



Pig rearing, killing and consumption: the healing effects of multispecies engagement for the communities of Ilva Mică and Prundu Bârgăului

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Abstract

This thesis considers the relationships between rural humans, their pigs and other nonhuman animals in Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică, villages in the county of Bistrița-Năsăud, northern Romania. I argue that all my informants' animals had positive effects on their owners' health and wellbeing, but that pigs have a special status. Pigs are relatively cheap to keep and fatten, their meat is notionally Romania's national food, and they make a unique contribution to peasants' empowerment as 'natural', 'traditional' agriculturalists, while also being twenty-first century Romanians. I argue that pig rearing has helped humans cope with socio-political trauma, namely their exclusion and misunderstanding by successive political establishments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I explore the private rearing, killing and consumption of pigs and the long-lasting human-pig relations of care, trust and attention. I do this by examining the political context of the region and the growing pressures from Romanian and European welfare and farming authorities on local peasants to develop their modes of labour. I also explore the influence of Orthodox religion and village norms on local patterns of pork consumption, and on the emotional aspects of human-pig interactions. Besides being a multispecies ethnography which considers the agencies of various animals on social life in northern Romania, this thesis is also a reflexive text. I show the development of my relationship with my informants through discussing culinary habits. I demonstrate the importance of commensality, hospitality and emotionality in negotiating my identity as a Romanian, vegetarian, 'ex-local' researcher, and the identities of my informants as traditional, curious and open-minded, peasants.

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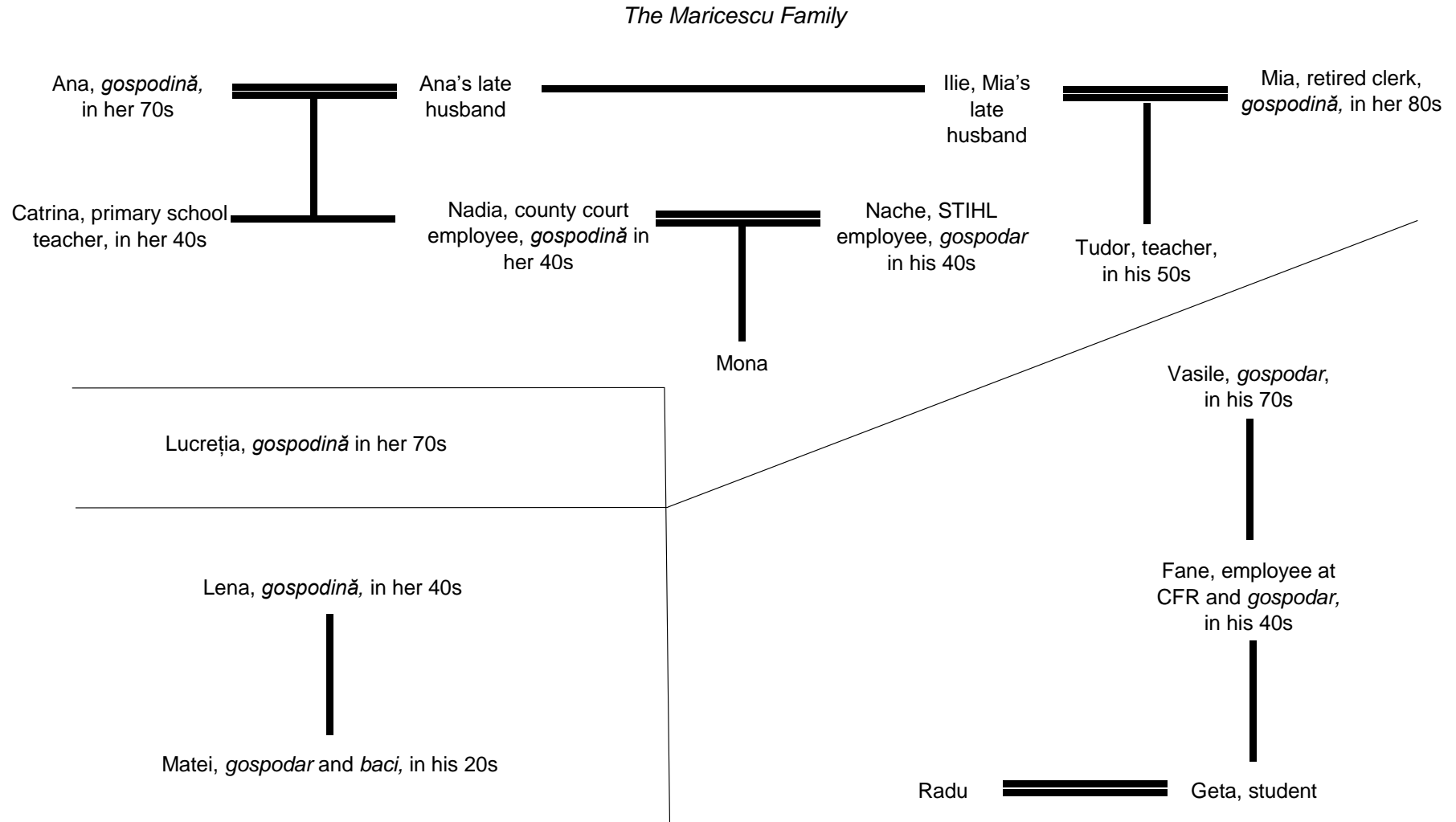
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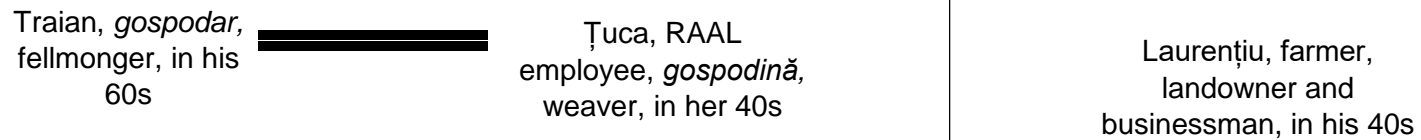
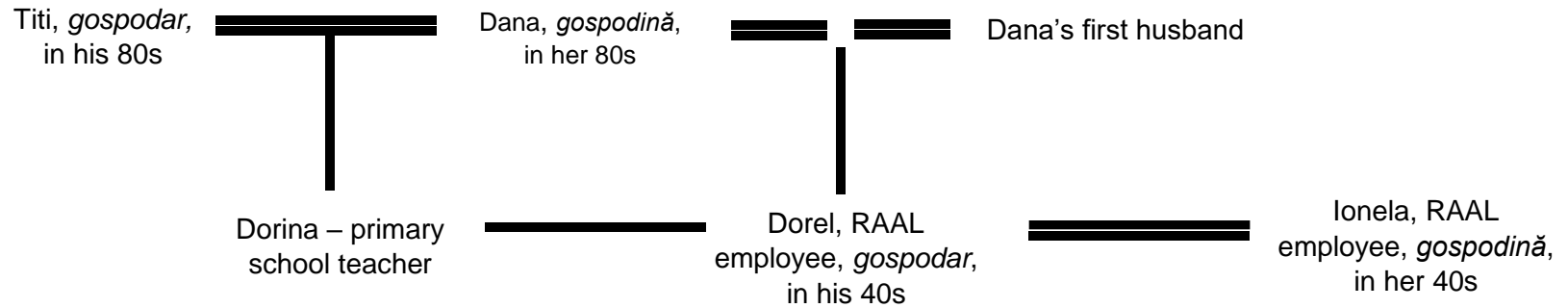
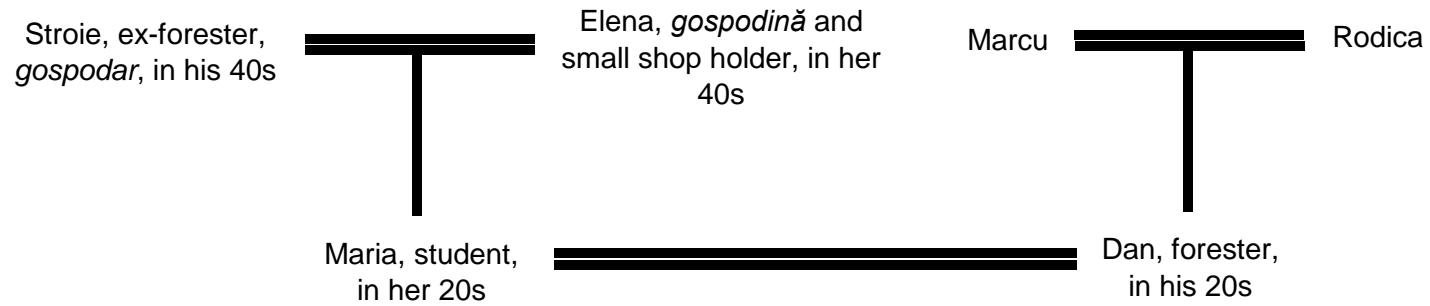
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List of Characters



Prundu Bârgăului



List of Abbreviations

APIA - Agenția de Plăți și Intervenție pentru Agricultură, Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture: Centralised system designed to help farmers around the country access agricultural subsidies.

CAP 1- Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție.

CAP 2 – Common Agricultural Policy.

CFR - Căile Ferate Române, Romanian Railways.

EU - European Union.

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

PHARE - Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies.

SAPARD - Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development.

SAPS - Single Area Payment Scheme.

UK – United Kingdom.

Romanian Pronunciation Guide

Romanian terms are italicised and followed by a bracketed translation in English. Original Romanian terms often lose their evocative function in translation, and so are retained and explained in the footnotes. The Romanian language is close to Italian in pronunciation. Below are some of its diacritics and specific rules.

Ă ă – [Eng: **alone**]

Â â – [This sound comes closest to ‘**urgh**’, without the ‘rh’.]

Î î – [Identical sound to â, but whereas â is only used in the middle of words, î is used to begin and end words]

Ș ș – [Eng: **shoe**]

Ț ț – [Eng: **pizza, czar**]

Ghe, ghe – [Eng: **get, ghetto**]

Ge, ge – [Eng: **germ, jeopardy**]

Ghi, ghi – [Eng: **gear**]

Gi, gi – [Eng: **gin, jeer**]

Che, che – [Eng: **kettle, kerb**]

Ce, ce – [Eng: **chestnut**]

Chi, chi – [Eng: **keen**]

Ci, ci – [Eng: **cheetah**]

Introduction

This thesis considers the relationships between rural humans, their pigs and other nonhuman animals in Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică, villages in the county of Bistrița-Năsăud, northern Romania (see Figure 1 and 2). Rearing animals for personal consumption and commercial purposes has a long tradition in northern Romania. I argue that pig rearing has helped humans cope with socio-political trauma, namely their exclusion and misunderstanding by successive political establishments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I argue that my informants' animals had positive effects on their owners' health and wellbeing, but that pigs have a special status. Pigs are relatively cheap to keep and fatten, their meat is notionally Romania's national food, and they make a unique contribution to peasants' empowerment as 'natural', 'traditional' agriculturalists, while also being twenty-first century Romanians.

My focus is the human-pig relations which develop during three stages: 1) pig rearing, caring and fattening, 2) the ritual killing, and 3) the consumption of home-grown and slaughtered pork. I contend that *tăierea porcului* (pig cutting) has strong emotional and material implications for both the humans and nonhumans involved. The practice encompasses the conflation of mythology, Orthodox and pre-Christian influences, and invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Pig cutting assists humans to make sense of past and present norms, as well as societal expectations. Chapter One assesses the lives of pigs in rural households. I look at their acquisition and inclusion in social networks, their accommodation, feeding and care, with a focus on pig intelligence and social attachment, the biopolitics of care and the concept of refuge in human-pig relations. Chapter Two examines the first part of pig cutting: the logistical

preparations, the slaughter and portioning of the pig. It theorises aspects of gender, labour, emotion and consumption in this community. Chapter Three focusses on the consumption of the pig. I analyse the second phase of pig cutting, the preparation of pork products and their year-round consumption, showing lasting and durable human-pig connections.

This study contributes to anthropological and anthrozoological literature about the therapeutic, empowering role of nonhuman animals who are raised and killed. It is a work of posthuman and more-than-human anthropology, wherein I emphasise the several ways through which domestic animals, especially pigs, influence individual and collective identities in relation to political and religious institutions. Although many views expressed in my study are anthropocentric, my thesis aims to de-centre human bias (Kopnina, 2012; Rae, 2014) by exploring the experiences of individual pigs and their significance in the local environment. Through explaining the details and rationale behind private pig rearing and slaughter, and through acknowledging nonhuman forms of influence and empowerment, this work shows the emotional and material links between peasants that are the foundation of the communities in my study. I suggest an emergent possibility of easing socio-political trauma by proposing a more profound collaboration between European authorities, Romanian authorities, peasants and pigs.

My ethnography engages with local accounts of the emotions and exertions involved in pig rearing, memories of the socialist system, the traumas of collectivisation, and the present impracticability of the farming subsidies system. These accounts portray the peasants' dissatisfaction with the political establishment and their ways of dealing with it. I also present my own thoughts

and feelings in the field, as my positionality was often contested by my informants. I show that locals' diets are not as meat-based as one might think and explain the confluence of rural culture, agriculture and food consumption through my vantage point as a Romanian and one-time meat-eater, but now a vegan living in the United Kingdom.

Context

Between 1947 and 1989, Romania was under communist rule. It was not part of the Soviet bloc, however, and was, at times, open to Western ideas. Since the fall of the Soviet bloc, precipitated by the Romanian revolution, 'The West', in its governmental guise as the European Union and its military guise as NATO, has since expanded from the Baltic to the Balkans, encroaching on areas once under Russian influence. Romania's geographic position has caused it to become a mediator between East and West, but has likewise made it illegible in dualistic geo-political thinking. The tensions between the Western Enlightenment tradition from which the EU claims legitimacy, and Eastern philosophies of collectivism, is widely apparent in contemporary discussion of pig sacrifice. This practice can be perceived as at once cruel, but also peaceful and reinforcing bucolic tradition (Butler, 2011; Pickering, 2015). The consequences of collective memory and trauma, and a history of geo-political non-conformity, are the basis of Romania's ideological and practical struggles with animal welfare, rearing and slaughtering.

In 1949, a nationwide communist collectivisation programme confiscated the majority of privately owned agricultural land and transformed it into state-administered collective farms. A system of collective farms (CAP 1) was implemented in Romania between 1949 and 1962, to increase overall land

productivity and to share the fruits of collective work more fairly between workers. The history of collectivisation is one of violence. Peasants, rich and poor alike, were repressed, imprisoned and even murdered for disobedience (Kligman and Verdery, 2011). In mountainous regions, such as Bistrița-Năsăud county, the lack of arable land left villages notionally 'uncollectivised'. However, residents here were forced to contribute to the collectivization project with "higher quotas for animals" (Dorondel, 2016: 46), by maintaining a substantial national livestock and producing more animal products. Thus, state interventionism reshaped the relations between peasants and animals. Collectivisation was a dehumanising and degrading process, which was violently enforced and diminished the independence, self-worth and collective and individual identities of peasants (Stoica, 2007). It also created suspicion between peasants from different regions: 'uncollectivised' villagers were accused of tax avoidance, as their lands were not integral to the national collective farm. This mistrust was damaging to wider social cohesion, but strengthened kin-based local networks.

Animal husbandry and agriculture have long been the central source of employment and income in the Romanian countryside. Under the communist regime, my informants described how typically one pig was allowed for a family's personal consumption, with the rest 'donated' to the state. Private animal slaughter was officially banned until the end of collectivism in 1962 to maintain a large national stock (Dorondel, 2016). However, the communist regime also provided tacit support for pig cutting as a way of ensuring that traditions were respected (Mihăilescu, 2010), a significant cultural aim of the regime. Communists could support pig cutting, even though communism prohibited it. This discrepancy between law and agricultural practices fostered

mutual suspicion among rural animal-rearers and their communal suspicion of state-imposed norms.

By the 1980s, peasants were dispossessed of land and animals to the extent that rural communities were on the brink of starvation (Membrii Comisiei Prezidențiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, 2006). At a national level, the natural landscape was being rationalised into a “map of legibility and control” (Scott, 1998: 348) for ease of taxation. Bureaucrats with differing politico-economic interests oversaw the implementation of the new policies. Land reforms in 1991 decentralised the agricultural system and privatisation was gradually implemented. An illusion of a radical change allowed the same corruption that had characterised the communist period to flourish. As Dorondel writes, “The postsocialist state was built on the ruins of the socialist state, but with the building materials picked up from these ruins” (2016: 14).

The end of the communist regime made Romanian authorities eager to restructure rural areas. They imposed capitalist practices onto rural household economies, a foreign ideology of competition and a nationwide programme of privatisation. Fifty-one separate government plans for agriculture have been implemented since 1991 to deal with the “underdevelopment problem of the Romanian village” (Dumitriu, 2010 in Roger, 2014), but with no long-term strategy (Mihăilescu, 2010). Since Romania negotiated entry into the European Union (EU) in 2004, two main political issues have directly affected Romanian peasants. The first is the introduction of a subsidies system, supposed to transform Romanian peasants into farmers (Fox, 2011; Roger, 2014), so to restructure their attitude to work and ownership, and orient it toward the market. The second is the coordination of Romania and the EU in terms of policy, law,

administration, economy and productivity, but also ethics and socio-cultural concerns. Programmes to assist Romanian peasants in their modernisation are numerous. The lifetime annuity, the Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS), Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE) and the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) were all introduced by the EU in Romania in the context of political and agricultural restructuring, offering farming subsidies and funding for agricultural development meant to transform subsistence farms in “viable’ agricultural holdings” (Roger, 2014: 739). Thus, an assumed incompatibility between European and Romanian agricultural and farming standards was implied. The development plans were stymied by bureaucracy and created confusion among peasants and would-be farmers.¹ All subsidies applicants have to go through *Agenția de Plăți și Intervenții în Agricultură* (APIA). This is a portal which is meant to ease the application process but is characterised by the same complicated bureaucracy that other Romanian public programmes have. Furthermore, Romania’s animal production has since been affected by the hygiene regulations of European industrialised farming. Romanian pork is currently sold only on the Romanian market. In 2008, the EU banned pork exports from Romania because of swine flu concerns (BBC, 2008). The ethics of sanitisation and consumption are part of the greater issue of miscommunication between producers, national and European institutions (Roger, 2014). These attempts to sanitise Romanian animal husbandry were driven by Western ideas of biosecurity (Foucault, 1976) in which clinical sterility

¹ Referring to the subjects of my study has been difficult because of the pejorative potential that the term “peasant” carries in Romanian, but also because “peasant farmer” is not used in Romanian. I use “peasants” and “would-be farmers” here to show the teleology implied in the rural reforms.

supersedes all other ethical issues, such as animal welfare, overcrowding and short lifespans.

In the context of the village's historical treatment as a space of underdevelopment, pig cutting takes on political and therapeutic dimensions. Consecutive ministries of agriculture have failed to acknowledge the traumatic effect these transformations had on peasants. Historically, mental health services in Romania have been sparse, especially in the countryside, which is not to say that mental health issues do not exist. The communist regime encouraged intensive labour as a proof of one's loyalty to the nation. Rural inhabitants, thus, developed an attitude to their daily work as a comforting activity, which almost denied the possibility of their having mental health disorders or issues. Mental health service provision is getting better, as shown by Nițulescu et al. (2008), but there is still room for improvement. The stigma attached to mental illness means symptoms of mental malaise, though they may be noticed, are rarely voiced (Rădulescu, 2015) and mental health services are not accessed. Private animal and especially pig rearing becomes significant as a self-imposed and maintained a measure of self-help for rural people. Pig rearing and cutting provide an ideal vantage point for the analysis of how Romanian peasants have been subject to the caprices of national and supranational governments which oscillate between forbidding and forgetting.

Ilva Mică and Prundu Bârgăului

I conducted fieldwork in the villages of Ilva Mică and Prundu Bârgăului,² and in the adjacent villages of Piatra Fântânele and Dealu' lui Maxâm. These

² Hereafter also simply 'Ilva' or 'Prundu', as many research collaborators, and myself, used these names colloquially.

villages are geographically close, but in terms of politics and culture, are separate entities. I chose this region for my study because of the apparent cultural variation between these villages. I know from personal experience, and this has been confirmed by participants in my study, that locals of these areas claim to have differing 'mentalities' and *cutume* (customs).³



Figure 1 - Bistrița-Năsăud County in Northern Romania. Source: Google Maps.

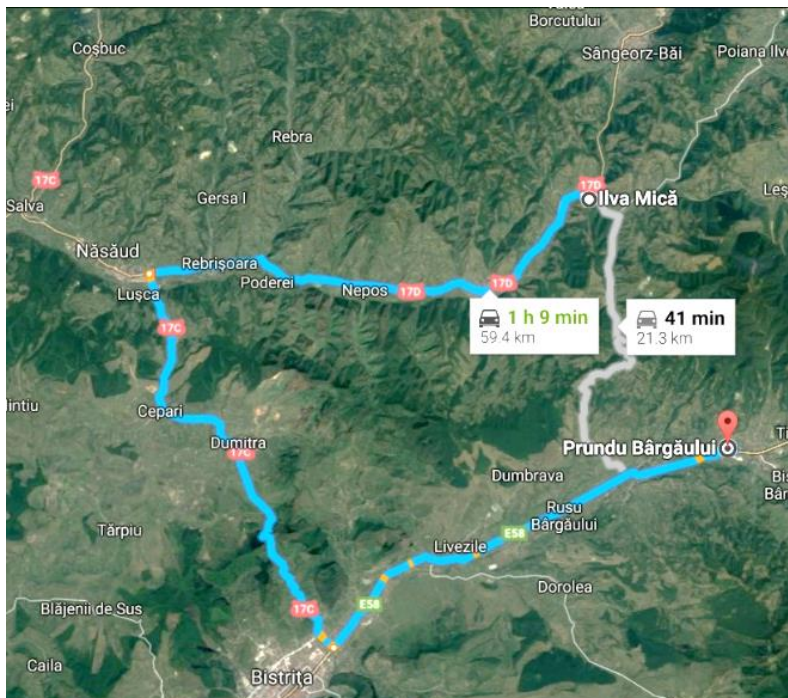
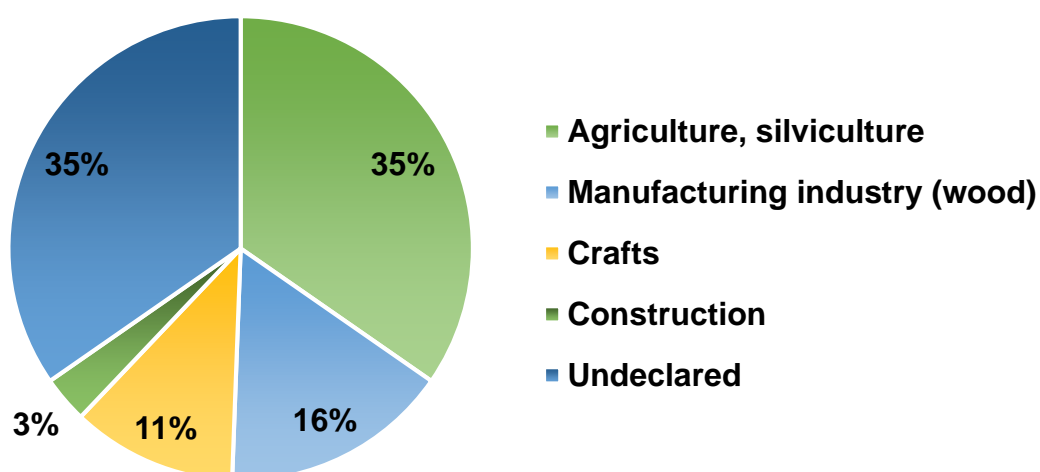


Figure 2: The distance between Ilva Mică and Prundu Bârgăului in Bistrița-Năsăud county, Romania. Source: Google Maps.

³ A glossary of Romanian terms used is appended to this work.

Țara Bârgaielor, or simply Bârgău, is a valley region in the centre-east of Bistrița-Năsăud county, also called *Ținutul Bârgaielor* (The Realm of the Bârgău [Rivers]) or *Valea Bârgaielor* (The Valley of the Bârgău [Rivers]). It was in the eighteenth century that Prundu ‘river bank’ Bârgăului was first recorded (Darlaczi, 2014). Today, as shown in Figure 2, six villages make up Valea Bârgăului: Rusu, Josenii, Prundu, Bistrita, Tiha and Muresenii Bârgăului. 64% of the large villages in the county belong to Țara Bârgaielor (Darlaczi, 2014). The region’s forests, *pajiști* (pastures) and *fânețe* (meadows) influenced the development of the villages and the local micro-economy. *Bârgăuanii* (people from Țara Bârgaielor), especially men, specialise in wood work and timber production (see Figure 3).⁴ Some even state that, because of the historical connection between locals’ work and leisure with the wood, the silviculture of the area epitomises the ‘true Romanian spirit’ (Darlaczi, 2014). However, wood culture is equally central in Ilva Mică.

Figure 3: Professions of the Inhabitants of Prundu Bârgăului



⁴ Lemnec Forest SRL, Triscastim SRL and CirioPrund Prodcom SRL are a few examples of timber companies based in Prundu Bârgăului, and another three similar organisations function in Țara Bârgaielor. See <https://prundu-bargaului.cylex.ro/prelucrare+lemn.html>.

