

**SPACES OF REPRESENTATION, PLACES OF IDENTITY
THE CASE OF POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA**

Raluca Parvu

PhD Thesis

Sept 2005

Department of Sociology,
University of Surrey

ABSTRACT

The post-communist condition has been theorised mainly through the prism of concepts developed under different socio-historical circumstances, namely in the Western world, with the consequence that local social actors are not given a voice in the matter of conceptualisations of social change.

This research explores the production of the social and refashioning of identities post-1989 in Romania using mainly interviews and other forms of fieldwork, and organises the analysis around concepts of place, within a discursive understanding of the social.

One of the main points argued is that the locations of the West and Eastern Europe are positioned in a hierarchical relationship through a backwardness discourse, which deeply affects the production of the social in post-communist Romania. The shape of social change after the fall of communism has been largely decided by the societal project of 'catching up with the West', and supported through power relations that implicate both the West and the 'local' (Romanian social actors).

Processes of production of the social are discussed both in the form of the 'return to Europe' project, and in the form of social actors' struggle to fill with meaning the signifiers of societal discourses. Through processes of struggle, hegemonic articulations emerge, and are antagonised by resistance discourses. The main traits of the dominant discourse structuring the social presently in Romania are a materialistic, individualistic stance.

These dominant articulations assign people to subject positions, therefore shaping their identities. The main criterion for allocation to subject positions is material status, and it is against this powerful positioning that individual social actors try to negotiate their identity.

Techniques of identity-work are captured in relation to a different dimension of space/place: place of residence. Three contrasting study areas are chosen for ethnographic research, and the articulations respondents perform explored. Both types of place of residence (detached house and blocks of flats neighbourhood) provide resources that are discursively used for valorising constructions of place and of the profile of the local resident, although in different ways.

Place of residence has the potential to offer alternative subject positions that can be used to mitigate the dominant positioning through the criterion of material status.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank for their support, friendship and intellectual stimulation the following people:

Prof Sara Arber, Prof John Abraham, Prof John Holmwood, Gurminder Bhambra, Nathalie Karagiannis, Mihnea Panu, Ruth Thomas Pellicer, Roddy Loeppky, Deepika Grover, Sam Knafo, Jeppe Strandsjberg, Robbie Shilliam, Mike Drymoussis.

This thesis was written with financial support from a University of Surrey Research Scholarship and the ORS scheme.

A special mention goes to the Home Office, which has relentlessly endeavoured to put me in my place - and in the process has stimulated my thinking on belonging, exclusion and relations of power.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....p1

PART ONE:

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 1: Exploring the post-communist condition.....p7

CHAPTER 2: Discourse, production of the social and agency.....p26

CHAPTER 3: Theorising place.....p40

CHAPTER 4: Methodological issues.....p61

PART TWO:

THE PRODUCTION OF THE SOCIAL

CHAPTER 5: Dislocation and suture in post-communist societies.....p73

CHAPTER 6: Positioning of Eastern Europe through
the backwardness discourse and the new societal project
of catching up with the West.....p85

CHAPTER 7: Production of the social from below:
the struggle over meaning.....p113

CHAPTER 8: New hegemonic and resistance articulations
and the issue of identity.....p141

PART THREE

NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY IN RELATION TO PLACE OF RESIDENCE

CHAPTER 9: Place and identity-work in an old
Bucharest neighbourhood: the case of Cotroceni.....p166

CHAPTER 10: Identity-work in relation to place
in block neighbourhoods: the case of Titan and Drumul Taberei.....p192

PART FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 11: Discussion.....p214

CONCLUSIONS.....p239

Bibliography.....p245

Appendix: List of respondents

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

At a general level, this research deals with the post-communist transition. This focus was prompted not necessarily by the urge to *discover* the truth about an exotic, hitherto largely unknown Other, but rather by the drive to understand how truth is actively *produced within* the process of discovering the ‘real essence’ of this Other. From this latter perspective, the study of the post-communist transition is central for the understandings of who we are now, considering its impact on the organising dichotomies posited as fundamental for our ‘grids of historical decipherment’: West/rest; West/East, capitalism/socialism, liberal democracy/socialism, modernity/pre-modernity and consequently on our more metaphysical understandings of the nature of history, truth, good, the subject, equality, freedom. All those are partly thought about, more precisely are constructed, through the relation between the West and the East, a relation that forms and reforms the identities of both elements of the relation. It is around this object and subject-forming relation therefore, on how it affects the form of social change in the East and on how it affects the identity and knowledge production of the West, that the analytical and explanatory elements of the research revolve.

I initially attempted to approach those aspects of the post-communist transformation through the main theories in the field. The literature review I undertook made me realise that there are specific patterns in the ways the great majority of the studies dealing with the issue of the post-communist ‘condition’ are undertaken.

To start with, the studies I am referring to read the contemporary West-East relationship as a clearly defined relation of power, since one part is codified as the winner of modern history, the other as the loser. The ‘communist collapse’ prompted a redefinition and repositioning of the West, a re-imagining of its identity as end-result of the evolution of history. Hence, the recurrent interpretations of this ‘collapse’ as the ‘end of history’ that many of those studies proffer (the classic statement is Fukuyama 1992) or

- in a less millenarian tone – as the ‘death of socialism’¹ or as the living proof of convergence or globalisation² theories.

What all those understandings allow is a positioning of the particular socio-political arrangements of the West – or more precisely of the ways in which they are imagined by social sciences especially in their realist-scientistic and neo-liberal capitalist guise – as not only preferable but natural: the only available alternative for those willing to live a free and prosperous life. There is nothing left but a total acceptance of the logic of the market and western political arrangements. The way the post-communist transition is approached is a direct consequence of this positioning: the 70 years of socialist experiment are discarded en bloc as a historical aberration and those societies that went through it are portrayed as dismorphic and in need re-education by the hand of the ‘winners’.

Since the only possible alternative to become modern, prosperous and civilised is liberal capitalism, those societies cannot be represented but as in need to ‘catch up with the West’³. This is a classical move in Western theorising⁴, one that permits the signification of the Other as placed somewhere in the West’s historical past, as primitive; in this case it results in a discourse of backwardness that will act as a grid of intelligibility for most analyses of Eastern Europe. And since the future is established and it is the West, it is the West that possesses the expertise on how to get there: the locals are sickly

¹ The impact for political thinking in the West was significant, since the collapse of communism was easily articulated with the lack of viability and desirability of socialist or even social democratic arrangements, facilitating a neo-liberal hegemony. One of the results of this alleged discrediting of left politics was the development of new models of political formation, such as the third way, a non-adversarial, ‘win-win politics’ based on dialogue and non-conflictual social paradigms exemplified in the work of Giddens and Beck under the theme of reflexive modernisation (for a more detailed discussion, see Laclau and Mouffe 2001, especially the Preface).

² Globalisation theories – emitted by both the left and the right - construct it as the inexorable spread of liberal capitalism. Irrespective of their tone (triumphalist or imminent doom), such theories confirm and legitimise neo-liberalism as the only possible option.

³ Ironically, this slogan was used by the Soviet communists to spur the economic efforts of their citizens, boost their morale and intimidate the opponent. That shows to what extent the struggle for world supremacy was since the beginning conducted on the West’s terms.

⁴ It must be made explicit that, even if inspired by a Western worldview, the theories and studies I am describing in this Introduction are not produced exclusively in the West. A plethora of similar productions emerge from Romania itself: this reflects both the impossibility to escape a relation with the West when describing any identity in the contemporary world and the firmly pro-Western stance of the local intelligentsia. It is to studies originating from both locations that I refer throughout.

children in need of education and therapy⁵. Hence, an array of studies that focus on the proper treatment that would restore their ailing health, with marketisation and privatisation at the principal cure, backed up by democracy and civil society.

I shall insist on the mythical images of both the East and the West those studies construct and use to reform and rule both types of societies throughout my text. For the time being I will simply assert that most of them are sweeping theories that adopt a God's eye view of the societies they 'study' to discover the most appropriate measures to hasten their complete transformation into liberal capitalist nations. If they are interested at all in the people whose lives they decide upon, it is a very particular image of the post-communist person that they sketch, mostly to explain why s/he exhibits anomalous behaviours that slow down, distort or thwart the neatly elaborated expert plans to re-build their countries. The ill-will or incapacity to comply with the therapy can only be explained in this paradigm by the lasting damage the years of monstrous communist rule inflicted on those people's selves. Their essential, liberal-individualist core has been contaminated, their competitive, striving, autonomous and democratic natural impulses have been repressed or annihilated: theories explaining the failure of the therapy because of the 'bad patient' are thus abundant (social capital is one of the better known examples).

One vital aspect those theories ignore are the poverty, unemployment and polarisation those therapies themselves engender. This time of opportunities and freedom for the East seem rather one of destabilisation, deprivation and confusion, of insecurity, humiliation and resentment. Nevertheless, it is not on those aspects that the main analytical focus of the research lies. Rather, in my opinion, all those studies miss another essential dimension: the way the social is re-emerging through discursive struggles whose heterogeneity and complexity cannot be captured by approaches focused on such totalising concepts as 'democracy', 'the economy' or 'State/civil society'.

The main research interest became the production of the social, its mechanisms and background (framed in discursive terms); this thesis considers that one of the most important issues after the fall of communism refers to changes in the structures of

⁵ The medical language portraying the East as ill, contaminated, collapsed, in need of therapy, as well as a paternalistic educational language – phrased in terms of (re)forming, teaching, tutoring, guiding, surveying – are rife in the type of studies I am scrutinising here.

meaning that used to anchor the identity of the local social actors. In brief, I am attempting to turn those theories of the Eastern-European 'transition' on their head and present the world from the perspective of the 'backward patient'. This attempt started from the understanding that once again, all that was solid melted into thin air for those people: their worlds and their selves have to be actively reformed and renegotiated. Therefore, only an understanding of the processes through which the actors attempt to make sense of (or 'make' tout court) their world could permit a glimpse of what those societies are or transforming into. Hence, the research attempts to capture in a snapshot the shifting terrain they have to negotiate, the permanently wavering contours of reality they have to attempt to stabilise, the complexity of the games of signification they are engaged in.

I have approached social change by looking at the discourses that effect it and combined this with a focus on social actors' understandings and practices as participants in discourses. In other words, I have engaged with identity-formation as a central mechanism of the formation of the social and examined both the ways in which discourses create subject positions and fashion subjectivities and by investigating how social actors negotiate their discursive positioning.

This is mainly a study about places, about the largely invisible but continuous and meticulous effort of construction (and the acerbic struggles over meaning) that confer places their stability, solidity, permanence and thus allows them to constitute the foundation of our understandings of the world. In other words, about how the fixed points around which we construct our worlds – places and spaces - are themselves constructed. About how the discourses that cause the West and the East to emerge as discrete geographical, social and symbolic spaces intersect the discourses that cause individuals to imbibe with sense and materiality - to 'place' and 'emplace' – themselves and their world. The social actors are performing this identity-work through every practice they engage in (in forms as different as accounts or narratives in informal settings, and choices over what car to buy); therefore a way of capturing it was to focus on a setting in relation to which identity-work is carried out – in the case of this analysis, place of residence was used as a relevant setting and an angle of analysis of identity negotiation.

It is hoped that at the end of this exploration not only a different image of what is ‘social reality’ in a post-communist society will emerge, but the accounts of the ‘patients’ might contribute to making more controversial the paradigms of their ‘doctors’. Those recalcitrant patients will show themselves able to contest categories that are considered fundamental to the extent that they are never questioned by the therapeutic theories and policies – precisely the meanings of the good and the good society, sociality, the individual, freedom, democracy, capitalism, market - showing a reflexivity obscured by the majority of the studies focusing on their deficient character. By giving a voice to those usually silenced in the studies that describe them, by picturing a different image of a post-communist society - although an essentially partial and transitory one – I do not aim nor hope to dislocate the dominant neo-liberal discourses; I nevertheless do hope I can contribute to making their taken-for-granted nature less evident, to assist

“in wearing away certain evidences and commonplaces [...] to bring it about [...] that certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer so unhesitantly performed; to contribute to changing certain things in people’s ways of perceiving and doing things; to participate in this difficult displacement of forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance”
(Foucault 1991, p83)

Overview of the chapters

This thesis is structured in three parts.

Part one presents the main approaches to theorising post-communism, including theories of stratification, as the landscape in which my research is located, and proposes a different angle of analysis that gives discourse a central place (chapter 1). Also, in part one the main theoretical concepts used throughout the thesis will be discussed. Chapter 2 deals with theories of discourse and of agency in a discursive understanding of the social, while chapter 3 looks the contributions of social scientists to theories of place/space and the use of space/place to conceptualise, explain or describe the social. Chapter 4 describes the methodology of this research and raises some ethical issues.

Part two of the thesis examines the production of the social in and across spaces. Chapter 5 proposes an explanation of the events around the fall of communism in Romania and the ensuing state of affairs that draws on the discursive nature of the social, and introduces notions of social dislocation and suture. The symbolic positioning of Eastern Europe and West is detailed in chapter 6, and its implications on the shape of social change (especially the suture of the dislocation) in Eastern Europe are spelled out. Chapter 7 uses interview material to illuminate a different dimension of production of the social – namely ‘from below’, meaning through the articulatory practices that social actors constantly perform. These articulations have taken at societal level the form of dominant and resisting discourses, which are presented in chapter 8.

