankrupt and then continued to earn a meagre income as the cleaner of certain local bars and buffets, which he supplemented by offering oral sex for money. His rather ambiguous title was "the fag of the neighbourhood" (*poponarul cartierului*), which was a unique quality, but it also exposed to him to an endless series of insults in the street. However, following a previous line of reasoning with reference to joking relations, I should add that similarly to the drug-users who could sometimes enter even the crowds at street-weddings (as the major rituals of neighbourhood life), Florin was also accepted in male companies in clown-like roles at least temporarily. The role allowed him to make comments from an explicitly assumed gay perspective, or to greet other men by saying that he would "kiss their ass" instead of their face, which was then of course reciprocated by subsequent joking formulas of humiliation. In sum, as sorrow and failure could be contagious, the sheer presence of a person with good luck could also bring success by spreading the chances for affluence to others around him. These forms of transmission were also instances of the exercises in social learning, to which I return below. When men "do not care" (*nu ţin cont*), when they recourse to the display of how they keep their madness under control (including by the very performance of excess), or when they are strategically mistrustful to their female and business partners, they are navigating in an uncertain social environment with many potential threats against their integrity.

[118] Of course, the public singing or playing of *manele* songs and other playful melodies were absolutely not sanctioned this way.

[119] The issue of gender and homosexuality in the neighbourhood deserves a separate treatise. I can only indicate here that among other reasons, homosexuality could be a particularly sensitive issue for the men, since former inmates among them were often exposed to or forced to take part in the provision of sexual services between men during their time in jail. The Romanian writer Adrian Schiop published a realist novel on the issue, see: Schiop, 2013.

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Collaboration and combination

As it was mentioned, exchange-relations in the neighborhood provided the regular scenes of street life, including the continuous deals with mobile phones or the rituals of honoring between men, whereby each invitation by one of the partners induced the sense of obligation on behalf of the others to reciprocate, ending up in extended cycles of giving and receiving respect. As a neighbourly or brotherly gesture, peers could also borrow each others' cars for an evening test with the idea of perhaps swapping them afterwards. A major stake of the exchange for the partners was to prove that eventually it is not the money that moves them, but they are the ones who put money (or other material goods) into motion. These were the significant moments when they established the kind of long-term cooperation they defined as "collaboration", governed by the principles of equality and mutual benefits[120]. As they said about such relations, *"We help each other reciprocally. If you don't have* [something]*, I give you; if I don't have, you give to me. This is real friendship"*. The group of peers in collaboration constituted the basic unit of social life in the streets; they were the medium between the family and the household on the one hand, and the potentially wild outside world on the other. The intimate relation between peers was marked by acts such as frequent and playful sham battles, mocked vituperations, or the fact that they were allowed to dig in each other's pockets without recrimination. All the peer groups of this kind with which I became acquainted during my fieldwork had both Roma and non-Roma Romanian members. Collaboration relied on the triple mechanism of mutual defence, control and support, and they assured one another that if one of them were under attack, all the others would take it as a personal offence and act accordingly. In sum, collaboration was the results of exchange as an uncertain, highly tactical activity aimed at extending a sense of community (Gudeman, 2009).

At least as an ideal type, collaboration can be distinguished from another form of economic transaction commonly known in the street as "combination" (*combinaţie*), the latter

[120] For a classical account of such brotherly relations, see Stewart (1997). In my account, however, the group of 'brothers' is not ethnically homogeneous.

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depicting short-term or occasional forms of exchange in which the rules, the value of the transferred objects and the personal worth of the participants were all open to negotiation and bargaining, implying a series of risks but also unforeseen possibilities to be realised in such a deal. Though collaboration and combination differed in time scale, they were nevertheless interlinked in various ways. First of all, every combination included the promise of developing collaboration between peers, even if it was actually not achieved in the end. In this respect, combination was similar to the type of informal exchange described by Stan (2012) in her ethnography on bribing practices in the postsocialist Romanian healthcare system, where the status of the bribe as gift or commodity can be defined only in retrospect in relation to the very act of exchange. It follows from this that combination can also signify those rich moments of social creativity when new information, possibilities and resources are discovered and a new idea of order is introduced. In such moments, the kind of social learning that is commonly associated with the street reached some of its highest peaks. Accordingly, engagement in 'combination' was desirable for anyone who wished to develop their skills in bargaining and business in general, or to avoid the misfortunes associated with the situation of "fools" (*proşti*) who subject themselves to boredom and are doomed to remain impoverished by accepting even the smallest gain in their specific field of occupation.

Given that the purpose of these acts was to gain material and non-material values, as well as some sort of control over the social environment, simple rational calculation is far from being the only, or even the most important, skill that neighbourhood entrepreneurs like Lucian were striving to acquire. "Counting" (*socotează*) was an indispensable skill for them, one that they cultivated perpetually during their deals or while banishing occasional boredom by playing the popular card game *remi*. Still, apart from this and the social control they could exert through the fear and respect encoded in their local reputation, these businessmen also put a huge emphasis on what they called "observing the motions rapidly" or having an "electronic head" or mindset in order to succeed at social navigation (Vigh, 2009). To put it another way, in a social and economic environment of uncertainty, and faced with an ensuing need for alertness, it was not simply luck that traders needed, but more specifically the gift of being able to figure out other people's intentions or inner thoughts, even if the respective person intended to hide them from others. Altogether these much-desired personal qualities of traders helped them circumscribe a

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realm that we might consider non-rational and, in this sense, external to well-executed calculations. However, this is definitely not the way the traders themselves would perceive it. As Lucian once told me:

> I'm not a fool (*prost*), I just look at a person and I already know all his thoughts, what's in his head and what's not, if he is my enemy or someone close to me, if he wants to tell me something or if he wants to hide it. I feel all this. May my son and daughter die [if I lie to you], but I can even feel when the police are behind me. As it was last time [around the market], I felt that there might be something, I said 'let's put things in order quickly,' and they were there already. I'm a kind of person who quickly perceives anything. Maybe it's three at night, and I'm sleeping, and I'm just like now, feeling bad, almost dying of exhaustion – but still, if I hear the smallest noise, I jump up immediately, while others just keep on sleeping.

If collaboration signifies those relationships in which partners mutually accept the rules of reciprocity in the long run, then combination marks the very margins of this sociality. This is where "rip-offs" can take place, since the rules of exchange are open to negotiation, and formerly unimaginable profits can be realised, together with the possibility of outwitting others or being outwitted by them. Consequently, it is during these affairs that traders can continue experimenting with crucial assets – such as the power of their reputation, counting, and *"understanding the moves rapidly"* – and potentially extend the realm of 'collaboration' and interests. However, as I show in the next section, this is far from being a one-way process.

The interstitial and the illicit

During their spontaneous celebrations after successful business deals – for instance, buying a new plot of land in the neighbourhood or finding a particularly gainful load (*încărcare*) of scrap metal – Spoitori Gypsy traders liked to praise themselves as bandits or *mafioţi* in an obviously positive light, even if they were outsiders to domains where the area's notorious *mafioţi* pursued their illicit activities, such as money-lending or dealing in prostitutes and drugs[121]. The direct and indirect outcomes of these illicit activities were omnipresent in the life of

[121] Similar to the ironic tone with which my acquaintances referred to themselves as *mafioţi* in this case, the severity of the area's actual *mafioţi* is also questionable. For example, a local Roma politician made a comparison based on his own experiences between the actors of the underworld in Romania and those from Moldova. As he

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the neighbourhood. Still, it was not only the moral or ethical imperatives of these people that kept them at a safe distance from direct involvement in the circles and activities of those they identified as *mafioţi* 'for real', without positive camouflage or irony. The story of Claudiu and one of his mates is a powerful example of the quickly emerging distance between peers due to one's involvement in the underworld. The two men developed this distance by emphasising their status in the dual sense of the material value they could exhibit and the personal worth they claimed in relation to one another.

Claudiu was a Gypsy man in his twenties who made a living out of performing small services at a nearby cemetery before opting for a much more lucrative job as a pimp. This switch was marked by a whole set of conspicuous changes in his appearance, beginning with an intense regime of bodybuilding, wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses and driving a new BMW; he also acquired a whole new set of clothes with particular items such as a spectacular set of tee-shirts in the colours of the Italian flag. The evaluation of his turn towards the underworld was a complex matter for peers, not in the least because someone's move towards a domain of illicit activities could offer access to resources and opportunities to others outside that domain. Accordingly, whatever they thought of Claudiu's new business in moral terms, when peers could afford it, they could still enjoy his assistance in making prostitutes available for them at reasonable prices in Bucharest's city centre, an area that they rarely visited otherwise, let alone for the purposes of pure pleasure. Still, in many respects it became impossible for them to accommodate Claudiu's changed status. To begin with, he stopped hanging out with the others in the street. Then, in the summer of 2012, he was invited to a wedding celebration by a family of Gypsies on one of the streets not far from the house where he lived. Following the usual custom in the neighbourhood, after the church service the celebration continued in a courtyard where family members and invitees gathered to eat, drink and enjoy the live music. The gates of the courtyard were left wide open to allow a whole audience of uninvited people (*neinvitaţi*) from the area to stare at the

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said, the ones from Romania are all talk and no action: *"they are like bandits with water pistols"* compared to the ones in Moldova. If in the aforementioned case the Gypsy traders glorified themselves as *mafioţi* by means of irony, in this case the actual *mafioţi* were disparaged in a similar manner.

merrymaking from the outside, though of course the limits between the zone of invitees and the uninvited were unequivocal for all[122].

Claudiu got an invitation to the wedding from the men of the host family. However, he used the occasion to demonstrate his changed status. Although he came to the celebration accompanied by some of his brothers and wearing his tee-shirt with the Italian tricolour, he remained out in the street among the uninvited, drinking his own wine and soda and requesting a few songs from the musicians from that distance. Claudiu's companions among the hosts perceived this as a great offence, but they decided to downplay it so that the flow of the celebration remained uninterrupted. It was this seeming disinterest – letting the annoying gestures go unnoticed – that proved in the end that Claudiu and his current position belonged to a domain that the others could hardly affect and might not even want to get involved in.

A few weeks later there was a further incident involving Claudiu, this time with Remus, a young and chubby non-Roma Romanian man who liked to hang out with the others from the area, at least when he was not at work. Like many other young males from the neighbourhood, Remus had professional training as a waiter, although he pursued this profession only occasionally after he was fired from a restaurant. Instead, he made his living through temporary jobs such as selling firewood, riding his scooter as a delivery boy for a local pizzeria, or occasionally working in the restaurant in Naples next to a Romanian cook. On a summer day, Claudiu was around the corner in the company of 'his sly ones' (*şmecherii lui*), as the others said, when Remus passed by on his scooter. Claudiu looked at him and asked off-hand if he was 'still running around only with that scooter'. As Remus told me later, *'he took me for a fool'* (*fraier*), and as he continued, *'I said, 'What the fuck do you want?' I'm not as slick as you are, get the fuck out, I piss on you!*[123] *And then I left'*. The next day Claudiu messaged him through others, saying that he should calm down and not revile him anymore in front of others, or else he might be beaten. *'This is what he said'*, Remus summarised, *'words of a fool!'*

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[122] When the zone of invitees had to stretch out in front of the house, the organisers usually put rugs on those parts of the street, thereby preserving the limits between the invitees and uninvited visitors.

[123] Swearing that one is going to "piss on" someone (*mă piş pe el*) is one of the stronger ways to express disregard or dishonour among men in the neighbourhood.