Traditional livestock farming has also been a main occupation in Bârgău. Many residents build small outside their villages, *casele din deal* (houses on the hill), where some of their animals, including some pigs, live permanently. This usually accommodates one or two people, with the purpose of providing proximity to their animals. It also enables peasants to provide more care and attention to their non-human companions. Most people in Țara Bârgaielor engage in agriculture, silviculture, as well as crafts, and do not consider themselves *fermieri* (farmers), but *țărani* (peasants). Although a considerable number have not declared their profession (see Figure 3), this is not a sign of idleness or lack of work. It is rather a symbol of an ingrained mistrust in the authorities and their damaging impact on local traditions (Fox, 2011), and a general preference for 'informal', irregular, network-based labour. People consider themselves, as my informant and host Ionela claimed, "the most hard-working people in the country." Although such claims are common in Romania, history attests to the diligent nature of people from this part of the country. Local shepherds and livestock farmers worked as frontier guards for the Transylvanian government, so a legacy of itinerant labour has impressed a hard-working attitude upon the local culture. Currently, Prundu Bârgăului houses RAAL, a multinational cooling-system company, which attracts local and foreign workers. With a population of almost 6500 residents (Ichim et. al, 2016), but also with RAAL, numerous timber producers, a high population of animals

and a large Orthodox church. Prundu is the largest village, and economic, cultural and religious centre of Țara Bârgaielor (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: A view of Prundu Bârgăului's main street. Author's photo collection.

Ilva Mică is also a large village with a population of almost 4000 inhabitants. It lies on the western side of Bârgău Mountains, but belongs to Valea Someșului. In contrast to Prundu Bârgăului's topography, Ilva Mică displays all the features of a mountain village: a large territory with irregular human settlement and extended distance between households. Meadowlands in the jurisdiction of Ilva Mică are insufficient for the locals' intense agricultural activity, and this has stimulated them to build their *case din deal* which they use mainly for animal husbandry purposes. This is the case for most of my research

participants, and of those who live in the middle of the valley all own remote land and temporary accommodation for agriculture.

Ilva has a similar history of border activity and land disputes between Romanians, *saş*⁵ and Hungarians. The region's economy and local employment benefits from agriculture, silviculture and livestock farming as well as from the Romanian rail service *Căile Ferate Române* and the timber industry. Locals of Ilva also consider themselves exceptionally diligent, as Nache, a proud *ilvean* who works at the local branch of a German chainsaw manufacturer recounted:

People [who come to have their saws fixed] have no patience anymore. His⁶ problem is more important than anything [...] these people form the basis of our society, *meseriaşi* (craftsmen), people who work the land. They know how to organise what they've got to do.⁷

The present study was conducted in twelve households in four villages. Research contributors declared themselves Romanian Orthodox Christians. Every research participant from Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică lived, at the time of the fieldwork, in detached or semi-detached houses. Generally, the architectural style of the households I visited was centred around the concept and practice of transgenerational communal living: extended family and descendants lived close by, sharing communal spaces and yards. Many people lived with or near their parents, children and in-laws. One notable case was the

⁵ The German-speaking minority in Romania, lit. 'Saxons'.

⁶ In Romanian *lui* – third person, masculine possessive pronoun. The wording reflects the gendered division of labour – only men ever go into Nache's workshop.

⁷ Nache, interview.

jointly owned house, with separate entrances and courtyards, inhabited by the widows of two brothers. Apart from one divorcee, all adults were married or widowers, which is to be expected in a conservative and religious community (Şandor, Popescu, 2008). These values can be challenged: many participants admitted that they or their children had migrated in search of labour. Migration occasioned deep sadness, creating and maintaining a postsocialist contradictory world in which working abroad provided money and pride, but also social anxieties (Hartman, 2007).

Literature Review

In approaching the topic of human-pig interaction, I engaged with literature which I grouped into four conceptual categories. The first one was literature on multispecies anthropology (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010), the ontological turn (Viveiros de Castro, 1998; Holbraad, Pedersen and de Castro, 2014), deconstructionism (Ingold, 2000;2007;2011, Vaisman, 2013) and reconstructionism (Latour, 1991; Callon, 1986). In what follows, I will add my interpretation of these and show the usefulness or superfluity of terms such as *life-world*, but the necessity of keeping some others such as nature or culture to explicate more-than-human interactions. While I do not fully endorse concepts such as 'modern', because as shown by Latour (1991), Ingold (2013) and others on many occasions, it divides the world into good and bad, civilised and uncivilised and so on, it would be unjust to neglect it, substitute it for something which conceptually works better, or satisfies the posthumanist anthropologist in me. 'Modernity' and 'modern' figured heavily in the speech of my informants. I use them to show my support for local knowledge and discourse, I draw inspiration from anthropology that has expanded multispecies terminology,

emphasising human-animal similarities and the potentialities of their collaborations.

Secondly, I examine literature on animal emotion and cognition (Sanders, Arluke, 1993; Wilkie, 2015), but draw attention to the limits of human knowledge (Candea, 2013). This will be relevant to my discussions of locals' conceptions of themselves and their behaviours towards their animals, especially in seemingly contradictory acts like pig slaughter. To understand animal cognition without falling into the trap of anthropocentrism and phonocentrism, a phenomenological approach, which emphasises lived experience rather than already formed knowledge about humans and animals, is needed. Such an approach would reveal that animals are "empathetic, complexly communicative and creative" (Sanders, Arluke, 1993: 379). *If Lions Could Speak* (1993) provides an excellent case for equal intersubjective treatment of animals and humans in research, by arguing that researchers should take on the "least human role" (Mandell, 1988 in Sanders, Arluke, 1993; Laland and Hoppit, 2003), so to analyse their relationship from a posthumanist vantage point without the assumptions of inherent superiority to nonhumans. I take a similar approach and argue for a flexible view of human and animal subjectivities and mutual influences, as embodied in social practice and in their environments.

Thirdly, I engage with literature on human-pig interactions throughout history. Ethnographic records acknowledge pigs' influence on the human production of labour (Minnegal and Dwyer, 2005), biosecurity procedures (Blanchette, 2015) and social perceptions of gender (Sillitoe, 2001). They also show humans' preference for pig husbandry due to their human-induced docility

(Rappaport, 1968, Minnegal and Dwyer, 2005; Bennet, 1970), but also acknowledge pigs' complex emotional and cognitive intelligence (Mendl and Byrne, 2010; Nicol, 2010) which makes suitable partners of intersubjective relations with humans (Hurn, 2012).

The intersubjective capacities of pigs who are raised, cared for, fattened and slaughtered by their owners is often obscured by issues of their welfare on small farms. Intersubjectivity is a core issue of my paper. I seek to answer the question: can pigs be therapeutic agents? Can they empower their owners as valuable members of society when pigs themselves are subjected to suffering and pain? Traditional animal-assisted therapy literature has been repeatedly shown (Berget et al., 2008; Francis et al., 1985; Hart, 2010; Serpell, 2010; Serpell, 1986/1996) the positive effects of living with animals on the human psyche. However, this scholarship narrowly defines therapy as immediate psychological therapy, and is often criticised for lacking clear goals, failing to measure therapy results objectively, and treating animals like medicine, thus objectifying them. I challenge this narrow view of animal-assisted therapy, as others have done (Herzog, 2011; Ioannidis, 2005), and propose a redefinition of therapy as a form of empowerment and self-help, more inclusive both of humans' and animals' emotions (Schneider, 2017; Hurn, 2003). This therapy is a mechanism to appease socio-political traumas caused by disenfranchisement. In this work, I consider, besides material comforts such as food and clothes that pigs and their derivatives provide, the agency and self-determination that pigs instil in their owners. I bring out the active social participation of pigs in households as producers of potent social and political influence in rural lives (Hurn, 2017).

Lastly, I draw inspiration from research on peasant studies and rural life (Scott, 1976; 1985; 1998; Wolf, 1966; Fox, 2011). I am interested in how ideas of 'culture' and 'tradition' are born and re-invented in bucolic environments (Williams, 1973; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Boia, 1997). I subscribe to the work that has been done on rural marginalisation in postsocialist, transitioning states such as Romania (Micu, 2010; Dorondel, 2016; Mihăilescu, 2010). I argue that it is essential to place nonhuman animals at the heart of rural modernisation or "restructuring" debates (Fox, 2011), and investigate their agricultural, religious and political agency (Shaw, 2013; Roger, 2014). Animals, their treatment and their relations with their carers can reveal the miscommunication between institutions and individuals, or even the failure of policies which were meant to improve rural lives, and instead have worsened them.

Methodology

I started my research by conducting ethnographic fieldwork between the end of November and end of December 2016. In *Anthropology is not Ethnography* (2008), Ingold criticises the use of "ethnographic" and "fieldwork" together. Etymologically, "ethnography" is the writing of the cultures, habits, traditions and so on, while fieldwork is doing research, engaging with participants. However, as the essays from *Writing Culture* (Clifford, 1986) confirm, doing and writing are not conceptually nor chronologically separated: they constantly interact with each other and inform the researcher's perception of her work and its scope. The intertwining of doing and writing also took place during my research. During the month of fieldwork, I carried out intensive participant observation with five families in Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică. I

lived in my gatekeepers' houses, and was in daily contact with my informants. While not all my participants were friends or families of each other, most of them were related in a way or more. My fieldwork advanced due to the connections of my participants, and their friends. I therefore successfully implemented a multi-sited strategy (Marcus, 1995) based on kinship and friendship.

The multi-sitedness of this project was influenced by the timeframe of a month, but also by the overprotectiveness and hospitality of my hosts. The first hosts were old family friends and the second hosts were my own extended family, so the dynamics of living with them impacted on my study. For my hosts, I was first a guest, then a friend or relative, and then a researcher. So, feeding me, keeping me safe, taking me to only the "best places in the village"⁸ and to the most *gospodar* people was obligatory. As Candea and da Col (2012) point out, through hospitality, a plethora of issues arise between researchers on one hand, and hosts and their communities on the other. Hospitality revealed the fact that we had differing views on politics, gender roles, culinary habits, which might have created hostility between the two sides. The host-guest dynamic, however, made us negotiate the terms of our sociability. That I relied on my hosts for contacting participants gave them a strong collaborative role, as not only did I learn from them, but through them and their social networks (Hastrup, 2017). However, I felt suffocated at times by their constant presence in my research trajectory, as they came with me almost everywhere I conducted participant observation and interviews. Doing anthropology at home (Jackson 1987; Munthali 2001; Peirano 1998) had an advantage of analysing something

⁸ Ionela, personal communication.

familiar from a unique vantage point, but it had limitations, too. Contrary to Mughal's argument (2015), my fieldwork shows that anthropology at home strongly impacts on the ethical norms and methodological strategies that I implemented. Being kin and friend of my participants required us to negotiate our roles, expectations, influences in order to maintain a good level of sociability (Hendry, 1992; Taylor, 2011). This negotiation was also essential to my project's development, in a way that is professional and truthful to my participants, myself as a researcher and as a Romanian (Coffey, 1999; 2002).

I observed most animal-related activities of my informants: cleaning animals' pens and stables, preparing food for animals, feeding them, caressing them, but I participated more when the pig was dead than alive. My human informants thought that handling live animals was "low", dirty and rough work, unsuitable for a "young, pretty student." I was ready to do some anthropological "dirty work" (Wilkie, 2015) as that is the basis of multispecies ethnographies, but when I said to my first host that I would like to help with mucking out, she looked at me as if I had gone mad: "I would never do that, not even for a lot of money!"⁹ I was, on the one hand, an urbanite, and this automatically raised suspicions that I was unfit for agricultural work. The second level of doubt consisted of my slight degree of foreignness. I have lived, studied and worked in the United Kingdom and other various countries in Europe, so was not a 'real' Romanian to them anymore. I was faced with a complex problem of positionality (Abu Lughod, 1991) which I decided to analyse throughout my fieldwork. The wooden animal enclosures (*grajduri*) smelled of animal faeces and urine, so not many participants were keen to allow me to be there on my own. In addition to my

⁹ Ionela, personal communication.

participation, I also did a great deal of insistence to participate in activities where I normally would not be welcome, for example mucking out and pig portioning.

As Cassidy shows in *The Sport of Kings* (2002), persistence shows willingness to try out an alternative way of life: it proves a sense of initiative, desire to learn and know the world that one is studying. Participation and insistence to get involved were necessary research tools in my case, because they enabled me to be taken seriously by my participants. I observed and participated in cooking, cleaning and church going, general maintenance of household with my hosts, but with other participants whom I observed. I participated in three pig cuttings, the private pig slaughters which informed my argument. I helped scrub pig skin, cut blubber, make pork products, and clean up, all of which gave me sense of the corporeal meaning of pig cutting and its implications for individuals in the area, but also for those people who are unfamiliar with this practice (Grasseni, 2007; Yakhlef, 2010).

I conducted interviews and engaged in informal personal communications with participants. All participants were comfortable with my recording of the conversations, but they worried that their affirmations about the ways they raise animals would be interpreted as backward and uncivilised. As per the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth Ethical Guidelines (2011) and the University of Exeter's own ethical rules, participants were made aware of the nature and purpose of this study prior to and during fieldwork. Although participants were generally open to my questions, some information they divulged could not be used in this thesis. All humans' and nonhumans' names in this thesis have been modified to protect

their identities. Though the above ethical guidelines supported my fieldwork with human participants, but they were not particularly helpful regarding the protection of nonhuman animal participants. ASA Guidelines (2011) stipulate that:

As members of a discipline committed to the pursuit of knowledge and the public disclosure of findings, [anthropologists] should strive to maintain integrity in the conduct of anthropological research. This ethics code applies to anthropological work whether studying 'up' and/or 'down', with persons and/or animals, within and outside the UK as well as in cyberspace.

However, as pointed out by Hurn (2015), the rest of the text is written in an anthropocentric way with no reference to the emotions and welfare of animals. That was a recurrent issue as many pigs, whom I considered participants, died during my fieldwork. One might consider, and recoil from, the ethical minefield which would accompany an anthropology of humans' systematic murder. In this case, I had to rely on the guidelines, but also on my moral instincts, the awkwardness of which could create apprehension and uncertainty. Ethical guidelines would benefit from more research on including nonhuman animals in a more grounded, realistic way to allow researchers to act with more confidence in such delicate situations like my fieldwork.

Informal conversations helped me obtain the most diverse and rich data. The nature of pig cutting and agricultural work encourages congregation and collaboration, so people were almost always in groups of two or more. This was a refreshing experience as I had only ever engaged in one to one interviews in the past, a method which has the advantage of privacy, but lacked in a diversity

of opinions. I also engaged in a visual and sonic documentation of the field (Pink, 2013; Gershon, 2013), especially of nonhuman animals. This was important as I could not spend enough time to be able to implement methods such as qualitative behavioural assessment (Rutherford et al., 2012). I had a sound recorder which captured the sonic vivacity of each individual household, and the diversity of life contained therein. I interpreted their animals' facial expressions through photographs and voice tonalities through the recorder which contributed to the multispecies nature of this project (McQuinn, 2016).

I visited the frontier guard museum (*Muzeul Grăniceresc Năsăudean*) in Năsăud, Romania, where I learnt about the agricultural history of the region, the local economy, politics and rural life. I consulted the National Archives in Bistrița, looking through the annals of local agriculture and animal husbandry during the communist regime. These two experiences were essential to the development of my project, which does not only concern itself with present rural life, but has a historical dimension. These experiences also confirm the necessity of researching beyond the methodological spectrum of anthropology, and confidently using historical methods (Edwards, 2001).

Between January and late April, I was in contact with my participants online, where I posed follow-up questions in an informal format. I also conducted a thorough media and law analysis and I critically engaged with national and local newspapers, agriculture publications, religious publications, the official monitor and other sources of agricultural law. These written sources, although incomplete and in a state of continual change (Altheide, Schneider, 2012), significantly increased my knowledge of rural life and agrarian reforms.

Chapter One: Caring for Pigs in a Multispecies Community

Pigs are some of the most popular animals in rural household economies in Romania. My informants had various animals: pigs, cattle, sheep, chickens, dogs and cats. However, no matter how big or small, rich or poor a household was, it had a pig or a pig being raised for it elsewhere. Pigs are the “poor man’s animal”¹: easy to control, breed and keep in the household, and provide a large part of what is considered a balanced diet. The most obvious proof of pigs’ presence was the all-pervasive smell. Then, there was the muffled grunting which animated the backyards, or the secluded annexes built for animals. They were a frequently subjects of discussion. There were the many pork products that were made the previous year hanging smoked in smokehouses, or silently defrosting on kitchen tops. Even empty pig pens were infused with the strong smell of pig, as if in anticipation. Pigs’ sensorial ubiquity reveals how interspecies relations of care and attention are part of the *mise en scene* of daily life in rural Bistrița (Ingold, 2001; Haraway, 2008) and the therapeutic role of domestic pigs.

In this chapter, I present the relationships between humans and their pigs, engendered in daily routines of mutual care and attention. As my informants kept chickens, dogs and cats with significant social roles, this chapter will account for their influence, alongside that of pigs. I start from the premise that, as Derrida (2008) and Wolfe (2010) argue, animals have the capacity to transform humans and often force this transformation upon them. I also look at a subject that has been overlooked by anthropologists in favour of compassion, cruelty, ethics and cognition (Arluke and Sanders, 1993; Premack, 2007; Singer, 1975). That is, the therapeutic role of pigs as

¹ Father Dudu, interview.

empowering their owners to cope with political neglect (Wolf, 1966; 1982; Stewart, 1996).

Subjectivising the Pig: Kin-telligence

A pig's entrance into a household is equivalent to the beginning of its pre-cutting phase, what Bărbulescu (2010) calls 'the making' of the pig. This is a period of intense feeding and fattening. Locals want a fat pig to slaughter at the end of the year, but the regularity of feeding instills a sense of trust in the pigs, as they expect their owners to feed them and to care for them every day (Baker, 2013). There was, naturally, no universal rule for the buying and keeping pigs in the villages in my study, but most were acquired well in advance of the sacrifice, with fourteen months being the longest time. Although some informants got their pigs delivered dead for the pig cutting day, or bought them a month before the ritual, most kept the pigs for a year, to allow them to grow enough to provide high-quality meat (Bărbulescu, 2010). Pigs were bought from friends or relatives. Due to the intertwining of commercial activities with kinship ties, it was, if not impossible, counterproductive to trace the market origin of pigs. Only once did I succeed in tracking down a group of pigs from Prundu: they were bought from a friend in the nearby market town of Târgu Mureş. A commercial network based on trust and kinship bonds (Minnegal & Dwyer, 1997), almost in the style of a reciprocal economic society (Malinowski, 1922; Graeber, 2001; Mauss, 1954), was a precondition of dealings with pigs and other domestic nonhuman animals. Pig exchanges are a private matter, showing not only the peasants' preference for the familiar and the familial over curiosity about nonhuman animal markets outwith their close-knit groups, but also a deep mistrust for the implementation of neoliberal market principles (Fox, 2011) in which peasants would ultimately be at a disadvantage.

A more pronounced sense of interspecies kinship and reciprocity-based transactions is expressed the example of the Maricescu family. They could not buy a pig in 2016 as Nache and Nadia both worked full time, and Ana, Nadia's mother, was unwell. Nache made a deal with an acquaintance to receive a pig after a year, on the day of the pig cutting. When I asked Ana if she knew the provenance of the pig, she replied:

Yes, he [the man who cared for the pig] was here once. Nache inherited half of the *casa din deal* and some land in the meadows, with good soil, from his [deceased] mother, He gave the meadow to a man in the village, Maxâm, to cut the grass on it. For this, in the spring, he gives him fertiliser for potatoes, and in exchange, he [the man in the village] gives Nache a pig ... Yes, and Nache fills the gap with money ... so that we can have a pig at Christmas.

This informal contract of mutuality is a frequent occurrence in the villages in the region. Not only do these social norms strengthen the local ties between community members, but also ensure that the practice of pig cutting is carried forward every year, without the full knowledge or involvement of authorities. This example shows how pigs can become part of a household without being physically present.

Mia, Nadia's aunt, lived alone in a house attached to the Maricescu's. In an interview, she also acknowledged her incapability in her old age to provide proper care for pigs (Poresky and Daniels, 1998): "It's too hard for me, I need to plant corn, potatoes ... I can't work to provide food for my pig."² Mia pays an old couple who run a small business raising pigs for other villagers, who rear the pig for twelve months

² Mia, interview.

and hand it to her already slaughtered. Mia's pig carers are her and her husband's wedding godparents (*nași de cununie*). The familial connection added trust and responsibility (Geană, 1978) to the transaction, and assured Mia of the pig's wellbeing. Orthodox godparenthood (*nășie*) proved to be the root of many social and economic connections, a relational continuum of mutual morality and obligations in which:

the spiritual is intimately interwoven with the material. Not only economic interest is at play, but also the belief in washing away sins, and the importance of doing good deeds, stemming merely from a religious morality (Vasile, 2010: 127)

Pigs' entrance in their owners' lives was also their entanglement in their socio-religious networks of trust and responsibility, in which they remained long after their sacrifice.

The most important criteria in choosing pigs was their price. Raising a pig can be very expensive, so a thorough cost-benefit analysis was carried out by my informants before purchasing one. The size of a pig was also crucial, as he³ had to provide food for potentially one year or longer. Thus, the most popular breed was the Large White, known for its ability to gain weight quickly and for its flavoursome meat. Because this breed was so common, it has also become the cheapest. The Large White is also considered to be one of the most docile breeds, and so has been intensively bred in this region and elsewhere. Large Whites are quiet, calm and do not normally cause damage to the land and property.

³ In Romanian, the noun "animal" is masculine, hence the use of the masculine pronoun.

Although the friendliness of the Large White was commonly acknowledged, some saw it more as a lack of sociality, so opted for a different breed: Mangalica (sheep pig). This Hungarian breed is a slimmer, leaner, more active pig. Laurențiu, a farmer and businessman from Prundu Bârgăului had interbred Mangalica with wild boars and created a more independent, active and curious type of pig. The friendliness and sociability of this breed transformed Laurențiu's attitude to them. He viewed them as dogs rather than pigs, allowing them to run free in the fields and talking with them on a regular basis, which was a daily comfort to which Laurențiu looked forward. His sense of self-worth as a rural human and worker bloomed because of the creativity involved in the process. The high price which he asked for the pigs themselves and their meat was also an incentive which validated his interbreeding work, and interest in creating a life worth living for his pigs.

Pigs were often considered equal to other household animals. Stroie, a one-time forester, now a farmer and respected *gospodar* in Prundu Bârgăului, said:

[Pigs] are cherished and appreciated for their unique contribution to the household. They are all equal, they must be. Each animal is special in its own way.⁴

I was pleasantly surprised when Matei, a young liberal peasant from Ilva Mică, acknowledged the high cognitive capacities of pigs (Mendl, Held & Byrne, 2010) and seemed embarrassed after this fragment of the interview, as our dialogue exposed fundamental contradictions in the logic of keeping, interacting with and eating pigs:

AO: Is there a hierarchy of animals in your household? Or are they equal?

⁴ Stroie, interview.

Matei: I am keener to work with the species that interest me [sheep], but scientifically I think pigs were proved to be the smartest domestic animals. Each animal is different in his own way. Each is smart in his way.⁵

Both Stroie and Matei expressed their love and respect for their animals, but most importantly, acknowledged the contribution of each animal to the wellbeing of the household and family. This view is influenced by the Orthodox teaching that animals were created by God to be used by humans for humans' wellbeing, in a way that does not diminish their subjective agency. Through pigs, peasants express their creed in God and his creation, and feel comforted that they abide by Christian morality when interacting with nonhumans.

Furthermore, many informants insisted on clarifying the status of pigs in their own experiences, as normally they are the butt of jokes in both rural and urban popular culture. Proverbs like "In the first stage of drunkenness, man is cat. Then he becomes a monkey, and at the end, he is a pig"⁶ (Botezatu and Hîncu, 2005: 68) show the low position of the pig on the scale of virtuosity and civil behaviour (Fudge, 2005). This also shows that the difference between humans and animals is one of gradation, not of kind (Hurn, 2012), suggesting sameness rather than divergence between rural humans and their pigs. Ana Maricescu illustrates this point, based on a widespread perception of pigs as disgusting. This point reiterates sameness of behaviour, and corporeal consistency between the two species, accomplished through continual reinforcing ties and physical contact (Ingold, 2013).

⁵ Matei, interview.

⁶ Original proverb in Romanian: La beție omul este pisică, maimuță și la urmă porc.

Ana: You know they say pigs aren't intelligent ... and sometimes a man can be called by (laughs) ... especially the wife, or whoever he's having an argument with ...

AO: 'You eat like a pig'...

Ana: You get dirty like a pig ... but, in fact, if you keep a pig since a young age, I must tell you, that's not the case.

AO: No?

Ana: No! When you go into his pen, give him food, speak to him [...] I wouldn't necessarily say he's intelligent, but he has an affinity for the master. He feels you.⁷

The same thought was voiced by her sister-in-law and neighbour Mia:

[Pigs] are not intelligent, but they have an instinct. They do some things out of habit. It depends on the human and on the routine ... the routine of doing the same thing. I had one pig whose excitement to see and recognise me were evident every time that I brought him food. He came to me and snuggled in my dress and waited to be patted on the head. I really liked that pig, I can tell you that.