Part three of the thesis turns to the specific use of place of residence by local social actors in their efforts to negotiate their position across discursive structures – in the context of strong criteria for social hierarchies (strong subject positions they are allocated to by the dominant discourses presented in chapter 8). Chapter 9 looks at an old detached house Bucharest neighbourhood, while chapter 10 focuses on two study neighbourhoods in two block areas. The analysis tries to capture the nature of identity work, the techniques and discursive resources used.

Part four introduces a discussion that unites some of the issues that different preceding chapters have raised (chapter 11), and a last chapter of conclusions brings together the findings of this research and highlights their relevance, but also the limitations of the claims made throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE POST-COMMUNIST CONDITION

Introduction

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe has prompted widespread debates across the social sciences. It was met with an initial fascination that Zizek captured as follows:

“Why is the west so fascinated by the recent events in Eastern Europe? The answer seems obvious: what fascinates the Western gaze is the *re-invention of democracy*. It is as if democracy, which in the West shows increasing signs of decay and crisis, lost in bureaucratic routine and publicity-style election campaigns, is being rediscovered in Eastern Europe in all its freshness and novelty. The function of this fascination is thus purely ideological: in Eastern Europe the West looks for its own lost origins, for the authentic experience of ‘democratic invention’” (Zizek 1990, p50).

This remark about the interest the West took in the developments in Eastern Europe can be extended to include, along with the emergence of liberal democracy, the re-birth of capitalism - re-inauguration of the free market and property rights, and a reconfiguration of ‘classes’ or other forms of social stratification. Post-communist Eastern Europe represented a laboratory of social change: by studying the production of democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe, more general insights could be gained, that would shed light on processes taking place in the West.

The initial interest and expectations Zizek describes were followed by frustration and disappointment with the post-communist ‘transition’: instead of the expected ‘democratic invention’, local developments often took the shape of national chauvinism and ethnic populism; as for ‘capitalism’, in Eastern Europe it took ‘messy’ shapes in relation to Western forms of capitalisms, due to specific arrangements of the past being carried to a certain extent into the present.

Nevertheless, in academic circles the post-communist condition has been at the core of renewed theoretical debates on a variety of topics, and a target for policies and intervention. The section below reviews some of the ways in which these debates have theorised aspects of post-communism, and highlights their shortcomings.

I will then introduce a discussion on forms of stratification in the communist and post-communist societies in order to locate my approach to these issues (which guided some of the research questions), but also as a useful background for issues raised later in the thesis.

The last part of the chapter will propose an alternative angle of analysis of the post-communist condition, which will be developed throughout this thesis.

Theorising the post-communist condition: dominant approaches and their shortcomings

This section does not attempt an extended overview of the field of post-communist studies, but it summarises some of the trends in the field, in order to convey a sense of how issues are generally framed, what questions animate research, and what types of conceptualisations are employed.

An important aspect of studies related to the post-communist condition refers to the fact that most of the knowledge produced about Eastern Europe comes from Western scholars and institutions (or Eastern European writers living and working in the West). There is not much independent work coming from Eastern Europe: local scholars tend to produce studies commissioned by international agencies, and to follow the concepts and strategies of research that are on the agenda of funding bodies (throughout the East funds for education and research have fallen after 1990 to bottom levels).

This goes against some initial expectations regarding a creative outburst among Eastern European social scientists. As Ule (2004, p160) states, “[t]he evaluation of sociology in (post)transition countries from the standpoint of ‘western’ sociology is based on the assumption that, after years of ideological constraint, East European social scientists are finally able to work and create freely... Thus sociologists are now expected to finally come into their own... to produce new theoretical concepts to make up for the

deficiencies of the past”; creating original concepts and analyses proved though to be more difficult than expected. This is partly due to the circumstances under which ‘local’ producers of knowledge (i.e. social scientists) work: harsh economic conditions, lack of funding and very low wages for those employed by university and research institutions. Almost all the funding comes from ‘outside’ through the programmes of Western institutions, agencies and governments.

The case of feminist research detailed by Smejkalova (2004) is illustrative for a more general situation of hierarchical relationships between scholars and research centres (involving funding issues) in the West and Eastern Europe. Smejkalova (2004, p171) points to the early 1990s when “western feminist scholars rushed to the region of Eastern Europe under the flag of ‘global sisterhood’...in order to ‘work on communist women’...Some of them also tend to treat (and hire) their eastern colleagues as more or less second-rate assistants to their own academic projects”. In short, “an assumption came onto being according to which the ‘West’ was the producer of ‘theory’ and the ‘East’ was supposed to provide the empirical data” (Smejkalova 2004, p171).

Generally, the relationship between the Western and Eastern European scholars has not been one of free exchange of ideas; Western scholars (together with international funding agencies, investors, experts, consultants) have turned their gaze to the fashionable field of Eastern Europe and started producing knowledge about the area – which was (understandably) done with the theoretical tools developed in the tradition of Western thought, often accompanied by a lack of knowledge of what the communist period entailed as a project of re-fashioning society and subjectivities within it.

Under these conditions of scarce funding, and as many local scholars depend for their income and lifestyle on participation in externally-funded programmes of research and policy, a competitive and backstabbing atmosphere rather than a cooperative one has developed in many Eastern European academic and research settings. Foreign contacts are jealously guarded and not shared – they constitute a form of social capital (as Bourdieu 1984, 1986 has defined it) that can be turned into economic capital.

This state of affairs also introduces a bias in terms of what kind of research is likely to be carried out: quantitative research, surveys, policy-oriented studies are much more likely to interest funding bodies. Locally-produced research tends to apply concepts

developed by various theories produced in the West, that often does not capture the nature of some local issues. In Romania, fashionable topics include studies of civil society (or rather the lack of), and various aspects of ‘reform’, ‘transition’ (the examining and monitoring of the adoption of Western models of social, political and economic organisation, usually accompanied by exposure of their ‘incomplete’ and deficient implementation and the causes for this situation)¹.

This research does not focus solely on the economic and financial conditions that determine knowledge formation, but rather insists on the hegemonic processes through which the understandings of the world, the grids of historical decipherment originating in the West colonise the local worldviews by making the local actors accept them as ‘normal’, ‘good’ and ‘true’. As Said put it (in the context of the Orientalist project), this colonising of knowledge is not a one-way process, and it necessitates the involvement or participation of ‘local’ social actors, under unequal power relations and unequal access to resources:

“The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’...but also because it *could be* – that is, submitted to being – *made* Oriental.... Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand...[he] was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part” (Said 2003, p7-8, emphasis in original).

To sum up, the post-communist condition has been theorised largely outside Eastern Europe, in an intellectual environment dominated by political science (or political sociology) and economics. Ethnographic studies have been produced as well, but they tend to be less publicised and take up less space within the general discussion related to post-communism². According to Bunce (1999), “the recent collapse of regime and state in the eastern half of Europe speaks nearly by definition to a broad range of the literature in comparative politics – including, for example, the work on nations, nationalism, and

¹ As exemplified by the articles published in leading Romanian journals such as *Sfera Politicii* and *Dilema*, and by the debates which animate the meetings of the GDS (the Group for Social Dialogue, an interdisciplinary forum for debating aspects of the communist and post-communist societies, including the ‘transition’)

² For examples of ethnographic work, see Kideckel (1993), Verdery (1996)

secession; on revolution; on the role of institutions in politics; and on transitions from dictatorship to democracy”.

The end of communism has given an impetus to debate on the nature of *capitalism*; attempts to grasp and theorise Eastern European countries’ trajectory towards capitalism, resulted in concepts such as ‘predatory capitalism’ (Kotz 2001), ‘chaotic capitalism’ (Lane 1999), ‘wild capitalism’, capitalism ‘Russian-style’ (Gustafson 1999) being used. A large amount of the literature approached change in Eastern Europe through the process of adoption of the *free market* (marketisation, privatisation, etc.), institutions and property relations³, and the prominent role of the free market in regulating other social aspects; within these approaches, ‘society’ is studied through the lens of its contribution to or hampering of the functioning of the market⁴.

Another tenet of the discussion of post-communism has been concerned with notions of *democracy* and functioning of political institutions, and the relation state-society⁵, with concepts such as *civil society*, *social atomisation* and *social capital* taking front seat. Post-communism has also revived debates on *modernity*⁶, theories of *nationalism*⁷ and of *globalisation* – especially ‘end of history’-type accounts. The communist experiment of social equality has stirred discussions on forms of *stratification* and paths of transmission of social advantage into the new socio-economic order (employing mostly Marxian or/and Weberian notions of class⁸).

In conclusion, much of the research on Eastern Europe employs almost exclusively lines of thought central to the Western intellectual tradition and is actually centred on the West, in the sense that it attempts to clarify concepts that are relevant for the Western experience, and the East has the status of a testing ground for various theories produced in the West. Moreover, the Eastern European experience is assessed from the normative standpoint of the West: this is “a way of looking at the world... a way of dividing up the world that puts an omnipotent subject at the center and constructs

³ See for example Cox and Mason (1999)

⁴ Studies produced by and for the World Bank and IMF are mainly investigating the conditions necessary for the reproduction of the features characteristic of capitalism in its neoliberal and globalised form, according to Gowan (1995, 1996)

⁵ E.g. Poznanski (1992)

⁶ See Bonnett (2004), Outhwaite and Ray (2005) and Ray (1997)

⁷ For example, Gellner (1991) and Magas (1991)

⁸ E.g. Lane (1996)

marginal Others as sets of negative qualities” (Hartsock 1990, p161). This is illustrated in the way a wealth of studies approached the phenomena in Eastern Europe: initially, there was the expectation that these societies will unproblematically switch to democracy and free market, and when local developments did not take the expected shape, and the ‘transition’ proved to be a thorny one, representations of ‘lack’ and ‘deficiency’ were produced to account for it, testifying a lack of understanding and of willingness to engage with the local context.

Bruner (2002) details the case of contemporary Russia and how “the oversimplified discursive equation of free markets and democracy (p167) is an approach that fails to grasp local specific developments, or to address relevant social issues such as the criminalisation of the business elite and the impoverishment of the population.

Eyal et al (1997, p69) point to the problem that many studies of post-communism are guilty of – namely the “assumption that privatization in East Central Europe should be analyzed with tools derived from the analysis of the rise of capitalism in the West”. Research guided by a focus on identifying the features of social change through the blueprint provided by the experience of Western capitalism will, according to these authors, ask the wrong questions and miss important developments characteristic to the post-communist countries and absent from earlier Western contexts. Also, by taking Western capitalism as the norm, characterisation of post-communist societies are produced in negative terms: “these societies have been defined by what they are not: they are not ‘proper’ capitalist societies because they do not have a recognizable capitalist class; post-communist institutions cannot work, or they have the ‘wrong’ property rights and therefore will not be able to reproduce themselves” (Eyal et al 1997, p70).

More generally, a teleological approach dominates early research on post-communism, which frames all local developments in terms of ‘return to capitalism’⁹ – a stand that impedes an examination of these societies on their own terms. Baudrillard (1994, p39) warns against “the naïve vision of a frozen history suddenly awakening and automatically heading once again, like a turtle, for the sea (for democracy). Things are much more complicated than that” – his description fits an initial simplistic approach to

⁹ as exemplified by the title of Poznanski’s book in 1992: *Constructing Capitalism. The Reemergence of Civil Society and Liberal Economy in the Post-Communist World*

post-communism as continuing a path that communism had interrupted, with Eastern European countries expected now to resume the 'natural' progression towards capitalism and democracy as espoused by Western countries, as if fifty to seventy years of communism could be erased by the fall of Eastern European regimes.

This is an example of the way dominant theoretical approaches tend to overlook certain domains of experience and practice located in various (non-western) sites, which so become subjugated knowledges. But it is not only Western-produced knowledge that marginalises local understandings. Romanian analysts represent the voice of the intellectual elites, and therefore authoritatively impose as 'objective' or 'true' a certain image of the social, that silences and marginalises other constructs of the present and of the past, coming especially from non-intellectual milieus. I am here in agreement with Verdery (1991, p17), who states: "[f]ollowing Bauman's lead, I treat 'intellectuals' as sometime occupants of a site that is privileged in forming or transmitting discourses, in constituting thereby the means through which society is 'thought' by its members, and informing human subjectivities". Romanian intellectuals have been active in portraying the communist past in a certain form, from a privileged, authority position. Representations created by the intellectual elite, for example, render difficult the understanding of such orientations as nostalgia for the past and rejection of the present arrangements that are present among Romanian citizens. Those who put forward such points of view are usually portrayed as conservative, un-reformable, irrational and unintelligible¹⁰. As Fuller (2000, p588) has noticed in respect to Eastern European intellectuals, "they assume the right to speak for everyone in the region".

Additionally, Eastern European (including Romanian) social scientists are happy to apply dominant concepts produced in the context of the exploration of Western capitalist societies to the local situation; the fashion of using the Eastern European context to 'test' Western conceptual models is a widespread one¹¹.

To sum up, the Eastern European experience cannot be grasped adequately by studies that use concepts developed from different contexts and that reflect particular circumstances (but claiming universal applicability), and that are not sensitive to the

¹⁰ The work of Patapievici (1996) is illustrative of this approach.

¹¹ For a clear example, see Aligica (2003)

ways in which social phenomena arise as the result of relations (which involve both the West and the 'local', i.e. Eastern Europe). This approach is bound to overlook practices and miscast the nature of local events, and to evaluate them through supposedly neutral, universal concepts that are actually a normative lens. The contribution of Eastern European intellectuals to reinforcing this approach should not be underestimated.