Although the management of this affair still fits the usual framework where partners resolve their interpersonal conflicts largely by verbal rather than physical means – for example, by discrediting the other as a sucker or a fool – the message containing Claudiu's threat was the last exchange I heard about between the onetime peers. Later, as we were discussing the events, Remus asked rhetorical questions while recalling the times when principles of mutuality and equity guided their relationship. *'When he was in trouble, who was standing next to him? Wasn't it me? Didn't I take him into my house, take responsibility for him and all that? I helped the man as I could'*. In retrospect, he could take a moral stance by enumerating his gestures according to former 'collaboration'; but he could hardly exert any control, let alone obligation, towards his former peer. At the same time, such a disruption in personal relationships clearly shows the boundary between the interstitial and the illicit economies of the area, together with the dramatic change of status that was induced by someone's turn towards the latter. Several months later, Lucian and his brother from the extended family of Spoitori Gypsies told me that Remus had taken to selling drugs. And, as they feared that his involvement in the drug trade could bring unnecessary police scrutiny onto their own business with scrap metal, they had stopped all contact with him.

Conclusions

The inhabitants of the 'most infamous' neighbourhood and the ultimate 'Gypsy area' of Bucharest do not tackle their disadvantageous situation in a way that would decidedly make them into 'fools'. Rather than dwelling on this status, the people I have presented in this account are taking advantage of the multiple resources and opportunities offered by the street, whereby they are striving to become the entrepreneurs or 'businessmen' in an uncertain and constantly changing economic environment. It is in this context that exchange practices and forms of economic or entrepreneurial action unfold and – at least ideally – end up in the creation and achievement of material value and personal worth that is not available to 'fools' who are known to accept exploitation without restraint at their workplace or in the street. The personalised nature

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of these transactions and the significance of developing trust and reliable personal relations are essential to these activities.

Because these resources are scarce and limited, the processes of making and breaking these relations are highly ritualised. If one way of exercising control is through the fear or respect generated by the display of violence (even if it is not deployed in the end) and 'madness', another way is through the losses a man is willing to incur for the sake of his peers. Exchanges of this kind are grounded in the ideals of equality and the mutual will to avoid predatory or exploitative ways of profiting. At the same time, the margins of this sociality are marked by 'combinations', which are also the testing ground of entrepreneurial skills. Accordingly, the forms of exchange and the business-making ventures that these people pursue at once create and maintain a livelihood, as they aim to take a stand that allows for some control over the flow of objects, information and people in the streets. These acts are crucial in both gaining and losing the social value attributed to a person, which is particularly apparent at those points where the interstitial and the illicit economies of the area coincide with each other.

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Chapter 5. The management of precarity

> ...it is still a law of modern Political Economy that the larger the scale on which Capitalist production is carried on, the less it can support the petty devices of swindling and pilfering which characterize its early stages. The pettifogging business tricks of the Polish Jew, the representative in Europe of commerce in its lowest stage, those tricks that serve him so well in his own native country, and are generally practiced there, he finds to be out of date and out of place when he comes to Hamburg or Berlin (...) The fact is, those tricks do not pay any longer in a large market, where time is money, and where a certain standard of commercial morality is unavoidably developed, purely as a means of saving time and trouble.
>
> Friedrich Engels[124]

Introduction

In recent years, the global expansion of precarious labour has gained prominence on academic and activist agendas alike, posing engaged scholars with the promise, or the imperative, of joining those agendas together. Such engagements are usually premised on the announcement of a presumably 'new epoch' of growing precariousness and uncertainty of livelihoods. Growing insecurities are reportedly threatening an ever more amorphous social grouping of workers in different world regions in an essentially similar manner (Standing, 2011). Consequently, the increasing precariousness of labour is a field of social analysis and criticism where a putatively universal 'suffering slot' (Robbins, 2013) has long been in the making. This paper engages with the notion of precariousness by building on the perspectives and practices of some of its alleged subjects in the territorially stigmatized marginal neighbourhood of Ferentari in Bucharest.

Continuing the ethnographic exploration of livelihoods in the neighbourhood, the present Chapter focuses on the practices and experiences of work among the members of an extended network of kin, the Spoitori Gypsies from the neighbourhood (and beyond). As the Chapter elaborates, the protagonists secure their livelihoods by combining various activities (many of which may be conceived as precarious, including scrap-metal trade, informal street vending or

[124] See: Engels, 2008 [1854].

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temporary migration), and they make a series of distinctions when it comes to their relationships to these forms of work, as well as the states or conditions they find themselves in while performing them.

The context of the ethnographic material in the Chapter is that of ongoing transformation. Firstly, regular wage work stands for a rather distant memory of the parental (or older) generations before postsocialism, followed by an era of petty-entrepreneurship (including mobile trade, street musicianship, or taxi-driving). Secondly, the outbreak of the crisis brought the decay of the previously lucrative and also exciting practice of temporary migration to Spain, but the end of migration was also due to a new wave of scrap-metal trade as an enterprise that might be a marginal niche locally (largely concentrated in the neighbourhood in the context of the city), but that makes part of an expanding international business chain at the same time. Although many voices predicted the coming end of scrap metal trade as a gainful branch, due to the nearly total dismantling and privatization of industrial plants from the Communist era (as the main sources of scrap metal collection, my evidence does not support this claim: the growing population of (largely homeless) drug-users as well as the elderly poor became a significant pool of street-level collectors who provide recyclable materials to traders in a highly unequal urban setting. Thirdly, apart from changing aspirations and opportunities, the increasing restrictions and police assaults on informal street vendors anticipates that new generations won't follow the career-path of the "peddler" (*ambulant*), and rather accept low-level employment – even if it that comes up directly against the ideology or idealized self-perception of the person who "has no other boss besides himself". However, the diversity of parallel livelihood practices among the Spoitori Gypsies is not likely to disappear.

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Precarity: livelihood, suffering and autonomy

One of the reverberations of the economic crisis in academic as well as policy-related and activist circles is based on claim-making for social change by correlating (implicitly or explicitly) the plight of increasingly insecure middle-classes in the developed world to marginalized populations under the umbrella category of an emerging new class of the precariat. (Standing,

2011) The rapid ascent of the concept was largely due to the promise of an analytic (and thereby political) convergence of social categories that – irrespective of their histories or the 'afterlife' of their previous privileges – are all exposed to similar threats at present, including material dispossession, decreasing social welfare and the shortening of time span (in terms of planning for the future). The apparent contradiction is that while precarity as a class under formation is introduced largely as a new development, this claim itself reflects the privileged standpoint – the one of those to whom uncertain livelihoods, insecure work or the retrenchment of the welfare system is in fact a novelty. To put it differently, in a context of crisis and shared decay, it became legitimate for an increasingly wide array of actors to claim that they are 'at the margins'. This claim presents a novel form of symbolic violence whereby domination takes place by the assertion of a putatively common plight and the downplaying of inequalities or historical divergences. Therefore, the claim-making tends to reinforce the silence (at least in formal political terms) prescribed to those to whom 'precarity' has been rather a historical norm than an exception. For example, in his criticism of the precariat as a concept, Munck argues that in a global historical perspective, it is not precarity, but Fordism and the welfare state that represented an exception – or at least a reference point of aspiration[125] (Munck, 2013).

Anthropologists have also noted already that the denunciations of a novel and currently expanding state of precarity – with its insecurities, temporal or irregular employment or personalized risks – is in a striking contrast with livelihoods that are not based on a straightforward opposition between 'formal' and 'informal' labour or economy, but rather a continuum or synergy of the two. In an intriguing piece of ethnography, Millar argued that instead of a finality or an exception to wage labour, the experience of work among the collectors and vendors of recyclable waste (the *catadores*) in Rio is characterized by a 'continual return' to the dump as a refuge and an intimate site of 'relational autonomy', where they can exert control and maintain their relations in spite of insecurity (2014)[126]. Accordingly, there is a peculiar

[125] For a similar argument with reference to neoliberalism in India, see: Cross, 2010.

[126] According to Millar, "as the transition to wage labor in industrial capitalism entailed the creation of new worker-subjectivities, the transition to precarious labor in contemporary capitalism is also a process involving the transformation of desires, values, and arts of living. In other words, like wage labor, work on the garbage dump is a site of subject-making, which *catadores* experience and express as transformative of their inner dispositions." (2014: 45.)

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paradox with the currently widespread discourse on precarity and the global spread of precarious labour. If we rely on a strict sociological definition of what this kind of work or labour market position entails, it is not difficult to see that many of those who would 'objectively' fall into the category, or may even represent some of its most alarming instances, rarely conceive of their ow plight in such terms. Certain ways of refusing wage labour by marginal groups have been a topic of inquiry for a series of ethnographies from different world regions (Bourgois, 2003; Liebow, 2003 [1967]; Stewart, 1997; Pardo, 1996 among many others). People whose livelihoods are marginal in the more encompassing political and economic structures may not only accept their insecure conditions, but they often make durable efforts to keep the state and its bureaucratic structures at a safe distance (or else to substitute its malfunctioning services by their own means), which is crucial for understanding their regimes of value and sense of social worth. This might be the case even if they are obviously integrated into the larger division of labour, do not live 'outside' politics and economy in any sense, and are exposed to various forms of social suffering.

The present Chapter aims to contribute to this line of inquiry. In his classical ethnography, Bourgois (2003) pointed out that the turn from factory-based economy to service economy during the 1980s and 90s resulted in large-scale unemployment among young inner-city Puerto Rican men in East Harlem, who then had to confront the norms of obedience and subordination that are typical for the sectors where they could find (close to the minimum wage) jobs. Opposed to legal employment, street-level dealing provided them with a source of personal dignity and a way to refuse their status as victims, but their 'oppositional celebration of street marginality (...) shielded them from having to face the fact that they were socially and economically superfluous to mainstream society' and it ultimately led to self-destruction, personal as well as social suffering (ibid. 114-130). In his ethnographic work on the *popolino* of Naples, Pardo (1996, 2004) argued that in Southern Italy where poverty and high official unemployment takes place in the midst of a historically weak and insufficient industrial development, practices of work and entrepreneurship in small-scale businesses are not characterized by 'short-term moves' or a lack of cooperation, but an ongoing negotiation between the moral and the monetary aspects of managing

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existence[127]. Although predatory practices (like extortion or drug dealing) are parts of the shared social environment, as 'honest people' in an 'absurd' world, many of the *popolino* manage to avoid the criminal path and engage in activities that are part of an ongoing interaction between the bureaucratic categories of 'formal' and the 'informal' or the units of the household and the workplace[128]. In his study on postsocialist workers in stagnating Romanian mining communities, Kideckel (2008) addressed slightly similar issues by referring to "getting by" (*descurcare*) as a notion that represents the wider ambiguities of instrumentalized social relations and unpredictable futures, as it refers to diverse legal and illegal practices that are based on the ability to thrive in spite of reduced resources and tough times, but it also entails uncertainty, embodied alienation, and the limitation to act solely for one's own interests and survival.

Apparently, work, livelihood or 'surviving and thriving' are core themes for ethnographers who work in various marginal settings, and indeed the same themes provide the main preoccupations for the subjects themselves – even if the normative or political stances of researchers and their interlocutors may be divergent. The protagonists of the present account from the marginal neighbourhood of Ferentari also rely on a series of distinctions between the kinds of labour they engage in, or that they may have access to. Categories of work and livelihood (either actual or putative) are primarily differentiated on the basis of the material and non-material benefits that they make possible. In this regard they are intimately tied to notions of selfhood, value and social worth (Skeggs, 2011), as a scarce good in a territorially stigmatized environment where anyone can be 'all the same and equal' in the dishonour and worthlessness that is associated with the place from without (Wacquant, 2008).

The work of hope

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[127] According to Pardo, among the *popolino* of Naples, it is common to distinguish between concepts of 'work' and 'toil', where there first regards activities that are rewarding in moral and monetary terms and open up paths towards the future, while the second is unrewarding and represents a dead-end.

[128] A related argument was made concerning the 'semiproletarian household' from a feminist world-system perspective by Dunaway, 2012.