She also thought that it is in pigs' nature to get fat, therefore their suitability for pig cutting:

We cut this pig (reminiscing) ... it got really big. There are some [animals] who eat and sleep – those get fat a lot, really quickly. The energetic ones don't get fat. Those lazy ones, that's what they're like.

⁷ Ana, interview.

Mia and other participants spoke of providing enough food, space and warmth as contributing factors to the quality of the pigs' meat, rather than ethical concerns. They were concerned about the welfare of the pig as a correlation to the quality of its meat, and so ultimately to pigs' welfare as a correlation to their own. However, as Mia has had many pigs, she admitted that as the years advanced, she had started to care for the pigs for their own sake and well-being, and began to recognise their emotional needs:

I got attached to them so even though I knew we were going to kill the pig, that didn't occur to me until very late in the year. I was feeding them as a routine activity and was worried about them when they were ill.⁸

Some of my informants held anthropocentric, yet flexible and mindful (Shir-Vertesh, 2012) perceptions of pigs' cognition and emotion. Sometimes, the two modes of knowledge were conflated, or brought closer, by informants in speech. 'Intelligent' traditionally stands against 'instinct' or 'habit', the latter being considered emotional responses rather than meaningful rational brainwork, therefore inferior. However, more recently the conflation of these two apparently differing processes has been reconciled for instance by Kay Milton (2005: 25; 38) who claims that "emotions are essentially ecological phenomena." Also, she suggests that "by focussing on ecological rather than social relations, we might be able to think ourselves out of this opposition." Similarly, but with a clear focus on animals, Sara J. Shettleworth (2012), indicates that the criteria of animal learning should not be restricted to cognitive intelligence. An emotionally inclusive approach is more apposite, and clearly

⁸ Mia, personal communication.

demonstrates the presence of animal capacity for insight, therefore, eliminating the need for the terms ‘cognitive’ and ‘emotional’ in the first place.⁹

Research participants spoke of their pigs in a way that integrated intelligence and instinct into an overall positive perception of pigs. The work of recognition of the human-pig connection was not only done by humans, but by knowledgeable, curious and self-aware pigs, too (Ellis, 2011). Although they ended up being slaughtered, they were recognised by humans as subjects, or almost-subjects. As evidenced by Hurn (2012) this constant pig-human interrelatedness, mutual awareness or as Kohn (2007:7) calls it, “a shared constellation of attributes and dispositions – a sort of transspecies habitus”, was a central component of daily life that transcended the differences between humans and pigs (Smuts, 2001). Human-pig relations inform the local imaginations (Minnegal & Dwyer, 1997; Bird-David, 2006) of what rural humans and animals are and should be. They also reassure peasants of the continuity and importance of their arguably benevolent interaction with the surrounding nonhuman, natural world.

The Politics of Pig Care

After the pigs have been brought into the household and network of trust and responsibility of my informants or their temporary carers, they were housed in basic wooden enclosures (*grajduri*). Pigs were rarely allowed outside. In fact, during my fieldwork, none of the Large White pigs were allowed out. This was mostly because of the wintry weather. However, I was also told by locals that “it’s too much hassle,

⁹ David Gary Shaw’s “The Torturer’s Horse: Agency and Animals in History” (2013) also supports the conceptual unification of thinking and feeling, suggesting the term ‘theeling’ (p. 18), while acknowledging social scientists’ tendency to excessively create new terminology which is not always helpful.

they grub the soil and it's not good.”¹⁰ EU regulations on pig welfare specify the necessity of a play space for pigs, a constant provision of hay and the instruction of pig carers in matters of pig welfare (Council Directive 2008/120/EC; Stevenson et al., 2014). While the pig-rearers in my study abided by these rules, they did it unconsciously. Pig rearing was seen by my informants as proof of self-sufficiency and self-help, and thus external regulation was anathema. In addition, the pig housing arrangements, although imperfect and unregulated by welfare directives, were viewed as superior to industrial settings by locals, who desired to remain outside of EU pig and pork markets.

Despite their omnipresence in smell and sound, most pigs were unseen unless searched for. Pigs were the most hidden of all animals in rural households. Some were kept in the same pens all their lives and released only on the day of their death. Although some rural pigs could become more than just “Christmas pigs”, they were as constrained conceptually as they were constrained physically and spatially. Most pig enclosures were delimited by fences. Besides this being a measure of protecting the pig, it was also an effort to diminish the pigs’ smell and polluting presence in the household (Douglas, 1966). This is partly a consequence of old Romanian wisdom: pig-phobic anecdotes, with which my informants seemed to disagree initially, were, in fact, enacted: “He who lives with pigs, smells bad to dogs” (Botezatu & Hîncu, 2005, p.33).¹¹ The example from folk culture epitomises the need for human-pig separation, while also implying that a too close physical attachment would trigger the animalisation, brutalisation and suspiciousness of humans (Fudge,

¹⁰ Nache, interview.

¹¹ Original proverb in Romanian: “Cine trăiește la un loc cu porcii, miroase rău la toți câinii.” Botezatu & Hîncu’s book “Dicționar de proverbe și zicători românești” expansively covers proverbs relating to pigs. An interesting discussion of the ways in which pigs are conceptualised in folk culture, see: [http://www.bp-soroca.md/pdf/Dictionar%20Proverbe%20\(Cartea\).pdf](http://www.bp-soroca.md/pdf/Dictionar%20Proverbe%20(Cartea).pdf).

2005). Although such proverbs do not inform everyday speech or ideas of my informants, their cultural sway is manifest in pigs' housing that reinforces the differences between the two species, while also acknowledging their commonality of smell and space.

Although not articulated, a hierarchy of animality and humanity (Fudge, 2005) was utilised by locals. The roles, contributions and influences of pigs differed at different stages in their lives, but most of the time pigs were treated as contaminating, polluting subjects (Douglas, 1975). This detachment of living displays an underlying vision of two spheres: of human purity and safety, and animal impurity and uncleanness (Douglas, 1966). Dan, the son-in-law of Stroie, confirmed the inherent dichotomic logic:

AO: There [in the West] some people keep pigs in their houses.¹²

Dan: God Forbid! Pigs? Big like this one (pointing to an at least one-hundred kilogramme pig)?! But they knock everything over! But how do they feed them?

AO: I don't know ... leftovers from the people's food, I guess.

Dan: Oh, my God!

Dan is a young farmer who lives in Prundu Bârgăului with his daughter, wife and his wife's family. He had agreed to keep a pig for his parents for a year and fatten in for Christmas. His parents live in the nearby small town of Năsăud. They provided the fodder for the pig and money for veterinary care. Besides material contributions, they frequently visited Dan and the pig. Whereas Năsăud is a small

¹² Such as of Esther, the Wonder Pig: <https://www.facebook.com/estherthewonderpig/?fref=ts>.

town, built around one main street and many of its neighbourhoods are essentially rural, Dan's parents confessed that it would have been inappropriate to keep a pig in the front yard of their high-rise block of flats. It would have upset the neighbours, the authorities, and the image of Năsăud as an urban place. For townsfolk, the space of the village is a seemingly undifferentiated space of lax notions of hygiene and pollution, as pointed out by Williams (1973), Eliade (1957), Halfacree (1993) and Shields (1992).

Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică were portrayed as spaces of secrecy and intimacy between humans and nature: places where dirty, polluting things happen. Locals were aware of their "dirty work" with animals and the land, but that was not conceived of as disgusting, but uniquely liberating and, to a certain extent, sacred. They were constantly self-conscious for their dirty hands, and sought to explain the beauty of their work to me: "That is what I live for", told me a young man from Ilva Mică after he has been to work with his sheep. A now ubiquitous Romanian saying is that "Eternity was born in the village"¹³. This started as a line in Lucian Blaga's poem *The Soul of the Village* (1970), and has become a national ode dedicated to nature and man (Boia, 1997). The village, in this conception, is instrumentally used for the metamorphosis of the profane into sacred (Douglas, 1966; Hedeşan, 2001) and is deemed a necessary component in the lives of Romanians who claim to stay true to their traditions while also embracing modernity (Assmuth, 2008). This imagination of the village is not exclusive to outsiders, as despite segregationist living arrangements for pigs, the sense of porcine presence was ubiquitous in each rural household I visited.

¹³ Original text in Romanian: "Veşnicia s-a născut la sat." in *Sufletul Satului* (Blaga, 1970).

The diffusion of pigs' presence and placeness was made possible by frequent contact with their human carers. Feeding them in the morning was the first act of physical closeness, and depending on the age and schedule of the human carers, took place between five and eight o'clock in the morning. It generally preceded any form of meaningful contact with other humans in the household. Lucretia, a *gospodină ilveancă* in her fifties, chose to "have breakfast at nine or ten, after [she had] milked the cow, made the cheese, fed the pigs ... there's a lot to do. And we only have a cup of tea for breakfast."¹⁴ Dana, a *gospodină* in her eighties from Prundu, had a similar morning routine:

So, we [she and her husband] wake up at five. He puts the TV on, but he is very deaf, so he turns it way up! I can't stand it, and tell him to turn it down or do something else. That's when he gets up and goes to his animals, makes them something to eat ... Feeds the pig, talks to them, then returns and we can have a proper conversation, but before he has been to the animals, it's impossible to speak to him.¹⁵

This instance shows the beneficial effect of physical human-animal contact on interhuman sociality. This quote portrays pigs, among other domestic animals, as intimate companions and good listeners, whose presences are preferred by humans over the presence of other humans. Pigs, assumedly docile and unable to receive toilet training, are portrayed as non-judgemental, easy-going others, as opposed to more active animals such as cats and dogs, who were often perceived as mischievous or even dangerous to the household. The beneficial effects of pigs and

¹⁴ Lucreția, interview.

¹⁵ Dana, interview.

the other animals mentioned in the quotes above should not be regarded as part of the narrow definition of animal-assisted therapy as something that animals do to humans. They should be seen as an activity that is created by humans, animals and their surroundings in their becomings –with (Ingold, 2011; 2013) and alongside each other.

Participant observation revealed that the rural human-pig relations are more significant than their participants say. Morning interspecies interactions show pigs and humans as each other's daily 'resonances' (Ingold, Littlewood, 1996, p.128) – subconscious actions of interrelation, communication and perspective sharing with nature (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Far from being a theoretical contraption, the concept of reconnection was, if not verbally used, played out in lived experience in Prundu Bârgăului and Ilva Mică. This was based on a cyclical perception of time (Eliade, 1957) wherein humans' and pigs' experiences stem from co-learned and shared mundane patterns. Interspecies reconnection is also a result of a cosmological, Christian Orthodox paradigm where each performs a meaningful function (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Humans glorify God by obeying religious norms, one of which is the use of animals for the human survival, with animals, in turn, complying with this imposed order. The dynamics of human-pig relations explain the inherent anthropocentrism of my human informants, but also the logic of their daily routines. Despite the tacit desire to confine pigs to their pens, peasants sought to engage with them. One can argue that it is not the contact with animals which is therapeutic to humans, but it is the fresh air, exercise, sense of routine and purpose which the activity of feeding provides (Banks, Banks, 2002). Why should these elements not be integral to the therapeutic empowerment that animals provide to humans? Through their work with animals and the land, locals are continually

entangled with the landscape and environment, and thus view themselves as extensions of their surroundings, and the surroundings as their own extensions. To dismiss the parts that do not directly involve animals as irrelevant to their therapeutic purpose would be to disregard the locals' holistic view of the environment. Besides the complex therapeutic effect that human-pig relations have on humans, pigs also receive some benefits from this interspecies setting. They receive what their owners think is a good life, natural, healthy feed and a shelter, and although these are economically-motivated factors, they nevertheless are integral to a rural pig's life.

While all domestic animals have a healing effect on their owners' wellbeing, a further analysis of kitchens and food shows the humans and pigs entangled in a more complex way. First, that is done through tastes and smells and the assumed omnivorous nature of both humans and pigs. Informants had a kitchen in their homes, where they had brand new cookers. These were rarely used for cooking, as they were more a proof of peasants' material orientation towards modernity (Miller, 2008). All participants also had a *bucătărie de vară* (summer kitchen), described as more rudimentary and where the bulk of the cooking happened. Boiling pots and pans of all sizes contributed to the atmosphere which I found in these kitchens. But not all these pans contained human food. Some had boiled potatoes, corn, greens and remains of human food in them. Sometimes my informants did not distinguish between them as well as they might have liked. Ana recounted how, once, she was simultaneously cooking a soup for her family and a vat of potatoes and corn for her pigs. She said she almost served the pig fodder to her family. Fortunately, when she removed the lid, the strong odour of animal food caused her to realise what she was about to do. This was a comical occasion, which was accidentally beneficial and relaxing for the humans involved. Sharing the cooking space of human and animal

foods points to a potential commensality between these two species, and thus implies a sense of trust that reinforced their connection. Ingold has pointed out the domination in domestication (1986) and although I do not deny that, interspecies food sharing offers nuance to the otherwise obviously anthropocentric, oppressive domestication practices, and highlights the risks that humans also take thorough the domestication of other species. By living in such proximity to pigs, and sharing foodstuffs with them, people were at risk of cross-contamination (Blue and Rock, 2011), but the often soothing, comical effect of these confusions was more important than the risks involved.

There is another factor that highlights the risks but also the benefits of feeding the pigs food cooked in their kitchens. Ana mentioned that she cooked the pig feed, which is in direct contravention to EU law on feeding pigs (Commission Regulation (EU) No 691/2013). They are only legally allowed to eat commercially produced pig food. My human informants were unaware of such regulations, but there was a consensus about the inadequate quality of market origin food and a determination to avoid it. This food, but especially market origin meat and fodder, was considered superficial in its production, taste, but also in the human-animal relationships it fosters (Bulliet, 2005). My informants, thus, avoided market origin produce in their diets, but in that of pigs, too. They were very proud and enthusiastic about the feed they planted, grew and cooked for their pigs. That peasants feed their pigs cooked food shows the miscommunication between small producers, market providers and the authorities which regulate product exchange, as well as those who oversee the enforcement of animal feeding laws. It allows peasants to enact their knowledge of animal welfare, feeding and biosecurity that function in parallel with poorly implemented legislation on pig welfare in Romania.

The feeding of the pigs in the period immediately before they are killed has been often trivialised and made into jokes and proverbs. One might assume that the popular proverb “You don’t fatten the pig before [Christmas] Eve”¹⁶ reflects an actual practice of intensive economically-motivated feeding, this is more of a warning that meaningful results only come after prolonged effort and care. My post-fieldwork connections with the human participants also demonstrate this: the new pigs they acquired were fed similar quantities of food as soon-to-be-slaughtered pigs. It is on the day before their deaths that pigs’ diets change, when they are starved. Studies have shown the negative impact of starving on the pigs’ welfare and on the quality of their meat (Adzitey, 2011; Smith and Grandin, 1998). However, locals preferred to work with empty bowels during the portioning of the pig to minimise the risk of infesting the meat with bowel contents.

In the rest of the year, the amount given to pigs was consistently substantial, as also documented by Minnegal and Dwyer (2005) and Rappaport (1968) in their fieldworks New Guinea. While a big pig was often a proof of successful household management, my informants acknowledged that the amount of food was burdensome for the pigs, which negatively impacted on their welfare. Here, Mia describes her remorse for her pig who had collapsed under its own weight:

I felt so sorry for one of them, really. He got so fat that he couldn’t stand on his own feet. Your grandad [Ana’s late husband] came and lifted it up on a plank. I think he weighed about 200 kilograms.¹⁷

This claim shows humans’ desire to have a large, fat pig who will provide enough meat and meat products for a year. It also shows that they acknowledge pigs as fully

¹⁶ Nu se îngrașă porcul în ajun.

¹⁷ Mia, interview.

sentient beings: the hardship through which pigs go when fattened for this purpose, their suffering and unhappiness. Private pig rearing and rural life are not simple, idyllic places that are always in harmony with nature or with locals' own ideas of welfare. The claim above shows the lived experiences of humans and nonhumans with real thoughts, feelings and anxieties which are left unaddressed by the Romanian state and the EU.

Private pig rearing is intimately connected with the control of pigs' diets. During the communist period, food was strictly rationed and pig rearing helped ease food shortages. Now peasants are deeply distrustful of the food industry (Abbots and Coles, 2015), and their complaints are a critique of neoliberal market principles: orientation towards profit, lack of concern for the health of the populace, and the sneaking of 'unnatural' ingredients into food to maximise profits.¹⁸ With no exception, the participants made it clear that by raising a pig they could decide what the pig ate, and what they themselves would eventually eat. Fodder consisted of vegetables and cereal of the best quality also grown by the peasants, and leftovers from humans' meals. Dan and his father, Marcu, best expressed the pride of self-sufficiency:

Dan: We give pigs flour, bran, corn, grass ...

AO: What about leftovers?

Dan: Yes, *zemuri* (thin soups), potatoes, but no bones ... Write in your dissertation appendix that here we eat only *eco* (organic).

Marcu: Food from a bag, that's not food.¹⁹

¹⁸ For an example of contemporary food politics, see the Bulgarian prime minister's claims about the low quality of food in central and Eastern Europe compared to the rest of the continent (Boffey, 2017).

¹⁹ Dan and Marcu, interview.

Private crops also partake in the creation of refuges of disconnection from socio-political life, contributing to a circular rural narrative: here, one needs meat for physical strength to provide the right food for her animals, which then she eats: “In the summer, they eat corn, beans, grass and weeds sometimes. In the winter, when the fattening begins, they eat potatoes and corn.”²⁰ Thus, a communal sense of good taste – *le gout de terroir* is the sum of crops, vegetables, animals and meat. Like in the case of Papua New Guinea’s affirmation as a new nation (Halvaksz, 2013) through the cultivation of food with pungent, unique tastes, my informants also considered the taste of their pork to be unique. The individuality of the taste proves the community’s labour, holistic view of the environment and commitment to rural traditions and self-sufficiency.

There is a substantial gap between rural people and the political establishment, expressed by the local and European food politics: if people cannot trust the food they buy and consume themselves, they are even more apprehensive of animal fodder, so they choose to feed their animals food from private production to ensure their health and wellbeing. While EU regulations stipulate that pigs can only be fed mass produced pig food or uncooked home-grown vegetables (Commission Regulation (EU) No 691/2013), this rule applies to pigs that are commercialised, to reduce the risk of transmitting bacteria to humans. However, the pigs in my study were unregistered with the National Livestock Registry as because after the revolution of 1989, authorities did not bother to verify the number of privately reared animals post-1989 (Mihăilescu, 2010). Because these pigs are raised for private consumption, the need for following animal feeding regulations on a local level is not imperative, and shows the power of the individuals who can decide what is good for

²⁰ Fane, interview.

their animals. Home-grown pig feed was also unsuitable for accessing pig farming funds, as confirmed by Țuca, a RAAL worker and *gospodină*:

Țuca: We tried one time to get involved with this ... um ...

AO: Subsidies system?

Țuca: Yes! Subsidies ... So we fed our pig the vegetables in our garden and all that ... cereal. When the time came to take the pig to the local slaughter point, they told us our pig is too small. What was that all about? Do they know how to even keep a pig? It needed to be at least one hundred kilos to be slaughtered there and ours only weighed ninety!

AO: Oh my God! So what did you do?

Țuca: We took our pig back, and fed it more food but we didn't go to the slaughter point again after that. What's the point of that?

This example shows the incompatibility of privately reared naturally fed pigs with the subsidies system. The latter places unrealistic expectations on locals and does not take into consideration their ecological knowledge, work and efforts to raise 'natural' pigs. As previously mentioned, the law requires pigs to be fed industrially produced, uncooked fodder. While feeding pigswill is a form of household recycling and has a long historical tradition in the area, it causes pigs to have a weight and taste that do not conform to EU farming standards. Thus, by refusing to conform, my informants implicitly enact their resistance to foreign-imposed laws.

Although the EU is normally associated with fair production, trade and distribution, this is not always the case. As evidenced by Boffey (2017), there have been numerous cases in Eastern Europe where the quality of the food sold to people was proven to be inferior to food in Western or Central Europe. Another similar

example is the horsemeat scandal: the ethics of producing and consuming meat in different European countries that should theoretically use the same ethical guidelines, but whose implementation varies in both type and degree (Šestáková, 2017). The assumption that Eastern Europeans would be content with low quality products and the loose regulation of businesses who operate on this assumption is dangerous. It causes people like my informants to deeply mistrust the food industry, and to find refuge in creating, making and sharing their food in their restricted social networks, which is the opposite of what the CAP 2 is trying to achieve: peasants' transformation into productive farmers (Roger, 2014).

Another aspect of human-pig connections can be found in the micro-politics of local material culture. My informants wore wellington boots when they entered animal sties and pens, and that removed them on their exit. The medium-sized sties were covered in manure, despite the constant efforts of the humans to eliminate it. Wearing boots implied humans' aim to contain the assumed dirt and impurity of pigs and prevent its further distribution and contamination of other spaces in the household. The human informants did not change into different clothes before and after being around their pigs. The only measure taken in this sense was the occasional donning of working mantles, which were not washed once during my fieldwork and remained in the vestibules of participants' homes. I observed in each household a prominent common feature: the abundance of rugs and mats of varying sizes and textures, and impressive collections of plastic slippers and flip-flops destined for indoor and outdoor use. These were placed strategically at all entrances into humans' homes, connoting the desire to compartmentalise human and animal worlds. As humans wiped of manure accentuating the patchiness of biosecurity, particles of pig manure and hair remained in the textile of the rugs and on the soles

of their shoes. Thus, the narrative of interspecies care was materialised on a micro-level, and travelled farther than my informants thought (Appadurai, 1998), especially when people forgot to put on any slippers at all!²¹

The issue of particle transmission is especially significant because of the locals' attitude to slippers (*papuci de casă*) and flip-flops (*șlapi*). Slippers were made of warm, comfortable materials and worn inside, but sometimes used to travel between buildings in one household. *Șlapi* were made of plastic and used for working outdoors. The purpose of my informants' footwear was often confused, especially by visitors who were unaware of any rules. Many times, I forgot to change my slippers when going indoors, and my hosts noticed, asking me to take them off immediately as I would bring dirt and manure in the house. My hosts, on the other hand, respected the slipper rules regardless of the circumstances. Once, I noticed that a pan in Ana's kitchen was overflowing and I was surprised to see that she took a long time to change her slippers before she attended to the problem. This shows that although my informants were not always aware of official biosecurity regulations, they had their own norms which they respected and demanded were taken seriously. The circulation of pig manure in the household articulates the often-unconscious intimacy between species in the countryside. Rugs, according to Foucault (1984: 6) are "a sort of garden that can move across space", so a place where worlds are juxtaposed but can never fully meet. Pigs and humans are united through the engendering of their co-existing, continually interacting microparticles in a heterotopic environment: one that begins with shared spaces and foods, but ends due to humans' desire to maintain certain biological boundaries. This is a vernacular

²¹ This was not as gruesome as it sounds! Most of my data was collected through a close inspection of these surfaces, when manure had already been dried for a few days.

version of the biosecurity rhetoric of the EU and other international organisations like FAO, whose guidelines (2010: viii) stipulate “the implementation of measures that reduce the risk of disease agents being introduced and spread.” Biosecurity measures (Blanchette, 2015; Bingham, Enticott and Hinchliffe, 2008) proved to be less-than stringent, showing the porousness of biopolitical norms in their implementation in everyday life.

Regarding odour, I come back to my claim that pigs were not given enough chance to create an odour of their own bodies that was not deeply connected to the environment of the sty. Although pigs have a notoriously potent body odour, for me and my uninitiated nose, this was inseparable from the odour of the sty and pig excrement. Pig odour was a daily normal occurrence, but its diffusion was viewed with suspicion in the presence of outsiders. On the first day of my fieldwork, after spending about eight hours in a *bucătărie de vară* (summer kitchen), with Dorel’s parents, Dana and Titi, in an acute scent of milk, cheese, manure and hay that heavily infused my clothes, I was told by their daughter, Dorina:

Come to my house [in the same household] and we can continue the interview there. I don’t want your clothes to smell like ... you know.

(She picks up the sleeve of my jacket and smells it) Though it might be a bit too late ... ²²

Informants expressed anxiety and embarrassment about the smells of their animals and animal produce. Although these pungent smells pointed to the richness and naturalness of home-grown food, locals thought these were considered unpleasant or uncivilised (Bogdan and Mihăilescu, 2009) by those untutored in animal husbandry.

²² Dorina, personal communication.

This contradiction was a result of the internalized conflicts between tradition and modernity which I observed in my informants' behaviours. Dorina, the sister of my host, Dorel, wore clothes that were infused with the same smell of fresh dairy and pig excrement from which she wanted to spare me. Whereas it was acceptable to smell like a pig or cow in the intimacy of one's home, and this specifically articulated the feeling of comfort that pigs accorded rural life, it was categorically inappropriate to spread the odour and reveal what many participants thought would be interpreted as barbarity, unsophistication and inability to adapt to modern norms of livestock farming (Wurgraft, 2006). On the other hand, informants' reactions to pigs' noises denoted personal satisfaction and happiness. Whenever the door of a sty was opened we were greeted by the bouncing and frantic running of pigs, deemed positive by their carers as "a sign of good health."²³ The humans responded with reassuring noises like *țucu-țucu* and *ciucu-ciucu*, interjections to which pigs responded with enthusiasm, wagging their tails and rushing to their owners. These interjections brought humans and pigs physically closer, but also allowed humans to enter the sonic dimension of porcine communication, realising their shared space of living, food, and language (Grandin and Johnson, 2005; Baker, 2013).