Eastern Europe has the potential – through the knowledges, contestations, divergent practices employed in social life and the different forms of intelligibility they articulate – to have impact on the production of knowledge both in the West, and in non-western contexts, potential which is not encouraged by the dominant approaches mentioned above.

Approaches to inequality and stratification in the communist and post-communist contexts

This section on debates on the nature of stratification under communism and in the post-communist period serves a few purposes. Firstly, the broad topic of stratification is an intellectual field in which my research interests are located: this thesis is tackling aspects of the 'reconfiguration' of the social in post-communist Romania, and stratification processes (the shape new divisions in the social realm take) are part of this reconfiguration. Secondly, aspects of the debate presented below can illustrate the point made in the previous section regarding the use of concepts assumed to have a universal applicability and the difficulties this approach engenders. Thirdly, by presenting arguments on and analyses of communist and post-communist aspects of stratification, I provide a background against which some of the assertions made in the analysis chapters, and also positions or representations contained in the interviews with Romanian respondents, can be better grasped and assessed. Finally, this section allows for a clearer exposition of the angle of analysis employed in this thesis, in terms of how it compares with other approaches to stratification.

Communism and social equality

The nature of social stratification during communism is a matter of debate: did communist societies have forms of stratification comparable or similar to the West, or were there specific traits that render the case of these societies unique¹²?

Some authors look at the particularities of communist regimes that have no equivalent in Western societies, and that are due to the program of social reform and social engineering that communist states have set in place¹³ - 'equality by design'. Efforts to alter the stratification regime and to influence social mobility patterns include nationalisation (confiscation) of properties and business, together with collectivisation of agriculture, which meant that the previous owners of property and land and their families were deprived of an important source of income and status and had to rely on state employment only; political criteria for job allocation¹⁴ – party members had priority for important positions and in the 1950s the 'social origin' had a strong influence on the career chances (manual worker and peasant backgrounds favoured compared to 'unhealthy social origin', meaning not only rich bourgeois and land-owner background, but also petty bourgeoisie and well-off peasants), but this tended to fade in the 1960s; finally, reforms in the field of education, with the expansion of the educational system and wide access can be seen as part of this effort of social engineering of social equality.

The effect of this effort to flatten social differences is often portrayed through images of social homogeneity. According to the 'homogeneity paradigm', communist societies "are understood to be composed of an amorphous and largely undifferentiated mass" and "a minuscule political elite who thoroughly monopolize all forms of power" (Fuller 2000, p585) – a dominant mode of representation among Eastern European scholars. Fuller (2000) highlights the fact that it actually represents the point of view of Eastern European intellectuals that work with the assumption that their understandings adequately grasp the experiences, opinions and interests of the whole population. Fuller asserts that the homogeneity paradigm glosses over a deep rift in communist societies between intellectuals and workers (with the former enjoying more privileges and being

¹² See Lane (1996) for a discussion of mainstream approaches.

¹³ For a discussion, see Hanley and Treiman (2004), Szelenyi, S. (1998)

¹⁴ Political criteria extended to admission into higher education, with quotas for certain social backgrounds.

deeply involved with the communist ruling and management structures), a fundamental line of division that analyses of communism should not obscure. This view¹⁵ is in line with the famous thesis formulated by Szelenyi (1982) that identifies a ‘new dominating class’ in communist countries – the intelligentsia (and which has been received with hostility by the said Eastern European intellectuals).

In a similar vein, many authors tend to emphasise the similarities in regimes of stratification and social mobility between communist and Western countries. “While some have argued that in the early days of communism, those with bourgeois backgrounds were actively discriminated against, there is a substantial body of thought, accompanied by many empirical studies, that suggest that the ‘distortions’ of the Stalinist period were just that – short-lived deviations from a system of status attainment and social mobility that did not differ fundamentally from that of Western countries” (Hanley and Treiman, 2004)¹⁶.

This is based on the assumption that high socioeconomic status is correlated with educational attainment, and that social mobility is determined by the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital: social skills – habitus, and knowledge, as detailed in Bourdieu’s work (1984). Although education was free during communism, and policies were set in place to increase educational opportunities for working class and peasant children¹⁷, in an effort to level educational achievement, the way the educational system was functioning put at advantage children from ‘intellectual’ backgrounds (cultural

¹⁵ Fuller reviews literature on Eastern Europe and concludes that “the relationship between the two classes is frequently described as estranged, formal, and uneasy at best and as tense, deeply antagonistic, and sharply contradictory at worst” (2000, p602); moreover, “they did not... share a joint oppositional history under socialism” (2000, p603).

¹⁶ For example, Parkin (1971), Lane (1982) are proposing this reading of social arrangements under communism.

¹⁷ Much has been made of the discrimination and restrictions that the offspring of wealthy families have suffered in the field of higher education during communism. It is a persistent theme in the landscape of Romania – and throughout Eastern Europe, both in scholarly work and everyday discourse. This situation though was generally restricted to the 1950s, and does not have the width that is often attributed (an ‘intellectual genocide’). The prominence of this account might be explained by the powerful, privileged position of intellectuals as producers of knowledge. Much less is for example made of the death of thousands of women through illegal abortions under the Ceausescu regime in Romania, as a form of systematic persecution and infringement of human rights.

reproduction theory): children from intellectual backgrounds were over-represented in higher education¹⁸.

Therefore, communist societies were not the classless societies that the Communist Party doctrine was boasting, but contained significant systematic inequalities and forms of reproduction of social advantage or disadvantage. On the other hand, the efforts of the state to reshuffle the older stratification criteria and bases for social advantage cannot be neglected¹⁹ – they had important effects at the level of representations, the ways people thought about themselves and about ‘society’ (which will be discussed in chapter 5).

Most studies on stratification and inequality during communism focus on identifying societal trends and formulate general theories that fail to capture the experiential, lived dimension of inequality, as well as specific everyday circumstances that ‘interfere’ with the generic models proposed.

The study of Ledeneva (1998) provides insights into the more complex nature of social ties and implicitly social hierarchies, by introducing the concept of *blat*. Her analysis captures aspects of the lived everyday that mainstream theories of stratification (in the dominant field of political science) do not account for, in the context of extended shortages, in Russia – but the analysis is relevant for any Eastern European shortage-ridden society.

The concept of *blat* covers very diverse practices. “*Blat* was an exchange of ‘favours of access’ in conditions of shortages and a state system of privileges... It served the needs of personal consumption and reorganised the official distribution of material welfare. *Blat* exchange was often mediated and covered by the rhetoric of friendship or acquaintance: ‘sharing’, ‘helping out’, ‘friendly support’, ‘mutual care’, etc. Intertwined with personal networks, *blat* provided access to public resources through personal channels” (ibid., p37). Therefore, “*blat* is a distinctive form of non-monetary exchange, a kind of barter based on personal relationship. It worked where money did not. In the

¹⁸ For similar findings, see Kesler’s (2003) study that shows inequalities in educational attainment at elite secondary level in respect to social origins (the service class vs manual workers) in the former GDR

¹⁹ The impact of the communist regime policies in Romania in terms of socioeconomic status, standards of living, health, education and literacy, women’s employment, childcare facilities, etc. were significant and similar to those documented in Russia or Cuba.

planned economy, money did not function as the main element in economic transactions, things were sorted out by mutual help, by barter” (p34).

One of the main features of the *blat* consists in the importance of personal relationships for its functioning – it is different from informal economic practices (‘grey’, informal economy, bribery, fiddling) because it is based in ties of reciprocity within personal networks, rather than profit-oriented activities and market-type exchanges. “There was no clear-cut quantification of reciprocity within such networks, there was a more intuitive sense of mutual obligations supported by eagerness to belong to the system and fear of being excluded from it” (p115)

Blat was a widespread practice that covered all areas of life: through *blat* scarce goods such as food, soap, clothing, etc. were obtained; through *blat* long queues were jumped and products obtained through the back door, as a ‘friendly connection’ with the shop assistant meant that he/she would put aside goods for ‘special friends and acquaintances’; through *blat* one had access to special treatment by the medical profession: being recommended to a doctor meant that one would get more attention, better care, adequate medication; also one could jump the years-long waiting lists for flats, cars, domestic appliances through *blat*, or avoid punishment for trespassing the law. “*Blat* is a ‘survival kit’ reducing uncertainty in conditions of shortage, exigency and perpetual emergency, in which formal criteria and formal rights are insufficient to operate” (p78).

Ledeneva discriminates between two types of ties implied by *blat* practices - horizontal and vertical ties: the horizontal ones were composed of people of the same status (sometimes sharing workplace or leisure activities, similar values and lifestyles), the vertical ones by people of different social strata interested in each other’s connections and linked by kin, personal contacts or intermediaries. While within the horizontal networks routine ‘help’ was present, the vertical ties were accessed rather intermittently for special favours, and had a more instrumental character.

An important consequence of *blat* practices, in which the whole of the population was enmeshed, was the impact on forms of social stratification and on occupational prestige.

Through being skilled at *blat* relations, one could have access to scarce resources; as these skills had no systematic connection with one's educational background, occupation or one's material situation, it meant that people could negotiate to a certain extent the social meaning of class or occupation. Being in a more comfortable position, able to get things done for one's family and friends was down to personal skills – one did not always have to reciprocate for favours in the same terms, often it was enough to be polite, friendly, and to make rather symbolic gestures towards the 'donor' of the favour, like small presents for birthdays, New Year cards, etc. Also, because of the wide-ranging character of scarcity, that affected every aspect of life, most occupational positions had something to offer in the *blat* system, in terms of resources, favours or simply information.

Therefore it was a very plausible situation that a clerk would be better connected and have a better life-style (e.g. more food, a better flat, better healthcare due to personalised connections to doctors and pharmacists) than, say, an engineer, although the wage of the engineer and his occupational prestige would be higher and therefore in theory he would have a higher position in the social hierarchy. The social positions of both the clerk and the engineer were redefined by the actual resources they commanded; the social prestige of the occupation was balanced in everyday life by the actual living conditions of the person.

The all-encompassing phenomenon of *blat* made it difficult to think of clear-cut social positions and hierarchies, as it blurred lines of stratification. It had an equalising effect, and at the same time it produced inequalities, between the well-connected and the ones that did not manage to master the techniques and skills of the *blat* to the same extent, or refused to engage in such practices for anything than serious emergencies. But these inequalities tended to be randomly distributed across the population, and not tied to certain group characteristics, making it difficult to talk about a systematic basis for inequality.

Of course, this statement excludes the highest echelon of Party members who had systematic preferential treatment, but they were seen as a category apart that did not need *blat* in the same way as the rest of the population to improve their situation – although they could be accessed by contacts, kin and friends for special favours.

Apart from the role it played in processes of material redistribution that rendered the boundaries between occupational groups (in terms of wage differentials, consumption patterns) less clear, *blat* changed the meaning of the social prestige of occupations; it added a dimension of power, as occupations were appraised in terms of access to scarce resources – therefore a shop assistant or a factory guard, or service technicians able to fix household appliances could be very ‘powerful’ positions; a certain hierarchy of ‘utility’ in terms of access to information, resources and privileges cut across other (pre-existing) dimensions of social prestige and financial rewards usually associated with occupations.

“Everybody had to find a way to enter into *blat* connections and thus either compensate for their relatively low occupational status or construct a symbolic value for their profession” (p133). In this way secretaries, shop assistants, factory workers, clerks, small bureaucrats, etc. were able to raise the social desirability of their position and gain individual and collective power through daily contacts in which their services were required as favours by diverse other social groups. “Certain individuals could make themselves as powerful as those who held high formal positions just by developing refined skills of negotiating and acquiring an ability to form a large social network that could serve as a form of wealth or as a resource-base itself” (p113).

Finally, *blat* practices had implications on forms of sociality, as they required constant social contact and active investment in interpersonal relationships.

The phenomenon of *blat* can be connected to Bourdieu’s notion of social capital. Bourdieu (1986, p249) defines the social capital of a social agent as “the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital...possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected”.

Both concepts of *blat* and social capital presented above are useful in grasping dimensions of inequality in communist societies that were based in everyday practices and experiences.

Post-communism and new forms of social inequality

The fall of communism and subsequent changes have prompted research on the new forms of stratification in Eastern European societies. Who are the winners (and losers) of

the ‘transition’²⁰? Who is the new dominant class, in terms of property and business ownership or access to privileged command positions? How is it different from the Western bourgeoisie or managerial class? These questions are prominent in the landscape of sociological inquiry on post-communism.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Nee’s theory of market transition published in the *American Sociological Review* in 1989 and the replies to it dominated the research agenda. Nee (1989) suggested that the main beneficiaries of the transition to market would be enterprising or entrepreneurial individuals. What are the determinants of socioeconomic attainment in the transition period? A wealth of studies tried to show who the ones benefiting the transition to market mechanisms actually are.

Staniszki (1991), Stark (1990, 1992) put forward the path dependency or political capitalism thesis: post-communist societies build *with* the ruins of socialism as opposed to a tabula rasa situation, resulting in a “new economic system constructed from elements of the old, imported ideas, and indigenous innovations” (Eyal et al 1997, p68). The conditions present before the fall of communism will heavily influence the form ‘capitalism’ will take in these countries; they cannot expect to converge towards the same social arrangements and norms as in Western Europe. Political capital is seen as a special form of social capital consisting of party membership; the new propertied bourgeoisie will come from the ranks of the former nomenklatura. The process started under communism: party cadres in privileged positions that they used to establish contacts (e.g. in export economic activities); this knowledge and power allowed them after 1989 to be the main beneficiaries of privatisation. This thesis tends to be applied to Poland (Staniszki 1991) and Hungary (Stark 1990).