Initially, the primary focus of my research was not on the issues or work and livelihood, but I soon realized in to the neighbourhood that these themes are simply unavoidable. After returning to my flat from the busy scenes of street life, I used to search for the most central words I heard in order to tag and categorize the research results of the day, ones that can be starting points in the elaboration of ethnographic concepts. I soon realized, how many of these notions were in direct relationship to livelihood, making a living by work (*muncă* or *treabă*), or by "producing" money at home or abroad in various ways. As it was already mentioned in the previous Chapters, the ideals, representations and actual practices of work could be highly divergent among my acquaintances in the neighbourhood. They were keen on depicting themselves as "bandits" of *mafioţi* sometimes, even if most of their actual earnings were based on remarkably decent – or one might say dull – forms of labour. For example, in 2010, in the midst of the international political scandal around criminality and migration, and the resulting sense of a 'national embarrassment' in Romania, I was even encouraged by my acquaintances in the neighbourhood one evening to record their spontaneous *manele* improvisation in which they were ironically celebrating the illicit forms of making money abroad. Whether on such themes or other ones, the ethnopop genre of manele as an 'open system' suited well such spontaneous improvisations, so youngsters regularly amused themselves with inventing new songs and fabricating lyrics right on the spot. At that time, the chubby non-Roma Romanian boy Remus was planning to leave for Spain to work there as the member of the kitchen staff of a restaurant, which he already did before in a restaurant in Naples. As an abrupt form of farewell celebration, he joined two of his Spoitori Gypsy peers, who worked as informal street-vendors during the day, but in the evening they loved to sing and play *manele* in the street or at home. As it often happened in similar circumstances, the discussion between the men soon turned into singing. The spontaneous improvisations followed the usual frames, as peers stood in a circle, where one hands over the voice to the other, based on the rhythm provided by the small drum called *darabana*. Young men in the neighbourhood said they form a "system", when they were taking part in such a set-up of collective performance. This time, each singer acted as impersonators of Remus in his present situation.

At first, Lucian, one of the Spoitori Gypsies, described the overall situation:

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> Tomorrow evening, tomorrow evening I go/To Spain, to Spain to produce/In Romania money is not moving too well/In Romania it's not working anymore/The guards are coming to fetter me/But I go to produce in Spain/Romania knows me/As I make a fortune/And the whole country knows me/Tomorrow evening, tomorrow evening I go/To Spain, to Spain to produce.

In this verse, we already see the overall plight in Romania with no prospects for good deals and the omnipresent risk of police arrest. However, the protagonist of the song is ahead of his social milieu, as he knows how to convert his economic and symbolic capital (namely his money and fame) from home into a prospective enterprise in Spain that will enable him to continue "producing". Apparently, the actual plan of Remus was already in a new dimension, as a miraculous opportunity to "produce" instead of getting a job in the service sector abroad. As Day (et al.) suggested once, opposed to work, the notion of production in marginal settings can imply the negation of material transformation and planning, as well as an exaggerated denial of effort, as the future seems to be guaranteed by the symbolic construction of an affluent physical and social environment[129] (1999: 21).

In the following verse, Lucian's brother Viorel took over the voice and continued the line of imagination about this specific mode of "production" as follows:

> My value, my value/No one else has my value/I'm going down the road and feel good/With my wife and lover/I'm going down the road and I'm glad/That I left for Spain/I came from Romania/To steal from the shops/I steal only clothes/'Cause it's so good to steal [laughter]/To feel that you are a big boss (*jupân*)/To let my hands spinning around/No one's going to notice me/Because I'm a boy of the neighborhood/I'm one of the greatest players (*şmecheri*)

In this verse, the unique "value" (*valoare*) and chieftainship of the man is manifested both in his well-being as a householder, and his cunning moves that enable him not just to "produce" in general, but to appropriate in a way that remains unexplored to outsiders. On the one hand, these practices are not the results of formal training or cultivation, as they just have to be released and let go, as one sets free parts of his body to move and perform. On the other hand, in spite of

[129] In order to contextualize this idea of production, perhaps also to avoid its potentially romantizing implications, the authors emphasized that in fact 'few people manage to live wholly within the present and, for the majority, some aspect of the long term is re-incorporated through the back-door (…) people consequently experience a double-identity, or even a divided world' and that 'households provide the settings in which this sense of division (…) is commonly located. (1999: 23-25).

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their general applicability (such as in the course of thievery in Spain) these nearly magical movements are still based on exercises that were attended in a clearly defined location: the neighborhood.

At this point Lucian took back the voice, and continued the improvised song with a verse on the protagonist's future return from Spain to the neighborhood. As a ways of raising the previous bets even higher, he depicted Remus as a person who is related to the most famous *mafiot* in the area, 'Mike the Moneylender' (*Nuţu Camataru*)[130]. Liviu finished the improvisation by alluding to him:

> I want to drink with joy/'Cause it's so precious to me/The neighborhood will hear/That Remus the Moneylender is here.

Although he looked very serious about it beforehand, finally it turned out that Remus hadn't even managed to collect enough money for his travel to Spain, so he remained among the regulars around the corner in the neighborhood[131]. Since he was fired from the restaurant where he worked as a waiter, he could practice his original profession only occasionally, when he was invited to weddings or other celebrations. Besides other instances of temporary employment, later he was hired as a vendor by Mike the Moneylender, who was involved also in the firewood market in the larger area. As heating with stoves was widespread in the rural-type households, the business with firewood during autumn and winter was still one of the best opportunities for men who were constantly moving between the states of temporal employment and official unemployment. After a few weeks' time, Remus got accommodated to his new job and he also

[130] As I mentioned previously, Nuţu Camataru was well-known in the Romanian tabloid press at the time of my fieldwork. His release after six years in prison got particularly great media coverage since he left on his favorite horse that was brought to him right to the prison and then he was riding home all the way through the city.

[131] He often recalled the job that he thought is the best one in real terms, namely that of the 'inspector', who is monitors all is in order: in fact there will be always something that's missing, which makes it possible to take a bribe (*şpagă*). Whenever he remembered those times, he liked to say in his usual joking manner, *"that's why God cursed me and I didn't finish high school, even if I'm clever, because he knew that if I enter university, I would have given fines to everyone so that they bribe me! ... It only depends on how well we understand each other."* Throughout the fieldwork I was having the sensation that for my acquaintances in the neighborhood, in fact the notion of *şpagă* does not equates to English concept of "bribe", but to that of real profit that one extracts without additional losses in a transaction.

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found out the ways of enhancing his income by selling always less wood to the customers than the amount shown by the balance. As a way of proving his commitment to his workplace, he concluded this way: *"I might cheat on the customer, but not my boss, isn't it right like this?"*

In fact, professional performances of *manele* on stage or during street-weddings were different from such a "system" around a street-corner as in our case. First of all, during parties or street-weddings, clients gave banknotes to the performers in exchange for songs they wished to hear or dedicate to someone, which was obviously not the case with the "system", where basically everyone was (or could be) an author and performer with no 'cash-flow' involved[132]. Because of the low levels of record sale and the nearly complete lack of media broadcasting (apart from a special TV channel that played only *manele*), the greatest stars of the music industry remained highly dependent on the income generated by lucrative live performances, hosted by patrons of the criminal underworld, and the discourse of manele (both the lyrics and the ongoing discussion of fans and opponents) has been strongly influenced by this set-up (on this connection, see: Schiop, 2016). For sure, the improvised performance that I reconstructed above is part of this broader social and discursive field, by the effort of 'ordinary folks' to imitate the 'big bosses', in fact with a good sense of irony. However, I wish to push the point further than the issues of mimicry and musical performance.

At the time of my fieldwork, members of the engaged young intelligentsia in Bucharest were yet quite ambiguous about *manele*, since on the one hand, it was clearly the expressive culture of the poor and the socially subordinated[133] that induced solidarity and curiosity towards

[132] The accessibility of manale performance was further facilitated by the low-cost studios in town with suitable equipment, where youngsters could record their own songs, which they were playing and sharing from their mobile-phones.

[133] Quite on the contrary to other European cases where members of local migrant communities, or (in certain Eastern European cases, see for example: Imre, 2009) the local Roma minority play a significant role in the local or 'grass-roots' production of hip-hop or rap, in the Romanian case, hip-hop or rap were typically cultivated by non-Roma Romanian performers. There were certain projects dedicated to the collaboration between the famous performers of the two genres in the past, but these attempts quickly disappeared from the increasing repudiation of manele by the mainstream (or more educated) public from the 2000s. In the neighbourhood I hardly ever heard hip-hop or rap music during my fieldwork. It happened one time that I saw a young man in the street who was dressed up according to the codes of hip-hop design, but he was immediately decried by the other youths around. It was completely obvious throughout the times I've spent in the neighbourhood that 'manele rules' (see also the

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the genre on their behalf, but on the other hand, the rather explicit celebration of the criminal underworld or the representation of male-female relations – and the objectification of women in the songs – were still difficult to tackle. Certain activists from the emerging Romanian Roma middle class were highly critical of the genre (which was dominated by Roma performers otherwise) because in their view it was "reinforcing stereotypes" instead of combating them. Another dilemma was related to the nearly total incongruence between the power, affluence and luxury that many songs were celebrating, and the actual living conditions, the poverty and the deprivation that a majority of the genre's audience suffered from. For them, the whole genre of manele seemed to be a 'public fiction', to return to Liebow's original concept that was quoted in the Introduction (2003 [1967]).

As I mentioned before, back in the day it was also puzzling for me to be part of this "system" in the neighbourhood and to celebrate criminal riches and theft abroad, more or less at the same time with the expulsion of Romanian Roma migrants from France, the rising hostility towards Eastern European migrants in the UK (just to mention two of the many instances defined by the concept of 'anti-Gypsism' in Europe), together with the ongoing accusation and scapegoating of Gypsies in Romania and the political struggles that all these processes induced in a 'unified' but still highly unequal Europe. Shortly after the street performance, Remus visited us in our apartment in the neighbourhood[134]. We were listening to music and we recalled the street performance. Still with a certain puzzlement concerning the aforementioned incongruity between the content of most *manele* songs, and the everyday realities of poverty and deprivation among a majority of their audiences, we asked Remus to give a clue to us as ignorant outsiders. This is what he said:

> There are a few songs about how the rich and the poor all born and die the same way, but I don't remember any now. But look, why is it called music? It's about hope, you understand? If you are sad, you play 2-3 songs to cheer up a bit, don't you think it gives something to your psyche (*psihicul tău*)? If you sing that 'I'm poor, and I'll stay like that all my life and I'll eat bread with potato', don't you think it knocks down your whole morale (*îţi doboară tot moralul*)? You have to

following excerpt), and that the local appearances of hip-hop is a result of project interventions by NGOs, therefore also rather limited to events or programs that they organized.

[134] According to a widely shared belief in the neighbourhood, people speak only "bullshit" (*prostie*) in the street, therefore the more serious discussions tended to take place in someone's flat or house (including its immediate surroundings) even among those men, who otherwise spend much of their time outside.

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> think about this as well. Everyone is poor, you understand, also the musicians (*lăutari*), but they still sing and dance. Manea gives hope (*speranţă*) to the people; this is what keeps you alive. Hope doesn't mean that you are going to die, it means that you say, oh Lord, maybe tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, I can win the lotto, maybe tomorrow I'll make a family with my wife and children, maybe tomorrow I can also buy a house, or maybe tomorrow my salary will increase. This is the meaning of hope. The songs (*manele*) should keep the morale high (*moralul ridicat*) for any person. If you listen to *Paraziţii*[135], they sing about poverty, but people don't really listen to them, because they want to stay alive. If you are upset (*supărat*), and I play a song of sorrow, you won't like it, right? It just makes things worse, it disrupts your mind (*zăpăceşte mintea ta*), it brings spiritual decay *(decădere sufletească).* It's different if I play a song about optimism to you, right? So this is what manele [songs] express.