Trust is instilled into domestic animals through daily acts of reconnection and resonance with their human owners who feed, caress and care for them. In turn, animals provide a sense of comfort to their owners through their smells, noises and reactions of recognition. Although trust might be a strategy to control domestic animals (Ingold, 1984) and obtain high-quality meat, trust becomes in time an expression of genuine attachment to animals. Rural life for my participants was

²³ Laurențiu, personal communication.

rarely flawless. The closeness to their animals, especially pigs, came at the cost of pigs' lives, which, as I will show in Chapter Two, is the desired, but problematic result of pig rearing for all parties involved: pigs, peasants and institutional authority.



Figure 5: Laurențiu's *casa din deal*.

Laurențiu: The Casa Din Deal and Pigs as Refuge

My informants' households stretched beyond their homes, gardens and backyards. Most of them also owned *case din deal* (houses from the hill). These are small houses, sometimes combined with animal stables or pens, built on remote, mountainous pastureland, and generally in a different village than their own. Humans came here daily to feed their animals, check on their health and safety, and spend time with them. *Case din deal* are spaces of refuge. First, because of their location, separated from the intensity of daily human sociality. Secondly, they foster powerful

human-animal engagements that are beneficial for the mental and physical health of the humans, but also for the animals, whose autonomy and freedom of movement increases in *case din deal*. The biological clocks (Baker, 2013) of rural humans and their animals was synchronised. Here, humans' responsibilities and efforts to create a meaningful interspecies connection intensified: waking up extremely early, driving to an isolated house and spending time away from home, meant that domestic animals, including pigs, dictated daily routine, a process of reversed domestication. (Budiansky, 1992; Cassidy, 2007) These peasants became tamed by their pigs: "I wake up at five. It permeates your instinct, like you're in the army."²⁴

Humans' departure from their household chores was not a negatively isolating action, but one they looked forward to, and which positively impacted on their mental health. I noticed, on my trips to *case din deal* with Laurențiu, his happiness to reunite with his animals. The entire architecture of the *casa din deal* is designed to encourage human-animal interaction. With no distractions of the modern world, no internet nor television, *casa din deal* provides the perfect setting for human-animal interaction. Usually, the house consisted of a room or two, so did not encourage human congregation. Rather, it allowed the humans to re-connect through the companionship of their animals, with the idyllic times of seamless human-nature balance; the countryside before it was disrupted by the intervention of the state, and prompted the privatisation, commercialisation and marketisation of the landscapes, and even the humans who inhabit them (Dorondel, 2016). Laurențiu illustrates this point:

²⁴ Lena, interview.

Man was happy until God gave him the burden of private property and this is a problem. [...] This house that I own here (points to his casa din deal) has a bad history. I got it as a gift, and tried very hard to keep it, ended relationships because of it and all that ... it's not easy.²⁵

Much of the literature on peasant life critiques the idealisation of rurality (Williams, 1973; Dorondel, 2016; Richards, 1985) as a weapon of political establishments to diminish rural lives. However, Laurențiu's idealised view of some of his rural experiences, and disparaging attitude to the capitalisation and privatisation of society derives from his involvement with development programmes such as SAPARD and PHARE. It is also a result of the trust he places in his own agro-ecological knowledge (Richards, 1985) and the conviction that he can interact with the environment a harmonious way. He possesses a huge amount of private property and which he referred to as a *blestem* (curse) because of all the complex transactional relationships that are created through it. The claim "man was happy until God have him the burden of private property" invokes a past time of freedom and autonomy. It shows Laurențiu's Rousseauian feelings about the social contracts which force people to behave in prescribed rational ways (Williams, 2014), but make them less content and spontaneous. It also shows that Laurențiu believes in an alternative to capitalism, one wherein competition does not undermine village sociality.

Private rearing of animals has become a commercial activity. Many valuable subsidies are allocated for ovine and bovine dairy products in Romania in order to

²⁵ Laurențiu, participant observation.

increase national dairy production (Sandu, 2015). Not all informants were involved in the subsidy system, but those who were confirmed the intense bureaucracy involved in accessing funds. The care and attention dedicated to these animals becomes profit-motivated. These economic tinges forge a political discourse of romanticised traditionalism in which humans and animals have prescribed roles. At the other end of human-animal emotive attachment is the Romanian agricultural subventions for cows and sheep, generally considered burdensome and complicated (Fox, 2011). Here, Matei, a young peasant from Ilva, describes his failed experience of accessing European funds for his livestock farming, which would have ultimately contributed to the welfare of his animals.

AO: So, did you ever try getting the funds?

Matei (looking incredulous): No ... but you must have someone 'high-up'.²⁶ You cannot thrive. I didn't have anyone to help me, I gave up. It would be a possibility ... money is important ... I could have also moved, but I've tailored my life around these animals. I've been taking care of them from the moment I opened my eyes (smiles).

AO: Did you get subsidies?

Matei: Yes, but late. Two or three years after I applied.²⁷

A sense of withdrawal from the politico-economic sphere prevails in Matei's speech. Instead, he has consciously opted for a life of limited comfort, but receive comfort and spiritual satisfaction from interactions with his sheep and other animals, which

²⁶ This is a translated expression (*sus puși* = nepotistic patrons).

²⁷ Matei, interview.

acts as a form of detachment (Millar, 2014) rather than rebellion (Scott, 1985), or perhaps a form of rebellion embodied by indifference.

Laurențiu believes in the necessity of spatial autonomy of his animals, as he himself experiences an incomparable sense of freedom when he comes to his *casa din deal* to care for his animals. He told me: “These animals are free and haven’t seen anything else apart from freedom.”²⁸ Later, when asked why he travels sixty kilometres a day to see his cattle and other animals, he revealed a deep sympathy for them. This unshakable trust (Ingold, 1994) that had formed over the years between him and animal individuals, unparalleled by his other social relations. His hope in Romanian politics is dim:

Romanians are a nation of *oameni de nimic* (worthless people).²⁹

Iohannis [Klaus, The Romanian President] is also bad ... Romanians are lazy. What can a priest do with a flock of demons?³⁰

His talk of humans includes several non-human names. Terms such as ‘flock’ or ‘demons’ reflect the conceptual equation of moral government of humans and animals (Pandian, 2008). Humans are deemed animals in a governmental context, they represent a ‘real’, spoiled category of animals, whereas their domestic animals are idealised versions of themselves (Fudge, 2005).

Stroie, a kind, caring farmer, spoke of his animals as pure, emotive and cognitive beings who deserve protection and guidance which he was able to provide in *casa din deal*, away from the worries of everyday life:

²⁸ Laurențiu, personal communication.

²⁹ Literally ‘people of nothing’.

³⁰ Laurențiu, personal communication. Romania’s president, Klaus Iohannis, is part of the Transylvanian Saxon minority, a group which is regarded with respect by Romanians for its assumed cultural superiority to other ethnicities in Romania, including Romanians themselves.

Stroie: Yes, animals are very smart. They know you and your feelings. [...] there must be mutual love, otherwise, it's pointless and you shouldn't be doing this.

AO: Lovely. And do your cows here have names?

Stroie (proudly and happily): Yes, of course they do. This one in the corner, is *Joiana* [generic cow name, such as 'Daisy' in English], the one in the middle is *Breaza* [the Clever One] and this one here is *Lenuța* [diminutive of the name 'Elena'].

This excerpt demonstrates the effort and dedication on which humans and their animals continually work (Ingold, 2007; 2011; Baker, 2013; Jackson, 2012), to maintain cordial human-animal relations. Through these efforts, the narrative of the traditional peasant profoundly engaged with her surroundings in all spheres of life.

As we were ascending to Laurențiu's *casa din deal*, we were surrounded by tall, coniferous trees, white hills, a cool mist, and the gentle lowing of his cows and buffalos. Laurențiu was visibly moved and stopped for a moment. He asked me:

Tell me, Alexandra, now that you see this natural beauty, wouldn't you like to move here in the hills and see this every day? Maybe find yourself a boy with blue eyes and live happily here?

To this I responded that "I have already found a boy with *green* eyes." "But he doesn't speak Romanian, does he?" was his riposte. I tried to answer that my partner speaks Romanian well, but Laurențiu was not listening. For him, there was something unique in the condition and language of the Romanian peasant, especially of those who live in the mountains (Darlaczi, 2014). This phenomenon is not unique to Romania, as Hurn (2008) has demonstrated in the underlying

connection between Welsh nationalism and language in horse breeding and exchange in Western Wales. However, the particularity of this connection in my study is heightened by the general miscommunication between local individuals and the Ministry of Agriculture and doubled by peasants' opposition to foreign impositions on their lifestyles. Laurențiu's claim might sound like it promotes the romantic, bucolic view of the Romanian village, but this was a well-grounded claim, based on his intensive work with domestic animals, forests and land.

On my first visit to Laurențiu's house, the pigs were frightened at my sight. They started grunting nervously when I approached their pen, so Laurențiu intervened to alleviate the situation. He taught me where to stand in relation to the pigs so that they would trust me. He opened the gate of the pen, thus allowing the pigs to approach me rather than the other way around. Laurențiu was a bitter man, but for good reason: he was poisoned by his ex-wife, in an attempt to dispossess him of his large inherited property. Laurențiu describes this near-death experience as "having had the devil in my house." His distrust of humans, caused by interpersonal and political disappointments strengthened his attachment to his animals, whom he considered benevolent. As his trust was betrayed, he turned to his pigs for understanding, so it is important to consider the question: did Laurențiu, in turn, breach the trust his pig have in him as carer by selling or killing them? Although I did not attend Laurențiu's pig cutting, I documented his genuine care for his pigs. Here, he indulges in a frantic proof of admiration for the physical qualities of his pigs:

Look how pretty (*faini*) they are! They are sitting like they're waiting to be photographed. [...] Come here you little one (*micuțule*)! Look

what fangs he's got [...] These ones are gentle, they're coming for the photo shoot.³¹

Thus, pigs did not always have to be hidden from the outsider's judgemental view. They were, in this case, a mark of rural pride, of understanding and mastering the workings of nature. Laurențiu was especially proud of his interbred pig-boars: they were a combination of sustained domestication of Large Whites as a species and the taming of boars (Cassidy, 2007), and their transformation into more sociable animals. Through their symbolic association with wildness and through their high-quality meat products, the tamed boars represented for Laurențiu a significant individual achievement. He was similarly proud of his Mangalica, a traditional breed, similar to boars in appearance and behaviour. This connotation of wildness and freedom meant an increased trust and respect for his pigs (Ingold, 1994). During my fieldwork, Laurențiu's pigs were kept separately in a big, sturdy pen, closer to his house than *casa din deal* as the pigs were his most valuable possession. He revealed plans to move his pigs in his *casa din deal* with other animals, so they can be able to enjoy full autonomy and movement (Dorondel, 2016). When asked by Dorel, my host, if moving the pigs to an unguarded place would jeopardize the pigs, Laurențiu responded confidently that "they are big, free animals, they need to move"³², thus taking the risk of theft or the pigs running away. However, Laurențiu did impose some rules on all his pigs' spatial autonomy: they were not allowed to get too fat or their lean meat would be ruined, their value would significantly drop and the taste of their meat would lessen. The complexity of spatial autonomy revealed the double-sided nature of domestication. Human-pig relations are economically

³¹ Laurențiu, participant observation.

³² Personal communication.

motivated, and involve a high degree of human domination, often masked as protection and care, but Laurențiu grew fond of his pigs and developed genuine care, interest, trust in them as autonomous individuals. His pigs empowered him to alleviate his disappointment caused by inter-human discord. Working with pigs helped Laurențiu to find refuge from the collective trauma of peasantry, which, as demonstrated previously, is a class alienated from the political processes that regulate it.

Laurențiu acknowledged the unprofitability of animal husbandry and commerce with animals. His pigs showed the incompatibility of private pig rearing with the subventions system and agricultural business, wherein pigs do not have value unless they match all the externally imposed criteria for weight and appearance. He respected his pigs, from whom he did not only seek value extraction, but a much-desired connection otherwise impossible, or inauthentic. Here, amongst his anger towards the state, Laurențiu describes his love for his infertile sow:

The profitability is almost zero ... you don't get any money out of this. The 'Socialist Romanian Republic'³³, the Romanian *nemernici* (scoundrels) only want to confiscate. I have documents for my business, but still ANAF are after me. So, I don't do it for that, I don't do it for money.

AO: No?

Laurențiu: No. See, I normally have a *matcă de prăsilă* (breeding sow) which is very useful, but what can I do ... mine is infertile. I

³³ This was said sarcastically, Romania is now called simply 'Romania'.

cannot kill her, though, look at her (smiles kindly to her and smooths the hair on her head) ... She is my weakness.³⁴

Human-pig relations in the countryside are maintained by a combination of habit, need and humans' preference for tradition, but Laurențiu's decision not to kill his infertile sow, unhelpful for his household economy, defies this logic. It shows that the countryside is not a homogenous place of rigid traditions, but one where interspecies relations take the shape of something greater than the economy of need (Mihăilescu, 2010): genuine human love for animals. This quote which purports the power of emotions, shows further inconsistencies in the argument that domestication is a case of domination (Ingold, 1984) and points to the fact that trust is significant component human-animal relations (Milton, 2002). Furthermore, Laurențiu's decision to keep his sow alive, despite the obvious economic profitability, is an act of resistance to the ANAF's dishonest practices and therefore one of self-empowerment. Lastly, because Laurențiu grew fond of his sow, he lets her live, but also her healing effect becomes stronger in an intimate, immediate sense.

Although Laurențiu found comfort in his companionship with pigs, he did not conceive of this refuge nostalgically. He associated the past with institutionalised corruption, nepotism and frustration. However, the corruption extended to the present, similar to Žižek's articulation of institutional polytemporality in post-socialist countries:

To the question "If capitalism is really so much better than communism, why are our lives still miserable?" [anti-Communism paranoia] provides a simple answer: it is because we are not really

³⁴ Laurențiu, participant observation.

yet in capitalism, for the Communists are still ruling, only now wearing the masks of new owners and managers. (Zizek, 2010, p.viii)

This suggests the inescapability of a hallucinatory present and the need for a new, separate reality besides the accepted, official one (Stewart, 1996). I argue that pigs are significant actors in the creation of this world. Laurențiu's case was not singular, but echoed even more forcefully in a discussion I had with an old rural fellmonger: Traian, his daughter, Țuca, a and my host and gatekeeper, Dorel.

Dorel: The state doesn't do anything but encourage mocking of our lands. When there will be nothing left, not even in the shop, then what will there be? What will happen to the land?

Țuca: Yeah, what will there be left to say to our *băieți*³⁵ (kids)?

Traian: You need an occupation, you feed a chicken, a pig ... I go there and I speak with them, or speak to myself.

Dorel: Because the TV (makes a dismissive gesture of towards the TV) ... oh my God! It's so bad. There are many [people] in the city ... what in the name of God are they doing, what should they do? They wait for their pensions, they start gambling and drinking.³⁶

My informants paint a dystopic image of Romania as a Hobbesian place of mistrust, instability and vice. There has been a widespread dissatisfaction with the way the country is run, ever since the fall of communism. Thus, the *case din deal* served as places of reflection, self-reflexion and reconnection with one's animals. Locals went

³⁵ Literally 'boys' in Romanian, is used to name both boys and girls in Bistrița-Năsăud.

³⁶ Dorel, Traian and Țuca interview.

to *case din deal* almost every day to check on their animals, but also periodically retreated there for a few days to escape their daily routines, deeply entangled with issues of private property, social obligations and expectations, which were symptomatic of their systematic oppression.

Conclusion

When pigs are brought into rural households, they become part of the social and kinship networks of their owners. They are confined to a separate space and regarded as quiet companions who eat and fatten so to provide high-quality meat. Humans and pigs communicate each day through sharing food, bodily contact, and recognition, and even through micro-particles that are carried unknowingly around the household. These daily interactions are beneficial for humans, who are comforted by the presence of a nonhuman other when alone, sad, angry or disappointed. The provision of intensive care and attention to pigs meant that the pigs would be healthy and this would make their owners proud. Although pigs are kept in constricting pens, their owners see this warm shelter as proof of care and attention which the pigs would not have on industrial mega-farms which nevertheless abide by EU regulations. This is an anthropocentric view, as it does not take into consideration pigs' wishes and ideas of a good life and welfare, although pigs have wishes in most of my informants' views. Laurențiu acknowledged their need for spatial autonomy, and others recognised their sentience. Most of the time these acknowledgements were overshadowed by the duty to follow tradition, an instilled sense of routine and need. The living arrangements, biosecurity concerns, but also the complicated relation between sacred and profane in the village revealed the importance of tradition to locals, but also its inconsistencies and animal welfare issues. The daily human-animal routines, the housing and feeding of domestic pigs,

act as ways of empowering their owners to affirm the autonomy of their households and their respect for village traditions.

The *case din deal* are spaces of refuge. They encourage the interaction of humans and animals, and empower humans to work and live in personally meaningful ways. They also extend their healing presence in their owners' lives, helping them achieve happiness without becoming intertwined with the convoluted system of subsidies. Humans and their animals met and paid attention to each other in *case din deal*, but this relation is characterised by anthropocentrism and inequality, as animals are treated as quiet, non-judgemental individuals, despite the complexity of their experiences (Haraway, 2008). Furthermore, humans and pigs develop mutual trust, but often this pact is breached, especially for the pigs who end up slaughtered. Nevertheless, domestic animals, including pigs, have powerful healing and empowering abilities. The human-pig connection is helpful on an immediate level, derived from the exercise, sense of purpose, comfort and friendship daily interactions (Serpell, 1986; Serpell, 2010; Hurn, 2003; Fox, 2011; Mihăilescu, 2010, Berget et al., 2008). Animals also boost their owners' sense of self-worth and pride, especially through peasants' work and care invested in raising them. Their statuses and self-identities are moulded by historically significant human-animal, but especially human-pig, relations based on pigs' docility, the relative ease of raising them privately, and the good taste of their meat. This connection has even more significance in the current political *status quo* in Romania, in which peasants are often obscured by policies that directly affect them.

Chapter Two: Tăierea Porcului

It is crucial to examine why pig cutting, despite its bioethical controversy, has stimulated so little political debate or change. Therefore, in this chapter, I analyse the first part of the pig cutting day through the lens of its political peripherality (Hurn, 2013). I explore the killing and death of pigs by documenting first part of pig cutting. I present a fusion of the three pig cuttings I attended and combine ethnographic vignettes with analysis. I ask how interspecies and interpersonal relations change, how the pigs are viewed by their human companions, and how humans view themselves as pig cutters, through a lens of personal emotions. This chapter interrogates the meanings of interspecies refuge symbolised by the pig once his dismemberment begins and explore the relations between the pigs and their owners, other domestic animals in the household and the wider environment of the countryside. I explore its trajectory assumedly from myth to contemporary life, of which is now an integral part.

The events discussed in this chapter illustrate the centrality of pig cutting to peasants' resistance to EU and Romanian farming and animal welfare regulations, as well as to the impoverished accessibility to agricultural subsidies, based on EU imaginations of Romanian 'farms' (Roger, 2014). This chapter will show how pig cutting empowers peasants to perform and assert the primacy of their agro-ecological knowledge (Richards, 1985) as valid, meaningful labour, in relation to EU hygiene and animal welfare guidelines and norms.

The Mythic and Religious Origins of Pig Cutting

The traditional date of *tăierea porcului* is 20 December, also known as St Ignatius' Day in the Orthodox Calendar. The pig is central in rural households for its

association with the winter solstice and thus, with solar regeneration: a pre-Christian myth present in ancient Roman, Greek and Hindu cultures (Onofrei, 2015, Panizza, 2016 [1900]). One myth describes how Ignat, a peasant, mistakenly killed his father on 20 December, and alludes to rituals of resacralisation, and the celebrations of soil fertility cycles present in Greek and Roman mythology.¹

Ignat with his dad, started to cut the pig. When Ignat wanted to hit the pig's head with an axe, he hits his father and kills him! What to do? He killed him, he killed him. He starts to groan: what wrong has he done that he killed his father?! The pig, will be from now on, the substitute of the sacrificed parent, and he will help re-sacralise the world. The blood of the pig (substitute of the father's) is the one that saves the world and which restore cosmic and solar harmony (crestinortodox.ro, 2013).

Variations of this myth, related by elders of rural Romanian communities (see Hedeşan, 2001), point to the link between pig meat and sustenance during the winter months, purporting the consistently nurturing qualities of pork, and conferring it a central place in rural subsistence.²

The private rearing of pigs and their cutting on 20 December is more common in Romania than the knowledge of these myths (Hedeşan, 2001), but a tenuous link to religion and to a distant past when pig cutting was instated was acknowledged by all participants. When questioned on the connection between pig sacrifice and Orthodox religion, human research participants seemed unaware of any significant

¹ There is no mention of the year of the first pig sacrifice in the myth. The only date mentioned is 20 December, which is connected to the relation of animal fat, warmth and very cold winters.

² See Hedeşan (2001) for variations of this myth.

connection between the two and referred me to local priests who “will tell you the right thing.”³ The provenance of the myth is mainly unknown as the Orthodox Church of Romania refuses to recognise any connection between this myth and Orthodox religion. It discourages Christians from engaging in pig cutting as it perpetuates gluttony, selfishness and harm. In the Romanian Orthodox Calendar, 20 December is marked as the celebration of St Ignatius, and is a fasting day. St Ignatius was a vegetarian (Roberts, 2004; Brent, 2007), but this fact was not acknowledged by the local priests, nor by the local community. A priest of Ilva Mică confirmed not only that pig cutting accords with Orthodox teachings, but is, in fact, an expression of care and respect for pigs:

Humans are the culmination of God’s creation and animal was created for their convenience. It is not a sin to slaughter your pig. Any gift received from God must be respected and protected. It would be an affront to God to dishonour His gifts. That’s why man had taken care of the animals and plants since old times.⁴

The priest of Prundu Bârgăului agreed:

In the Bible, the animal was created to be used by man, for food, for work, so it must be killed! Electric shock [stunners] is a draconic invention ... and anyway, no one can stop me from cutting my pig in my household, that’s for sure!⁵

As Deborah Jones shows in *The School of Compassion: A Roman Catholic Theology of Animals* (2009), this purely utilitarian view of animals might be a

³ Lucreția, interview.

⁴ Father Dudu, personal communication.

⁵ Father Rebrea, interview.

misreading of the Bible. The neglect of nonhuman animals in religion (Gross, 2014) may have been due to the peasants and priests' scepticism to forced modernisation and secularisation of Romania. Recently, vegetarianism has been included in Christian thought and practice of self-discipline and faith (Largen, 2009). While the two priests in my study were aware of vegetarianism as a proof of kindness to animals, they did not see it as necessary in the life of a good Christian.

The 20 December date is often not recognised. Pig cuttings take place in the two weeks before Christmas, or sometimes in November, but many deviate from this timeframe. Informants recounted examples of this divergence from 'true' tradition. Ana, recounted how her brother had always cut the pig after Christmas:

to save money ... they only cut after *Bobotează*⁶ (celebration of St. John the Baptist) ... he didn't want to consume a lot of meat, because you know people make *sarmale* (stuffed cabbage leaves), sausages and then the meat is gone!

Although the reason for this irregularity appears to be economic, in other cases, it was a result of personal sentiments the owners "felt like eating *șoric* (pig skin)",⁷ or simply had the time to do it.

Private pig cutting is a practice born out of the availability of land resources as well as the historical need for animals and their products. The ritualistic part of the practice is an invented tradition, as Hobsbawm argues (1983: 3):

'Custom' is what judges do; 'tradition' is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding the substantial actions.

⁶ The celebration of St. John the Baptist on 6 January.

⁷ Matei, personal communication.

However, as opposed to Hobsbawm's imperial historical view of tradition as invented by the powerful for the powerless, *tăierea porcului* was invented by individuals and adapted to each one's possibilities: size of property, family, number of helpers and the level of skill. Furthermore, *tăierea porcului*'s ceremonial format helps attendees to deal with the dilemmas caused by the killing, death, dismemberment and eating of a pig.

Rather than an invented tradition, then, *tăierea porcului* is a constantly reinvented tradition. Locals reinvent tradition each time they perform it, and in doing so, they include religious agency to differing extents into the rationale of the practice, as Sahlins (1999: 409) observes:

From what I know about culture, then, traditions are invented in the specific terms of the people who construct them ... if such traditions are authoritatively narrativized, or when they contingently rise to consciousness, they will be aetiologized: that is as charter myths.