Another thesis refers to post-socialist managerialism (Eyal et al 1997, 1998) – based on a study of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland. The ones with human and cultural capital (dissidents, intellectuals, technocrats and managers) rather than political capital will be in power positions in the post-communist period (the top officials in the former Party structure will be in the public eye, scrutinised by ex-dissidents). The authors draw on Bourdieu’s concepts of different types of capital: “the new power elite of post-communism resembles the most closely what Bourdieu has called ‘the dominated fraction

²⁰ Crow and Rees (1999), Roberts et al (2002), Bryant and Mokrzycki (1994)

of the dominant class' in Western capitalism: it exercises power principally on the basis of knowledge, expertise and the capacity to manipulate symbols, in short, 'cultural capital'... We show that the incumbents of economic command positions are those who were already in managerial positions prior to the fall of communism" (Eyal et al 1997, p61).

Finally, Szelenyi (1988) proposes the 'capitalism from below' model. The experience accumulated in the secondary economy can be used in the post-communist context (the socialist entrepreneurs in the legal secondary economy or private sector and also the ones in the illegal black market or grey economy – speculators - had the cultural capital as expertise, experience, an understanding of the principles and practical functioning of the market, contacts, etc.). The second economy was a subversive force within the planned economy that challenged and eroded the power of the Communist Party (Rona-Tas 1995) – this was though characteristic of certain countries, like Hungary and Poland, that had a well-developed private sector, which was almost inexistent in Romania, where the secondary economy was severely curtailed.

These analyses of the 'winners' of the post-communist society look at entrepreneurship (ownership of property or business, employers, self-employed) as a sign of socioeconomic privilege or achievement. The diversity of theories and pathways to achievement proposed by social scientists reflect the diversity of the situation during communism and after (policies of privatisation, etc.) in Eastern European countries.

Hanley (2000) though questions the indicator used to assess 'success': self employment is not necessarily a sign of achievement but just a survival strategy under conditions of poverty and loss of previous (preferable) employment. Stoica (2004) further questions the usefulness of entrepreneurship (self-employment and being an employer) as sign of socioeconomic success in the new market economies. He points to forms of entrepreneurship that do not fit into the ideal-typical models of the West (part-time entrepreneurship characteristic of some Eastern European societies). According to Stoica (2004, p252),

"in East Central Europe, some part-time entrepreneurs – taking advantage of widespread corruption, the lack of the rule of law, and poor enforcement of existing rules – keep their main jobs in the state sector to siphon off state

resources to use them in their private business. Accounts in the Romanian press suggest that state officials have massively adopted this entrepreneurial strategy, in this case, we are dealing with the phenomenon of “predatory state bureaucracy”, which has negative consequences for the development of domestic entrepreneurial classes and economic growth” (Stoica 2004, p252).

Part-time entrepreneurship is also a strategy for ordinary people, who combine a few jobs, of which one is a state job - still considered the safest option (a safety net in case the private business goes wrong).

Stoica (2004) predicts the Romanian case to fall within the political capitalism model rather than capitalism from below or managerialism because of the mass character of the Romanian communist party – a very high number of members, and the fact that most responsibility positions necessitated being a party member (professionals). So a numerous contingent of former cadres can still use their good connections (or social capital: “social networks, with access to resources and privileged information about economic opportunities and niches” Stoica 2004, p264). The author also details what networks and resources are used or necessary for what type of projects. For a small business for example, ideas and family support, a small capital, and hard work are sufficient. For a medium one, money is necessary, but connections become more important. As for a large business, connections are most important, as they can provide access to money, in the form of preferential bank loans, state contracts, etc. This connection between political functions and business is a widespread feature of Romanian society.

This section has outlined issues that have been at the core of an ongoing sociological debate. These studies of post-communism use (implicitly or explicitly) notions of individual economic status in order to evaluate success and failure, to separate the winners and the losers - it could be argued that this criterion oversimplifies more complex lines of division. The approaches above rely heavily on statistical exploration from which models of the social are built, and pays less attention to the ways social status and social divisions are negotiated in the sites of everyday interaction in these societies, an issue I will turn to in the next section.

The aims of the research

The research at the core of this thesis explores aspects of the post-communist condition, and the preceding sections have briefly looked at the theoretical environment in this field. This section locates my approach within this environment and introduces the broad questions that have animated the research.

I am employing a discursive understanding of the social (that sees the objects, concepts, phenomena constituting the social as discursively produced, and underpinned by power relations, as discussed in chapter 2) in order to examine how discourses are deployed in the local cultural context, at the level of social practices, how they are involved in the production of the social and in the creation (and negotiation) of identities.

The general issues that have guided the research and analysis and that engage with the theoretical debate presented above on the nature of post-communism are: the restructuring of the social in the form of dominant and resisting articulations (the new discourses, including practices and institutions, that are implicated in the production of the social in contemporary Romania, and their conditions of possibility), and the implications of this restructuring for the identities of local social actors.

It has been asserted that most research on post-communism tries to fit a complex local situation into concepts produced in a different socio-historical context (or ‘tests’ these concepts on Eastern European ground). Rather than starting to analyse the social through the lens of predominant concepts or theoretical models (or theoretically under-developed questionnaires), the focus of this research is on local practices of meaning-making and localised understandings, as part of the processes through which the social is produced, more precisely on the ways social actors engage with their social world and their position within it (brought about by the new discursive structure, the new institutions and social arrangements).

The research targets the processes through which ‘the social’ is created (in post-communist Romania), how meaning is produced and fought over (since these meanings produce social realities for the actors involved), by following both more general issues of knowledge production, and the interests and concerns of the respondents, what they perceive as relevant in terms of aspects of social change.

As the post-communist landscape is marked by new social divisions, new social hierarchies and new subject positions, the issue of identity becomes acute, and the research focuses on both the discursive production of these hierarchies and positions (as part of the production of the social), and on identity-work social actors perform in relation to the way they are positioned - a different angle on the issue of stratification compared to the ones outlined in the precedent section.

The research will link the production of the social in Romania to processes of knowledge production and regimes of representation that involve the West as a privileged, dominant voice, and will indicate how the identities of both Eastern Europe (and Romania) and the West are shaped through this relationship.

In order to structure this investigation of the social, concepts of space/place are being used; the intertwining of place and knowledge production is tackled at the level of the symbolic *locations* of the West and Eastern Europe (and Romania specifically); the processes through which the Romanian *social space* comes into being (the production of the social) are addressed; finally, the level of *place of residence* is introduced to ground issues of identity negotiation social actors are involved in.

The next two chapters will detail theoretical debates relevant to the issues addressed in this thesis, namely concepts of discourse and possibilities for agency (chapter 2), and concepts of place in social thought (chapter 3).

CHAPTER 2

DISCOURSE, PRODUCTION OF THE SOCIAL AND AGENCY

This chapter discusses the concept of discourse I shall be using, that draws mainly on the work of Michel Foucault, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and insists on the productive, constitutive aspect of discourses in respect to the social world and on issues of power, subject formation and agency. The discussion will subsequently move towards an exploration of the possibilities of agency in the context of a discursively structured social reality, looking at feminist uses of Foucault's insights (especially D. Smith and J. Butler), de Certeau's notion of tactics, Pecheux's concept of disidentification, and Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualisation of agency.

This analysis will be used to set in place the theoretical framework employed to interpret the data, a framework which integrates a focus on discursive structures (or articulations) with an emphasis on social actors' everyday practices of reality construction (i.e. the articulatory practices they engage in). This approach allows for an understanding of discourse as intertwined with power and as secreting social reality that still acknowledges spaces of agency in which social actors operate, situated at the intersection of discourses that never manage to achieve a closure of meaning.

Discourse and the formation of social reality

In his 'archaeological' work (*Madness and Civilisation*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*) Foucault explores the way knowledge is formed according to historically-specific procedures that constitute a system of *discursive practices*. The focus of this inquiry is not on the content of what is said and thought, nor necessarily on the changes of theoretical paradigm, but rather on the *rules* that in each society permit the separation of statements into true/false, rational/irrational, scientific/non-scientific within discourses that in themselves are neither true nor false.

rules assumed as fundamental to such an extent that they remain untold. It is therefore those rules that govern both what type of statements are accepted in the discourse and what are the proper procedures to prove their truth; between them they constitute a 'regime' of knowledge, a 'politics of the scientific statement'. The effect of such a system of truth-regulation practices is that it makes thinking outside it problematical: it is through exclusionary practices applied to what can be thought and said that discursive rules and power exertion (i.e. discourses and the formation and reproduction of social systems) are connected (Foucault 1980, p112).

In this configuration, a discourse will represent the group of statements regulated by the same rules of formation. Hence, discourses refer to the "different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice" (Fairclough 1992, p3) in the sense that they provide the fundamental frames of reference, the grid of interpretation that inject meaning into reality, allow 'objects' and subjects to take shape and thus cause the world to emerge as meaningful (Burr 1995, p57). In other words, discourses are processes of societal production of meaning, "constitutive processes that produce and sustain particular realities" (Gubrium and Holstein 1998, p240).

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and Laclau (1990) develop the concepts of discursive field and hegemonising discourses in order to provide an even more specific account of the production and nature of the social. Central to their understanding of those processes is the practice of articulation that designates the fundamental process of discursive knowledge formation: the practice of establishing a relation among elements¹ that modifies (creates) their identity, while a discourse (discursive structure) represents the structured system resulting from the articulatory practice². The field of discursivity

¹ Laclau and Mouffe (2001, p105) name 'elements' any differences that are not discursively articulated and 'moments' the differential positions as they appear articulated within a discourse. The identity of the element is not pre-relational but part of the discursive field. What that means is that before articulation, the meaning of the element as perceived from within a particular discourse is not decisively fixed within the structure of signification of this discourse.

² The regularity in dispersion that the discursive formation exhibits and that makes possible its understanding as an ensemble of differential positions doesn't imply some underlying external principle but is produced within the discourse. The discursive notion of dispersion is thus different from the Saussurean system, where identities are fixed by the necessary character of all the relations, making articulation impossible. This system is precisely the type of closed totality where each moment is subsumed under an initial system of repetition. Structuralism thus exhibits the desire for a structure that is always finally absent, making the sign 'the name of a split, of an impossible suture between signified and signifier' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p113).

consists of floating signifiers (elements), the meaning of which various articulatory practices try to fix into discursive structures. But as Laclau and Mouffe insist, since no centre that would definitively fix the system of differences that the discourses creates is ever possible³, meaning can only be partially fixed: the discursive field is “never completely absorbed by discourse... a field of undecidability which constantly overflows and subverts the attempt to fix a stable set of differential positions within a particular discourse” (Torfing 1999, p92). It is therefore from the incomplete nature of all articulation (that always makes alternative articulations possible and thus threatens every discourse with the destabilisation of its system of differences by alternative articulations acting from outside it) - that is, from the agonism of the practices of articulation/dislocation, that the social emerges. Otherwise phrased, society arises from the competing propensities to fix nodal points⁴ and to dislocate them:

“Society never manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it. The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p113).

Hence, a discourse is “a relational totality of signifying sequences that determine the identity of the social elements, but never succeed in totalizing and exhausting the play of meaning” (Torfing 1999, p90).

The other concept Laclau and Mouffe consider central for explaining the production of the social is hegemony (hegemonic articulation), a concept they borrow from Gramsci and modify to define an articulation that takes place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices. Hegemony thus refers to the processes of construction of a predominant discursive formation, “the expansion of a discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by

³ This impossibility is inferred from the Derridian impossibility of a ‘transcendental signified’ that would ever arrest once and for all the chain of signification of the differend. Once this idea is introduced in the theory of discourse the play of signification is extended ad infinitum, making all definitive fixation of meaning impossible.

means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces” (Torfing 1999, p101). Any hegemonisation of the discursive field entails therefore conflict, power and resistance since a discourse

“manages to *signify itself* (that is, to constitute itself as such) only by transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalence which constructs what is beyond the limits as that which it is *not*. It is only through negativity, division and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalizing horizon” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p143-144, emphasis in original).

To sum up, the basic conditions of possibility of any hegemonic articulation are, as argued above, the overdetermined nature of the discursive, the surplus of meaning any discourse presupposes. Hegemonic articulations thus necessitate both the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them: only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps form the terrain permitting the definition of a practice as hegemonic (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p136).

To suggest the importance of this concept suffice to say that if the social represents the never concluded attempt to limit the play of differences, to domesticate infinitude, to embrace it within the finitude of an order, then this order no longer can be conceptualised as an underlying essence of the social but rather as an attempt to *hegemonise* it (Laclau 1990, p91). Those understandings of the reality as a result of hegemonic processes will thus posit power and antagonistic struggles over meaning at the centre of the production of the social. It is thus towards a discussion of power I shall next turn.

Power, knowledge and the social

It has been asserted above that reality is produced through diverse discursive practices that control processes of meaning-making; and it was suggested that this process of reality building is imbued with power, since it presupposes the authoritative exclusion of

⁴ Where nodal points, following Lacan, are privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain, or master signifiers that unify a field. The nodal point thus creates and sustains the identity of a certain

any alternative or antagonistic versions of reality. By wishing to impose a particular version of reality as true, discourse formation is always-already a relation of power and discourse 'both an instrument and an effect of power'. Like all relations of power then, discourses are unstable, a point both for resistance and for the elaboration of opposing strategies: "Discourse transmits power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault 1981, pp 50-51).