I mentioned in the previous Chapter that during hang-outs in the street, men strived to avoid the expression of pain, hardship or suffering in each other's company, and that if woes still erupted on someone's behalf, the others did their best to stop it. This custom was based on a strong sense of equality induced by hardships – after all, there was no such severe personal distress that could not be matched with the one of others, and a person's overt plaintiveness could always trigger the same reaction on behalf of others. It seemed to me that the avoidance of such endless spirals was one of the main principles of a hang-out group as a unit based on "laughing and joking" (*râdem, glumim*) and therefore on the maintenance of a "high morale". The case of the spontaneous – therefore seemingly effortless – performance in the street, and Remus' elaborated appraisal of *manele* as a source of hope helps us to further elucidate these points and to expand the argument towards the issues of work and livelihood. Apparently, the ultimate source of livelihood is hope, which then paves the way for material achievements; in other words, hope comes first, and the social and material world 'out there' is second, as the latter in its actuality has only scarce resources (if any) that would enable movement or transformation. This idea was also reflected in the usual stance of inhabitants of the neighbourhood who believed that theirs is a place where "nothing really ever changes" or that actual changes are just superficial without real outcomes[136] – even if of course the opposite was also true, since (similarly to the whole city of Bucharest) the neighbourhood and the very livelihood strategies of my acquaintances went through many changes and transformation during my fieldwork and

[135] *Paraziţii* was one of the major hip-hop formations in Romania at the time of my fieldwork. For the issue of hip-hop, see the previous footnote.

[136] This notion was also reflected in the usual claim of my acquaintances that their neighbourhood is a nice area only in the winter, when the streets and the heaps of garbage are all covered with snow, so no one has to see them.

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afterwards. In this condition, protagonists of my account strived to conceive the present time and conditions as transient, a 'meantime' before the nascent of future opportunities. In fact this led to a considerable downplaying of their own efforts dedicated to work, livelihood, or the everyday ordering of their spatial and social environment. Nevertheless, the true source of these efforts seemed to be in their very denial. This adds a further layer to the problems I introduced with regard to "not caring", as a self-ascribed behaviour of inhabitants in the neighbourhood (especially in public), which was in fact not a sign or a source of disengagement, neither a feature of a putatively 'impossible' community, but the main strategy in their management of livelihood.

The work history of Remus represents the kind of movement between temporary jobs, as well as the formal and informal, or licit and illicit domains of work that was common especially among the young men who used to hang out in the streets of the neighbourhood. It was this sense of constant movement, moving around and literal 'busy-ness' – without any certain prospects for mobility in social terms (see: Di Nunzio 1017, Vigh 2008) that they usually expressed by notions such as "surviving" (*supravieţuieşte*) "managing" or "fending for" themselves (*se descurcă*). One of the overarching analytic problems of marginality is the very refusal of marginal positions on behalf of those who are clearly positioned that way in strictly understood structural terms – often by the redefinition of the hierarchies that places them in a situation that is by all accounts disadvantageous. Hence, instead of assuming their social suffering and making claims on these grounds, they spend a great deal of their personal and collective investments in redressing their plight or simply assuming it to be non-existent. As it was mentioned beforehand, there was a widespread tendency in anthropology to catalogue such instances of refusal (or as a continuation, nearly any form of 'agency' on behalf of the subordinated or marginalized) as forms of 'resistance' that gradually led to the analytical inflation of the concept (Ortner, 2006; Rabinowitz, 2014). In his ethnography of a neighbourhood at the besieged outskirts of Sarajevo, Jansen argued that previous scholarship tended to identify popular forms of resistance or hope as 'infra-political' in the sense of being primarily against the state and governmental intrusion (2014). In contrast, he elaborates a case in which resistance takes the form of hope for the state through practices of 'gridding', that is, investments into ordering statecraft from below, based on a 'yearning for normal life'. Jansen's points help us to create a link between two senses of resistance (and the hope that serves as its basis): that of explicit or implicit social protest, and

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another which is rather about the endurance and perseverance in a set of conditions that people may conceive to be 'impossible' at the same time[137]. Opposed to its association with a fatalistic acceptance of the existing conditions as already given, it is rather based on the active organization of social space and possibilities by the means of corporeal knowledge and practice. Endurance in this sense may connect both the 'infra-political' meanings of resistance (in the sense of social criticism regarding the circumstances that one is exposed or even contributes to) and those that concern 'gridding' (as defined by Jansen). In the following section I continue to elaborate the issues of livelihood and work by an ethnographic focus on scrap-metal trade in the neighbourhood. As I point it out, instead of a simple 'misrecognition', the resistance (in the aforementioned double sense) exerted by the protagonists of this account is rather based on a very critical comprehension of the social world around them, including their own constrains, as given.

Street vending and scrap metal trade

As I mentioned in the Chapter on history, a large part of local knowledge in the neighbourhood was transmitted in proverbial forms (*vorbe*) – sometimes associated with the persons known as the inventor of a given phrase – and many of such "sayings" directly concerned the matters of livelihood. For example Vasile, the head of the extended family of Spoitori Gypsy traders, used to tell me at their scrap metal collecting site that "we have to get by (*să ne descurcăm*) somehow, if you don't run, you don't eat! (*dacă nu alergi, nu mănânci!*)*"* As it was the case with most such proverbial forms, that served simultaneously as descriptions, instructions and concise statements about some of the main forces in social life, Vasile could deploy this saying in a variety of situations, whether in relation to the highly competitive relationship of scrap metal traders in the neighbourhood (running similar legally authorized collecting sites), or

[137] I have no space to elaborate Bourdieu's concept of the 'subproletariat', as described in the last chapter of his Pascalian Meditations (2000), the last volume in which he provided a comprehensive summary of his theoretical input. In his view, contradictions between practices and discourses, the 'fatalistic dispositions' or the oscillation 'between flight into the imaginary and fatalistic surrender to the verdicts of the given' are produced by dispossession, namely the lack of chance to incorporate social time and the structure of possibilities in habitus. As he argues, these dispositions 'can have the appearances of purposiveness only if it is forgotten that, by a paradoxical counterfinality of adaptation to reality, they help to reproduce the conditions of oppression' (2000: 217-221).

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else with reference to the traders' willingness to ignore the question if certain pieces of scrap that were brought to their site were actually stolen material or not (I return to this later)[138].

The Spoitori Gypsies I knew were pursuing diverse income-generating activities, or striving to utilize several possibilities and resources that were available to them – or that they could discover – and this way they created value both in a material sense and in the terms of ideas about (personal or group-specific) worth. According to them, Gypsy dominance in the local field of commerce is opposed to the plight of non-Roma Romanians who accept meagre salaries in exchange for their work (*muncă*), which eventually makes them "dead" (*mort*). On the contrary, the Spoitori Gypsies were not dealing in one or a few particular types of goods but they were recurrently changing the profile of their trade according to specific times of the year, the available resources at different wholesale markets in and around town. For this reason they rarely made distinctions between the different items or objects of trade, but used to refer to them indifferently as "merchandise" (*marfă*) – that is to be kept in motion, obtained at a good price and then passed on at a higher rate. Such basic rules of trading applied equally to all the "merchandise" they were dealing in; so in this respect one could hardly find any difference in their relationship to the diverse materials and objects of trade. However, these different forms of work hold still very different meanings and values for the Spoitori Gypsy traders.

For many years, the Spoitori Gypsies maintained a livelihood by a combination of predominantly two kinds of work, apart from other temporary jobs that certain family members ran against (such as public cleaning). As I already mentioned in the previous Chapter, some of them engaged in temporary migration to Spain as street musicians with their accordions. During these trips female partners could sometimes accompany men, walking with a glass in their hands, as the ones who receive the donations. Some of their family members were already settled in Spain, some of them were dealing with scrap metal trade there as well, while others were begging. Back home, they did unlicensed street vending around outdoor markets in Bucharest, where they were selling melons, potatoes and flip-flops or other clothes in the summer, and hats

[138] Legally speaking, officially authorized scrap metal traders such as the Spoitori Gypsies were not supposed to accept materials that their suppliers have stolen, but since it was often impossible to make such distinctions, this rule was largely ignored by the traders.

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or other warm clothes in the winter that they got from Bucharest's famous wholesale market for Chinese products, called *Europa*[139]. As they were vending always next to markets, they could keep their prices always below the ones available for similar goods inside the marketplace, paying only bribes to the police as to toll men, instead of the higher costs of an officially rented stall. For the same reason, being in 'good terms' with the policemen was above all a state of not being bothered by them – potentially because of previously established bribing relations, to which the Spoitori Gypsies simply referred to by saying that they "know" the given policemen. When informal street vendors were accompanied by their children during their ventures around the open air markets in town, it could be the son's task to keep an eye on the area around the venue of trading and to call their parents' attention on time if policemen are approaching. Police-presence was nearly continuous also in the neighbourhood, as police cars were regularly strolling around the streets and the scrap-collecting sites. Even if in most cases the aim was simply to maintain the visibility of officialdom without any direct contact with the residents, once the cars passed, the trades often expressed their discontent and anger by spitting on the asphalt. This was an expression of their views regarding the uselessness and inefficiency of a police that keeps on harassing the 'small fries' without being able to capture those 'big fishes' who are responsible for the omnipresent corruption and poverty in the country. As they maintained, the temporary increment of police patrols was simply due to the policemen's occasional prospects for career advancement or wage increase, making their arbitrary or undue interventions even more likely.

Albeit trading definitely gave them a sense of pride, especially in opposition to those miserable "workers" who always had to meet the requirements set up by their bosses instead of being their own bosses, still it was hardly a 'traditional occupation' for them, especially in terms of the prospects of transmitting it to their offspring. In the afterhours when the time of reflection had came with regard to the gains and the budget of that day, or to business and other matters of life in general, the traders used to ponder over the future of their children and the kinds of occupations they wished them to acquire. The usual hopes for sons was to become lawyers – so that finally they will be able to make those rules and regulations that policemen need to maintain, instead of being exposed to their high-handed procedures – and for daughters it was to be doctors

[139] For a detailed ethnographic study of this market in Bucharest, see: Crăciun, 2009.

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– so that they would be able to help the future elderly and sick members of the family to avoid all the disquiet and complications that institutions like hospitals could evoke to them (including the anxieties over maltreatment or the necessity of paying bribes).

However, quite on the contrary to the usual agonistic lectures on trading, fathers sometimes also acknowledged their own difficulties with giving thorough explanations to their children about the actual purpose of going to school (especially when the kids were not motivated enough with certain subjects). In such cases, beyond the general explanations about the need to go to school, after a certain point they might have felt there are no other means at their disposal apart from yelling at the children as a way to persuade them to learn[140]. Apart from such ideas about a future in which new generations should abandon street trade as an occupation, the past could appear in the work-related narrations of the Spoitori Gypsies as a contiguous time of trading. When speaking about the old times, the elderly used to tell me that their ancestors were making "always a kind of business" (*tot un fel de bisniţă*), referring for example to mobile animal trade they engaged in with buffalos and other animals they brought to the markets of Bucharest from the countryside (on foot), or the trade in second hand cars from Hungary after the fall of Communism (during which they performed industrial labour in factories[141]).

In terms of time and work, the housing conditions of the Spoitori Gypsies are an important issue. First of all, I should note that their relations with their rural kin were controversial (see the Chapter on urban history). As many other residents, they moved to the neighbourhood at the time of severe demolitions in a central area of the city (where they lived after the migration of the family to the city from the countryside). Their relatives were scattered in the villages of Bucharest's extended southern hinterland (reaching down to the city of Giurgiu), but most of them were living in a village close to Bucharest, and they were engaging with scrap-metal trade on a large scale. Due to the lucrative businesses, many villagers could invest in the construction of conspicuous multi-storey houses without the necessary legal permits

[140] In fact, sport was an actual career-path that many children were purusing, football in the case of boys, and handball in the case of girls.

[141] In Bucharest they worked for example in a cotton factory. As many others in the neighbourhood, Vasile as the head of the family was also playing music at weddings under Communism besides factory work. Musicianship was a much more lucrative occupation than the otherwise secure factory work.