Thus, I contend that *tăierea porcului* is a sort of sacrifice: mythology, Orthodox religion, elements of pre-Christian creeds, and invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) are found in this practice, despite the argument that animal killing is only and inherently violent (Hurn 2003, Knight, 2012). This is not necessarily an external imposition, but an emic and organic mechanism of self-representation and managing. The variation of pig cutting in this chapter reinforces the flexibility of peasant culture and the playfulness of the individuals in northern Romania who neither deny nor oppose modernisation. It shows their idiosyncratic ways of coping with multi-sourced pressures: village norms, Romanian authorities, European authorities, their own emotions, habits and religion. Equally importantly, the locals' unawareness of the religious origins of pig cutting, and the reluctance and disinterest

of priests to explicate the connections between the current practice and the vegetarian Saint in whose name many pigs are slaughtered, is problematic. It shows the convoluted, self-contradictory ethical grounds of the Orthodox creed, in which kindness is restricted to humans, or if it includes animals, it does not exclude their death. It is in such conditions of unawareness or perhaps ignorance of the contradictions of tradition and custom, that the pig becomes so important to the household economy.

The Killing of the Pig: A Di(e)ary of Three Cuttings

Pigs' complex cognitive capabilities gain different valences around pig cutting time. As we have seen, throughout the year, humans normally considered pigs as beings of habit, instinct, and moderate to high intelligence, sacrifice leads people to remark on more numerous capabilities of pigs. They can see, or at least feel, the future, making the sacrifice morally problematic. Popular culture attests to the cognitive enhancement of pigs before their death: they are said to dream of themselves wearing red marble necklaces which signifies impending death, but also their centrality in rural households (Bucurescu, 2012). It is impossible to say whether pigs do indeed dream in this way, as animal behaviour scholars have only relatively recently evidenced that animals do dream (Pearlman, 1979). Pigs are implicitly co-opted into the 'cosmopolitics' (Kohn, 2007) of Ilva and Prundu, a logic formed of theological and traditional knowledges, reinvented by individual experiences. Villagers suggest that they contribute to their sacrifice through premonition, but their agency is limited for they can do little to stop this.⁸

⁸ In this animated fable, the sealed fate of the rural pig, and by extension, of the rural human as beings of habit is illustrated well, if simplistically: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aerj4qXPHJc>.

Ana from Ilva, who had participated in numerous cuttings over the course of her life, noticed that:

[Pigs] feel it [when you want to cut them]. [...] So, the day before the sacrifice, you only give the pig a little water to help the emptying of his intestines. Now, people buy the intestines from the shop ... anyway. So, I noticed, when I went in his pen ... the pig was hungry, and this is uncommon. I never found them relaxed or sleeping before sacrifice. So, they have a feeling, a premonition, like dogs, that something is happening.

The head of the family and his male friends head out of the house and approach the pig sty. The cutter holds a sharp knife and his friends carry a rope which will be used to tie the pig down if he tries to escape. They call the pig towards them, as they would when feeding him, in lullaby-like voices: “*țucu-țucu, țucu-țucu*”. At first, this seems like a gesture of love or the sign of coming food to the pig. In retrospect, it seems more like the deception of a hungry pig. At the same time, it was a mechanism of coping with the sorrow caused by the irreversibility of pig slaughter (Hurn, 2003). Through calling “*țucu- țucu*”, they evoked the daily contacts and care for their pigs, reflecting on what pigs mean to them beyond food.

As in halal slaughter, the pig is killed with one precise stab to the jugular vein, to bring about a rapid, if not painless, death. There are no stunners nor anaesthetics, which obviously impacts on the pigs' welfare in death (Anil et al, 2006; Anil et al., 1993; Dunn, 1990). The helpers hold the pig still, and the knife is withdrawn as quickly as it was inserted. The blood flows quickly as the pig desperately catches his

last breaths. His eyes remain open, fixed on his slaughterers. They hold him tight for a moment before they drag him into the snow where his scorching begins. After the stabbing, the pig still moves his body from the neck down for a few minutes, but the sacrificer assures me that he is categorically unable to feel anything.

Ritualistic perfection is achieved in Stroie's pig cutting: the pig is slain within seconds, and a sense of tidiness and precision dominates the yard (Willerslev and Vitebsky, 2014). Pig blood flows smoothly in one direction, creating a boundary between the place of sacrifice and the rest of the household. The other animals cease their loud chattering which has accompanied the slaughter, except for the family dog who carries on barking. A smile of relief appears on Stroie's face as he removes the blood from the knife with his fingers and washes his hands in the snow. The slaughterers tend to ask me, teasingly, whether I am still looking or have I run away, scared. I attribute this attitude to the burdensome emotional strains on these men. Their refuge in silence, silliness and sexism was a method of coping with their own emotionality. Likewise, in Hamilton's work on veterinary practice (2007: 492), "by sharing a joke, the vets are able to draw upon mess as a form of distancing mechanism that symbolically, if not physically, separates them from their animal patients." Although dying pigs are not patients, their owners and killers have put them in highly vulnerable positions and humour helps the humans deal with the tragedy of the situation. I found the killing upsetting, not only because of pig's death, but as it also killed a part of the pig cutters: that which could potentially consider pigs worthy of a complete life. However, given the intensity of the pig cutting and the amount of work I carried out, I was forced to restrain my emotions. Not only did I understand the reasons for locals' refusal to show their grief, fears and anxieties, but I saw the death of the pig in a novel light: a modern project (Latour, 1991) that

reduced the countryside to an isolated enclave of unreceptive traditions and customs. I observed that peasants treated pig cutting as proof of their loyalty to natural laws and self-sufficiency.

If the intensity of *tăierea porcului* is derived from a long-term care relationship between pigs and humans, it is equally the result of many hours of preparation on the day. Feeding and caring for a pig for twelve months and killing him for meat might be interpreted as a betrayal of trust of the pig (Ingold, 1986). The ceremonial killing of a pig requires the same, if not more, attention and care that humans normally provide for their pigs.

The first pig sacrifice I attended took place in the household opposite my hosts' in Prundu Bârgăului. I was instructed to wake up at seven so that my host would accompany me there. Although I was awake at 6:30, I did not notice any activity in the house opposite, and knowing that the punctuality of pig sacrifice had been of much concern to peasants lately (Onofrei 2015), I relaxed back into bed. When I went downstairs for breakfast half an hour later, I was met by my host's disappointment. She reproached me for disrespecting tradition and not waking earlier and rushed me out of the door, calling her husband Dorel to "go now!"⁹

Only two men were awake in the house when I arrived, with the women and children still sleeping. The pig-owner, Stroie, had gone to cut someone else's pig in exchange for meat and money, and to feed his cows and sheep at his *casa din deal*. I was given coffee, but shortly after, still very early in the morning, Stroie's son-in-law, Dan jokingly offered me a shot of *jinars*, plum brandy boiled with caraway seeds

⁹ Ionela, participant observation.

and sugar. It is unusual for locals to drink this early in the morning, but this is a special occasion, and as Hurn argues (2013), strong spirits gain a new meaning during ceremonial sacrifices. In this case, the drink is offered to all participants at *tăierea porcului* to maintain general mirth, as well as physical and psychological strength in extreme weather conditions (Pamfile, 2006). There is an expectation to accept the drink, but no obligation. My instinct was to refuse the spirit, but Dan insisted that I have at least a glass, and eventually, I foolishly downed the *jinars* as a compensation for the fact that later I would refuse eating pork. I had to ration my refusal to keep my hosts happy and open. This episode of assimilation into indigenous culture (Geertz, 2005) made the men laugh, but the spirit made me grimace.

Early in the morning, participants were quiet and reserved, which was a proof of their emotional restraint on the one hand (Kitagawa, 1961) and keenness to work on the other. Our discussions were centred around administrative issues, circumventing talk of the killing. There was no mention of emotional or physical consequences for the pig or his sacrificer. These mechanisms expressed denial that tragedy was imminent, but also justified it, through discussion of local norms of ethics and hygiene. This highly ritualised process, similar to the rural Welsh foxhunters' formalist approach to the sacrificed foxes (2013), translated the right to abide by the local, communal rules which are no less ethical than official norms. Logistical arrangements were, besides mechanisms of eluding emotional talk, essential to a successful day, both for the humans and the pig. Great care was taken to ensure that the sharpest knives and strongest ropes were provided for the sacrificer, the gas tanks for scorching were functional, there was a steady supply of water for cleaning the pig, and the wooden plank for meat portioning was placed in

the yard. As with the work around pigs done by peasants during the year (Pedersen et al., 2011) this work for sacrifice was itself arguably therapeutic. Being in control of the material aspects of pig cutting comforted the participants and reassured them of the importance of their local knowledge considered underdeveloped by EU animal welfare regulations and the Romanian agricultural subsidies system (Fox, 2011).

As these tasks were completed, we were engaged in making kin (Haraway, 2015), which, as in the buying and rearing of pigs, was central to the logic and purpose of their deaths. Informants were not satisfied until they had found a connection to me. While we waited for Stroie, I learnt that Dan had worked in Scotland, where I had lived for five years. This commonality was strengthened when he learned that my mother is from Ilva Mică. Similarly, at another pig cutting in Ilva, my identity as a Romanian fieldworker (Tsuda, 1998) was tested by the local community:

Neighbour (pointing towards me): Whose is this girl?

AO: I'm Alexandra. I don't think you know me. I'm from the Maricescu family, maybe you know my grandmother Ana?

Neighbour: How couldn't I? Marica ... from Patriei street, yeah? But whose are you?

AO: Catrina's ... she left about twenty-five years ago so you might not ...

Neighbour: (looking confusedly to everyone): Who is Catrina? I only know Nadia.

Radu: Yes, yes, Alexandra is Nadia's niece.

Neighbour: Oh, okay then. I know her. Hello, Alexandra, nice to meet you!¹⁰

This reassured him my presence there was harmless, and calmed his suspicions that I was an intruder. The day of the cutting was an opportunity to strengthen familial connections, create new ones, and rejoice in the pig meat. A sense of excitement and nervousness conjoined young and old alike in expectation of the event and its products, especially of the warm, fresh pig skin, which everyone seemed to adore.

For Mia in Ilva, waiting for pig cutting is even more significant. Although it took place at the end of November, for her, it was equivalent to, if not more important than, Christmas. Both of her children have moved to the city a long time ago, but she insists on carrying out a cutting every year to reunite her family. Mia attributed her participation in cuttings to her profound mistrust of the meat industry, but also because:

Pig cutting is Christmas to me. My children ask me ‘why do you insist on having this every year? You could just buy the meat from the shop, you’re too old for this.’ I know that if I cut the pig, they [her children] will also be here. I don’t need that much meat, so I give most of it to them.¹¹

The socialising and motivating effects of interspecies relations are traditionally associated with dogs and other companion species, as shown in literature on animal assisted activities (Hart, 2010; Haughie et al., 1992; Francis et al., 1985;

¹⁰ Radu, participant observation.

¹¹ Mia, personal communication.

Beyersdorfer and Birkenhauer, 1990; Rogers et al., 1993; Serpell, 1996; Messent, 1984), but pigs are also conduits of social interaction. The socio-cultural integrative function of pig cutting (Iwasaki-Goodman, 1994) is particularly beneficial for the community's cultural wellbeing. In the logistical preparations for sacrifice, the pig was the main subject of discussion and cohesive element of the group (Hunt et al., 1992), thus, enlarging rural networks of acquaintances. In addition to congregation by talking, participants also gathered to prepare the paraphernalia for the produce-making to come, developing transgenerational collective and individual skills (Grasseni, 2007). They peeled garlic and cleaned the mincers, pots and pans, and served coffee and *jinars* to encourage each other to get through an exhausting process.

After matters of communion and commonality were established, another issue arose around the dyadic understanding of pig sacrifice outside the community which practices it. When we got comfortable with each other in Prundu Bârgăului, Dan's wife, Maria, revealed her anxiety towards the perception of pig sacrifice in 'the West'. She implicitly associated pig sacrifice with barbarity and asked me kindly to "not show pictures of the pig as he lies in blood. We don't want the foreigners to judge us." Maria's motivations were like those of the neighbour who had contested my motivation as an anthropologist. She saw me as a conduit to the West, who could make local practices legible, while, in fact, I was there to disrupt this monolithic view of the West as 'civilised'. When I inquired whether she minded the "barbarity" of the action, she replied smilingly "Eh, what a question ... what can we do, it must be done." This conversation with Mara made me think that the morning of the pig cutting is a time of conscious ignorance and denial of the emotional and material consequences of killing and death of pigs. As both Dwyer and Minnegal (2005) and

Rappaport (1986) show in their ethnographies of human-pig connections in Papua New Guinea, but also Hurn (2003) in her work on foxhunting, this attitude of apparent aloofness is common among people who are about to end the life of their animals.

Motivations of taste are highly significant in pig cutting. Pork from a pig slaughtered “naturally” has a heartier taste and consistency, according to my participants, and contrary to research on animal pain (D’Souza et al., 1998; Weary and Fraser, 2008: 158) which demonstrates that “pain before slaughter [...] can result in psychological changes that reduce meat quality.”¹² Also, it has been argued that castration has a negative impact on pigs’ taste (D’Souza, Mullan, 2003). However, such studies are unknown to locals, who would argue that pigs’ private rearing supersedes the negative impacts of their castration. Peasants from Ilva and Prundu engage in thorough preparations for killing the pig precisely because they want him to have the quickest, most painless, easiest death possible, which would be a release for the pig and for his owners. Radu in Ilva tried to persuade me of the locals concerns for welfare in pig cutting. He said that in the past, locals used to give pigs a tincture of *jinars* and milk, before they put them to sleep. I asked multiple times if this was indeed the case, the man who made the claim said “Yes, of course it’s true, why, you don’t believe me?” while laughing anxiously, so his clarification was hampered by a sense of mischief. While trying to trace the veracity of this claim, I realised that its truth-value was irrelevant to an anthropologist whose duty is to

¹² The high-quality of meat might not be solely because the pig was not anaesthetised before being killed. I show in this paper that peasants were sceptical about what industrial animals farms are fed, how they are kept and spoken to, and so on. This not to invalidate research which demonstrates the opposite, but to take into consideration the views of my informants.

listen and engage, rather than verify and inspect (Latour, 1991; Ingold, 2000; Vaisman, 2013). The administering of homemade anaesthetic to pigs is probably true, but even if it were not, this claim shows locals' awareness of the reality of pig's pain during the slaughter and their keenness not to appear inhumane. Although they could still administer alcohol to soon-to-be killed pigs today, my informants' reluctance to speak about this practice confirms its truth value, and suggests an ethical dimension incompatible with the EU welfare regulations. Administering alcohol to pigs instead of stunning them could be viewed as an extreme case of pigs' maltreatment and would create more problems than it would solve (Becker, 2000). On the other hand, there is some anecdotal evidence that sows, when giving birth, are soothed by the admission of alcohol (Pinchin, 2014).

The informants with whom I spoke about the ethics of pig killing were always confused by the subject. They are aware of directives that regulate animal killing, mostly by the way of village gossip and rumour (Bărbulescu and Andreescu, 2010). In one case, however, the knowledge of these regulations was made very clear by Matei, the young man from Ilva. When asked if he had ever killed a pig, he replied: "No. Never. I like to eat his meat, and I help my family after the pig has died but I can't kill the pig, no." When asked whether stunning was a positive measure, he answered: "Yes, of course. They say pigs should be stunned before they are killed." When asked if that was a positive thing, he responded:

Oh, I think it's very sensible. If pigs can feel, then why should they suffer before they die? I think no one cares to regulate pig killing in the countryside. But change comes from within and I hope that our collective mentality will change. It is, in fact, quite barbaric to kill the pigs like that. I really don't like it.

Romania is a bit under the level of development it should be. Things must really change soon.

The language Matei uses is heavily influenced by dichotomies that have been put forward in social discourse in Romania and beyond (Latour, 1991; Ingold, 2013), and while it portrays a world divided by stages of 'development', it expresses local ethical concerns for animals. Animal welfare was a significant consideration in my informants' worldviews, but as evidenced in Matei and Ana's accounts, these were uncomfortable topics and rarely voiced, unless I enquired about them. In addition, their silence and refusal to divulge emotionally, shows, in turn, the locals' general dismissal of emotion when they interfered with their daily work. As devout Christians, locals did not believe in afterlife for pigs, so killing them was not an act of cruelty, but one of respecting Bible teachings. The ceremonial form of the cutting, then, has the role of attenuating these contradictions, coming to terms with this confusion and justifying the act of killing (Hurn, 2013). Although there are rules implemented for animal slaughter and rural property management, their dissemination is obfuscated, and when they do reach the wider rural public, they are hardly comprehensible. As Mihăilescu (2010) argues, peasants are obligated to comply, but the rules are never explained nor the reasons for which they are better than the status quo. Thus, in this context, peasants act as fully-rational actors.

The Portioning

After his momentous killing, the pig remained at the centre of the event, and was gradually transformed into food. First, he was carefully scorched with an improvised flamethrower – a gas cylinder with a hose attached. I was frightened by the noise the cylinder made and genuinely believed that it might explode. However, my experience of living in Romania for nineteen years made me recognise this as a

case of structured improvisation. Far from being a sporadic occurrence, improvisation is a solid national philosophy, based on an ideology of “getting by” (Kideckel, 2008). The material improvisation showed the skill these people have in creating their own tools, and trusting themselves and each other to use them. This contributes to achieving self-sufficiency in a society that my informants perceived to be increasingly alienated from rurality and in which the necessity to make one’s own things is diminished.

The intense noise of burning pig skin with a flamethrower dominated the yard; this was a time of respite for the men. There was no room for speech, which gave participants a chance to reflect on their activities. I also paused my questioning, and made room for reflection. I watched the pig being burnt, until it was completely black, and was enveloped by a strong smell of burnt hair. There was insignificant variation regarding this procedure employed over the three pig cuttings I observed, but in the last pig cutting I attended, the pig was covered in hay and then burnt so that “his skin tastes better, and the ham has a nicer colour.”¹³ Most people in my study had no hay, and no time to create it. Hay was a proof of a hardworking household, because it meant having a well-managed plot, a large provision of fodder and satisfied cows. All pig cutting participants told me that was the way it used to be done, to show their awareness of old methods, as a means of self-ascription to a transgenerational, polytemporal community of peasants (Hegnes, 2013).

Next, the pig’s skin was scraped and cleaned, usually by men. Compared to scorching, which encouraged reflection and self-reflexivity, this stage allowed for more verbal communication. Jokes were made, there was more physical contact and

¹³ Vasile, personal communication.

collaboration involved as it is normally at least a three-person job. Anyone keen was called to help pour water on the pig and scrape the burnt skin. Participants were not satisfied until the pig skin was completely smooth and hairless, and, sometimes, they continued long after this condition was achieved. The repetitiveness of this activity was not considered dull, as partakers became engrossed in it. The manual labour, combined with the visual proof of having contributed in some way to the pig cutting, as well as engaging in banter with the others, gave me a unique sense of worth, and of collective belonging. That was also the point of maximum contact with the pig. I could feel his warm skin and caress his stomach and head. The locals' association of docility, friendliness and slowness with the pig dominated our work and obscured the fact that the pig had died. His owners never referred to the pig as "dead", because they thought that would trigger unwanted emotional responses among the participants. In fact, the pig became more symbolic of his owner's hospitality skills. In Radu's pig cutting in Ilva, before the portioning began, participants expressed their admiration and respect for the owner for raising such a large, fat specimen. Participants looked at the pig and touched it, smelled its skin and gave the final verdict: the owner is a veritable *găzdoi*, who not only provides food for his family, but is also a host of great renown, who shares his hard-worked-for plenty with other members of his community.

The pig was then moved onto an improvised wooden plank. This was normally done by a few men who coordinated their efforts to place the pig on his back. Everyone is welcomed outside. Regardless of gender, age and ability, all engaged in lengthy conversations about life: it is an opportunity to catch up while transforming the pig into pork. Elder men explained all the procedures very carefully to me and the other participants. The extensive explanations of pig cutting were

done partly because the cutters were conscious of the danger that pig cutting may become obsolete, but also because they wanted me to understand its complexities, and document them for public and academic reference. The pig's legs are cut off, placed in a plastic bag and taken to the smokehouse. After a few weeks or months, they will be great material for soup, but some make *răcitură*, a sort of jellied pork, for the Christmas and New Year's Eve meals. The pig is then turned on his front. Typically, and theoretically, men still dominate the sacrificial landscape, as important knowledge had to be transferred from the elders to the youth, while female partakers orbited the table, assisting with all tasks, and serving brandy. The thin fat is scraped from the skin and the muscles and placed immediately into a tub to make lard and molten lard. Then, with care, the front and back muscles are detached from the spine.

Every element in the pig carcass has a clear purpose and place in the rural economy of foodstuffs, and nothing that is edible or can be made into something edible is wasted, as that would be to disrespect God's will and gift. At his cutting table, Stroie, a devout Christian, made a gesture reminiscent of the cross he made with his hand before he stabbed the pig. He crossed the pig's head with the knife. All precautions were taken to ensure that the pig's flesh was intact. As is the case of the pig farm described by Blanchette (2015), a biosecurity that put pigs first was implemented here to protect the purity and taste of their meat. Participants were watched constantly by the head pig cutter to ensure that the meat did not mix with blood, or that it did not touch the ground, or that no dirty human hands touched it. When this happened, Stroie was visibly irritated and demanded that participants treated the meat respectfully. This suggests that although the portioning of the pig

did not happen in perfectly clinical conditions, strict hygiene rules were enforced by my informants.

Nache proved the confluence of religion, ecological knowledge and veterinary science in pig husbandry and cutting. Every time he cuts a pig he told me, he takes a piece of pig meat to the local veterinarian to check it for trichinellosis. This often asymptomatic, but occasionally fatal disease, caused by the worm trichinella, is contracted by humans by eating undercooked pig meat (van der Giessen et al., 2007). I was intrigued to find a real concern for pig-transmitted diseases and asked: “When do you take the meat to the vet? Now, before you start the hard work, the portioning?” To this Nache replied, as if that was obvious, “No, after. We have stuff to do first.” Although at first counterintuitive, this claim did not take me by surprise. It rested on the same logic of permeable biosecurity that I noticed in the pre-cutting phase, where people and their pigs exchanged fluids on a micro-level, without knowing it. I was told that the pig’s health was monitored by the vet during the year anyway, and that this final check was only a formality, because Nache knew “the meat is good, it can’t not be!” But as an integral part of the ritualised killing of the pig, it attempted to justify the practice, find sources of institutional approval, and demonstrate, once more, that privately-reared pigs create the healthiest, most delicious and most clean and pure meat, hence its favourability to shop-bought meat. Although the veterinary element might be conceived as contrasting to the traditional project of the pig cutting day, I saw it as an essential component of the ritualistic set-up. As such, pig cutting and modernity should not be placed in opposition, as my interlocutors did not operate on the basis of this divide. Looking at the therapeutic effects of pigs emphasises the cultural value of the complex local networks and exchanges of knowledge that might be perceived as conflicting – transgenerational

informal skills and veterinary medicine (Hurn, forthcoming) and truthfully represents the hopes, fears and the subsequent home-made therapeutic mechanisms of local peasants.

Although I initially thought the portioning of the pig would be the longest lasting part of the ritual, I was surprised to discover that it was in fact the most rapid. Everyone was keen to “take the pig inside” so to place all the meat and pig bits in their kitchens and begin the most strenuous part of work inside, out of the wind and snow.¹⁴ The one who cut the pig normally did the portioning, too. *Jinars* is also served during the pig portioning to all, but especially to the pig cutter, to deal with the cold and unpleasantness of butchering the pig. That drinking is a substantial part of the pig cutting ritual suggests its function of hospitality but also one of stress and emotional pain relief, as Hurn has suggested in her ethnographies of foxhunters (Hurn; 2003; 2013). The chief butcher needs to also be a talented sculptor: he splits the pig skin at the top, and breaks it off from the thin layer of fat and muscle, without touching the meat. By-standers catch the pig skin in buckets and take it in the summer kitchen or place it in smokehouses to make *slănină*, a smoked ham.

A complex labour chain of collaboration, coordination and patience is needed in the portioning of the pig. The butcher is ahead of everyone else, as the others combine working with talking, creating a festive, friendly atmosphere, with plenty of laughter. The portioning of the pig was yet again another opportunity for participants to interrogate me about my views on religion, meat eating and rural Romania, which, as irritating as it was, served to consolidate the newly formed kin ties between us.

¹⁴ Locals generally had more than one house in their yard, as multi-generational living was quite common in the area, and all had a summer kitchen separate from living areas, which was the most accommodating of pig cutting’s messiness and dirt.

They teased me by fluttering the freshly cut meat close to my face, tempting me to re-become an omnivore. They said I was skinny and I needed to “put some meat on” me (see also Hurn, 2013), but were disappointed when I refused. Exhibitionism was a large part of the portioning, mostly to my benefit. My interlocutors thought me ignorant in matters of pigs’ anatomy. They possessed an impressive knowledge of the local ecology, while I was an outsider. I was also constantly amazed by my participants’ knowledge of cutting techniques and their ability to weigh with their eyes instead of their scales. I had supported pig cutting for its emphasis on transgenerational knowledge and the value of *communitas* as a “modality of social relationship” rather than “an area of common living” (Turner, 1969: 361) but, I had seriously underestimated its cleanliness and precision. As previously shown, modernity is presented to local peasants in the form of norms and impositions which are seldom explained as preferable alternatives to the *status quo* in agriculture and animal husbandry. The portioning of the pig is therefore an act of cultivating, consolidating and sharing communal virtues. Rather than an expression of anti-establishment feeling, it is a claim of cultural, political and economic compatibility with the modern project (Fox, 2011), and a request to reassess norms of modernity altogether.