Foucault's work helps illuminate the restrictions discourses and the workings of power impose on individuals' subjectivities as well as the possibilities for resistance and agency such a concept of power entails. As opposed to most concepts of power that tend to treat it as something possessed by certain actors or institutions, Foucault sees power as circulating through a decentred field of social networks and only subsequently taken up by larger structures such as class or the state (Best and Kellner 1991, p52). That is because, rather than being a 'substance' that can be possessed, power is relational, thus visible only when enacted, negotiated in each interaction and never fixed and stable (Mills 1997, p 39).

That does not mean that the exercise of power is simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it rather represents a way in which certain actions modify others (Foucault 1983, p219). In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others but instead acts upon their actions: "an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future". To exert power thus consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome, to structure the possible field of action of others" (ibid., p220-221). It is in this sense that power is diffuse, capillary, productive and ever unstable⁵.

Firstly, power is diffused in society through the everyday practices actors engage in, not just through the institutions of the state or the market. Rouse contends that in Foucault's understanding, the power nominally deployed through the state apparatus is

discourse by constructing a knot of definite meanings" (Torfing 1999, p99).

⁵ In parallel with power being diffused in a field of social relations, there are obvious positions associated with increased political or economic power. Although Foucault acknowledges that power can crystallise as domination - "the solidification of power relations such that they become relatively fixed in asymmetrical forms and the spaces of liberty and resistance thus become limited", he does not dwell too much on macropowers such as the state or capital (Best and Kellner 1991, p71).

complexly mediated and power relations are disseminated through extensive social networks, not just transmitted unidirectionally (Rouse 1994, p102). “Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978, p93).

Secondly, power cannot be simply understood as the repressive law that says ‘no’ any longer but has to be re-conceptualised as productive: techniques of power and knowledge are practices that produce new kinds of human subjects, of knowledge and modalities of power. As power is diffused throughout the social field, it constitutes individual subjectivities, their bodies and their knowledges, emotions, desires and pleasures even while inducing obedience and conformity. Since the seventeenth century, individuals have been caught within a complex grid of disciplinary, normalizing, panoptic powers that survey, judge, measure and correct – thus create - their every move (Best and Kellner 1991, p54).

Thirdly, power is contingent, and therefore vulnerable. While it is true that power is present everywhere and permeates the social fabric and social relations, at the same time all power engenders resistance, contestation and struggle. As resistance is always possible, since no total fixation is imaginable, an opening is created for agency and for a conceptualisation of subjectivity as not just a construct of domination. And as a result of power acting upon action and being always open-ended, it supposes an agent. In other words, power always being a way of acting upon an acting subject by virtue of her being capable of actions, once a relationship of power is established, a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible interventions may open up (Foucault 1983, p220). Power and freedom are thus conditional upon each other since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination (Foucault 1983, p221). Foucault talks of multiple points of resistance on the network of power:

“Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities” (Foucault 1978, p96).

The subject is still discursively and socially constrained for Foucault and still theorized as situated within power relations; but individuals also have the power to “define their own identity, to master their bodies and desires, and to forge a practice of freedom through techniques of the self” (Best and Kellner 1991, p64-65). The next section attempts to address these issues by looking at how various theorists have adopted or rejected a Foucaultian framework while dealing with issues of agency on the part of social actors.

Subjects and the possibility for agency

The understanding of the subject used here is one that blurs the classical internal/external ontological dichotomies in the explanation of the subject in order to argue for a concept of individual subjectivity as formed by complex and pervasive (discursive) operations of power that mould its most intimate desires, emotions, behaviours, thoughts. That means that even the most fundamental characteristics of the subject are not immanent but are ‘implanted’ into the subject by the systems of relations she is always-already enmeshed in. It is these operations themselves that create the illusion of a pre-existing interior: a self, personality, ‘soul’. In other words, there is no subject as origin of social relations, an originary, founding totality - just subject positions within a discursive structure.

Somehow paradoxically, the agency of the subject is similarly created by power relations; as mentioned above, being created by discourse does not mean being fully determined by discourse, since the impossibility of any discourse to close itself and thus fixate the meaning of the objects and subjects it creates in a permanent and unequivocal way always leaves room for escaping those determinations. That is, as every subject position is a discursive position, it partakes of the open character of every discourse; consequently, the various positions cannot be totally fixed in a closed system of differences (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p115):

“A conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the ‘elements’ in an ultimate literality” (ibid., p96).

The opening created by the overdetermination of all subject positions and identities is what in this context will be addressed as agency: not an essential trait of the subject, that

thus necessitates a pre-formed subject, but the possibility to negotiate between different systems of meaning-making and thus to form ourselves as subjects ‘through the deed’, without ever being but the result of power⁶. That is, although meaning and signification are pre-given in discourse, this does not mean that a discourse will have an overriding power to determine the values and interpretations on the part of social actors, since the relation between discourse and local practices is not strictly causal and within discourse there is play and interplay (Smith 1990, p203). For Dorothy Smith, the actors can manipulate elements of various discourses and transform them into resources to re-negotiate their position.

Using a similar approach to the ‘ontology of the self’, Judith Butler describes identities as self-representations, “fictions” that are neither fixed nor stable. The subject is not a thing, a substantive entity, but rather a process of signification within an open system of discursive possibilities. The self is a regulated, but never fully determined, set of practices (Sawicki 1994, p299). Butler thus points to the performative aspect of identity since it is a social entity that... “has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality, and if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is a function of a decidedly public and social discourse” (Butler 1990a, p336). Her performative theory of the self leaves thus room for the resignification and recontextualisation of identities, that is for subversive ‘practices of the self ‘ that can destabilise dominant meanings (Butler 1990a, p338), i.e. reformulates agency as enactments of variation within regulated, normative, habitual processes of signification (Sawicki 1994, p301).

This understanding of identity as daily practices of negotiation and re-negotiation of world representations, power relations and subject positions, that is of the systems of differences discourses attempt to stabilize, brings discourse into the fabric of daily practices, inserts them “as the normative structure of the everyday” (Smith 1990, p202). Smith espouses a socially context-bound view of discourse, which is attentive to what individual subjects do within and through discursive structures, other than assuming that discourses force us to behave in certain ways asserts that individuals actively work out their subject positions and roles in the process of negotiating discursive constraints (Mills

⁶ This is in fact the agency that the Foucault tries to capture in his formulation of the ‘care of the self’.

1997, p86). Discourse is removed from any conceptualisation as an abstract set of textual practices to become the grounds on which social relations are organised, the means through which social relations between individuals are negotiated (ibid., p91).

This is a notion of subjectivity created through practices of the self, “ways of knowing and governing ourselves that are inherited from historical traditions” (Sawicki 1994, p288), through procedures that prescribe how the individual is to define, maintain and develop her/his identity with a view to self-control and self-awareness. This understanding of self-technology analysis thus divides the world into subjecting and subjectivation, and shows sensitivity to the practices through which the self can summon itself and activate itself in order to master its own creation (Andersen 2003, p59). Thus, we can understand how in the contemporary landscape the subjects engage in their own constitution, acquiescing with or contesting the roles to which they are assigned (Mills 1997, p45-46), while at the same time never being able to claim full autonomy since their agency is but an opening left in the subject-position discourse creates. It encourages us to focus on the historical transformations in the practices of self-formation in order to reveal their contingency and to free us for new possibilities of self-understanding, new modes of experience, new forms of subjectivity, authority, and political identity (Sawicki 1994, p288).

It must nevertheless be emphasised that identity does not involve only dispersed positions the subject freely negotiates; since those processes are always games of power, games always involving exclusions and inequalities in access to (discursive) resources, the field of social practices, and implicitly the meaning of identities, is always partially structured by nodal points that themselves structure the possibilities the subject has to negotiate its position. That is, to claim that the subject and its identifications are mere effects of practices of signification is not to claim that these effects are not real or that identity is artificial or arbitrary. Gender and race are the most obvious examples of such nodal points⁷; another example, namely the nodal point of ‘backwardness’, will be detailed in my discussion of the formation of identities in the post-communist Romanian discursive field, a field where because of the undecidability of the terrain the subject will

⁷ Thus, the discursive practices gender are rule-governed structures of intelligibility that both constrain and enable identity formation (Sawicki 1994, p300).

aim to identify with one of the emerging hegemonic projects that seem to offer a 'solution' to the 'crisis' of the structure (Torfing 1999, p150).

In this context the role of critique then is to understand the power relations that bring into existence, stabilise and reify identities - rather than taking cultural identities as unproblematic grounds for claims and political action, and by that to open up possibilities of "complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constitutive subjects in their place" (Butler 1990a, p339). Through the analysis, description, and criticism of existing power/knowledge relations we can hope to create new spaces for resistance, to take advantage the "tactical polyvalence" of discourses and practices, to developing oppositional strategies and new forms of experience (Sawicki 1994, p294). In what follows I shall introduce some theories of agency, mainly those of Michel de Certeau and Michel Pecheux, and that can add a supplementary analytical focus to such critical attempts, especially in the context of my theoretical focus in the minute practices of negotiation and re-negotiation of identity that form the daily experiences of a number of Romanians.

Negotiating agency in everyday life

The question that remains after accepting that Foucault's theory does not erase agency concerns the nature of this agency (and what concrete possibilities for identity-creation it entails). The local micropolitics of resistance Foucault is proposing consists of merely reactive strategies of resistance and subversion, or can it be extended to more constructive processes, emancipatory practices of self-creation? For example, for Wendy Brown, "the politics of resistance is more a reaction to power than an effort to wield it" and it must be supplemented "with deliberate efforts to create democratic spaces for inventing and contesting political visions and norms" (Sawicki 1994, p304).

Other authors have tried to theorise the nature of this agency as well, producing concepts such as disidentification, tactics, translation, rearticulation, etc. Among these efforts, Michel de Certeau's notion of tactics developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) is one of the most detailed accounts of resistance practices in a discursively

ordered social world. The focus of the book is on resistance practices and provides a counter-balance to Foucault's concept of power and disciplinary techniques:

“If it is true that the grid of ‘discipline’ is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also ‘miniscule’ and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what ‘ways of operating’ form the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or ‘dominee’s’?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order” (de Certeau 1984, pXIV).

The book is an investigation of the ways in which ‘users’ operate; everyday practices and “ways of operating” are not “the obscure background of social activity”, they need theoretical questions, methods, categories and perspectives to articulate them (pXI). Power and discipline are evaded through procedures of everyday “dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of “discipline”. Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline” (de Certeau 1984, pXIV). According to de Certeau, social actors “make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules”, a view that emphasises agency as expressed through various tactics.

“These tactics, through their criteria and procedures, are supposed to make use of institutional and symbolic organization in such an autonomous way that if it were to take them seriously the scientific representation of society would become lost in them, in every sense of the word” (de Certeau 1984, p59).

In taking these tactics as the focus of analysis, de Certeau places himself in proximity of the ethnomethodological tradition – he lists Garfinkel, Sachs and Schegloff as pursuing a similar approach to his in uncovering the methods through which the representations of a society and its modes of behaviour are put to use by groups or individuals (de Certeau 1984, pXII). Ethnomethodology emphasises agency because of the focus on “the local and artful ways in which setting members assemble and use available interpretive resources in formulating their understandings of, and responses to, practical issues” (Miller and Fox 2004, p47).

The key concept in relation to agency for de Certeau is 'everyday tactics' as a specific mode of 'consumption', or 'use'. "To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called "consumption". The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (de Certeau 1984, pXII-XIII). De Certeau goes on to give the example of indigenous Indians facing the Spanish colonisers: "they often *made* of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them in respect to ends and references foreign to the system that they had no choice but to accept"... "their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge; they escaped it without leaving it." (ibid., pXIII).

While acknowledging the importance of the Foucaultian concept of discourse, de Certeau argues that to focus only on the representations circulated and contained in discourses is to miss an important aspect: their use by common people, their 'consumption'; therefore an analysis of 'cultural production' (through discourses) must be complemented by looking at "manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization" (ibid.).

The specific practices by which actors or users "reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production" (pXIV) are detailed under the concept of tactics. This 'reappropriation', 'manipulation', 'use' or 'consumption' of the dominant socio-cultural order (which is the expression of individual and group agency) is not a homogenous process, equally open to everyone. De Certeau points to the fact that not all social actors have "the same critical or creative elbow-room", depending on power relations, social situations, information and financial resources (pXVII). Apart from this, de Certeau's conceptualisation of agency seems to restrict it to subversive work done ultimately within the framework (and limits) imposed by dominant discourses, not outside it, and in this respect it is entirely compatible with the Foucaultian vision on discourses and power.

If for de Certeau agency is manifested through the specific use of a discursively structured social order, for Michel Pecheux it is captured through the concept of disidentification or counteridentification, which involves resisting subject positions. In discussing possibilities of disidentification, Pecheux describes “the discourse of the ‘bad subject’, in which the *subject of enunciation* ‘turns against’ *the universal subject* by ‘taking up a position’ which now consists of a *separation* (distantiation, doubt, interrogation, challenge, revolt...) *with respect to what the ‘universal Subject’ ‘gives him to think’*...In short, the subject, a ‘bad subject’, a ‘trouble maker’, *counteridentifies* with the discursive formation imposed on him...” (Pecheux 1982, p157). “Discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity. Pecheux’s work is ... very useful in that it enables us to consider ways in which subjects can come to a position of disidentification, whereby we not only locate and isolate the ways in which we as subjects have been constructed and subjected, but also map out for ourselves new terrains in which we can construct different and potentially more liberating ways in which we can exist.” (Mills 1997, p15). This view drawn on the “conflictual nature of discourse, that is always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions” (ibid., p14), a position open to the possibility to modify discourses, to ideas of agency through resistance or rejection and choice.