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because of their bribing relations with the local mayor. When it came to the issues of these shady transactions, the city-based Spoitori Gypsies from the neighbourhood liked to take the stance of law-abiding citizens, who condemn their backward rural kin for short-sightedness and irresponsibility. The growing number of corruption-related court cases against Romanian politicians (including local mayors) clearly conveyed a message to them that such illegally built fancy houses – as those of their rural relatives – may be demolished any day. However, this wisdom could hardly cure the allurement that the spectacular buildings exerted on them. As it was mentioned in an earlier Chapter, perhaps no other videos could trigger such a great curiosity among the Spoitori men and women alike as the wedding videos of related families, where the conspicuous multi-storey houses often served as the background. However, apart from the laughs and amazement, during such visual spectacles of wealth the grudge was also sensible in the air sometimes. In such cases, the Spoitori Gypsy traders had to profess what they are *not* able permit or provide for their families – albeit that was hardly a usual part of the common performances of masculinity. At the same time, these urban Spoitori Gypsies cherished future plans about building a two-storey house with at least four rooms on each floor on the land where they were running their scrap-metal collecting site. This was supposed to become a house that is at least comparable with some of the spectacular builds owned by other wealthy scrap metal traders in the neighbourhood. The construction of this new building finally never kicked off, as their family budget could not allow them to make such a conspicuous investment. Still, whenever they saw nice and appealing houses within or outside the neighbourhood, the younger men were taking photos of them with their smart phones, saying that these are possible "models" for their future home. However, in spite of their meagre funds, finally they still managed to develop their housing conditions by demolishing large parts of their existing rural-like house (located in the same street with their scrap metal collecting site) and rebuild it with an extra floor. They managed to present the whole investment as merely "renovations" to the authorities. Initially, the construction was to be carried out by a building craftsman who was hired and kept under close inspection by male family members who also regularly helped him out. This was not just to monitor his performance but also to learn the tricks of his trade as soon as possible, so they could get rid of him[142] at a certain point and finish the building operation by themselves (as another

[142] Later on they asked for the help of the "master" (meşter) only occasionally.

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instance of cost reduction and recourse to informal or self-initiated makeshifts, this time in the management of housing). In spite of their self-depiction as law-abiding, "clean" or "civilized" Gypsies – partly in opposition to their rural kin – such informal or improvised solutions still gave a great sense of pride to them. Their pride was even greater when they made comparisons between their "courtyard" (*curte*) – which granted a sense of autonomy and well-being to them – and the Communist-era blocks of flats with the atomization and general plight of residents who "don't even know each other" – therefore unable to engage in everyday forms of mutuality. As a consequence, even if their household was lacking running water and each unit of the extended family had one room to share, they still maintained that living in block of flats is highly undesirable. Once when a brother managed to buy a two-room apartment in such a building (not far from the shared household of the extended family) it was apparently just a matter of investment in a flat that can be rented out. Accordingly, the building investments or the wedding celebrations represented a strong reference point to the Spoitori Gypsies in the neighbourhood – both when they loudly criticized them as instances of the lavish and irresponsible customs of "backward" (*inapoiat*) rural folks, and also when they had to deal with the sense of shame induced by the acknowledgement of their relative poverty.

In 2012, not at least as a response to the decrease of opportunities in Spain, the Spoitori started a new business by opening an officially registered scrap metal collecting site on a rented plot in the neighbourhood not far from their house. At the beginning, they rented an empty slot for a monthly sum of 500 Euro, a few houses away in their street, which was later bought by a building contractor and shortly afterwards a new one-storey building was built on the slot, waiting to be rented by tenants (but it remained empty for many years). A year later, they could already buy another slot right in front of the former one. The internal division of labour also changed within the family, as it was the duty of the younger male siblings to take a greater chunk of work with scrap, and now it was only Lucian as an older brother who could preserve the occupation, or in a sense privilege, of street trading sometimes accompanied by his female partner. At the scrap metal collecting site, or in their word the "centre" (*centru*), they bought scrap directly from street-level collectors usually in smaller quantities, that they later sold in larger units (measurable in tonnes) usually to a firm called Remat, which dealt with the industrial

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management and transportation of the merchandise in camions to a port at the coast of the Black sea[143].

Scrap metal trade remained a thriving business in the neighbourhood during the years that followed the eruption of the economic crisis, especially in comparison with the rest of the job opportunities available to most inhabitants, and the subsequent wage cuts. This could be the case not in the least because of the connections, indeed a vast business chain that developed around scrap, from the local scale of relations between street-level collectors and traders to the scale of a transnational economy and its firms and enterprises interested in recycling[144]. Opposed to other forms of local commerce – such as the trading in and around markets or the workings of the small grocery stores and other shops in the neighbourhood (many of them were changing in a quick succession of bankruptcy and restart) – scrap metal trade was also different because of the relatively minimal risk caused by the changing interests and purchasing power of customers. Because of the chain that linked together different economic scales, there was always demand for accumulated scrap metal, and the Spoitori Gypsy traders had some space of navigation in terms of their choices to sell the merchandise to the aforementioned recycling company or to other private entrepreneurs. In fact, these traders were intermediaries in this large business chain.

As the prices were changing around the marketplace according to the current state of their bribe arrangements and the current rate of prices within the market at the official stalls, the price conditions of scrap were also changing rapidly in the neighbourhood – not in the least because of the ongoing competition between the traders or trading families who were running similar collection sites. Traders were all trying to develop and maintain around themselves a more or less stable circle of street-collectors, as suppliers of theirs and not the other traders. The Spoitori Gypsies often described their work – and the taut context of competition – by saying, "here, you have to run" (*aici trebuie să alergi*)[145].

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[143] For example, in the summer of 2012 the Spoitori Gypsy traders bought one kilogram of copper for 2 RON (0,4 EUR), while the sale price of the same unit was 3,50 (0,7 EUR).

[144] For the issue of 'global waste flows', see: Alexander-Reno, 2012.

[145] To make sense of the resulting tendencies of secrecy and suspicion around the work of scrap trading, it may be enough to recall that indeed one of the ways in which I could make myself useful for my acquaintances was to take recurrent walks through the neighbourhood and ask the traders from the other scrap collecting sites in the role of a

The Spoitori Gypsy traders were proudly claiming that they have all the necessary papers or documents for scrap metal trade, and that they are in permanent connections with lawyers in order to remove the potential legal obstacles to their work. As they exclaimed: "*It's legal now, we are the businessmen!"* In a sector such as scrap metal trade, the boundary between legal and illegal is anyways difficult to draw. As I mentioned, traders were aware that the police can punish them in case they find stolen materials in their collecting sites. However, all actors from the trading chain were aware of the fact that from the tons of "merchandise" gathered and collected in each and every one of the collecting centres, it is rather difficult to trace back the history of items if they are actually 'stolen' or not. I have never witnessed any occasion when the police or other local authorities have tried to make an effort to figure this out. In the neighbourhood, as sometimes also elsewhere in Bucharest, drain covers were sometimes missing in the streets – in some cases fallen trees were put into these holes so that drivers or pedestrians do not suffer an injury.

Opposed to unlicensed street vending, the scrap metal collecting site – practically an empty plot in one of the side-streets of the neighbourhood – was running according to a strict but practically speaking endless schedule. According to the official opening hours, the "centre" (*centru*) of the Spoitori Gypsies opened around 7 or 8 in the morning, and they were waiting for new supply or working with the already accumulated "merchandise" (*marfă*) until 11 at night. Whatever item arrived to the site, it had to be broken down to pieces in order to select the different materials it contained. In the absence of any further machines, the traders were cutting up the incoming pieces – sometimes even whole car wrecks – with circular hand saws and hammers. The injuries caused by these devices usually left traces on their legs and arms. When there were already some tons of scrap metal gathered in the courtyard, and the time came for "loading" (*încărcare*), the traders called for a truck from the company that handled scrap metal industrially. As elsewhere in the streets of Bucharest, there were whole bundles of electric wires

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curious outsider about the current rates they offered per kilogram for copper (*cupru*), stainless steel (*inox*), brass (*alama*), or the other usual materials they bought from street collectors. The underlying assumption was that in case they would try to do the same inquiry, traders from the other centres would not tell them their real rates.

between the posts in their street also, hanging way too low to allow the usage of any machine that could have lift up the metal from the ground and put it onto the truck in bigger chunks. For this reason, the loading of scrap metal was also a manual work and it could take half of a workday. After this, the women took brooms and cleaned the street of the leftovers. After the official closing hour of a workday, some of the men at least used to stay around also after the closing time, when – at least during summer – the collection site finally fully turned into a 'social centre', hosting neighbours, friends and relatives who came for drinking and exchanging information about the workings of the world. However, these prolonged gatherings could also serve as a pretext to the Spoitori Gypsies as they were still waiting and accepting clients with merchandise at this time (although this was prohibited) which they paid according to a different, night-time price list. In the later years with the increasing state-regulations and police presence that affected the trading activities of the Spoitori Gypsies, this parallel day and night economy of scrap metal has largely disappeared. In some cases I witnessed how the traders refused even the most bitterly pleading street collectors in urgent need for cash, just because they arrived after the official closing time. As the late night hours came, scrap metal trade remained a physically demanding exercise at least for some of family members. Because of their constant fears and concerns about a possible robbery of the merchandise they purchased and stored in the courtyard of the centre, a couple of family members had to act as night guards of the site in a small hovel built up at one corner of the plot, requiring the corporeal skills of constant alertness and to put up with a state of half-asleep instead of proper rest.

In general terms, the Spoitori Gypsies conceived both street vending and scrap metal trading as "work" (*muncă*), so the announcement that someone is at work entailed no specification for whichever of these activities. Still, the value they attributed to the two kinds of work was not the same. Regardless of the apparently greater cash income that could be generated by the trade of scrap metal and plastic waste, men often complained about scrap trade and the boredom (*plictiseală*) they had to endure during the empty hours of waiting for suppliers. Work at the centre was far less exiting also because it offered a small but constant and predictable income to the Spoitori Gypsies, while unlicensed street vending – if only occasionally, and at the price of several risks – represented a domain of great profits. In an ideal sense, trading was associated with freedom, as the market was as a space full of possibilities and prospects to try

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their own mastery, with the careful avoidance of explicitly illicit forms of money-making[146]. The way it seems, work that is able to bring certain unforeseen gains was far more valuable to them, as opposed to the one that brings a constant, nearly always identical, and most often small amount of income to the person and the family. The key to the precarious nature of work such as the one at the scrap collecting site, which brought so much "torment" (*chinuială*) and boredom, was related to its constant sameness, the constancy of small gains and the lack of prospects for attempts and risks. After all, this kind of work was slightly similar to the world represented by educated people, those who have done "many classes" (*multe clase*) and therefore believe that the world should work always precisely that way as they learnt it, and who are therefore determined to always get away with the same foreseeable conditions for the rest of their lives, dependent on bosses and deprived of any further space for movement – just like as it is with "miserable" (*amărât*) folks.

Traders and junkies

The enterprise with scrap metal was in a strong contrast with the aforementioned ideals of trade; therefore it can be approached as a replication of the same opposition – this time among their own practices of livelihood – which they made between themselves and the "miserable" ones. Scrap metal trade required close engagement, and the development of a certain mutual dependency with people who represented to the Spoitori Gypsies (similarly to many other inhabitants, Roma and non-Roma Romanians alike) filth and stink, and also the source of many urban ills that the neighbourhood suffered from: the community of drug-users or "junkies" (*drogaţi*), many of whom were also homeless. As my acquaintances used to say in emotionally charged moments, "Junkies are the plight of Romania!" (*drogaţii sunt halul României!*). I have witnessed many situations when local residents were scandalized by the inefficiency of the authorities in handling drug-trade, and had desperate quarrels with the patrolling policemen, who verified the IDs of junkies (if they had one) and left them behind. In such dramatic moments the inhabitants of the neighbourhood stressed their desire to see harsher treatment, possibly the total extinction of junkies, 'the lowest of the low' in the local hierarchy of social value.

[146] For a comparison, see: Goldstein, 2016.