Once the muscles were safely stored in freezers, the intestines were carefully removed. While all informants tried to recycle them by feeding them to the dogs, most were thrown away. In the past, these would have been used for sausages, but now, interlocutors said “it’s not worth it anymore. We can afford to be *domni* (lords, posh).”¹⁵ This suggests, that it is becoming increasingly hard for rural inhabitants to function independently from the marketplace, as this provides uncstly and

¹⁵ Nadia, personal communication.

expedient solutions for carrying out pig cutting, while also being a cosmopolite to a certain extent. The modern versus traditional is thus unsubstantiated in lived experience. Instead, these two domains are conflated in practice: peasants are not the idyllic characters of fantasy stories, but most have jobs on top of their subsistence agriculture, and thus lack the time and space to engage in pig cutting in the 'old' way.

This was especially the case in Nache and Nadia's pig cutting, as they both worked full-time, so to take the intestines of the pig, empty them and fill them with sausage paste would have been too tiring. On the other hand, when Radu cut his pigs, Radu's grandparents excitedly emptied all the pig's entrails of faeces, and they got me involved in it, too. It was a cheerful activity. We squeezed the entrails, and repeatedly rinsed them with boiling water, to ready them for sausages. Not all informants had the time to wash pig entrails multiple times, so they resorted to more convenient and cheaper market-origin entrails. Private pig cuttings are not entirely separated from the market of which they are so suspicious. The death of pigs is co-opted into a lucrative business that functions on the assumption that rural life is based on rigid traditions, and thus on the peasants' desire to maintain pig cutting.

The portioning is based on intimate tactile contact with the pig. The act of physical and emotional care which peasants attentively provided for pigs was carried forward after the pigs' deaths (Onofrei, 2015), but during fieldwork I observed a nuance of this care relationship. Rather than expressing sadness, interlocutors rejoiced in their relationship with the dead pig, and treated him as a member of family who was not laughed at, but with whom people were laughing. Although dead, pigs contributed to the creation of a humour specific to the day: reinforcing stereotypes about the physical strength of men and women, jokes about drinking and

eating. As he started cleaving the pig's back, Stroie pretended that his knife got stuck in the pig's skin, and while laughing, he said:

Oy! Look what happened ... the knife's stuck, it's not moving anymore. What are we going to do? Who has the solution for this?

Pig cutting participants: Oh, you are such a trickster! Yeah, right. We know – so that the pig cutter can continue his work and his knife can move again, the pig cutter must have some *jinars*.¹⁶

Jinars was served again to the pig cutter and the other participants, in a humorous and relaxing atmosphere. This example shows the comforting function of alcohol (Hurn, 2003) on humans who carry out the cutting for an entire day. One might think that the once the pig is dead, participants can relax. Although the portioning of the pig is straightforward, it involves prolonged human contact with pig organs, blood and innards that have a strong smell. Thus, this work can be overwhelming and emotionally tiring as the pig was intimately known by humans who now cut him into pieces.

This intertwining of humans and pig products was, besides an entertaining endeavour, also another opportunity for locals to show a mystical type of knowledge. They explained to me the distinct functions of various parts which were important indicators of weather signs in the past. For instance, when Radu and his grandfather took out the pig's spleen, they explained that in a not so distant past, people believed that the width of the spleen reflected the harshness or softness of winter. If the spleen was wide at the top and thinner at the end, it meant that the hardest part has already passed, and from then on, only light snow and mild temperatures were to be

¹⁶ Participant observation.

expected. However, if the spleen was consistent in width, there as going to be a long, monotonous and heavy winter.¹⁷ The spleen of Radu's pig was long and thin so we all rejoiced in the fact that the winter would be mild.

Stroie and his grandfather looked delighted to share the winter forecast with me. I asked them if they believe in these signs found in the viscera, and their facial expression brusquely changed to a self-deprecating smile. They said "there is no point in this question. Even if we believed in this, would *they* believe in us?" This implies the dismissal of this type of knowledge by Romanian and foreign societies' institutionalised knowledge, though this does not mean that peasants do not also rely on scientific medicine and meteorology. In the quest for legitimisation of their ways of life and everyday choices, and because many of these choices are presented in terms of modernity versus tradition (Mihăilescu, 2010; Kideckel, 2008), many Romanians concomitantly find themselves supporting homeopathy, divine intervention and institutional medicine. Thus, the attention to the natural world which my interlocutors have is not necessarily unacknowledged or shunned and they themselves sometimes make fun of it. It is more a case of not knowing whether knowledges like haruspicy – the art of reading organs - have real power in the epistemic system of nation-defining values, which shows exactly why these people need psychosocial therapy, dialogue, and institutional reassurance.

The pig's gall bladder, on the other hand, was an organ of bad luck, and had to be eliminated. Not even the cats or dogs, who were normally fed the pig remains, were given the poisonous bladder. Contrary to the industrialised view of pigs as all

¹⁷ The art of reading organs, especially the pig spleen, is far from being time and place-specific knowledge. It was a common practice of the Romans under the name of *haruspicina* (Geller and Petrovic, 2004), and is still widespread in Scandinavian countries today (Macgregor, 2015) and in Canada (Billinger, 2016), where this sort of knowledge is taken seriously.

the same on the outside and inside (Vialles, 2002), my participants proved that there are many particularities of pigs which are connected to the local surroundings. The ease and dexterity with which these men handled the pig's organs was a proof of the intimate knowledge individual humans have of pigs' anatomy. It also revealed an expert knowledge which has been transmitted trans-generationally, bringing a temporal level of interspecies communion to the pig cutting day (Hegnes, 2013).

The social creativity and playfulness of ritual participants were at times, played down. I was told to go inside because the portioning would last a long time and I would get cold and bored. Nache had previously displayed this attitude of mysteriousness and secrecy about pig cutting, so I was intrigued to encounter this again. Essentially, this stance suggest that pig cutting is seen a complicated and fascinating phenomenon, but could be regarded as boring or repetitive by me. As an outsider, the opposite was true. I noticed differences in the rituals' intricate details. In the deep white snow of the yards, my toes quickly froze and soon after my hands gave in, too. In the end, I grudgingly walked inside the house for a while to warm up.

I learnt there was no significant time of respite in pig cutting. One had to work whether one was outdoors or indoors. As the pig meat was cut up and brought inside, the next phase of the day had to be prepared. While I was inside the house, the nature of all tasks involved movement. First, because there were too many people to be contained in one room, then there were different tools and materials such as mincers and knives, hot water and plastic bags that were requested both in the house and yard. Also, the extreme cold temperature from outside had to be counterbalanced with the extreme warmth of the stove. At my last pig cutting in Ilva, I took the opportunity and asked Radu's mother about the other animals of the family. A panic flashed across her eyes as she said "Oh, God, I completely forgot about

them!” She returned to the house to make a meal for them, and ran to their pens. She was laughing at her own obliviousness, saying “God forbid, how could I forget?” Like other participants, she had a *casa din deal* where she went every day early in the morning to feed and milk her cows, then she took the milk to the local collection point, and then returned home. Understandably, on a day like the pig cutting, a plethora of new tasks change the household’s collective self-awareness. Forgetfulness was not a result of uncaring, disengaged individuals, as I have shown that these people are capable of co-creating and sustaining affective relations with their household animals (Govindrajan, 2015). This absent-mindedness was not at all characteristic of my participants, but shows instead the functional centrality of the pig cutting ritual in interspecies relations of the rural household. It also attests to the healing contribution of the practice to the peasants’ self-perceptions and sense of personal and collective worth.

While the pig is a ‘hidden’ animal throughout the year, he truly dominates both human and nonhuman spheres of activity at the time of pig cutting. Not only do his proprietors become engrossed in the ritual dismembering of the pig, like participants in the Ainu bear festival *Iyomante* (Kitagawa, 1961), but domestic cats, dogs and chickens likewise participate in the pig cutting ritual. They are sonically engaged during the pig’s stabbing and after, showing what I and my participants interpreted as a sincere testament of their loyalty to other animals in the household (Govindrajan, 2015) to the pig of the family who was to be sacrificed. First, through their agitation and noise during the stabbing, and then, by maintaining prolonged silence during the rest of the pig cutting. When the pig’s portioning begins, they surround the scene and expectantly walk around, knowing that they will receive food. My interlocutors fed these animals cartilages, blubbery bits and other small pieces of pig that were

undesirable to human stomachs. Ana told me “It’s their lucky day [referring to cats and dogs], but they also get sick of it [pig remains] ... how much of *porcării*¹⁸ can you give them in one day?” Thus, other domestic animals were implicated in the pig cutting, not only by regretting the death of the pig, but by enjoy his offerings, too.

Gender, Generation and Emotion

There was a tacit reluctance in the groups in which I conducted research to show any ‘negative’ emotions such as pity, sympathy or love, as local superstitions construe weakness as detrimental to the sacrifice and spoil the meat of the pig (Pamfile, 2006, Bărbulescu, 2010). Female participants could display a wide array of emotions, so long as they stayed out of the killing site. In fact, women and girls were discouraged from participation during the killing. Their influence would spoil the ritual perfection which is imagined as a man-built ceremony (Bărbulescu, 2010). Their assumed febleness and tendency towards compassion for the dead would jeopardise the success of the pig cutting, and the efforts of the household would be in vain. This gendered view of emotion is a widespread practice in work with animals, especially in slaughtering or sacrificing animals, as documented by Dwyer and Minnegal (2005) in their multispecies ethnography in Papua New Guinea, or by Sarah Pink in her work on women in bullfighting (1997). In the community of my study, this attitude to women’s detrimental influence was informed by local religious perceptions of gender, which has its roots in original sin and woman’s eternal re-enactment of it.

Gendered views were deeply ingrained in the collective values of Ilva Mică and Prundu Bârgăului, and though they were reiterated by all sexes, they were also

¹⁸ Pork products, but also indecent, silly actions.

challenged by women. At the first pig sacrifice I attended, Rodica, Stroie's *cuscră*¹⁹ repeatedly displayed traditionally masculine traits: a husky voice, moderate vulgarity and even adopted a similar dressing style to men, which made her occasional presences in the yard during the killing more acceptable (Hurn, 20038). An extreme case of female resistance to patriarchal habits in pig sacrifice is the one of Nadia. Here, her husband, Nache recounts the story:

One year, we asked for a neighbour's help and he just wasn't coming, we waited hours and hours, so me and your aunt started to do it ourselves. She was a real butcher. We finished it quickly. We washed it, took the fat, the muscles. At the end of the day, Nadia told me: "Next year, if you don't kill the pigs, I will! I can't be bothered with this anymore!"

The importance of self-help and self-sufficiency strategies were even more significant for Nadia, whose intention to cut the pig was prohibited by the gender expectations of the local community.

When I woke up for their pig cutting, Nache had gone to retrieve the pig from his friend. Ana was still asleep. In the dim light of the kitchen, Nadia and her daughter were sitting silently on the sofa, drinking coffee. Their faces looked grim, in anticipation of the workload for the day. As I entered the room they tell me "Woah, you are awake. There is nothing to do just now." I shrug: "I am not going back to bed now. Aren't you excited about the pig cutting?" The girl smirks sarcastically as she empties her coffee cup and Nadia says in a bitter voice: "I am excited for when this is all over. I took two pills of Colebil²⁰ already, I just know I am going to be sick. My gall

¹⁹ Mother of son-in-law.

²⁰ Medicine used to treat stomach pain, bloating, sickness and nausea.

bladder is not strong enough! I am already in pain, just thinking about making the molten fat. This happens every year. What excitement ...” Nadia had a drawer full of medicine for all kinds of problems and if I coughed or felt sick, she claimed she knew how to treat it. This was another proof the locals’ “getting by” attitude to life. With only one GP in the village, and hospitals or mental health services only available in big towns of the county, Nadia, like many other Romanians, decided to self-medicate. Carrying out the pig cutting every year put Nadia in a position where the sociality of the practice, the sense of satisfaction or even *jinars* could not alleviate her sickness alone. We sat in silence for a while until we saw two car lights in the dark. It was Nache, returning with a pig. Nadia took a last sip of coffee and stood up, and though she had just told me how she dreaded this event, she looked readier than ever to get the job done. Anti-patriarchal sentiments were transmitted to the daughter of the family, Mona, aged fifteen. She woke up as early as her parents and helped them throughout the day. While Nadia was busy with chores, her daughter was holding and lifting the pig. She was overcoming the patriarchal interdiction of her participation in this activity (Douglas, 1975; Pink, 1997) as a matter of necessity, suggesting that rural practices are in fact subject to change. The “traditionalist” male culture of pig cutting, thus, has made room for women to participate in anomalous cases. Here, Ana, Nadia and Mona and myself participated because there were no men, besides Nache, present on the day.

Similarly, during the third and last sacrifice I witnessed, women and elderly family members were the primary actors of the day. Radu, the head of the family, was nervous and slightly inebriated, so killed the pig quickly. He then went missing for a couple of hours, to drive his father-in-law from his work to the sacrifice. While Radu disappeared to collect another man, his wife, Geta, her grandparents and I

were left to deal with the pig. Geta was infuriated with her husband's behaviour, as not only had she had to prepare the hot water for the scorching, peel the garlic for the sausages, and be a good host for me, she now also had to clean the pig.

On the other hand, this was an opportunity to exhibit her skills and knowledge. She showed great precision, speed and attention to detail in the cleaning of the pig. When she had finished, she victoriously cut a large slice of his skin (*şoric*), and stuffed it in her mouth, expressing the joy of fresh pig skin. Although pig meat is the *piece de resistance* of pig cutting, with a taste glorified by all my informants, pig skin was special in a different way. It was not eaten on a regular basis: soft, strange, sometimes hairy and serving a comforting function. Lupton (1996: 31) argues that

comfort food is generally a very personal fixation [...] Foods we consider comforting are manifested by a particular's food associations with strong memories coupled with warm, savoury, and simplistic taste.

Although *şoric* was raw and seemingly unsophisticated, it is appreciated for its unique taste and texture. It has no medicinal qualities *per se*, but pig skin was psychologically comforting for humans as a food, in a medicinal way (Morris, 1994; Costa-Neto, 2005). Traditionally, toothache can also be treated by pork, as Mihăilescu (2016) observes with his tongue firmly in his cheek: "A small slice of unsalted pig fat should be applied on the sore tooth, between the gums and cheek. The pain will gradually go away." For Geta, *şoric* was doubly significant as it remedied her anger at her husband's disappearance. Her satisfaction was even greater as she obtained the pig skin herself without having to resort to her husband. She offered me a piece, and as I refused, she asked me "How can you live without pork? This is pure life. I don't know what I would do without it ... I really don't." And I, seeing her happy face covered in pig fat and small pieces of pig skin, wondered, for

a moment, the same. The cutting of the pig is then not only beneficial for the northern Romanian peasant in a wide political sense of definition of her work, life and value, but is an act of empowerment for women through the contravening of gender roles. Doubly suppressed by the bureaucratic obstructions of post-socialist government (Kideckel, 2008), and by the gender inequality of rural life, saturated with purist Orthodoxism in which men are the height of godly creation, women see in pig cutting a moment of respite. It is a chance to reflect on their own condition as rural female workers, and on the social expectations which they support through everyday practices (Bourdieu, 2010; 1994).

Pig cutting's intense socialising function does not always have positive effects. Mia and her neighbouring relatives, Nache, Nadia and Ana, deepened their decades-long discord on the day of her pig cutting. Nadia confessed that she felt neglected in Mia's pig sacrifice, and her help was taken for granted, while Mia's own children, the privileged urbanites who received the pork, hardly worked for it. She thus decided to busy herself with something else during Mia's pig cutting, leaving her husband, Nache, to help with chores that required more physical strength, and forcing Mia's family to earn their meat. Nache overworked himself to compensate for his wife's absence, and to comply with the neighbourly expectations of mutual help between them and Mia. So, pig cutting was in this case catalysed social dissonance, but also prompted Nadia's emancipation from her prescribed pig cutting duties within the domestic indoors (Josephides, 1983; Minnegal and Dwyer, 2005).

Pig cutting was challenging and, in some ways, liberating for the men who took on the role of pig cutter, but exposed some of their emotional or familial problems. Nache was only helped by his wife, daughter and mother-in-law and

myself. He lifted the dead pig weighing 200 kilograms by himself.²¹ He dropped the pig on the plank, giving himself and everyone a fright. He almost fainted. He said he could not breathe and saw black in front of his eyes. Nache was brought up in an agricultural family in which his help and work were always encouraged and, to a certain extent, exploited, and this contributed to his character:

Back in the day, kids were well behaved because they had something to do, they had an occupation. When they came from school, they studied for two to three hours, then they had to plough the land, they had the cows. They had to work, didn't really have time to sit down. In the summer holiday, we would give anything in the world to go fishing or bathe in the river for two hours! We wanted to catch *boace*²² with forks ... now, the youth are on their phones all day ... what else can I say.

Nache's sister became a nun during his teenage years, his mother died a few years ago in a terrible accident, and his father did not keep in touch after the death of his wife. Nache's emotional issues were never discussed with his family, or if they were, they were never taken seriously. Mental health is a taboo in Romania, especially in the countryside (Rădulescu, 2015; Fraser et al., 2005; Jukkala, Mäkinen, 2010; Zamfir, 2004). The widespread lack of recognition of various social malaises makes it difficult for individuals to express their feelings. While this is not a unique problem (Scheper-Hughes, 1979), the intertwining of mental health, post-socialist politics and rurality is certainly interesting. Kideckel (2008) shows in his ethnography of post-

²¹ As mentioned already, their extended family live in close proximity, and they see enough of each other during the year. On this occasion Nache and his family wanted to be left alone.

²² A local species of fish.

socialist Romania, those individuals who are burdened by financial and labour insecurities, and who were affected worst by the transition from communism to democracy, are those forced to make use of self-help simply to “get by”.

The pig cutting day offers a platform for people like Nache to reassert their social statuses as men whose self-reliance and self-sufficiency define their personhood. In the end, Nache proved his proficiency as a householder and pig cutter. He dropped the pig right in the middle of the home-made table, which he crafted on a slope to facilitate the flowing away of the remaining pig blood downhill. Nache felt powerful and accomplished, and, although at he was exhausted by the end of the day, he smiled contentedly at his and his family's day's work. Managing to organise the pig cutting in his own family was a sign of his maturity and independence from his family from which he is now alienated. The ritual perfection of pig cutting, based on extensive awareness and knowledge of the local land and ecology mitigated personal and collective ills.

Pig cutting is short but heightened by audio-visual and olfactive factors which are diffused throughout the whole household, and beyond. Contrary to the intuitive assumption that pig sacrifice is malevolent, its performance is carefully planned and controlled, discouraging improvisation that might be provoke animal or human pain. Instead of violence, pig cutting exposes informants' notions of religious morality and spirituality whereby the animal gives itself to the community for its wellbeing (Brightman, 1993; Ingold, 1984). As per the commentary of the priest from Ilva, animals have been created for humans' benefit, and thus, my informants believed they were following Biblical teachings in this practice.

Peasants also justified pig cutting by bringing together the notions of need with religious morality. Generally, the pig cutters do not enter the pig sty on the day

before cutting. Is this because seeing the pigs so vulnerable, hungry, tired, and possibly aware of their death would perhaps change their minds? Would men themselves become vulnerable and unable to perform what constitutes, on both a conceptual and practical level, their masculinity? For men, pig cutting is an annual opportunity to prove their masculine authority. Those who cut pigs prove their centrality in the family, household and in the village. Not all are able to engage in pig cutting, and are either considered uninitiated or emotionally weak. Where father-son relationships are dysfunctional or where there is a distance between the two, the skill to sacrifice a pig is transmitted erratically. Nache was reticent to cut the pig by himself with no male help, but was forced to, otherwise his wife would have done it instead, and that would violate his position as head of the family (Parry, 2010). Mia recounts how her husband, Ilie, now deceased, was horrified by the event:

In this regard, my husband was so compassionate (*milos*) towards animals that we cared for and grew. When [the sacrificer] would come, Ilie would go in the house so that he can't hear the pig grunting. He would hide in the clothes cupboard. He would stay there until the grunting was over. Then, he would come out and help washing, cleaning, carrying the pig, but he wasn't able to cut a chicken. He hasn't cut anything. He wouldn't have put the knife in an animal, God forbid.²³

Ilie was often ridiculed in his extended family for his job, a primary school teacher, and then for his fear of killing pigs and of any living being. The association of killing the pigs of the family with masculine authority, and refusing to obey inferred an

²³ Mia, interview.

anomaly of gender roles. For the younger generation, the duty of pig cutting was less accentuated than it was for their parents. Despite the collective complaints regarding the state of the youth today, most of the families in my fieldwork rested on meaningful communication and understanding of trans-generational changes. Although Matei refused to partake in the pig cutting out of ethical considerations which would have been considered feminine and weak some decades ago in the local community, his masculinity was not diminished by his refusal. He compensated by being a skilful shepherd, spending two weeks with fellow sheep-lovers in a sheep pen, shearing the sheep, milking them, and producing cheese for private consumption and a modest profit. The traditional duty of pig cutting was transferred to older men, or men who were used to this job, therefore comfortable with the emotional and physical strains. Thus, the category of 'man' was built on a complex hierarchy, and 'manliness' was a spectrum that was evidenced during pig cutting, but also through mastery of human-animal relations. Pig cutting is therefore, an act of initiation into a position of respectability, family-care and independence from the state.

Being able to cut one's own pig is not as much a proof of manhood and patriarchal authority as one of self-sustenance notwithstanding the developmentalist incursion of modernisation theory and practice onto the daily lives of locals. Although young men are not forced by their social groups to cut pigs against their will, pig cutting is a valuable skill to have in a community where household economies are based on self-sufficiency. Having such skills also expresses disenchantment with the way policymakers impact on rural livelihoods. Manliness, then, is not something related to physical power, but more a matter of "skilful coping" (Ingold, 2000:171) in rural environments in which modernity and traditionalism are so deeply intertwined.

The act of pig cutting itself revealed a blend of many emotions such as fear, pride, guilt, sorrow and grief. This discussion with Stroie, a pig cutter, shows the reconciliation of the “emotional discomfort” (Adams, 1990:66) of the cutter with killing the pig and later eating its meat:

AO: Do you feel a little bit sad or not?

Stroie: (smiling candidly): No.

AO: But I saw you made a cross before you (gesticulating to suggest killing the pig) did this.

Stroie (smiling): Really?

AO (laughs): Uh-huh.

Stroie: Well, we, here, are Orthodox. I don't know what you ...

AO: Yes, me too.²⁴

Stroie: Oh, yeah? Ok, well, then. If you start a journey, you always think ... (looks up to the sky, suggesting, that one must think of God).

AO: But is there any connection with ...

Stroie: You look at God,²⁵ yes. You want God to help you – not to hurt yourself [during the sacrifice]. You want him to bless the food, to help you to have good, healthy food ... all with the help of God. If not, we can't do anything ... naturally. [If God helps you] then your

²⁴ I am not a practicing Orthodox Christian. I take a flexible, situational approach to religion.

²⁵ He uses the name “Doamne-Doamne” which means “God” but in a childish way; used in children's prayers. Stroie is thus positioning himself as my guide in pig sacrifice, almost like a fatherly figure.

phone or recorder is working ... otherwise, it gets broken, you can't record all this ... (laughs).²⁶

Romanian Orthodox peasants are conservative in their relationship with God. However, I was surprised to find out that ritualistic perfection, laboriously constructed by participants, rested on providential aid rather than the material conditions that were in their control, and their great logistical efforts. It was a mechanism of coping with the slaughtering of a pig which shifted the guilt to a world where there is no guilt – God's Kingdom. At the same time, the highly ritualistic presentation of the slaughter tended to create an idealised death of the pig. It was meant to produce a painless death, for the humans and the pig. Sadness and grief were hidden behind playfulness, humour and good cheer, but their absence only magnified their importance.

Pig Cutting and the Authorities

As evidenced in Morris' *Blue Juice* (2015), ethical issues about the suffering and death of animal are common problems in veterinary practice, and the responsibility to find the best solution or justification is normally passed around as terminating the life of an animal is always difficult. In my study, the responsibility was placed in a supernatural realm. As the priest of Ilva told me:

The sacrificing of pig is perceived first of all as a blessing and not as a violent act. Not once in eighteen years since I became a priest did anyone come to confess that they regret 'killing' their pig (laughs).

Animals were created to be used, to contribute to the survival of

²⁶ Although I considered this silly at the time, I should have taken it more seriously because I subsequently lost all my pictures from my fieldwork. Stroe, personal communication.

human nature. Christians see their relationship with their pig as a divine blessing and not as a “slaughter.”²⁷

Gross (2014) and Linzey (1994) have explored the relationship between religion and animal slaughter at length. They suggest that the Christian view of animals rests on a rigid, but ethically unsure, human-animal division, wherein animals are at once glorified creations of God but inferior to humans and thus serve human purposes. In my study, the religious ethics of slaughter were further complicated by the ethics of European and Romanian animal welfare norms, as well as by the issue of assumed rural underdevelopment. Therefore, as Mihăilescu (2010) points out, peasants who privately slaughter pigs find comfort in the religious ethics of this practice, because the lack of reassurance and clarity from the authorities who regulate pig cutting. Although ecclesiastical guidance for addressing human guilt inferred from pig sacrifice is absent, the comfort of knowing the divinity approves and supports this practice is very much present. Residents of varied backgrounds held a Biblical utilitarian view of rural animals, not as an excuse for their practices, but a source of pride and legitimation. They are thereby holding their ground in the increasing secularisation, de-spiritualisation and capitalisation of the Romanian society and of its traditional, Orthodox values.