The possibility to act on discourses, to modify them, is prefigured in Foucault’s work, for example in “the rule of repeatable materiality, which Foucault describes as the process by which statements from one institution can be transcribed in the discourse of another. Despite the schemata of use and application that constitute a field of stabilization for the statement, any change in the statement’s conditions of use and reinvestment, any alteration in its field of experience or verification, or indeed any difference in the problems to be solved, can lead to the emergence of a new statement: the difference of the same” (Bhabha 1994, p22). In this process, social actors have a role, as it is through their ‘use’ of discourses (actors enter discourses when they conceptualise or represent the surrounding social order, and when they act) that the latter are employed in new circumstances, leading to modifications of the statements that compose them. Change is possible, and its nature is described by Bhabha as follows: “the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements...” (ibid., p28) performed by

various social actors. For Bhabha, agency can be expressed in the form of cultural practices at the periphery of dominant discourses, that can amount to open opposition. “Forms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional cultural practices” (p20).

From the previous sections it has emerged that a discursive understanding of the social is not incompatible with possibilities for agency on the part of social actors – and these insights will be used in the analysis chapters in this thesis in an effort to combine attention to the discourses implicated in the production of the social, with a focus on actors’ articulatory practices in relation to social reality and identity.

CHAPTER 3

THEORISING PLACE

This chapter traces the sometimes uneasy relationship between space/place and social thought, the various dimensions along which space and place have been conceptualised and used in sociological studies, and the more recent interest in theorising place/the local in the light of postmodernist theory, postcolonial studies, feminist work, and theories of globalisation. It dwells on the relation of space/place to issues of social organisation - or production of the social and of identity.

Space and place are concepts difficult to pin down and use uncontroversially. They are used across a variety of disciplines and theoretical currents (social theory, sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, political economy, cultural studies, development studies, post-colonial studies, feminist theory, etc.) that bring their own intellectual traditions, ways of conceptualising and specialised concerns with space/place.

Traditionally in social theory space is thought of as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile”, and devalued in favour of time (Foucault 1980, p149. Agnew (1989) traces the intellectual devaluation of space in social thought to the association of geographical place and community, on the one hand, and to Marxian political economy, on the other (both ‘the eclipse of community’ thesis and the analysis of space through the workings of capitalist economy have engendered the theoretical invisibility of place).

Even if poorly theorised, place and space have been at the heart of sociological inquiries into modernity and capitalism, crucial in the development of understandings of social organisation and order, forms of sociality and social control. More recently place is being reasserted as a central concept for grasping the global/local nexus while integrating theoretical insights around issues of representation, power and knowledge, an approach that allows to acknowledge the importance of global phenomena in shaping localities and to theorise the local not as inert space, but as a site of struggle and resistance, of re-

coding and reworking of external meanings and processes, a site where 'local voice' can be articulated and directed towards other 'places' or 'the global',

Space and place in sociological investigations

Agnew and Duncan (1989, p2) identify three approaches in the study of places: the study of locales as "settings for everyday routine social interaction", a focus on 'sense of place' and identity, and finally space as the site of distribution of social and economic activities through the workings of the capitalist market. 'Place' in various guises has been one of the earliest concerns of sociological work. The role of place in social thought cannot be disentangled from concerns with modernity (including industrialisation and urbanisation) and the changing nature of social relations. Savage and Warde (1993) show how the study of urban life, often in contrast with rural/traditional forms, represents part of the efforts of sociology to investigate 'modernity'. Georg Simmel, the Chicago School, Louis Wirth, all tried to capture the experience of modernity through an exploration of the urban as the site of this experience: "sociology emerged in the early twentieth century as a discipline primarily concerned with the nature of urban life and the analysis of might loosely be termed 'urban problems'" (Savage and Warde 1993, p9). Place was an important conceptual tool in understanding the nature of social change, and to capture the texture and the experiential nature of life in a fast changing urban environment.

Community studies represent another illustration of the sociological use of place; they were usually concerned with social relations in small geographical areas - this territorial definition of community has been since partly displaced by various criticisms that stress the fact that commonality of feeling or identity are increasingly not bound to a specific geographical space. Many community studies have employed theoretical assumptions informed by early sociological concepts such as Durkheim's organic-mechanical types of solidarity or Toennies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Wirth's 'urbanism as a way of life' and Simmel's work on 'the metropolis'. These assumptions did operate a conflation of place with type of social relations, setting in place the rural-urban continuum (Gusfield 1975). This vision was tinged with nostalgia for the rural, traditional community characterised by strong identity through place, sense of order as

opposed to the chaos, anomie, impersonal relationships of the city, resulting in metaphors of loss of sense of community. These nostalgic depictions of 'traditional' communities (initially rural ones, but increasingly located in the city neighbourhood, e.g. working class urban communities) appeared in the socio-economic context of the disruptive processes of industrialisation.

This is echoed by later studies on place, for example in the idea of authenticity that authors like Relph (1976) introduced in relation to place and which embodies dichotomies such as rural/urban, or premodern era/modern capitalism. The penetration of the forces of the market is seen as rendering a place 'inauthentic', displacing rootedness, familiarity, belonging. The place is conceptualised by Relph as a basis for retreat from the anonymity and harshness of market processes, and for an 'authentic' existence. Tuan (1980, p3), on the other hand, characterises the longing for roots and sense of place in American culture as "conservative, traditional, and nostalgic", while Featherstone (1996, p51) states that community studies with their focus on order and attachment are infused with "myths of belonging, warmth and togetherness... an integrated organic community" which is "emotionally fulfilling, with relations more direct and integrated, an image of coherence and order". Studies of locality have conflated bounded space and local social relationships, usually close-knit ones, kinship ties, length of residence, and a common 'culture'. 'Community studies', including urban studies, have been subjected to serious attacks. Dennis (1968) mounts a powerful critique on 'the popularity of the neighbourhood community idea' and Stacey (1969) exposes 'the myth of community studies' and argues for discarding the disputed concept of community as a study method altogether. Nevertheless, Bell and Newby (1971) argue for the relevance of 'community studies' in understanding issues of social organisation and social transformation in their socio-cultural complexity.

One of the most important themes running through studies of locality is that of identity and place. The general "assumption is that one's identity and those of one's significant others are anchored in a specific locale, a physical space which becomes emotionally invested and sedimented with symbolic associations so that it becomes a place." (Featherstone 1996, p51). The issue of place and identity is often approached through the prism of the coherent social order of the local community. Belonging and

identity are forged through face-to-face relations in a small geographical space; daily contacts generate a common culture, norms, values, ways of doing things, enacted through everyday practices.

Issues of place attachment and subsequent grounding of identity in places are at the disciplinary intersection of human geography, sociology, anthropology and psychology, drawing on dispersed theoretical insights such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, various positivist philosophies, etc. which betray the lack of consensus as to what these concepts cover¹.

Other studies have for purpose an investigation of the way people use symbols and images of the city to impose order and meaning on their environments, or the conditions of production and distribution of such imagery. For example, Pons's work (1975) on urban imagery advocates a focus on "the social, economic, political and historical contexts within which image-makers, image-purveyors, image-users and image-breakers operate" (Francis 1983, p135). Authors like Suttles (1972) focus on the way symbols and representations are locally constructed, negotiated and modified against a specific background of social relations, norms and values, in a way that integrates meanings, societal political and economic issues, and 'place', or 'community'. Similarly, Francis (1983, p135) calls for a study of "symbols and images, developed and used by different individuals in different contexts...whose existence and character depend on their relationship to *both* local and wider social, economic, political and historical processes".

With the gradual demise of community studies, urban sociology was marked by a change in relation to the conceptualisation of place. "Rather than examining how social actions were rooted in specific places, social practices were related with the operations of common, national, class (and later, gender and race) systems"(Savage and Warde 1993, p24). This type of studies used place as a context, a frame to examine issues of class and stratification, general social institutions and societal trends, combined with a move

¹ For an illustration, see a volume edited by Altman and Low (1992): under the generic label of 'environment and human behaviour', authors explore the various dimensions of place attachment, its theoretical foundations, and propose conceptualizations such as community attachment, community sentiment, sense of place, varieties of people-place. The main points the collection raises are the centrality of affect, emotion, feeling in the concept of place attachment, building on earlier work by Proshansky et al (1983) on place and identity.

towards surveys, national samples and statistical analysis rather than analysis of local environments. Local case studies (of neighbourhood or 'local community') – deemed too idiosyncratic and impossible to replicate - were replaced by surveys. This approach “is seriously lacking when it comes to understanding how people use, understand and interpret the social and spatial environment of which they are part” (Dickens 1990, p1). Similarly, for Gieryn (2000) the census tract widely used in sociological studies on poverty, violence, residential segregation to “distinguish one neighborhood from another in terms of its economic or demographic features” renders place “a stand-in for clusters of variables located in spaces chosen for their analytic utility but generally denuded of...actors' own narrations...perceptions and understandings of the place” (2000, p466).

The Marxian approach to place

A distinct approach in conceptualising space and place is represented by Marxist and neo-Marxist scholarship (Castells, Harvey, Lefebvre, Massey, Logan and Molotch, Gottdiener, etc.). Places are produced through the workings of capital, differences between spaces/places are explained through the various ways operations of capital are realised spatially. These authors have made a crucial contribution to the theoretical status of concepts regarding space and to the related epistemological debate in social theory and urban sociology. Generally they have oriented their attention to material spatial practices (the uneven development of capitalism, spatial divisions of labour, the social production of space, means by which spaces are appropriated, regulated, controlled).

Castells (1977) provides an analysis of the contradictions of capitalist societies and the role of cities as centres of collective consumption, and locus of potential urban social movements. Harvey's (1982, 1985, 1989) Marxist analysis of the urban focuses on capitalist production and the social production of space. Harvey highlights the process of capitalist hegemony over space through technologies of space-time compression, in a society over-run by free market theologies. In his later work he adopted the “Lefebvrian matrix” (Harvey 1989, 1993) “as a way to think through how places are constructed and experienced as material artefacts; how they are represented in discourse; and how they

are used in turn as representations, as 'symbolic places', in contemporary culture" (Harvey 1993, p17). "Particular representations... emerge from specific material spatial practices and from certain forms of domination and control of space, yet they can become material forces in their own right, a sort of spatial habitus to appropriate Bourdieu's language" (Watts 1992, p118).

Lefebvre (1991) attempts a neo-Marxist analysis showing how space is constructed by capitalist forces. He provides a complex depiction of space, seen as having three dialectically related elements: the experienced, the perceived and the imagined, fusing representation, experience of place, discourse and spatial practice. The importance of symbolic differences between places in the context of a capitalist global market is detailed.

Massey (1994) offers a nuanced picture of space and place by introducing the dimension of gender in order to provide a critique of standard concepts of place. She conceptualises space as social relations (including class and gender relations) 'stretched out'. The spatial, constructed out of a multiplicity of social relations, is central to the understanding of society: "within this dynamic simultaneity which is space, phenomena may be placed in relationship with one another in such a way that new social effects are provoked. The spatial organization of society, in other words, is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics" (Massey 1994, p4).

But many of the authors above try to combine a Marxist analysis of space as constituted by material practices of production, consumption and capital flows with an analysis of representations of place (e.g. construction of myths and symbolic landscapes) and the use actors make of them in everyday life. For example Harvey (1993, p16) argues against a disjunction between "how communities and places are represented and imagined on the one hand and how they are actually constituted through material social practices on the other"; Massey acknowledges the meaning and symbolism integral to social relations that constitute places, and how social relations of space are experienced and interpreted by social actors, while Lefebvre (1991) integrates discourse, representation and symbolic realms. According to Harvey (1993, p23), "The strength of the Lefebvrian construction...is precisely that it refuses to see materiality, representation

and imagination as separate worlds and that it denies the particular privileging of any one realm over the other, while simultaneously insisting that it is only in the social practices of daily life that the ultimate significance of all forms of activity is registered. It permits, therefore, an examination of the processes of place construction in which the material grounding still retains its force and salience.”

Some authors still feel that the political economy approach advocated by Marxists should not replace local, ethnographic studies, which would amount to “denying the importance of the relations between the localized processes of social and cultural organization and the supra-local processes of class formation, class conflict, and the activities of the state” (Francis 1983, p121). This potential separation between political economy studies and more cultural, meaning focused, ethnographic research is rejected by Agnew and Duncan (1989), who argue that rather than seeing these approaches as incompatible, they should be seen as interrelated and complementary dimensions. “Local social worlds (locale) cannot be completely understood apart from the macro-order of location and the territorial identity of sense of place” (Agnew and Duncan 1989, p2).

In conclusion, for many authors it is obvious that space and social theory cannot be separated (Foucault 1980, Soja 1989, Gregory and Urry 1985, Agnew and Duncan 1989, Watts 1992). Place has always been used (although often under-theorised) as a tool or site for grasping the economic, social and cultural phenomena of liberal capitalism and modernity, linked with issues of industrialisation and urbanism, community, ideas of social order and social change. As a result, for Watts (1992, 118) “a growing concern with context and a belated recognition that local socialisation is central to the constitution of society has meant that societies must now be seen as constituted in time *and* space”. Social structures cannot be separated from spatial structures (Gregory and Urry 1985); moreover, “Social structures are geographies – overlapping, partially integrated and messy geographies - and they have to be not just perceived but theorised and even represented as such” (Thrift 1989, p263).