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At a time when both scrap metal trade and the sale of legal drugs were thriving businesses for those who could make a profit out them, drug-users provided a steady labour force as suppliers for entrepreneurs like the Spoitori Gypsies. If scrap metal trade was thriving on the one hand because of its connections to the higher scale of transnational commerce, at the lower rank of business hierarchy, another contributing factor was related to the dramatic changes of the drug-market in Bucharest. Scrap metal trade was the most efficient sector in the local inclusion of the – partly homeless – population of drug users by the utilisation of their labour as collectors at the street level. In fact, drug-addicts were a steady labour force for traders such as the Spoitori Gypsies especially because of their constantly urgent need for cash and their accompanying willingness to accept the lowest and most dangerous types of work, such as manual garbage selection or scrap metal collection that often required to take bodily risks such as climbing up on walls, digging in all sorts of places or entering intro buildings in construction or under demolition[147]. Many junkies were wearing bodily injuries or they were walking on crutches from time to time, as manifestations of a stigma that leaves no room for any kind of 'passing' (Goffman, 1990 [1963]), as it is with people who are the closest to a sub-human condition. Accordingly, the traders used to distance themselves from the drug-users.

> I don't like junkies (*oamenii drogaţi*), I don't like the face of the man. I just don't notice (*nu bag în seamă*) people who are priggish (*care au fiţe*) and these dope heads (*drogaţi*). With my own combinations, with my cunning tricks (*şmecheriile*), I'm legal. I don't know how drugs look like and I don't even want to know. ... They are digging the garbage (*caută în gunoi*) to buy drugs for themselves.

The Spoitori Gypsy traders in the neighbourhood, similarly to many other inhabitants there (whether Roma or non-Roma Romanians), had to cope with the everyday consequences of substance abuse in their immediate environment and their work. The period around 2011-12 was also marked by revolutionary changes in the local drug-market, namely a shift from heroin and other illegal substances to what is commonly known as 'legal high' or "etnobotanice" in Romanian, with far-reaching consequences to the economic and social life of the neighbourhood.

[147] A non-Roma Romanian neighbour of the Spoitori Gypsies (who was a construction site worker) put it this way: "there are two businesses that are truly thriving in Romania: constructions and demolitions"

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The appearance of legal or 'designer' drugs induced dramatic transformations not only to the users or "junkies" (*drogaţi*) themselves, but also to all the people who were exposed to the everyday sight of substance abuse, or who had to share the same spaces, streets or neighbourhoods with addicts. The quick market penetration or invasion of legal drugs was possible on the one hand because of their significantly cheaper prices compared to any of the until then common illegal substances – such as marijuana and especially heroin[148] – and on the other hand because of their free and unrestricted availability in shops that were selling them with the usual pretext of being 'pesticides', i.e. not intended for human consumption. As it appeared later in successive press reports, legal drugs, presumably coming from China, were based on chemical compositions that were easy to change in great varieties, so by the time one of them was criminalized, another combination could already be available on the market under a new name. The resulting unpredictability[149] was the reason why in these cases neither the experts, nor the users themselves could have clear ideas of the actual physical and bodily effects of drug use.

Around 2012 the local presence of drug-users, together with the everyday visibility of drug-abuse in the streets was on the rise, and it became ordinary to see drug-users injecting themselves, digging in trash dumps or trying to sell mobile phones or other small items to members of local hang-out groups. The authorities already started shutting down legal drug shops in other parts of Bucharest, following the public outrage and media hysteria concerning the

[148] Before the revolution of legal subtances in the local drug market, inhabitants generally considered heroin as the most typical and widespread drug in the neighborhood, which was part of a mutually reinforncing symbolic association between the 'toughest' drug and the 'worst' neighborhood in town.

[149] As indicated at in the previous chapters, unpredictability – with or without drug use – was an omnipresent concern in relations between the inhabitants of the neighborhood, and especially in the manifold kinds of exchange that took place in the street. On the one hand it was something that a partner in an exchange continuously tried to overcome by engaging in the cognitive exercise of figuring out the true intensions and hidden interests of the other – even that person strived to masks or hides them. On the other hand, unpredictability was also a faculty that the same person might also regularly practice and develop in everyday terms as a way to exert social control on others, or to generate fear or respect towards himself. So altogether, unpredictability could be heavily reprimanded when it was a property of others, and at the same time was highly praised when it belonged to oneself. After all, this ambiguity was similar to several other 'problems' of neighborhood, that inhabitants presented in general terms as unfortunate, unwanted or shameful, while in the meantime the same speakers also had their fair share in their reproduction, even if to varying degrees and different ways.

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dangerous and unpredictable effects of these substances[150]. The shops indeed disappeared from the city centre, but this was not at all the case in the neighbourhood, where several such shops were still running – one of them along the main road was open even a year later with no sign of illegality. It was well-known that apart from these shops, the same substances remained also available in hidden ways or "in the back" of places that had otherwise different outlook and profile than the drug shops. One night I witnessed the way in which body guards from a security company were defending the shop from policemen who attempted to raid there. In this period, the prolonged accessibility of legal drugs in the neighbourhood (as opposed to other parts of town) had a visible and locally omnipresent effect: the presence of "junkies" (*drogaţi*) was on the rise in the streets.

Drug-abuse was clearly one of the hottest issues and most pressing problems of the neighbourhood both in terms of the users' health condition and for the inhabitants in general, who were exposed to the everyday visibility of addiction (including children). Still, the locally active NGOs at this time rarely covered the issue in their agendas. For most part of my fieldwork, intervention in the field of drug-abuse, medical services and the distribution of sterile syringes were supposedly provided by a small organization made up by a professional doctor, social workers and members of a local family, but due to the irregularities of funding, sometimes their office was closed for weeks or months just to be re-opened again in case they found further support. Later the same office was taken over by another organization, which relied on medical students as volunteers with limited availability, so they could offer syringes or other forms of assistance only two days per week for a few hours. Apart from the limits of their availability and resources, these organizations also had to face the challenge of limited support and sometimes explicit animosity on behalf of local residents, who looked at them rather as supporters of drug-abuse and not as the primary agents in the reduction of risks. In sum, while drug-addiction was undoubtedly a major problem of the neighbourhood not just for the suffering addicts themselves but also other inhabitants who had to manage the challenges of everyday cohabitation with junkies who populated the streets, there were few official solutions on offer.

[150] It may be important to add here that at the time, the public concerns in relation to drug-abuse – and particularly to the distribution of legal drugs – were mainly provoked by cases of substance abuse among the youths of mainstream society, and less by the the outcomes of drug-trade and drug-abuse in marginalized settings.

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Therefore, local residents were under pressure to find their own ways of managing their plight and to engage with socially accumulated problems by coping strategies and other devices they have or invent. To put it differently, in the case of drug-use, the herds of stray dogs, or undesirable social categories, the authorities seemed to follow the same strategy of making urban ills invisible as much as possible in the city centre, or other more decent areas, while leaving them to accumulate in the 'free zones' of the periphery, where they largely remained to be managed by the locals themselves. The involvement of drug-users as street-level collectors into scrap metal trade can be seen as one such solution. In other words, albeit the trading of *etnobotanice* was just in the process of criminalization and relegation back to the domain of illicit economy, drug-users were still embedded in the economic and social life of the neighbourhood through relations and dependencies which were evidently broader than the strictly or legally defined sphere of criminality. Users who were on methadone or under medical treatment already, sometimes got hired by the traders to perform small services around the scrap collecting centres form some money, that the traders considered to be a way of helping them get back to work and leaving behind their dependency. As the traders used to say, they had to learn how to speak in a proper way with the junkies, that is to retreat from the open expression of their disgust and even to pay them some respect – such as calling some of them "brothers" – so that they'd return with more "merchandise". As it was mentioned in the previous Chapter, certain junkies were present even at the big rituals of street-weddings, where they were accepted in clownish, burlesque roles. Traders also recognized sometimes with pity that junkies are homeless people without families who are not consuming drugs for joy but because of their wish to die. In general terms, the approach of local residents to junkies was different if the latter were already familiar to them from the streets or if they were suspicious newcomers to the local community of drug-users. As mentioned before, some members of hang-out groups in the street maintained joking relations with some of the drug-users, as they could also be temporary business partners who nearly always had something on sale, such a cell-phone, a car radio – with prices that were way below any rate in the second hand market.

In some cases I witnessed as non-Roma Romanian neighbours were trying to argue to the Spoitori Gypsies that their business is established on highly unpredictable resources – since scrap

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metal might arrive to their centre in suitable amounts one week but it might not come at all on the other – or that they are at risk also because the police can search for stolen items at their centre and in such cases they will be accused. Instead of a reply, the Spoitori Gypsies were just enumerating their tricks and innovations, such as their advancements in the ongoing price competition with other traders, their availability around the centre day and night, or that they take just any small amount of scrap metal from the collectors, even if it is way below the limit of one kilogram, which was otherwise the basic unit in which the prices had been set up and advertised on the slabs at the entrance of scrap collecting sites. Hence, whether in direct or indirect ways, drug-trade came into contact with and exerted its influence on other spheres of the local economy. Drugs came to be integrated into the economic life of the neighbourhood through connections and dependencies that could not be relegated to the domain of illicit or criminal activities anymore. The issues of this entanglement coalesce around the relationship of traders and junkies, together with their cohabitation and the management of their livelihoods in a shared uncertain environment.

One telling example of this controversial economic interlocking – in spite of the overall disgust and rejection of drugs and drug-users – is that scrap metal traders often went to the shops of legal drugs for the sake of breaking money from larger denominations to smaller ones, which was a service that the shop-assistants of these stores were willing to do. This way a supplementary monetary flow was established between the local domains of trading in drugs and in scrap, besides the primary one carried out by the drug-users themselves, whenever they went to buy legal substances in the same shops after they received cash for the scrap they have collected. Much like the street-level collectors, the traders were also indispensable partners for those who stood at the higher ranks of the business chain of scrap metal trade. The work of traders in the accumulation and then the selection of various sorts of scrap was also a work of symbolic purification. They undertook the role of mediation, that of being the ‘last ones’ who are visible, so they contributed to the invisibility – or else legal purity – of those at the higher levels of the commodity chain. As the trucks of the regional company left the neighbourhood filled with tons of scrap metal, and brought the merchandise to industrial sites and from there to the seaside, nobody was asking for the individual origin of each item anymore. In their passionate political

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criticisms, traders referred to such processes by saying that Romania might have the most fertile soil on earth, but it's a country that was altogether "sold" (*ţara vândută*) by its leaders.

In the Chapter on street economy, I have discussed the ambiguous relations between the domains of everyday exchange relations broadly defined in local terms as "collaborations" and "combinations". Briefly put, the former term refers to durable relations of sharing and mutuality based on principles of brotherly equity and sense of obligation; while the latter is alluded to in situations when new economic possibilities are discovered, when resources of exchange partners are combined in a previously unforeseen way, and the overarching rules of the transaction can be open to negotiations in each case. Instead of being fully separate in practice, these two realms of transactions are in fact intertwined, since every combination entails the possibility of 'collaboration', i.e. it circumscribes the space of opportunities where social relations can be extended by means of exchange[151]. Nevertheless, these features of 'combinations' also suggest the uncertainties of such transactions, as they might simply end up in 'rip-offs', in spite of the initial hopes. These forms of exchange, the commodities and the stories of how one managed to gain altogether them defined "value" (*valoare*) which was one of the main organizing themes of debates between men. "Value" was discussed in largely personalized terms – as "my value" or "your value" – and hence it tied material properties and personal qualities to each other[152]. The ideal person in this environment was the one being capable to set up the very terms of an exchange or interaction: the one who defines the rules of the game instead of only playing it according to already given prescription.

In the present Chapter this argument goes toward the issues of livelihood, precarious employment and work. The labour histories of Spoitori Gypsies in the neighbourhood, as the main protagonists of this account, are indicative of the tensions between what they see as

[151] As I elaborated in the previous section, these practices could provide access to resources such as information about opportunities to make money, exchanging services in the form of barter, getting food, drinks or other products from a shop-keeper for cleaning or providing some other kind of help around the place.

[152] It was due to this connection that issues of regular income, house-equipment or car-ownership were amongst the first things I was asked about when being introduced to someone I didn't know before.