Next in line of importance after the Orthodox Church, is the Romanian state and its institutions. After the fall of communism and the collapse of cooperative farms, peasants were mainly left to their own devices in the project of Romania’s modernisation (Fox, 2011). Rural landscapes have been minimised for the ease of their management (Scott, 1985) after the fall of communism. The Romanian state

²⁷ Father Dudu, personal communication.

offered no solid plan to achieve a state of modernity, or if it did, it was lost or manipulated by regional and local lords for their own benefits, as it has been clearly shown by scholars of post-socialism (Dorondel, 2016; Micu, 2010). Instead of engaging with the ways of life and problems of rural humans more meaningfully, the Romanian state created an interface of highly inaccessible subsidies.

However, contrary to expectations, the Romanian state tacitly supports pig sacrifice. It allows its continuation without applying sanctions despite being incompatible with the modern project it claimed to develop. Specific examples of institutional moral ambiguity are evident in the Romanian state's approach to welfare laws. While most such laws are compulsory, the EU allows ample room for their interpretation at national levels (Stevenson et al., 2014). National-level interpretation does not mean that directives' implementation is negotiable, but it does allow for some flexibility to account for local custom. Mia told me that when she worked in the public sector, there was a consensus in her office about getting a day off and covering for the one who had a pig cutting scheduled:

We cut the pig when we were free. If we weren't, we took a day off, because back then we only had Sundays off.²⁸ We asked if we could take the day off and asked a colleague to cover for us. I used to say to my boss "Tomorrow I cut the pig and I will stay home" and it was generally okay.

Although not directly expressed, Mia's confession refers to office work during the communist regime, wherein the authority and privilege of managers and bosses was an acknowledged social fact, and workplace corruption was more blatant and

²⁸ Saturday was introduced as a free day in 1990 in Romania.

acceptable than in the present day. Mia claims that her office was a place of hierarchies that were influenced by pig cutting, as many office workers in the countryside were entitled to take the day off for this practice. Catrina, a relative of Mia, who was raised in Ilva, but has moved, was reluctant to call it “a day off.” She said:

It was more like a deal between co-workers, they helped you out, but you had to help them out, too. Or you pretended to be ill and stayed home, but yeah ... if your boss was okay with it, then you had to give meat in return because he was understanding.²⁹

An interesting equation of work and relaxation arises from this statement, as these people carried out pig cuttings on their free days or took holidays from work to carry out their pig cuttings, which are exhausting activities. Furthermore, other participants confirmed this view. Catrina, recalls how her father was expected to give meat to his boss, after he had had a day off to cut the pig:

His boss did not say ‘you must bring me meat if you want the day off’. It was almost impossible to find meat in the shops back in the seventies, really hard! So everyone tacitly agreed to give back meat to their bosses in return for the favour. That’s how it was. And even now it happens the same way!³⁰

Thus, pig cutting does not interfere with daily life, but is integral to it, and has been buoyed by public institutions in the communist regime, and now through loose regulation of this practice, and through the misinformation of the public with regards to pig cutting.

²⁹ Catrina, personal communication.

³⁰ Catrina, personal communication.

Ethical concerns were brought up by informants during pig cutting, showing the gap between locals and the institutions which creates policies for them. Here, Stroie, jokingly, but warily, says:

You know, Alexandra ... what we do here is tradition ... I hope you won't disclose *all* [original emphasis] the details of pig sacrifice in Europe and then the Court will come and we will be in trouble.³¹

Two things can be inferred from this affirmation. First, it is unclear from the context to which court he referred. "The court" is probably the European Court of Justice which enforces EU Directives, and functions as the seat of the EU's juridical power.

Romanian farming regulations and animal welfare norms are, besides loosely implemented, also poorly disseminated among peasants (Rappert, 2007). While pig cutting happened openly in these villages, it remained a matter that took place in the privacy of one's home and which was deemed to remain incomprehensible for the urban populace that do not have yards or pigs.³²

Locals were convinced that pig cutting was necessary, whether they were involved in it or not.³³ This is further demonstrated by the inability of authorities to change this practice. With the church operating on both sides of this imagined, and often enacted, opposition, pig cutting seems to be profoundly influenced by institutional uncertainty. Or, perhaps it is not always institutional negligence or failure

³¹ Stroie, interview.

³² This is not always the case, as many people post videos and pictures of pig cutting on social media and YouTube, showing all stages of the event. Furthermore, there is an International Festival of Pig Cutting in Balványos Baths, where the quickest team to finish the sacrifice is awarded a medal. The purpose of the festival is to gather to cut pigs, learn techniques from others, celebrate the tradition and enjoy the products of the sacrifice. The festival is known to the local and national authorities: <http://www.romaniaturistica.ro/festivalul-international-de-pomana-porcului-baile-balvanyos>.

³³ Not partaking in the pig sacrifice was hard. I had to leave early from my first hosts – a couple in their 50s, because the lady's mother was cutting the pig in another county, and they had to help on the day.

to enforce law, as per the Balkan argument that people in South-Central and Eastern Europe are solely defined by corruption and driven by personal interests (Borcan, 2010; Bakić-Hayden, 1995). In cases wherein scapegoating a culture or mentality, as well as creating and supporting solid social strata is commonplace, it is helpful to examine the reasons of institutional ambiguity. Pig sacrifice creates an oppositional society wherein the state is positioned against the individual. This model is never complete nor revealing: the state is often an ideational creation which obscures the reality of political work and its materiality (Harvey, 2005). Mia's son, who travelled from the other end of the country to Ilva Mică to participate in the pig sacrifice, said "tradition beats EU exigence"³⁴, reiterating this oppositional model and the impotence of political forces in the face of rural customs. This view of society also illustrates the commonplace conception of Romanian peasantry as a static category, unchanged for millennia, which conveniently erases the fundamental changes that various political regimes have imposed on this class, its production, reproduction, education and other aspects (Mitchell, 2002). Hurn (2013) has tackled the state-individual relation in rural foxhunting communities in Wales, specifically demonstrating the flaws of such political models, and the stereotypes they reinforce conveniently for the ruling political class. As others have previously shown (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012; Babadzan, 2000; Gogea, 2011), tradition, be it peasant or otherwise, is far from being an inert mass of knowledge. This interpretation of tradition is the catalyst of ideological conflicts between state and peasant, modernity and tradition, which persist in lived experience, despite their reconciliation in academia (see Haraway, 2015; Latour, 1991; Ingold, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2013).

³⁴ Tudor, personal communication.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the ways in which peasants address the loss of their pigs through organising a complex ritual for their slaughter. Gender roles, social relations and changing expectations are exposed in the morning of the ritual. Women and men are both given the chance to assert their authority and strength in the family. Participants share their contributions and knowledges with younger generations and embody the historical importance of pig cutting in the historical ecology of the region. Pig cutting encourages people to collaborate to create their own produce and maintain the autonomy of their household economies, but as I have shown, the intense sociality can also cause human relationships to loosen. The organisational skills and self-composure required in pig cutting portray peasants as hard-working, knowledgeable individuals who can sustain this practice in parallel with the ethical norms and impositions from national and European legislative bodies. Thus, pig cutting is beneficial for the peasants because it is a source of pride and autonomy based on human-animal knowledge. Of course, many of my informants' assumptions about pigs' welfare and intelligence, as well as human superiority are incomplete and ill-informed, but it is important to point out some of their efforts to show the flaws in their thinking, and their knowledge of regulations as well as compassion for pigs.

The ethical and emotional contradictions of pig killing and portioning were brought to surface by our conversations about food: my vegetarianism and foreignness were seen as a deviance, but not one which threatened the practice of pig cutting. Fortunately, I was transformed into their kin as the day progressed. Although we were different, my informants and I found ideas and experiences in common. Informants were aware of EU and Romanian ethical norms and animal

welfare requirements, but in the local conceptions of need and necessity, informed by religious teachings and ecological knowledge, pig cutting expresses self-sufficiency and pride rather than animal cruelty. It is also a less fashionable way of recycling which creates a self-sustainable, multispecies household economy. Pig cutting, in its ritualised form, helps to ameliorate the political and economic alienation of rural people by the actors of modernisation. It contributes to the legitimisation and justification of the practice, which Mihăilescu (2010:157) explains with a metaphor:

[The chain of legitimisation] must be recalled periodically. It must be enacted in a more-or-less festive way, so that the labourer in question does not forget why he tightens a screw in the manner he is accustomed to, thus maintaining the meaning of his small action.³⁵

The cyclical festivity of pig cutting legitimises it through anticipation, celebration and by reinforcing the positive collective memory of human-pig interactions. Although peasants do not abide by EU norms of hygiene and animal welfare, they are driven by natural, traditional, rural norms as well as religious morality. Thus, pig cutting empowers individual peasants to validate their choice of self-sufficiency through their labour and through their corporeal and quasi-religious interaction with pigs.

³⁵ Original in Romanian: Este adevarat insa ca tot acest lant de delegari ale legitimitatii, tocmai pentru a putea fi scurtcircuitat, trebuie amintit din cand in cand, trebuie pus in scena in mod mai mult sau mai putin festiv pentru ca muncitorul cu pricina sa nu uite de ce strange el surubul asa cum s-a obisnuit sa faca si a-si pastra astfel sensul actiunii sale marunte.

Chapter Three: The Consumption of the Pig

Pigs are the only domestic animals in Romania for whom their owners organise a wake. Other animals are slaughtered for consumption, but never in this ceremonious, complex way.¹ Pigs, as shown in Chapter Two, have an informal, non-institutionalised, but syncretic connection to Orthodox Christianity. Their ritual slaughter culminates in a rich meal, cooked and shared between their owners' friends and family, with the majority of their meat is kept for consumption throughout the year. In this chapter, I analyse this consumption. I explore the beneficial effect of pig meat through the concepts of hospitality and commensality, starting with the lunch on the pig cutting day, known as *pomana porcului*, 'the pig's offering'. I analyse the process of preparing pig products, where participants coordinate their efforts to produce long-lasting delicacies. Lastly, I explore the year-round consumption of the pig by his owners, to demonstrate the profound connection between peasants and their pigs which continue long after the death of the pig.

Pomana Porcului

In Romanian, the words for "pig" and "pork" are both denoted by the same word - *porc*. This could mean that human-pig relationship, carefully maintained during pigs' lives, does not cease with the death of the pig. During the pig's wake, *pomana porcului*, participants praise this gift of home-grown meat, thank God for his help and blessings, and wish that for a repetition the following year. Furthermore, the symbolic segregation between humans and their pigs vanishes through the act of ingestion. As Levi-Strauss (1969) suggests, a transformation of something considered impure into a complex, enjoyable and celebrated symbolic social activity

¹ The closest any other animal slaughter in Romania comes to pig's experience is the lamb at Easter.

was required before the communion of pigs and humans could be accomplished on an organic level.

While the portioning is in its final stages, and long before the meat is returned safely from the local veterinarian, female participants start preparing the long-awaited *pomana porcului*, sometimes called *cina porcului* (the pig's dinner). The meal is served at midday and symbolises the family's hospitality and gratefulness for their wealth, that is similar to the post-fox hunt meal that hunters share in Wales, as documented by Hurn (2003). The name *pomana* (dole, alms, but also a calling or a mentioning of someone) is indicative of a holistic view of society as a network of interrelatedness wherein kinship is a constant potentiality (Haraway, 2000; 2003; 2007, Franklin, McKinnon, 2002). *Pomana* is, put simply, charitable giving to the community, organised after a human's death. Thus, by organising a *pomana* for the pig, the community in my study puts forward a humanised, if anthropocentric, view of pigs, who are respected members of and contributors to the local multispecies society.

Romanian funeral customs dictate that when one loses something dear, she gives away food and drink to all comers in a feast organised to honour the deceased (Dettiene & Vernant, 1989). *Pomana* as a general concept, allows for and encourages the expression of pain, sadness, but also of happy memories with the deceased. In contrast, the *pomana porcului* does not place any emphasis on grief, and I did not detect any of sadness in my interlocutors' attitudes and speech. *Pomana porcului* focusses on humorous, positive collective memories of human-nonhuman interactions. Here, patience and active listening are encouraged. The tacit interdiction to discuss the delicate subject of terminating the life of such a close companion that was a constant of rural life, was extended at the table.

Post-sacrifice meals are not unique to Romania. A similar example comes from Rappaport's work (1968) on the relations between the humans and pigs of the Tsembaga Maring tribe of Papua New Guinea. When the number of pigs grows too large, the pigs are slaughtered and their meat shared in a communal meal in which the whole tribe participates. Another example can be found in Wales (Hurn, 2003: 184). Foxhunters organise a ceremonial post-hunt feast where they invite community members to enjoy food and drink together. Similarly, *pomana porcului* reaffirms the hospitality of the family unit within the local community. Hospitality is essential to the success of the meal, so all grudges and discord are put aside and participants engage in constructive, humorous and comforting conversations, while sharing the collectively-cooked pork stew.

At Radu, Geta and her mother's meal, there was a festive, joyful atmosphere. We were all tired from the morning work, but, there was a stew to be made, meat to be fried, garlic to add, polenta to boil and tables and chairs to be arranged. Intergenerational conflicts quickly arose as there appeared to be more than one way to make polenta. Geta says to her mother:

Mama, I told you that this is new polenta. You don't know how to make it. You think it's done in your way. This was twenty years ago, for God's sake. What you made here looks like *șir* (a starchy corn meal which pigs are regularly fed), not like polenta!

The tension is defused by my laughter, and this sets Geta and her mother laughing too. The polenta does turn out like *șir*, a corn meal fed to pigs, so the divide between human and pig lessens again. Notions of ingesting the pig, and ingesting the pig fodder, converge in the overarching ideology of need and pragmatism that is characteristic of many rural households (Mihăilescu, 2010; Diaconu, 1997) wherein

waste disrupts the cyclical multispecies coexistence, and disrespects the offerings of God and nature. This conflict is also reminiscent of Ana's near-miss when she almost served her family pig's food, as both show the inherent flexibility of interspecies boundaries.

Whereas polenta was quite similar in all households, the stew itself *pomana porcului* was a point of divergence, and reflected the individuality of each practice as a mode of resistance to market homogeneity. I noticed this first in the mode of preparing and cooking of the stew, and second, in the serving and time of the meal. Nache and Nadia expertly prepared the meal in under two hours, using only the basic ingredients: pork loin, onion, garlic and paprika. They let it boil on low heat, to bring out the freshness and tenderness of the meat. On the other hand, Radu and Geta played with the flavour of the stew and added homemade cream and plenty of cheese until the food turned orange, a significant visual departure from the blood-red stew with which I was familiar. The newly married young couple who were carrying out one of their first pig cuttings created their own flavour, their own "custom" as opposed to "tradition" (Mihăilescu, 2010: 99). Thus, preparing the meal is influenced by "modes of thinking and acting that are shared, and which are governed by a sacred rationality."² The recipe was transmitted from mother to son in this case, that has nothing to do with the "national" pork stew, the latter being assigned to an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). Nache and Nadia, the godparents of the young couple, were later invited to taste the creamy, cheesy stew, and described it as rather odd but were happy to have eaten it. This proves the uniqueness of each household's striving gastronomic habits. While idiosyncratic cuisines are not perfect

² Original in Romanian: "Moduri mai mult sau mai putin impartasite de a gandi si a actiona, supuse unei rationalitati retrospective de ordin sacru."

nor they can satisfy all tastes, they are preferable to market-origin food. Also, these small-size cuisines function alongside an industry of cheap, convenient, unreliable ready-made meals which my informants regard with suspicion and from which they desire to be separated.

In Stroie's pig cutting there was no *pomana porcului*. The pig belonged to Marcu and Dan and Stroie was simply the cutter. It was Stroie's cutting, however, as the ritual creates a sort of allegiance between the pig cutter and the pig. After the portioning, however, the meat was transported back to Năsăud, where Marcu and Rodica live. They were less concerned about having the ceremonial meal, and left soon after the portioning ended. Dan's parents insisted that Stroie keep some meat for his efforts, but Stroie refused as he takes pride in being a self-sufficient *gospodar*. For lunch, Stroie and his family had instead a chicken stew and polenta, and I had polenta with homemade *zacuscă* (vegetable spread), so pork was entirely absent from the meal. Nevertheless, the post-slaughter meal felt as much a *pomana porcului*, despite the pig's absence. As discussed in Chapter Two, Dan's parents regarded themselves as urban and they wanted to have high-quality homegrown meat, without being necessarily interested in respecting all the ceremonial elements of pig cutting. This shows the flexibility of pig cutting, and distinct reasons for engaging in it: to reinforce household autonomy and agro-ecological knowledge, to respect the village traditions and satisfy the expectations of a good Christian, and to have a year-round supply of pork of superior taste and quality.

Pomana porcului in Maricescu family was an opportunity to relax and engage in entertaining conversations. It was a private affair which placed emphasis on the individuality of tradition in this family and the subsequent mode of coping in a society whose standards they describe as "better than ever before" but wherein one must

“be serious and work hard”³ to be an accomplished rural person. Nadia was praised for the meaty stew she had cooked, and thus, although she exceeded the expectations of her duties by participating in the open-air part of the pig cutting, confirmed that she is a true *gospodină*. Ana served *jinars* to all of us, and as her cardiologist recommended, she only tasted the stew. Her heart condition meant eating an excessive quantity of red meat would harm her cholesterol level, due to pork’s high fat content. Although the tone of the conversations was normally jovial, tension seemed to arise by recalling Mia’s own stew which she offered to the family as thanks for their contribution to her pig cutting. “Her stew was black and sour. She doesn’t know how to make it good. Also, does she think that *this* is enough to thank us for all the work we’ve done for her?”⁴ This created intrafamilial communion, if only at the expense of intra-extended family division, as well as an emic validation of their own way of life as better than others. It also showed that although the pork meal is generally a time of sharing as a family or community, pork brings out familial and social responsibilities with which this practice is tied up. Pork, thus, can be an object of exchange which reveals my participants’ expectations of each other, as in the case of the Kula ring exchange in the Trobriand society (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1990) At the same time, it shows that rural life is not idyllic, but allows for and requires, to some extent, competition (Mihăilescu, 2010) for social status, recognition and economic benefits (Fox, 2011).

In Ilva Mică, Radu and Geta’s *pomana porcului* was served for many more people: their parents, daughter, siblings, and grandparents were present and animated the atmosphere. The television was on and the constant chattering and

³ Nadia, personal communication.

⁴ Nadia, participant observation.

laughing made this experience feel quite surreal for me. Furthermore, it was an extra opportunity for my informants to ask me about my vegetarianism. As everyone ate the creamy pork stew, polenta, bread and pickles, my plate always looked empty and I was encouraged to eat more cheese, to make up for the lack of meat. I was even 'taught' by Dana's father how to eat polenta, pickled cabbage, cheese and cream to obtain the best flavour: "You take a spoon of polenta, dip it in the cream and dip it in the cheese, that is the way to eat this. And then you taste the pickles as well"

Because I did not eat meat for lunch, my fellow diners kept an eye on me constantly: they were worried about my having enough to eat, and were overprotective of me. Following a balanced, complete diet was important to the families I met. As previously shown in the advice given to Ana by her cardiologist, eating pork can have negative consequences on health, but the concept of "balanced diet" did not necessarily follow medical guidelines, although participants were aware of these. It was instead influenced by the amount and types of works my informants do. Pork was considered the unifying principle around which rural life and labour were constructed and substantiated:

Alexandra, if you don't eat meat, then you don't have strength to lift the hay, to plant vegetables, feed the animals and so on. With a fried egg and a piece of cheese you can't be guaranteed to have a successful working day.⁵

Pigs and pork, were, therefore, viewed a necessity, but more than that, they were the epitome of vitality (Panizza, 2016 [1900]). Radu and Geta's daughter, only two years old at the time, was proclaimed the "biggest carnivore in the family." Among the first

⁵ Dan's father, interview; Radu, personal communication.

words she learnt was *poc* (po[r]k). She preferred pork dishes to everything else she was fed: “like father, like daughter”, the diners agreed, and thus, the conviction that “being a truthful peasant” was successfully transmitted to the young generation became common knowledge.

As Radu and Geta’s daughter proves, contrary to the widespread view of meat as the elitist symbol of male power (Adams, 1990), pork for my informants is a staple food, widely available, regardless of gender or age. Although some scholars portrayed vegetarianism as “the essence of life” (Twigg, 1983: 28) eating pork turned out to be the engine of everyday life in Ilva and Prundu. While there exists a correlation between pigs and religion, this does not automatically suggest the centrality of the pig in local cosmology. As Panizza (2016 [1900]) contends, mythology is mediated by material means and deficiencies. Thus, the pig’s status in the household reflects the status of rural workers and the cyclicity of their microeconomies. The priest of Ilva Mică confirmed the pragmatic approach to pig husbandry:

Why do we cut the pig at Christmas? Because he has always been considered the animal of the poor man. That is, it is simple to rear or ‘keep’ as we say in Valea Someșului, because it doesn’t need a substantial material, financial investment. Basically, the pig feeds on household waste.

‘Waste’ in this context should not be read as a negative term. As demonstrated in Chapter One, pigs are fed plenty high-quality food. The fact that it is leftovers does not make it less valuable or unsuitable for pigs. Although this contravenes animal feeding regulations, it is a proof of a functional cyclical economy of near-zero waste. The recycling function of pigs further consolidates the need for their existence in

rural homes. They create interspecies identities as conscious, self-sufficient individuals who treat waste not as a by-product (Williams, 1980), but as integral to the circularity of 'natural' life that is in no need of external regulation. As the Fathers Dudu and Rebrea suggested, in the Orthodox religion, nonhuman animals have been created solely for being used by humans, it becomes clear that local concept of waste is only incidentally environmentally-friendly. Primarily, waste refers to the waste of God's creations and his gifts (land and animals) and for humans to override this order of things would be disrespectful to God and nature.

Although the equation of eating pork with stamina and loyalty to rural traditions came across first, there was something impure, or even unholy, about this (Douglas, 1966). As I repeatedly refused to eat meat, and declined the many top ups of *jinars*, Radu eventually surrendered and admitted, as a joke: "Well, you don't eat meat, you don't drink. You will live a hundred years and you will go to heaven for sure!" This statement not only validated my lifestyle choice in the eyes of my participants, but also recognised that many ways of living, eating and thinking other than the local one was acceptable, and even superior. Thus, once more, participants have shown, in a joking, slightly envious manner, that they understand the positive aspects of a vegetarian or vegan diet, and even appreciate ones who can abstain from eating meat. Furthermore, affirmations like this confirm that rurality and urbanity, Western and Eastern, modern and traditional, are not reflected in everyday lived experience in pure forms, but are conflated, and intertwined. Religious knowledge, folk knowledge, modern methods and even conceptions of meat eating blend together in these communities, to create lifestyles which do not conform to dyadic views of the world. Pig rearing, slaughtering and eating are, through their association with vivacity and traditional life, a therapeutic mechanism to fight against

conveniently imposed and maintained dichotomies between rural and urban, civilised and uncivilised (Micu, 2010; Dorondel, 2016; Scott, 1998).

The term “companion” is derived from the words *cum panis* meaning “with bread” in Latin (Haraway, 2003) and suggests the intertwining of companionship, commensality and hospitality. While pigs are dead and cannot enjoy the benefits of commensality as humans do, they form a significant part of the ritual hospitality of pig cutting. Through the death of the pigs, human-pig companionship is transformed, and pigs’ therapy is enacted in their continued nourishment for humans, as an incomparable joy at eating the pig’s offerings. Thus, the idea of a pig as pet was hard to imagine for most of my informants. On the contrary, following the Biblical teachings, eating the gifts of God is an enactment of the ‘normal’ order of life, simultaneously based on human affection for their pigs, but also on a sense of economic necessity. Lastly, home-grown pork also provides a rich taste and physical and psychological power. As Berger (2009: 7) points out:

A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork.

What is significant ... and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*.

The human-pig connection formed during the pigs’ lives continues at the table. The post-slaughter meal puts commensality and companionship in a novel perspective that goes against the modern human-pet relationship. This is a relation that is consumed both spiritually and materially. Of course, this is based on a fundamental inequality between human and nonhuman, but it nonetheless brings these two categories closer in terms of corporeality. The pig, who is allegedly the

dirtiest animal in one's household, offers the most delicious meat, and becomes one with the humans who raised him.

Eating freshly cut meat was a significant risk to take by my participants. Although bacterial checks are carried out on the meat, the chance of contracting salmonella or *Campylobacter* in even slowly cooked fresh pork is much higher than in pork that is a few days old (Mihăilescu, 2010; Lammerding et al., 1998). However, this was a risk worth taking as my informants praised the unique, strong taste and smell of *pomana porcului*. I can also confirm, based on previous experience, that *pomana porcului* has a unique taste. Supermarket pork cannot compete with the melt-in-your-mouth texture, warmth, flavour and positive associations of *pomana porcului*. It is a revitalising food, which when ingested gave everyone a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction. When the meal is over, everyone returns to their chores, but not without jokes on the subject: "Shall we grab the sledge and have some fun?" Radu shouted in a childish tone, and his family ridiculed him. They have to deal with the innards of two pigs, and although I do not stay until the end of the day, I am told that they stayed up well into the night making sausages. The risks of infection are far outweighed by the rewards of familial cooperation, bonding, humour, and gastronomic satisfaction.