In this context, it is useful to integrate feminist insights on the way ‘place’ is used in mainstream sociology, as social theory is packed with gendered meanings of place. The frequently employed background assumption of place as the passive, immobile receptacle or backdrop of social processes and change (the passive, ahistorical place vs

the dynamic history or time) can be read in the tradition of gendered dichotomies that pervade mainstream social thought. Furthermore, feminist critique has been directed at the association of place with nostalgic home-base, site of repair, relaxation and warmth which pervades much sociological work. According to Massey (1994, p11) this reading is bound up with reactionary politics and “a particular cultural reading of something called woman”. Additionally, the very concept of place used by mainstream studies, its bounded character and identity are attacked: “the need for the security of boundaries, the requirement for such a defensive and counterpositional definition of identity, is culturally masculine” (Massey 1994, p7). Community studies are also a point of contention: while most authors predicate attainment of identity and personal fulfilment on the traditional type of community rather than in the impersonal, chaotic city, feminist writers have pointed to the potentially oppressive and exclusionary character of such close-knit, place-bound communities.

More recent developments across the social sciences have seen the re-emergence of space/place, the theoretical understanding of which is placed in the context of ‘globalisation’ and postmodernism.

Space/place, modernity and postmodernity

Theoretical discussions around globalisation and modernity/postmodernity seem to frequently feed upon each other; they employ spatial concepts in order to theorise the nature of the changes affecting different spatial scales (both ‘the globe’ and concrete ‘places’). Globalisation or global restructuring (the term preferred by Marchand and Runyan 2000) refers usually to a series of processes driven by the capitalist expansion, with economic, social, political and cultural implications. This evolution is associated with a post-modern or late modern phase of social organisation.

The postmodern condition is described by Bauman in the following terms:

“Individual life-projects find no stable ground on which to cast anchor, and individual identity-building efforts cannot rectify the consequences of ‘disembedding’ and arrest the floating and drifting self.... The image of the world generated by life concerns is now devoid of the genuine or assumed solidity and

continuity which used to be the trademark of modern 'structures'. The dominant sentiment is the feeling of uncertainty – about the future shape of the world, about the right way of living in it, and about the criteria by which to judge the rights and wrongs of one's way of living." (Bauman 1997, p50).

Giddens (1984, 1991) explores issues of modernity and globalisation, and gives space/place a central role in the understanding of the changes characterising what he terms late or high modernity. The late modern phase we are witnessing represents a threat to our ontological security because space is not fixed or permanent anymore. Time-space paths, routinisation of daily practices are themes used to explain the nature of social change and our experience of it: "individuals have been dislodged from their familiar or 'traditional' patterns of behaviour (their 'routines'), and also their beliefs and certainties about the world, by the need to adapt to the rapid changes taking place in their economic life or their social and cultural environment" (Taylor et al 1996, p7). High modernity is also characterised by a separation of space from place: space and place do not coincide anymore because of the possibility of relationships with distant or absent others, and not just face-to-face relations. According to Giddens, "locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them" (1984, p18).

On a different note, Dirlik identifies some elements of a postmodern consciousness (directed against Enlightenment metanarratives, denial of difference, suppression of localised consciousness) in the form of heterogeneity, culture as everyday negotiation, local knowledge against universal scientific rationality, political movements as politics of difference or politics of location "that serve as enabling conditions for a contemporary localism, but also produce it." (Dirlik 1996, p27).

Under the influence of the discourse of modernity, the relationship between the global and the local has often been conceptualised as a dichotomy, as in "the modernist binary of the universal (global) subsuming the particular (local)" (Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996, p6). Such an abstract formulation of the dichotomy global/local, as James Clifford has observed, "either favors some version of 'globalism' self-defined as progressive, modern, and historically dynamic or favors a localism 'rooted'... in place, tradition, culture, or ethnicity conceived in an absolutist mode" (quoted in Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996, p6), reminiscent of the nostalgia for an idealised local community

present in so many studies of modernisation, urban sociology and community studies and reactivated in contemporary academic and media discourses in the context of the impersonal forces of globalisation.

For Nandy, globalisation is linked to modernity, understood as “ideologies of progress, normality and hyper-masculinity... theories of cumulative growth of science and technology” (Nandy 1983, pX) – that the West has the power to impose. We are faced in the present with an attack on non-modern cultures that threatens their survival, with “the...prospect of a fully homogenized, technologically controlled, absolutely hierarchized world, defined by polarities like the modern and the primitive, the secular and the non-secular, the scientific and the unscientific...the developed and the underdeveloped” (Nandy 1983, pX).

The modern dichotomies between universal and particular are often translated into global-local dichotomies; modernity represents “a historical consciousness that identifies civilization and progress with political, social, and cultural homogenization and justifies the suppression of the local in the name of the general and universal. Modernist teleology has gone the farthest of all in stamping upon the local its derogatory image: as enclaves of backwardness left out of progress, as the realm of rural stagnation against the dynamism of the urban, industrial civilization of capitalism, as the realm of particularistic culture against universal scientific rationality” (Dirlik 1996, p23).

This modernist positioning of ‘global’ and ‘local’ (with the latter being marginalized in the ideologies of modernity) is being challenged by postmodern, poststructuralist (including postcolonial and feminist) theories, with their focus on local narratives and “reassertion of the local against the universalistic claims of modernism” (Dirlik 1996, p25). Issues of global/local and politics of identity have gained prominence not only in the context of postmodern theorising, but also in the light of social movements (ecological, women’s, ethnic movements) – therefore the local needs to be conceptualised in its multi-layered connotations, as spatiality but also as local needs of social groups. The revival of the global/local interactions is heralded by the work across the social sciences of authors like Friedman, Featherstone, Robertson, Wallerstein, Hannerz, Appadurai, King, Jameson, Gupta and Ferguson.

Postmodern theory, post-colonial studies, feminist writings, and social movements have allowed for a recovery of 'the local'.

"It is the struggle for historical and political presence of groups suppressed or marginalized by modernization...that has dynamized this postmodern consciousness and has produced the contemporary notion of the local, which must be distinguished from 'traditional' localism.... This is the local as it has been worked over by modernity. It finds expression presently in the so-called 'politics of difference', that presupposes local differences (literally, or metaphorically, with reference to social groups) both as a point of departure and as a goal of liberation" (Dirlik 1996, p35).

Featherstone tries to connect the twin processes of globalisation and postmodernism by asserting that "the changes that are taking place as a result of the current phase of intensified globalization can be understood as reactions which seek to rediscover particularity, localism, and difference, all of which generate a sense of the limits of the culturally unifying, ordering, and integrating projects associated with Western modernity. Hence in one sense it can be argued that globalization produces postmodernism." (Featherstone 1996, p60).

Space/place and globalisation

Although there is no unified theoretical perspective on globalisation, most accounts in the social sciences today do make some reference to the changed nature of various processes (economic, technologic, informational, with social and cultural consequences) that can only be grasped in their 'global' moves. Fulcher (2000, p525) tries to capture the overlapping among various definitions and understandings of globalisation in a very broad manner, as "the development of relatively distanceless relationships that extend beyond the national units and involve a growing consciousness of the world as a whole". Common themes of the globalisation literature are: the changed nature of flows of capital commodities and information, a speed-up of global flows and communications and the fall of spatial barriers due to advances in transport and technology, together with a 'compression' or 'shrinking' of distances and stretching of relationships (economic,

social, etc.) across spaces and the weakening of national borders; the idea of interconnectedness on a global scale, accompanied by a global awareness of this interdependence; some focus on the cultural dimension of globalisation, be it cultural homogenisation ('the global village') or processes of resistance, pointing to "a new world-space of cultural production and national representation which is simultaneously becoming more *globalized* (unified around dynamics of capital logic moving across borders) and more *localized* (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition and resistance) in everyday texture and composition" (Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996, p1).

Theories of globalisation² have 'place' at their core. The global/local nexus is conceptualised in various way. For Held et al (1999, p1), globalisation "reflects a widespread perception that the world is rapidly being moulded into a shared social space by economic and technological forces and that developments in one region of the world can have profound consequences for the life chances of individuals and communities on the other side of the globe". According to Featherstone(1996, p46) "this is one of the problems in attempting to formulate a theory of globalisation, that the theories often adopt a totalizing logic and assume some master process of global integration which it is assumed is making the world more unified and homogenous". Insofar as the impact of globalisation is assessed, ideas of integration and homogenisation are in sharp dissonance with notions of uneven impact, polarisation or segregation and cut across the economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions. Authors like Bourdieu (1990) and Bauman (1998) point to the process of globalisation as better described by polarisation, an uneven differentiation: "what appears as globalization for some means localization for others....Some of us become fully and truly 'global'; some are fixed in their 'locality' – a predicament neither pleasurable nor enduring in the world in which the 'globals' set the

² According to a large group of authors, capitalism and technology are the impetus behind globalisation. Divergences arise when evaluating these processes: for some, "the emergence of a global single market and the principle of global competition" are "the harbingers of human progress" (Held et al 1999, p3), while for others they represent "the triumph of an oppressive global capitalism" (Held et al 1999, p4). For these authors the essence of globalisation is a cluster of economic phenomena within the framework of the capitalist form of organisation that have acquired a 'global' dimension (key terms such as 'global capital', 'global markets', 'financial flows' point to this); these processes are seen as having various effects on places, including the physical transformation of landscapes (which raises ecological issues), migration of populations (from rural to urban environments for example, or across national borders).

tone and compose the rules of the life-game” (Bauman 1998, p2). Nandy (1983) as well takes a critical position on what he sees as a process of polarisation where divisions are set in place, with political implications. Many reflections on globalisation indeed point to a new form of social stratification made possible by the transnational flows and markets, with the emergence of a mobile transnational class or elite united by its privileged position and commitment to a neoliberal economic view, and a marginalised population on whom a new consumerist ideology is imposed, and that has little control over the processes affecting its livelihoods.

Lash and Urry (1994) talk of ‘disorganised capitalism’, where the capitalist organisation becomes speedy, mobile and migrates across various labour and consumer markets in order to prosper; in this context places are variously affected: cities cease to be the centres of particular kinds of production, and new circuits of capital spread across a wide range of sites. Places are restructured not only by the mobility of capital, but also by what they call “the new mobile middle class” and its consumerist interest in various aspects of a locality (schools, facilities, crime rates, etc.) that provide the impetus behind relocations in search for a better quality of life. Harvey (1989) explores the impact of ‘global capitalism’ on the local and detects a new phase of capitalist development (flexible production and accumulation, disorganised capitalism, global capitalism), characterised by “further deterritorialization, abstraction and concentration of capital. In a fundamental sense, global capital represents an unprecedented penetration of local society globally by the economy and culture of capital” (Dirlik 1996, p28).

Bauman sheds a bleak light on the process of globalisation (and its other side, localisation), in which decision-making on the part of the business becomes detached from territorial constraints, hence the owners of capital are free from local obligations and responsibilities towards communities whose livelihood depends on the jobs they generate. The wealthy and powerful welcome the possibility of “free floating, locally unbound capital” (Bauman 1998, p9) as they are free to pursue the effectiveness of the investment and to incite places to compete for capital. Globalisation so understood divides, segregates, excludes, and these processes are spatially translated. “Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation.” (Bauman 1998, p2). Spaces is also used by the new elites to isolate themselves, by carving safe private spaces

and shrinking the public ones - “translated as ‘safety’ of persons, of their homes and their playgrounds. Deterritorialization of power therefore goes hand in hand with the ever stricter structuration of the territory” (Bauman 1998, p20). Attention is drawn to the power of global processes to shape places on a variety of dimensions, which is not matched by possibilities of resistance or choice; regional resistances and oppositional movements “are easily dominated by the power of capital to co-ordinate accumulation across universal fragmented space. Place-bound politics...is doomed to failure” (Harvey 1993, p24).

One of the most important impacts of globalisation is addressed in connection with a special type of ‘space’, that of the modern nation state, a territorial and political entity ‘undermined’ according to some commentators by transnational pressures and decision-making. Directly related to the issue of transnational flows and global markets is the political dimension of globalisation: a questioning of the role and nature of the nation-state in this (for some) fundamentally changed environment. National governments “have to manage increasingly in a context in which the constraints of global financial and competitive disciplines make social democratic models of social protection untenable and spell the demise of associated welfare state policies” (Held et al 1999, p4). Institutions for global or regional governance (the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO) are challenging the authority and legitimacy of national governments, that are increasingly losing control over their economies and borders. The financial integration and transnational organisation are at the core of global economic integration, a process that “constrains governments to open their economies to market forces and adopt neo-liberal policies which weaken the state” (Fulcher 2000, p530). The increasing scope for the jurisdiction of international or transnational institutions versus the sovereign power of the nation-state is another element fuelling the debate around the position of the latter. In a globalised era, the nation-state is declining in relevance (Albrow 1996) or at least the concept of state and associated ideas of sovereignty, governance and power are in need of a radical reworking. ‘Global society’, ‘global democracy’, ‘cosmopolitan governance’ (Held et al.1999) and ‘the global political community’, are just a few concepts that testify such efforts of conceptualising the political dimension of globalisation and the changing role of the state in relation to other institutions and phenomena. An additional group of

arguments indicates the weakening of the control of national borders (faced with flows of migrants and information or communication) and of the national territory (due to ethnic and religious groups claims that can lead to movements for autonomy) that the modern state is witnessing.