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valuable and worthless forms of work, not only by opposing their own conduct to what they see as the "miserable" lives of those who endure precarious employment, but also in terms of making a value-based hierarchy (Robbins, 2007) between their own forms of labour. According to this division, unlicensed trade and the deals around open-air marketplaces in Bucharest constitute a realm of practice that is highly uncertain, with its ups and downs, especially because of the regular confrontations that it entails with the local police as well as private security guard personnel. In spite of these anxieties, or perhaps because of them, it is still the kind of work that they embrace as their true domain of making and affirming personal value and autonomy, particularly as it presupposes the navigation of risky, convoluted situations. Indeed, in comparison to their market activities, they tend to devalue their licensed trade in recycling because of the time frames and obligation that it offers, and, more importantly, because it entails the necessity to engage with the most debased social group in the neighbourhood, the junkies, who happen to be their main suppliers. The present ethnography builds on such contradictions to make sense of the different kinds of personal engagements, practices, and notions of value and worthlessness associated with these forms of labour. As the Spoitori Gypsy traders made careful distinctions between themselves and others who were "miserable" because of accepting monotonous and subordinated positions at work, a similar opposition was replicated in terms of their own activities as unlicensed 'tough' traders around the marketplace, and as workers at the scrap-collecting site.

Conclusions

The protagonists of this Chapter are not all forced into the domains of informal labour or self-employment by impending economic necessities. Many of the men hanging out around in the evening at street-corners, around grocery-stores and in other shared places had regular employment as car- or cab-drivers, security guards and night-watchmen, temporary workers on construction sites, cleaners in shopping-malls and cinemas in town or at carwashes, selling firewood from outlets, or performing services in one of the nearby cemeteries or running around the area on a scooter to deliver pizza. The main inconvenience of such jobs, according to them is that they doom the person to boredom, inertia or even suffering, under the command of high-

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handed bosses who keep their subordinates at bay by allusions to queuing would-be applicants at the entrance door (who wait to take their place in case of explicit discontent). That is to say, they present their practitioners with reduced possibilities to demonstrate and accumulate personal worth, and instead bound them to stagnation, both financial and social. Although men's trajectories between different forms of work and business may represent a putatively clear-cut switch from licit to illicit domains of money making, most of the time these movements are far from being unidirectional or unequivocal. The divergent values extracted from these activities – both in economic terms and also with regard to the value attached to personhood – are assessed in relation to one another; either in retrospect (by relating a certain phase of one's work trajectory to another) or else by comparisons between different practices and prospects of livelihood performed by the same persons or by himself and others at a certain time.

Especially after the legal substances revolutionized the local drug market, inhabitants of the neighbourhood had to deal with a growing presence drug-consumption and drug-users, many of whom were coming from other parts of town, gathering or lying and injecting themselves in the streets, which was a powerful case of what it is to deal with socially accumulated problems in an abandoned and highly personal way. The growing presence of drug-users also provoked changes in the local field of scrap-metal trade, which remained one of most flourishing businesses in the neighbourhood regardless the outbreak and procession of the economic crisis. Scrap-metal traders, such as the extended family of Spoitori Gypsies in this account, were not involved in drug-trade in any direct sense, and they shared the repulsion of many other inhabitants towards junkies. Still, the predominance of drug-addicts among the street-level collectors and therefore suppliers of scrap metal made it necessary for the traders to engage in direct contact with them, and to accept them as exchange partners. Moreover, since scrap metal trade was going on in a highly competitive business environment with several local traders or trader families striving to establish themselves in the same intermediary positions of the business chain, these traders also tried to stabilize a certain circle of suppliers of suppliers who bring the stuff they collected exclusively to their site and not the others. The development of such supplying circles also required further engagement with drug-addicts in a strange partnership borne out of necessity. Especially since the recent growth of political pressure for measures against corruption in Romania, their diverse livelihood strategies sometimes brought them into

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open conflicts with the agents of law enforcement. That is to say, many features of the work that these Spoitori Gypsies perform in Bucharest and abroad can surely be identified by concepts such as insecurity and a need for permanent alertness to the sudden changes in a zone of uncertainty (Niehaus, 2013). Indeed, a recent wave of scholarly accounts relies on the notion of precariousness in order to analyze labour deregulation, especially in the aftermath of the global crisis. However, as this Chapter argued, such assumptions would cause us to misunderstand the categories by which the potentially precarious subjects make sense of the social and economic contexts in which they act, as well as their regime of creating value.

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Concluding remarks

As in many other research fields in social sciences, debates among scholars of poverty and marginalization often seem to be based on the repetition of dilemmas that originate from the founders of the field. In the anthropological study of poverty this role belongs to Oscar Lewis, inventor of the, controversial of the culture of poverty[153]. Lewis' theoretical input regarding the interplay of structure and agency was rather vague, some of his statements contradict each other and his listings of behavioural patterns were only substitutes for a definition of culture. His major concept was based on genuine intuitions concerning some universal patterns of poverty in developing countries that he had way before he would have been able to work through the research material he collected with his collaborators amongst poor families in Mexico or Puerto Rico[154]. In this sense his work remained unfinished – in spite of all the volumes he wrote in the genre of passionately written *ethnographic reports*. His books became widely successful and his style influenced even those who criticized him or intended to overcome the pitfalls associated with his work and career. In the midst of the heated poverty-debates of the 1960s, this genre of writing allowed readers to attribute almost any kind of political intention to his statements on a left-right scale. Lewis believed that basic structural changes in society and the redistribution of wealth are the major prerequisites for eliminating the culture of poverty. However, his accounts on families and individual persons became the target of harsh criticisms for providing academic support for the American folk-theory, which considers poverty as an individual failure before anything else.

'Blaming the victim' became a main catch-phrase in the context of these heated debates. As Wilson argues, putting the emphasis on the role of structure (in the sense of low incomes, joblessness and bad housing) *or* culture (that translates into attitudes, tendencies, and the resulting behaviour of people) in the reproduction of poverty came to be perceived as mutually exclusive choices of analysis, derived by ideological or political convictions (2009). Claiming to

[153] Amongst the books of Lewis there is a rarely quoted volume of essays which provides a rich overview of his work and the topics he was interested in (Lewis, 1970).

[154] For an intellectual biography of Oscar Lewis, see: Rigdon, 1988. In the light of the criticisms, misinterpretations and accusations regarding his work, I think its important to add that Lewis relied on Fanon's book as a major reference in his writings (Fanon, 2004 [1963]).

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speak for the poor or else taking part in their empowerment, researchers often reproduced these divisions which came to be perceived as more and more insurmountable. As part of the same vicious circle, some representations were criticized for blaming the victim, or giving spectacular 'pornographies of poverty' instead of grounded analysis, others were seen as 'sanitizing the poor' and their social suffering by the avoidance of ethnographic engagement with everyday practices of getting by, and a quick withdrawal to issues of 'structural forces' – such as the critique of a certain powerful discourse, globalization or neoliberalism as such[155]. As Robbins pointed out, the anthropological focus on social suffering or victimhood was part of a scholarly quest to rediscover universal human experiences, and in this sense it was reflecting the crisis of the discipline in the first place (Robbins, 2013). An alternative approach was represented by accounts which aimed to counteract the tendencies of victimizing or pathologizing the poor by focusing on their everyday forms of resistance (Rabinowitz, 2014). Paradoxically, these accounts tend to deprive the full human agency of their subjects by identifying just any manifestation on their behalf as hidden or explicit, direct or indirect forms of the resistance that the scholars were searching for. These celebratory representations of 'marginality' and 'resistance' – as mutually connected, interdependent phenomena – are often due to the ethnographic weakness of the respective accounts (Ortner, 2006).

In fact, such controversies should be seen as being embedded into predominantly American academic and policy discourses as well as the changing political-economic conditions of the US in the course of the last decades. As I argued in this dissertation departing from Wacquant's analytical toolkit, the purpose of imposing these discourses in a European – and specifically Eastern European – context is to suggest that the 'problems' in the field of poverty and social marginalization are perhaps the same as on the other side of the Atlantic[156] (so governmental or non-governmental interventions might also follow similar paths). Such examples had been conducive to the setting up of discourses that dealt with the problems of poverty and ethnicity – or to put it differently 'the Roma' – in post-socialist Eastern Europe in academic and

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[155] Bourgois (2003) and Bähre (2015) both make similar points.

[156] Loïc Wacquant argues for the comparative formation of ideal types for the American ghetto and the French banlieu exactly in order to counter this trend of conflation (Wacquant, 2008).

engaged scholarly circles.[157] As it was mentioned in the Introduction, in these conditions the Roma could easily become the victims of *unbalanced comparisons*. These comparisons are based on analogies set up between cases or groupings – minorities or Diasporas – which are different in the sense that one of them entered the fields of recognition struggles and academic knowledge production earlier, so the other is defined as a latecomer in this context. Based on this relationship, unbalanced comparisons treat one of the cases as being a normative model for the other. To give one example, during the last few decades it became a general practice to use the notion of *ghetto* with reference to divergent forms of spatial and social exclusion in Eastern Europe. Strategies of interpretation based on such concepts tend to reproduce exclusion on an analytic level as they represent the social worlds of the marginalized as being separate and fully secluded from the more respectable domains of society.

Following these critical concerns, the thesis provided a historically grounded ethnographic account on urban marginalization in the capital of a state at the postsocialist periphery of Europe, in order to develop a case that is suitable for further comparisons (instead of conflations). The dissertation lies at the intersection of several research fields that have rarely been connected to one another in an explicit manner, even if their findings can be mutually relevant for each. The ethnographically grounded argument concerns the social and spatial construction, as well as the social imaginary of marginality in late-postsocialist Romania. Based on fieldwork in the territorially stigmatized neighbourhood of Ferentari in Bucharest, I detailed the ways in which local urban inequalities in Bucharest work in tandem with unequal relations between postsocialist and Western states of the EU. More recently, since the outbreak and the subsequent prolongation of the global crisis we have been witnessing a new wave of scholarly but also media-driven debates concerning the failure of social integration in Europe, and as a particular cause of this failure, the putatively misguided tendency of scholars, engaged experts the play down some of the 'palpable realities' (as everyday language would put it), or some troubling aspects of personal *agency* and *culture* (in sociological terms) in the comprehension and representation of poverty and marginality and their social consequences. While international migration created potential confusions between Gypsies and Romanians from the outside, insecurity and disorder was also

[157] The notion of the underclass was the focal point in a major debate of the period, see: Stewart 2002.

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threatening from within or from below. In this case the causes of unrest could be located in certain manifestations of popular culture as well as stigmatized territories or 'Gypsylands' (*ţiganie*), as the one that provides the field site of this inquiry. These different scales of stigma coalesce when the inhabitants of the 'Gypsy' neighbourhood – and by extension Romanian Gypsies in general – are accused of giving 'a bad name' to the Romanian nation. Accordingly, the Romanian case provided useful material to upgrade those perspectives on the stigma that tend to limit the scope of the inquiry to the interpersonal (or solely psychological) scale, and to extend the original model in spatial terms, to orient the scope of inquiry towards the interconnected layers of stigmatization as a relational process.