Producing the Pig

The pig meat, organs and bones look disordered on the tables, chairs, floor and in bowls. I asked to help and I was given the "easy" task of cutting blubber into squares and deciding if they can go to the cauldron with *jumări* (pork rind) or whether they need to go into the pan where lard is made (see Figure 5). As the separation process was not obvious, I often mixed up the squares. Most of the product preparation takes place in rather neglected summer kitchens, which during the winter

are used to store firewood. Dust, cobwebs and unused tools and materials, like hammers, nails and gravel, gave me the impression of disarray wherein 'food safety' and 'hygiene' were impossible. Despite my carelessness, my interlocutors seemed to have a different sense of biosecurity than the one to which I was used. It was not one based on immaculate, clinically sterile spaces of symmetric order, but rather based on a deep knowledge of and trust in the environment. As evidenced by Douglas (1966), norms of working with meat, such as kosher rules, might seem disorganised, confused or arbitrary to outsiders. However, my informants' rules were based on maintaining the symbolic, but actually highly entangled, boundaries between themselves and their pigs, in a way which fitted perfectly into their view of their surroundings.



Figure 6: The making of jumări (pork rind) - Father Dudu's photo collection.

A similar attitude accompanied the production of sausages and *cartaboși* (a sausage pâté). Although the meat was contained, it did not look particularly “clean” or ordered. Sausages were falling out of the old sausage maker (*cârnățoaia*) into a plastic basin. One had to learn on-the-spot how much mince was necessary to fill a sausage. This took time, but it was also fun and relaxing for participants. The intestines were cut by hand and so each sausage looked different. Preparing pig products was another opportunity of sharing skills and knowledge with younger generations. In the Maricescu family, there are no male descendants, so the daughter of the family, Mona, was taught how to make sausages. The first ones she made were rather bulky and mince popped out of holes in the entrails. She was a fast learner, however, and soon she produced perfect sausages that fall gently in the plastic basin on the kitchen floor. Her parents watched her with pride while preparing other meats.

The *slănină* was also cut by hand on a table filled with a plethora of other meats, knives, bowls and pans and, again, this looked rather disordered. I was told, however, that it was the order in which “things should be happening”. The pig fat was then hung in a tall smokehouse, which was built by the participants, and left to mature. I am also told that other products are made on the day like *tobă and răcitură* (both jellied pork delicacies). There is rarely enough time for making these products in current times when “we have jobs, we have to get up early in the morning to go to work.”⁶ This example suggests the intertwinement of folk knowledge with modern working patterns in private pork production, and shows the flexibility of pig cutting. This instance reiterates that rural life and knowledge should not be conceived as stuck in an *illo tempore* of human-nature harmony, alienated from the experience of

⁶ Nadia, personal communication.

modernity. In the past, pig bones were used for making one's own soap, but this can now be found in the shop for a small price and much less effort. Now, bones are cut in smaller pieces, smoked for a long time and used in soups and stews.

As opposed to the pig stabbing and portioning which was generally viewed as a masculine job, in this phase of the pig cutting, the contributions of all participants are equally valued. Whether one makes sausages, molten lard, cleans up or serves *jinars*, one is respectfully thanked for it by the others, and feels satisfied, helpful and active. The short intervals I had to go out during Maricescu family's pig cutting, I was surprised by the pig fat smell of my borrowed work clothes. The family laughed at me and asked if I still wanted to help them or if it would be better for me to go inside and watch television! As I was a guest, they were worried about my well-being, comfort and safety and feared that I might get hurt. I, of course, stayed to help, and was ultimately appreciated for doing so.

The local norms of biosecurity persisted during this stage of pig cutting. Based on trusting and being aware of one's environment, these norms are conceptually close to the biosecurity regulations advanced in Blanchette's study of labour on pig farms (2015), where pigs are given primacy in pig-human interaction and where pigs' health is protected at the expense of the humans'. But this logic was complicated by the permissiveness of local biosecurity, which did not reflect a lack of hygienic rules for meat handling, but an

atmospheric attunement, [...] an alerted sense that something is happening and an attachment to sensing out whatever it is. It takes place within a world of some sort and it is itself a generative, compositional worlding (Stewart, 2010: 4).

Here, the atmosphere of the day was created and shared by human and pig participants, as if suspending the normal order of things, and diluting themselves into novel forms of life based on familiarity, trust and a sense of corporeal interconnectedness (Choy and Jerry, 2015). Biosecurity without intermingling would be an absurdity in Ilva and Prundu. This vernacular multispecies logic shows once more that an oppositional model between tradition and modernity, dirty and clean, is not a valid one. Individual traditions are invented and sustained in the intimacy of one's home. The therapeutic function of producing meat derives from the familiarity and mutual trust of participants, wide participation, sharing a plentiful pork meal with family, and their ability to create their own long-lasting pork products.

Curating the Pig

The pig cutting day is intense and eventful, but it is not the end of the human-pig relationship. The main purpose of pig cutting is to create year-round food supplies. The consumption of the pig continues all year, and the issues of bioethics, contamination, pity and companionship continue to arise during this time. Generally, participants were happy to eat food they produced. Most gave me a tour of their house, as in a museum, showing me their family heirlooms, old photographs and industrial freezers that contained two-year-old meat as though the thematic links between these items were self-evident. Their pork, besides being stocked, cured and rationed, is also *curated* – becoming proof of one's skills as a householder and a substantial source of pride. Radu and Geta, the newly married couple, told me their plans for the following year:

We have just finished building our house. It's finished ... on the outside at least, on the inside, it needs a bit more work ... We are planning to move

there soon. Also, this pig that we cut is going to be a good source of food to begin with.⁷

Having homemade meat and meat products was a sign of maturity and independence, not only from the state and market, but from one's family. The pork products made during pig cutting were portrayed as the foundation of a solid start in married and family life.

The rhetoric of vegetarian/vegan feminists, and especially that of Carol Adams (1990), suggests that if people were forced to kill animals, they would not eat them, as the negative emotions which accompany the act of killing would be unbearable. Most locals believed the contrary - that killing one's own animals was a necessary part of earning one's right to eat meat. By putting them in direct contact with their meat, in a way that is not otherwise possible, my informants engage with their pigs for at least a year before they kill and eat them, so understand the effort that goes into producing high-quality meat, and thus, consume less than they would if they bought from the supermarket. This is not to say the locals did not eat shop-bought meat, but that learning and sustaining the skills necessary for more-than-human acts, including killing animals, was an essential tool for achieving self-sufficiency. Stroie told me he used to buy salami sandwiches when he commuted to work in Bistrița:

It was ... Oh my God, so good! Now, I wouldn't buy salami or anything like that from the shop. But I have to, for the little ones (his

⁷ Geta, personal communication.

grandchildren) ... they want hotdogs and ham, so I buy it for them.

I'm not too happy about it.⁸

To this, my host and gatekeeper, Dorel, replied:

I know, I make my own Kaiser ham. I learnt how to boil it and everything, it takes a while but it's good. I don't want to buy anything from the shops. The sausages ... You put them in the fridge, and the next day, if you touch them, they stick to your hand, that can't be good."⁹

Although it is evident that these communities are consumers of market products, they do not seem content with this situation, and they do it for younger people in their families who have different tastes. Not only do these people carry on enacting transgenerational knowledge, but they learn new skills in order to minimise their interaction with market origin meat, and prove that they can survive happily by using their own knowledge and crafts.

Despite the tacit acknowledgement of the high-quality of home-grown meat, some research participants confessed that it was not always easy to stomach the meat they created. I have shown in Chapter One how Mia from Ilva had become attached to one of her pigs and had created a daily routine of feeding and speaking to this pig. On the day of the cutting she describes how she was horrified by the sound of her pig dying (Dwyer and Minnegal, 2005). She also recounts the post-cutting grief she felt, especially when she had to cook the pork and eat it:

⁸ Stroie, interview.

⁹ Dorel, interview.

So, I oversaw cooking, as it is in most families. I remember being unhappy about having to make my friend into stews and soups. I never said anything to anyone about this, but I felt a deep unease, really. [The pig] knew me and I let him die. I had to eat it and I did, because otherwise the meat would have been wasted, which is worse. But, nevertheless, it was sad. It was. I felt better when the meat from that pig was finished because I didn't want to think about it anymore.¹⁰

This particular pig was secretly missed, showing the attachment that was formed between him and his carers. Mia felt guilty that she did not honour the pig properly, and that she perhaps took for granted the special connection of care and solidarity (Coulter, 2015) between herself and the pig. However great the love was for the pig, he had to be made into food for the family's sake. The therapeutic purpose of pigs is shown as having two contrasting facets: one, of sociable friendliness and patience, and another of nourishment, that is charged with unavoidable ethical dilemmas.

Ana from Ilva Mică also recounts a traumatic experience of eating pork, but motivated by different considerations:

We cut this pig once and our kids also took part. They were young and running around everywhere. Our daughters [Catrina and Nadia] asked if they could mince the meat, and as they had done it before, we said 'yes'. We kept an eye on them, of course, to be sure nothing happens. But pig cutting is a huge event with so many things to do, there are moments when you can't keep everything under control. And then, we hear shouting and crying: '*Mama! Mamaaaaa!* Help me! It was Nadia, her face was all red. Catrina, her

¹⁰ Mia, interview.

sister, was hugging Nadia and sobbing as well. I realised that Catrina had minced Nadia's thumb and I almost fainted. I grabbed Nadia and we rushed out of the house, hitchhiked to the nearest hospital in Năsăud where they cut the top of Nadia's thumb. It was heart-breaking, I can't even think about it now. We returned home, Nadia still crying ... I was crying, too. Well, that's the only time when we felt repulsed by eating the sausages of that pig. We didn't know in which sausage Nadia's thumb ended up. I felt sick every time we had sausages and my husband was also sad. We were relieved when that batch of sausages was gone. You've seen Nadia's thumb, it's incomplete. She is a normal person, she can do anything she wants. But that was a traumatic experience, there is no doubt.

Nadia is, indeed, healthy and happy. With the same hand that was caught in the mincer four decades ago, she now cares for other pig. She still turns them into food for her family, fully aware of the risks, but also benefits, involved. Pig meat had to be pure, clean and evocative of harmonious human-pig relationships that were ended by the killing of the pig. This was not always possible, hence the ethical and emotional dilemmas which my informants face every year, and which show the sacrifices, personal as well as porcine, they make to achieve self-sufficiency in an increasingly 'ready-made' society.

Pork and the Nation: A Female Vegetarian Researcher is also Romanian!

Pork is by far most popular meat in Romania – one popular saying jokes that “pork is the best vegetable.”¹¹ In my life, I have consumed pork, of private and market origin, and had previously participated in pig cutting. Despite my Romanian

¹¹ Dorel, personal communication.

passport, locals saw my emigration to the United Kingdom for education as diminishing my qualities as a 'true' Romanian. This even though I lived much of my childhood in Ilva Mică with my extended family and my familiarity with the cultural protocols of Bistrița-Năsăud. I was an 'ex-local' - a concept derived from Abu Lughod's notion of 'halfie' anthropologist (1991), one who is caught between her homeland and her new home, continually negotiating her multiple identities. I emphasise the 'ex' in this liminal state as it reflects the doubt and curiosity of my informants, but also my self-consciousness regarding the partial loss of local knowledge and its substitution with new worldviews. I knew I would be teased by my informants who took my aversion to meat to be a result of a desire to lose weight, be sexy, or a cause of my perceived lack of physical strength. One informant remarked: "What do you eat if you don't eat meat?"¹² Many exchanges on this issue were reminiscent of the conflation of sexism, masculinity and meat exhibited in Hurn's case study of a Welsh fox-hunting community (2013). However, research participants, although meat-eaters, did not conform to the dietary habits prescribed nationally.

The National Day of Romania took place on December 1 during my fieldwork, and while many Romanians eat *fasole cu ciolan*,¹³ a stew of beans and smoked pork ribs, but this national food was unappealing to my informants. I was surprised to discover that, in the countryside, this meal was considered farcical and locals preferred to celebrate the day with their own dishes and by flying Romanian flags from the roofs of their homes. *Fasole cu ciolan* was not customary but its marketability is suitable for propagating nationalism in the media (Mihăilescu, 2010).

¹² Radu, participant observation.

¹³ Beans with a smoked, meaty bone.

My informants had no interest in it, so they kept their pigs' bones for other dishes that did not so overtly monopolise national rhetoric.

My participants did not have major objections to my research, but they teasingly pitied my chosen livelihood: "How on earth is academic research sustainable, and why do you prefer it to a practical job?", they asked. They were unconvinced by my intentions of studying pig sacrifice, and suggested I spend my time researching other subjects such as economy or chemistry. Meanwhile, participants presented their villages to me as boring, uneventful, and incomprehensible to an altered Romanian who had fallen for the mirage of the West (Abu-Lughod, 1991). When I Nache to accompany him to another pig sacrifice, his exasperation spilled over. He yelled "Have you not seen enough yet? [All pig sacrifices] are the same."

For Nache, tradition was a well-defined, stable body of knowledge meant to be respected and carried forward. He disagreed with its being questioned, ridiculed and simplified, especially by urban or academic elites. Pig cutting was meaningful for Nache, but he considered my study a waste of time. He was convinced I could never truly understand his lifestyle. Whereas Hurn's (2008) newly acquired knowledge of horse breeding in Wales was welcomed and preferred to that of some uninterested locals, my knowledge and curiosity were dismissed as inauthentic by Nache. The apparent inaccessibility of "true" tradition, only attainable to a 'true' Romanian, feeds into the larger logic of rural economy where members of different species and their natural environments are fundamentally interconnected (Viveiros de Castro, 1998; Ingold, 2000). I argue that these local attitudes facilitate the creation of a therapeutic function for domestic pigs in the region, offering pigs consolatory roles in the face of such profound misunderstandings.

I initiated a meaningful discussion about dietary habits by exposing my culinary choices and then interrogating the locals' own. Some admitted to only rarely eating meat. A young shy girl proudly declared herself the only vegetarian in the family in Ilva, related to Radu and Geta, though her behaviour was interpreted as a whim rather than a rational choice. However, male informants felt somehow threatened by the material possibility of being unable to eat meat:

Dan: Until now, we have always cut the pig – every year. Now, there are all sorts of things you can buy ... but you must be well-off. You must have money if you want to live how you want nowadays.

AO: So, do you want to live without meat? Could you, if you had the possibility?

Dan: What, are you joking? You can pay my taxes to the priest to bury me, because I'd be dead without pork (laughs vigorously, drawing the other participants into the joke).¹⁴

The prospect of a meatless life seems to be insufficiently connected to the act of meat ingestion and its physical effects, and instead points to the likelihood of deepening the gap between the rich and the poor, the unrepresented and disenfranchised rural class. This is especially true if peasants become dissociated from the process of impacting on policies that directly affect their lives and labour (Scott, 1976; Micu, 2010). Dan's cynical comments suggest that he would rather die than lose his right to determine what is good for him, and, essentially losing the grounds for his existence, self-definition and purpose in life. Then, it reveals the

¹⁴ The Romanian Orthodox Church unofficially levies a funeral fee for holding the burial. The Church has repeatedly denied ever imposing a tax on death, but it is common knowledge that one must pay a large sum of money to be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of God.

culinary indulgence that home-grown pork offers to locals. With its unique taste and texture, Dan finds it difficult to imagine a life without home-grown pork, a reason which is often invoked by people who refuse or fail to become vegetarians (Childers, Herzog, 2009). As mentioned before, Romanian pork is deemed unsuitable for EU markets as it does not pass the swine flu test. However, privately raised pig meat is not only edible for Romanians, but preferable to market-origin pork. One of my informants, Nache, completely denied the existence of swine flu and mad cow disease:

They said on the TV that cows and pigs are ill and a lot of farmers killed their animals ... which was tragic, as you can imagine. And then, I saw a special reportage showing this lady who kept her animals and ate them in the end, despite the rumours of disease. What to make of this? I am not sure it's real.¹⁵

This claim might be dismissed as a conspiracy theory, symptomatic of disenfranchised peasants' mistrust of authorial voices. However, Hinchliffe (2015: 29) also highlights the farming policies' focus on "contamination and transmission of pathogens rather than the socio-economic configuration of disease and health", without taking into consideration local practices and the entanglement of human-animal relations. However, the locals' affinity for the taste of pork reveals an affinity for the taste of place, *le goût du terroir* which organises and strengthens collective identity (Halvaksz 2013, Weiss 2011).

Conclusion

With its year-round continuation, and the ever-presence of its related domestic chores, it is impossible to say that the pig cutting ever really ends.

¹⁵ Nache, personal communication.

Normally, the house, yard and kitchen were restored to their usual state between seven and nine in the evening of the pig cutting day. Pig cutting is an all-pervasive event, totally engrossing from the first shot of *jinars* served in the morning, until the last pan of *jumări* have been boiled to the participants' high standards.

In this chapter, I explored the lasting effect of human-pig connections, which are created in during the pig cutting meal, the preparation of products and their consumption. These effects are based on trust and the co-option of nonhumans into human activities. People are proud that they can use their knowledge. They can cook and eat a pig whilst still caring for him, make one's food from scratch, and maintain a household on their own, all while also seeing themselves as modern, or at least 'modern enough'. A sense of worth through work, of work as an exercise of creating communal value and local-esteem flourishes from the pig cutting. Through interspecies attention, trust and skills, but especially through sharing meaningful, sustainable labour (Mihăilescu, 2010), human participants benefit from a therapeutic efflorescence of interspecies collaboration, social bonding, and full stomachs.

Pomana porcului shows the idiosyncratic gastronomies of each household, the intergenerational knowledge and consequent conflicts which arise from its negotiation, but also the interference of market products in this economy of practice. The consumption of a privately-reared and slaughtered pig reveals locals' reluctance to be consumers of market-origin food. At the same time, their views, influenced by religion and village norms, reveal different kinds of patterns of consumption which model their behaviour to their pigs, their relatives and the environment.

The consumption of the pig and his offerings does not end on the pig cutting day, but continues for at least a year, until the process begins again. It demonstrates peasants' pride and remorse about the ways in which pig cutting is carried out. The

consumption of the pig is beneficial through its nourishing function. It also provides comfort to the pig's owners, who can rely on a constant supply of meat for a year. Pigs' consumption is, however, reminiscent of the social therapy of pigs as patient, non-judgemental companions, because they contribute to the enactment of commensality and hospitality even when dead. The order and logic of meat distribution and meat making, at first invisible to me, reiterated the same human-pig relations that were established during the pig's life in which there is risk, contamination and grief, but which are instrumental to the maintenance of household autonomy.

Main Conclusion

The pig is the poor man's animal, so the saying goes. But in my fieldwork, the pig was the animal of the disenfranchised, rural and multitasking human. Arguments which portray the countryside backwards and blame it for 'falling behind', when no reason and intelligible apparatus for modernisation sustain or justify these claims, are ethically unfounded. I have argued that domestic pigs form strong bonds of affection with their owners and play significant roles in their daily struggles. Chapter One explored the human-pig relation from the moment of a pig's entrance into a new household. The housing pigs are given, the food they receive and the daily routines of interspecies care, attention and trust suggest that pigs are recognised as sentient, even affectionate, beings who deserve a good quality of life. In turn, this faith will reward peasants with a superior quality of a highly-prized meat. The recognition of pigs' intelligence rests on the anthropocentric principles of Orthodox religion and local traditions opposed to the 'de-peasantisation' of Romania. Locals are vaguely aware of animal welfare regulations, but mostly they go by idiosyncratic, even instinctual, human-animal norms of biosecurity, sharing and co-habiting, because their pigs are not destined for export markets, and also because they trust their own norms more than they trust ones imposed from above. Although humans are aware they will betray the trust of their pigs through slaughter, in examples like the *case din deal*, the human-pig connection is profound and intense, and this interaction increases pigs' value as therapeutic, relaxing and comforting friends, to the benefit of both pigs and their owners.

Chapter Two examined the killing and portioning of the pigs. Many hours of thorough logistical and emotional preparation precede the slaughter, showing human respect for the pigs, and concern for the pigs' pain. Most participants are reserved

about their remorse and grief towards the dead pigs, and as a coping mechanism, they resort to Christian principles that support the subordination of animals to humans. Locals rely on the loosely-implemented regulation of pig cutting for its yearly success, and on their perceived responsibility to keep traditions alive. Socialisation is encouraged through collaboration towards the success of the procedure, although pig cutting is often a male-dominated practice. Men assert their position of skilled *gospodari*, learn from their elders and share their knowledge with the next generation. Because of changing familial dynamics, women and girls also get a chance to affirm their contribution and skill in pig cutting and in household work. The highly ritualistic nature of the practice, besides holding an obvious socialising function, helps humans deal with the guilt and sadness of killing the pigs. The private killing of a household raised pig is an act of self-help and affirmation of idiosyncratic autonomy within the local community as opposed to the autonomy of a market-oriented farm.

Chapter Three explored the consumption of the pig, looking specifically at the pig cutting celebration meal and at the year-round consumption of homemade pork products. *Pomana porcului*, the fresh pork meal served to pig cutting participants, highlights the locals' hospitality through commensality. The pig's death is never mentioned, and jokes are shared by participants instead, thus putting forward an idealised death of pigs, that is neither painful nor problematic. Participants rejoice in the taste of fresh pork, lauding its beneficial qualities to health, stamina and happiness, all of which are essential to a hard day's work. After this first lavish pork meal, the rest of the pig is made into products that last for a year or more. Making the pig into wholesome food reveals the skills of participants, and their determination to resist market-origin food. It also reveals the interrelation of pigs and humans in a

vernacular form of biosecurity, in which inevitable accidental transmissions occur. These transmissions can be actual and emotional, as shown by Nadia and Mia. The consumption of the pig is rationed over the course of the year, and thus, despite the valorisation of pork, locals' relatively low-meat diets show they are aware of the physical and emotional cost of home-grown meat.

Through their short lives and ceremonial deaths, home-grown pigs address the breach in the logic of rural economies which have been left unaddressed by those who would 'upgrade' the countryside. They show the miscommunication between government and countryside, and peasants' preference for simplicity over bureaucracy, and for familiar practices over foreign influences. These pigs are evidently more than food: they are friends, kin, and even therapists. My conclusion is that officially, despite the positive elements of this assertion of peasant autonomy, the ambivalent enforcement of inflexible regulations locks pig-peasant relations into a damagingly bureaucratic bind, wherein vested interests – the state, the Orthodox church and the EU - compete for cultural and governmental authority. Pig cutting is also the intersection of consumption and consumerism. While this practice reinforces household self-sufficiency, it relies on the state's laissez-faire implementation of animal welfare rules and businesses selling pork and entrails at low prices.

Locals' claims to celebrate tradition and religion through pig cutting reveals the imperfections and contradictions of village life. Saint Ignatius, among other Sainly figures, was a vegetarian, a fact unknown to the priests in my study, or to their parishioners, although this knowledge may change the way pig cutting is performed. The contorted religiosity of the sacrifice of a 'dirty animal', in the period associated with Ignat, the birth of Christ, and fasting, shows the power of local churches, not formal institutional theology, to govern peasant norms.

A more meaningful collaboration between legislative, regulatory and religious institutions would make pig cutting more consistent with the care, kindness and human-environment harmony that my informants claim it perpetuates. More awareness of pig welfare and their complex behaviour could reduce the ethical concerns of pig cutting. Through daily contact, sacrifice and consumption, pigs offer their humans a possibility of self-sufficiency and freedom. They are humans' close allies in navigating the world, and particularly the complexities of peasant life in Romania today.

Glossary of Romanian Terms

Bârgăuan(m)/Bârgăuancă(f) – Someone from Bârgău.

Casa din deal (case pl.) – A small house that some informants had on isolated patches of land outside their villages, and where they kept some of their animals.

Cartaboși – A type of sausage made with pig blood.

Cârnați – Sausages.

Cutume - Customs, oral traditions.

Fain (faini pl.) – Beautiful, nice, cool (Transylvanian regionalism).

Fermier (fermieri pl.) – Farmer(s).

Găzdoi – Regionalism for a rich, self-sufficient, respected householder.

Gospodărie – Household. This term is more than the physical space of a household, and denotes the wealth and good management of a property and household work.

Gospodar(m)/Gospodină (f) – Householder.

Ilvean (m)/Ilveancă (f) – Someone from Ilva Mică

Jinars – Plumb brandy. On the pig cutting day, this is mixed with sugar and caraway seeds.

Jumări – Pork rind.

Matcă de prăsilă – Breeding sow.

Pomana porcului - A stew made of chunks of pork, paprika, and garlic (with regional variations), served with polenta and pickles to all helpers on the pig cutting day, literally 'the pig's offering'.

Porcării – Piggeries (lit.). Silly, unreasonable or vulgar things/words.

Slănină – Smoked pork fat or ham.

Șlapi – Flip-flops, sometimes used as slippers.

Tăierea porcului - Pig cutting practice which involves the slaughtering of a household raised pig, literally 'pig cutting'.

Țăran – Peasant, rural inhabitant.

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