The quest for well-secured distinctions between Romanians and the Roma or Gypsies, and the construction of a postsocialist sub-proletariat are part of a quest to define the local obstacles to civilizing process, as Romanian un-modernity come to be imagined as rooted within the stigmatised corners of Romanian society. Indeed, these relations are interdependent in any case where a certain 'constitutive outside' is there to circumscribe the domains of the centre against the periphery, that of civilization against its supposed adversaries, or that of respectability against those who are deemed unworthy. To understand this process, the thesis advanced a conceptual framework of stigmatization that connects local and urban scales of inquiry to the marginalization that occurs at the level of the EU superpolity. Accordingly, on the basis of the dominant narratives on urban development in Bucharest, breaking with the 'trope of disorganization' may not be a simple task such tropes have been frequently deployed in local urban scholarship with reference to the whole city (especially in post-socialism) when the idea of disorganization was hardly limited to set of delineated zones of relegation or ethno-racial closure. Conversely, in the discourses of urban experts as much as in media accounts or the broader public, one finds at least two oppositional trends when it comes to approaching 'trouble-spots. One is represented by the ongoing efforts of the media (or else decent citizens) to delineate the fragile domains of civilization they wish to inhabit and defend from the threat of the margins. On the other hand, in a slightly paradoxical manner, because such 'no-go areas' are imbued by the_symbolic power which makes them capable to represent and to stand for the overall plight of the postsocialist state or nation at the European periphery, they can also serve as a source of a 'national embarrassment' – much like it is the case with those mirrors that are showing a distorted or rather too precise

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image of the collective subject. Moreover, these areas can serve as storage of legitimacy at hand for social planners, politicians or other members of a project-society who strive to find the suitable spots for localized and well-targeted interventions, based on the illusions that the roots, the manifestations and the possible solutions of social problems are located all at the same place. In other words, a dominant way of exercising power in peripheral settings is by the means of *localization*, that is, the quest for territorial zones and social categories designated as prime sources of problems. It is this sense of insecurity that surfaces when 'civilized' citizens of Bucharest express their disgust regarding the presence of people from marginal neighbourhoods in the city centre or whenever local majorities indulge in the frightening visions of *reversed assimilation*, in which minorities are imagined as taking over the place of the majority. Apparently these are the concerns at stake whenever ordinary non-Roma Romanians express their complaints regarding those embarrassing situations in which ignorant foreigners supposedly confused them (or their likeminded co-ethnics) with the Gypsies. In these shifting contexts, those who stigmatize the Gypsies as unwanted others in national terms, or consider a poor neighbourhood as the blemish of the city, may find themselves in stigmatized positions in different geopolitical contexts, this time in the position of belonging to a notoriously 'backward' and racist society. Consequently, it is also a society that is repeatedly called to expose itself with its 'dirty laundry' to acts of moral regulation and purification which are then repeated within the same peripheral society towards places and peoples located at its own margins. These mechanisms still provide ample evidence for the ways in which stigmatization preserves an extraordinary power as a disciplinary device in the unequal relations that bind together centres and peripheries in a single town, or at the level of the nation state as well as the EU superpolity. In the previous literature, similar instances of widespread social fear and ager were framed by the notion of an emerging wave of anti-Gypsism, as an integralist response to European expansion, while other accounts have approached similar developments as a resurgence of neo-nationalism in postsocialist eastern Europe as a 'return of the repressed'. In my account I was arguing for a historically long-term perspective in order to highlight the recurrent patterns of relationship between the urban centre and the margins. To put it differently, a comparative investigation of urban marginality departs from the careful distinction between folk-models and analytic, based on the historically and ethnographically grounded formation of ideal types instead of the taken for granted acceptance of a given set of 'readymade' concepts. In order to take steps in this

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direction, the thesis offered a brief history of marginalization in the case of Bucharest. First, if the analytic concept of the *ghetto* assumes closure and containment as the two of its constitutive features, in our case the urban formation of the *mahala* represents a rural-urban buffer zone, in terms of the 'village-like features' of the social and built environment, the infrastructure as well as the recruitment and flux of its inhabitants. Second, opposed to a fully contained space, these territories have been representing a major challenge, indeed the grey zones and the 'tests of strength' for urban governance and central planning in the city history. Throughout its modern history Bucharest kept on expanding due to recurrent efforts by the state for urban development especially in the central areas, which meant the elimination of previous neighbourhoods or *mahala*s, and the relocation of their inhabitants. In other words, the margins were in constant motion throughout urban history, in fact they represented the 'borderlands' where the city was in the state of expansion. The flux of population from rural areas was added to this movement, as a response to the demands for industrial labour force. The Southern peripheries of Bucharest had been historically associated with the lower classes, as part of the broader uneven development of the city. The conflicts between the principles of central planning and the unregulated expansion at the margins presented the municipality with a persistent contradiction between the spatial expansion of the city, and the need for 'densification' as a scope of urban planning. In other words, urban expansion or urbanization was practically obtained largely by the gradual inclusion of more and more settlements that beforehand represented a hinterland made of former villages around the city. The process led to an urbanization that translates as an ongoing expansion into rural territories, and a series of governmental efforts for spatial cleansing. This phenomenon provides one of the reasons why in the history-writing of Bucharest, the trope of disorganization is often expanded to the whole of the city, and the state is described in re-active terms, in other words, one that merely reacts to otherwise spontaneous and already unfolding processes, instead of initiating them at the first place. In the Communist era, the ongoing project of industrialization was accompanied by a prolonged housing crisis in terms of the state's ability to accommodate those who arrived to the city, but as I demonstrated on the basis of historical and archival sources, in the neighbourhood of this research, the Communist plans for systematization were never fulfilled, which opened the way for the further waves of incoming settlers in postsocialism. Because of a state power that is largely exercised through ignorance in these territories – best represented by the controversial role of the police as a main exponent of state power that

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manifests itself in the area – local forms of place-making largely rely on the personal means of the inhabitants themselves in terms of ordering. These local spheres of order in the street or the household are made and remade by the ongoing attempts of inhabitants to appropriate, cultivate and hence to 'civilize' their immediate social and physical environment. Categories like *community, respectability* or *antisocial* provide resources also for the residents themselves in poor areas. As the scholars, they use such terms strategically while making distinctions between "inside" or "outside" in terms of space and belonging. Dealing with the dichotomies deployed by the inhabitants of poor settings in order to differentiate behavioural codes or value-orientations – such as that of the 'decent' and 'street' – is a risky analytic exercise, if scholarly accounts do not manage to make a proper distance between the categories of everyday practice and those of the analysis. Residents use these oppositions according to their actual interests both with reference to themselves and others. Hence, we can grasp such distinctions through the social division of space – such as the negotiation of the public and the private domains – as it is expressed in the regular debates and conflicts between realms of the household, wives and families and the male-dominated hang-out groups that socialize in public.

In conditions of urban marginality inhabitants struggle to pull themselves out of their unfavourable circumstances. One of the few available resources for this is to show the proof of value, worth or the quality of immediate spaces – such as the household – they inhabit and strive to control. These strategies are crucial in situations where structural problems accumulated by the wider society are turning into personal problems and practical challenges faced on a daily basis. Long term fieldwork in a territorially stigmatized area of Bucharest allowed me to grasp these struggles in their immediate forms. The common forms of exchange in the street worked at the same time as practices of contributing to one's livelihood, ordering social and physical space, and also gaining worth as a person in an environment where dignity or trust appear to be scarce resources that are hard to gain and easy to lose in front of others. When the men occupied a certain outdoor spot in the neighbourhood as their hangout place, it equalled to taking a stance towards their environment and exerting some form of control on the flows of street-life, including objects, information and persons. In this context, categories such as "civilized" and "vagabond" or "cunning" and "fool" are central to the ways in which inhabitants organize their perceptions of the social world. Entering this space in the role of an ethnographer implies that one's own

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activities are also categorized by such concepts on behalf of the informants. As might be apparent with regard to the categories and distinctions introduced in this chapter, their power in organizing the social world is due to their flexibility and the multiple contexts. To put it in their terms, the inhabitants of the 'most infamous' neighborhood and the ultimate 'Gypsy area' of Bucharest do not tackle their disadvantageous situation in a way that would decidedly make them into 'fools'. Rather than dwelling on this status, the people I have presented in this account are taking advantage of the multiple resources and opportunities offered by the street, whereby they are striving to become the entrepreneurs or 'businessmen' in an uncertain and constantly changing economic environment. It is in this context that exchange practices and forms of economic or entrepreneurial action unfold and – at least ideally – end up in the creation and achievement of material value and personal worth that is not available to 'fools' who are known to accept exploitation without restraint at their workplace or in the street. The personalised nature of these transactions and the significance of developing trust and reliable personal relations are essential to these activities. Because these resources are scarce and limited, the processes of making and breaking these relations are highly ritualised. If one way of exercising control is through the fear or respect generated by the display of violence (even if it is not deployed in the end) and 'madness', another way is through the losses a man is willing to incur for the sake of his peers. Exchanges of this kind are grounded in the ideals of equality and the mutual will to avoid predatory or exploitative ways of profiting. At the same time, the margins of this sociality are marked by 'combinations', which are also the testing ground of entrepreneurial skills. Accordingly, the forms of exchange and the business-making ventures that these people pursue at once create and maintain a livelihood, as they aim to take a stand that allows for some control over the flow of objects, information and people in the streets. These acts are crucial in both gaining and losing the social value attributed to a person, which is particularly apparent at those points where the interstitial and the illicit economies of the area coincide with each other. Such a 'interstitial' space is occupied by Spoitori Gypsy traders, who maintain parallel interests as temporary migrants in Spain, as vendors (or as they put it, 'businessmen') around open-air markets and also as traders dealing with the purchase and sale of scrap metal and plastic waste. The trade in scrap metal and plastic is the dominant mode of involving the homeless drug-addicts of the area into the local economy as street-level collectors. Large-scale scrap-metal trade has become one of the main mediums that involve Romania into the transforming world economy as

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a sender of this valuable commodity to various target locations, including China. Positioning these Spoitori Gypsy traders as middle-men in relation to other actors in these international economic chains help to see the changing relations between formalized and informalized economic layers. At the same time, this analytic strategy also allows us to comprehend both the prospects and the limitations of the autonomy that such highly entrepreneurially minded actors can develop at the crossroads of licit and illicit chains that coincide in the neighborhood. The management of the unequally shared social suffering provides a key aspect here. Drug-abuse was clearly one of the hottest issues and most pressing problems of the neighbourhood both in terms of the users' health and the inhabitants in general. Local inhabitants were under pressure to find their own ways of managing the socially accumulated problems by strategies and devices at their disposal. In the case of drug-use, the herds of stray dogs, or undesirable social categories, the authorities seemed to follow the same strategy of making urban ills invisible as much as possible in the city centre, or other more decent areas, while leaving them accumulated at the margins, where they largely left to be managed by the local inhabitants themselves. The involvement of drug-users as street-level collectors into scrap metal trade can be seen as one such instance. Drug-users are embedded in the economic and social life of the neighbourhood through relations and dependencies which are evidently broader than the strictly or legally defined sphere of criminality. Hence, whether in direct or indirect ways, drug-trade came into contact with and exerted its influence on other spheres of the local economy. The issues of this entanglement coalesce around the relationship of traders and junkies, together with the material and also moral aspects of their cohabitation and the management of their livelihoods in a shared uncertain environment. As the street-level collectors, the traders were also indispensable partners for those who stood at the higher ranks of the business chain of scrap metal trade. The work of traders in the accumulation and then the selection of various sorts of scrap was also a work of symbolic purification. They undertook the role of mediation, that of the 'last ones' who are visible, with which they contributed to the invisibility – or else legal purity – of those at the higher levels of the commodity chain. Being conceived as an ultimate 'no-go area' for long, the neighborhood has been witnessing the growing presence of governmental and non-governmental initiatives that are aiming to engender local development. Players in the local NGO-field introduced the notion of 'Roma ghetto' with the hope to develop and promote good practices. Together with (Roma) politicians who intended to establish their careers as local representatives, the neighbourhood

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provides a storehouse of legitimacy for these actors to establish their own positions as middle class professionals. As in many other contexts where poverty and marginality are to be managed, the subjects of intervention are represented in terms of their victimhood status also in the case of the neighbourhood. Using these representations as a point of departure, this chapter deals with the forms of social unrest that have been unfolding amongst the protagonists by showing the everyday forms of popular politics (Auyero 2012) with which they respond to the harsh outcomes of the postsocialist transition as well as the local reverberations of the economic crisis, that have been often mediated through their very personal livelihood strategies and related moral concepts. The emerging forms of popular politics helps us to rethink earlier approaches to the changing scope and meaning of 'mafia' in postsocialism, as well as the links between marginality and the political articulations of resistance.

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