As with the interpretation given to the economic changes subsumed under 'globalisation', the changing role of the national state is at the core of heated debates. Fulcher (2000) for example makes a case for the continuing relevance and even strengthening of the nation-state throughout the history of globalisation, and indicates that the neo-liberal policies many states adopt are actually imposed by "national governments, with their particular national interests and ideologies, and the international organizations that represent them. These are represented by the strongest economies, above all the United States, and are therefore agencies of the most powerful nation-states" (Fulcher 2000, p530). What some theorists see as convergence of economic and welfare policies due to the impersonal, objective pressures of 'globalisation' processes, others interpret as pressures on the Third World from organisations like the WTO (and the reinforcement of free trade), the IMF and the World Bank (that make loans conditional upon the adoption of neoliberal policies) (Fulcher 2000). In the process, and under the cover of 'globalisation', the interests and ideologies of clearly identifiable nation-states are pursued at the expense of others – globalisation, in other words, is driven from concrete places, rather than being a disembodied, dis-emplaced process.

Massey makes a similar argument when she challenges "the characteristic counterposition of space and place", because global space is "concrete, grounded, real" (2004, p7) just as much as the 'place' of daily life is. Drawing on Latour (1993), she emphasises "the groundedness, the emplacement...of so-called 'global' phenomena" (Massey 2004, p8). Massey (ibid.) gives the example of a concrete place, the City of London, as the site of global finance, asking "Could it be global without being local?". Capitalism itself, far from being a disembodied, abstract process, consists actually of cultural practices that vary among places, and it is, like 'globalisation', made up of relations and practices "utterly everyday and grounded at the same time as they may, when linked together, go around the world" (Massey 2004, p8).

Apart from the economic and political issues discussed so far, but closely related, is the cultural dimension of globalisation. One of the main lines of analysis in relation to processes of globalisation looks at processes of cultural production and appropriation and their underpinnings (economic phenomena, flows of information across borders, etc.). Featherstone also looks at the common assumption that globalisation wipes out local identities, meanings and traditions (shared by authors that use a Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony) and argues that local knowledges do not disappear, there is no homogenisation of content: “theories of cultural imperialism and media imperialism that assume local cultures are necessarily battered out of existence through the proliferation of consumer goods, advertising, and media programmes stemming from the West... share with theories of mass culture a strong view of the manipulability of mass audiences by a monolithic system and an assumption of the negative cultural effects of the media as self-evident” (Featherstone 1996, p62).

While a multitude of studies in the cultural field try to emphasise the local processes of resistance to globalising pressures, some feel that this is a fashionable accent on the “creativity and skilfulness of active audiences and consumers” (Featherstone 1996, p63), or that the “ongoing process of disruption and manipulation by global discourses and technologies is all too uncritically being rearticulated as...*in-between* spaces of negotiated language, borderland being, and bicultural ambivalence” (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996, p2).

A different position argues for moving away from a simplistic acknowledgement of either resistance or manipulation of the ‘locals’, and for a different reading of globalisation-related phenomena, as “various forms of hybridization and creolization emerge in which the meaning of externally originating goods, information, and images are reworked, syncretized, and blended with existing cultural traditions and forms of life” (Featherstone 1996, p63). This is a position that advocates an integration of the global and local that does not wipe out the capacity of the local to generate social meaning – necessarily of a hybrid form.

The connection between global and local in globalisation and postmodern theories is a conceptualised in complex and contradictory ways, with a few scenarios emerging. These conceptualisations have important implications in terms of place-based identity.

One of the most frequent conceptualisations of the global/local connection in globalisation theories sees the local as annihilated or rendered meaningless by the global (e.g. Bauman 1998); metaphors of penetration and ravaging abound in many of the studies that look at the effects of 'globalisation' in different sites/communities. Feminist authors such as Gibson-Graham (1996) and Marchand and Runyan (2000) point to the fact that these descriptions follow a rape script in presenting the brutal aggression of capitalism/globalisation towards the passive, victimised 'local' or place. A variant of this scenario is the 'homogenisation' thesis that sees places as losing their distinctiveness and meaningfulness to homogenising pressures of capital and media or Western cultural production. A possible outcome of this development is the nostalgic return to localism, in an effort to retrieve meanings, relations and ways of being that have been displaced.

In this scenario, places become robbed of their capacity to generate meaning and identity at the hands of globalised capital and unequal power relationships. The relation between globalisation and the local is sometimes described as disorienting for local actors because of the lack of capacity of places to generate social meaning, to ground experience and attachment (Dickens 1990, Giddens 1984, 1991). "Our experiences and means of orientation are seen as divorced from the physical locations in which we live and work. The fate of our residence and work seems to be in the hands of agencies in parts of the world foreign to us. Localism and a sense of place give way to the anonymity of "no place spaces" or simulated environments in which we are unable to feel totally at home" (Featherstone 1996, p46). In other words, globalisation means that "the locality is no longer the prime referent of our experiences" (Featherstone 1996, p63). Massey is challenging this type of account of globalisation, on the ground that it reflects a specific position, which is not that of marginalised groups. She asks "who is it who is so troubled by time-space compression and a newly experienced fracturing of identity? Who is *really* that is hankering after a notion of place as settled, as resting place? Who is it that is worrying about the breakdown of barriers supposedly containing an identity?" (Massey 1994, p122); the answer is not those 'on the margins' of that old, settled, mythologised coherence (ibid., p123).

According to Featherstone (1996, p47), "increasing levels of cultural complexity, and the doubts and anxieties they often engender, are reasons why "localism", or the

desire to return home, becomes an important theme”. Similarly, Taylor et al (1996, p11) argue: “There is no doubt that the advance of ‘mass media’ and global economic competition has undermined the process through which a strong and immediate sense of local identification is adopted by individuals, but it would be a very sweeping generalisation that denied the continuing desire for such a local identity”. Massey draws attention to the fact that lamenting over the loss of identity (or of the power of places to ground identity) and the theme of disorientation common in globalisation theories are actually implying the loss of stability, boundedness and authenticity of places - an essentialist position, to which she opposes the image of place as shifting and created through interconnectedness.

A second scenario allows for a more ‘active’ role of the local, because it sees it as continuously recoding, translating the global. A product of this encounter can be the hybrid or creolised identity. Communities outside the Western center “deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate’, and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity.” (Bhabha 1994, p6). This type of account is not without its critics. Friedman (1997) looks in the global context of cultural globalisation at the new forms of identification contained in the discourse of cultural transmigration, hybridisation, multiculturalism, creolisation, trans-ethnicity, transnationality, hyphenated identities - which according to him emanates from a cosmopolitan cultural intellectual elite.

A third scenario sees places or the local as site of resistance and political mobilisation in the context of an attack of global capitalism and mass media. Globalisation therefore can be seen as catalysing efforts of recovery of local cultural originality. This reassertion of the local is not an unequivocal process, as it can be the ground for emancipatory movements and politics of difference, or can amount to conservative forms of localism. “Globalization, paradoxically, has led to a strengthening of local ties, allegiances, and identity politics within different nation-state formations” (Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996, p5). There is recognition of the fact that the blending, recoding and hybridised identity described above are not unavoidable outcomes. “The conditions under which such a hybridisation might occur as a social fact are very far from the pronouncements at hand. The tendency to rootedness, to boundary-making and to

opposition to the immediate social environment dictates against such ecumenism, and these tendencies are generated and reinforced by the real fragmentation of the global system” (Friedman 1997, p76).

One of the most important issues at stake in conceptualising the nature of the local is its relation to identity. The ‘politics of identity’ is a frequent theme of recent interdisciplinary approaches to place and the local. It is linked with possibilities of emancipation and ‘voice’ (Appadurai 1988), politics of difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), and political mobilisation of social movements such as gay and lesbian, native or ethnic. But the other side of the issue is that both place and identity tend to be constructed by drawing boundaries and establishing differences (see Cohen 1985 on the importance of symbolic boundaries for the construction of communities) – which can lead to exclusionary, discriminatory and oppressive practices. While some authors argue for the possibility of a hybrid, cosmopolitan, de-territorialised and global identity, others dismiss this vision as being a possibility confined to just a few privileged ‘cosmopolitans’.

The thorny issue of identification and belonging in relation to place in the light of the dual nature of the ‘local’ as both site of liberation, emancipation, ‘voice’, political mobilisation, on the one hand, and of oppression, parochialism, reactionary and conservative politics, identity through difference obtained by degrading other places/identities, on the other hand, is a recurrent one in writings on the new role of place in a globalised era. Some authors caution against a version of localism that “is willing to overlook past oppressions out of a preoccupation with capitalist or Eurocentric oppression and that in the name of the recovery of spirituality affirms past religiosities that were themselves excuses for class and patriarchal inequalities” (Dirlik 1996, p37). As Dickens (1990, p14) puts it, “locales are also a context of tension and potential conflict as individuals and social groups each try to assert their personal and social identities”.

There are voices that defend the possibility of a conceptualisation of the local detached from normatively and politically charged notions of authenticity, by acknowledging the inevitability of hybridisation: “the local need not embody a regressive politics of global delinkage, bounded particularity, and claims of ontological pastness, where locality becomes some backward-gazing fetish of purity to disguise how global,

hybrid, compromised, and unprotected everyday identity already is. The local is reshaped by the global, there is no ‘authentic’ local untouched by global processes” (Hall quoted in Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996 p5). This integrating tendency is embraced by diverse scholars who try to overcome the conceptual opposition of the global and the local. For both Massey and Harvey understanding of the local is impossible without connecting it to the global. For Harvey (1993, p15) “what goes on in a place cannot be understood outside of the space relations that support that place any more than the space relations can be understood independently of what goes on in particular places”. Massey (1994, p5) asserts that “the particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included in that place itself”, as it comprises relations that stretch beyond the place: “the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside”– with the implication of a challenge to the possibility of claims to internal histories or timeless identities.

A discursive approach to place/space

This thesis employs a discursive approach to place/space. Discourses constitute places by first constructing them as meaningful entities: a place becomes a place as discourses carve out its identity (e.g. in relation to other places, by establishing boundaries, similarities and differences) and fixing (a fluid and unstable fixing) the content of this identity. But discourses also structure the place through their multiple workings within the respective place. They are not only involved in the material production of places, but they also order local understandings and ways of doing things, penetrating the layers of everyday life; they shape modes of thought and forms of politics – it can be argued that they produce ‘the social’ in all its dimensions.

Discourses act *within* and *between* places: they structure both places, and the relations between these places. Places are hierarchically organised through discourses in the context of power relations; the issue of unequal power of symbolic representation and hierarchisation of places is central to social theory inspired by post-colonial insights. By putting together place as site of production of discourse and the notion of places as discursively positioned in various relationships, issues around the consequences of

representational practices emerge. Discourses originating in a certain place construct other places in the symbolic realm, and in the material one as well, by codifying and naturalising ways of thinking and acting towards places. This offers a basis for legitimising a variety of practices that further transform places.

Also, local subjectivities that shaped by the same processes that construct 'place'. The fact that places are often sites of enunciation within asymmetrical relations of power crucially affect the constitution of subject positions in a given place. Places offer identity positions through the variety of discourses that inhabit and structure them; some of these constitutive discourses can originate in other places and, according to the prevalent dispersion of power relations, carry particular consequences and put particular limits on processes of identity formation in a given 'place'. Personal and group identity is linked to the 'identity' of the place broadly understood as the dominant/hegemonic fixing of meanings that articulatory practices perform.

The analysis chapters are developing these insights by dwelling on the production of a social space (the Romanian social space) inextricable from the identity of the respective place – which in its turn is fixed in relation to another location – the West. Further, place of residence as locus of identity is explored in the form of the study areas included in the research.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The analysis in this thesis is based on fieldwork in Bucharest, Romania. The first phase of the fieldwork consisted of a pilot study (April-May 2002); following this, the research was redirected in order to capture more adequately the issues raised by this initial exploration, and three areas were chosen for in-depth investigation. Two more fieldwork periods followed (September 2002, and April-July 2003), and they comprised in-depth interviews (in total 78 interviews were performed), combined with observation and participant observation through involvement in a series of local practices, informal chats and socialising. This was supplemented by a survey of the media and public debates (TV, newspapers and opinion journals).

The study areas were chosen in order capture aspects of identity-work in relation to place: they present contrasting features from the point of view of the built environment, social make-up and location in the historical landscape of Bucharest - features that can potentially be used, or rather articulated, in social actors' symbolic constructions.

Interviews consisted of discussions that focused initially on perceptions around the place of residence and neighbourly relationships, and opened up to include life issues that respondents saw relevant. Everyday concerns were connected in the respondents' accounts with understandings of social change and of one's position in the new social order: identity issues were at the fore of people's preoccupations. Interviews took usually the form of long narratives around the intertwined topics of the shape and meaning of social change, and identity. The interviewee's agenda was a strong determinant of the direction of the interview.

Short historical background

Bucharest is the capital of Romania, the political and administrative centre. The institutions of the presidency, the Parliament, and central government are located here, together with the main political parties, main bank offices, financial and cultural institutions, etc. The capital has a population of over 2 million inhabitants (2 037 278 in July 1996¹, which represents over 10% of the country's population).

The town was re-shaped to a large extent during the communist regime. After 1945, policies were aimed at the reconstructing and developing Bucharest. In the fifty years of communist rule, many industrial units were built, including the industrial platforms at the periphery of the town, and new accommodation units as well in the form of hundreds of thousands of flats in blocks.

The rise of the 'blocks' neighbourhoods is a phenomenon linked with the intensive industrialisation process that Romania underwent from the 1950s. The industrialisation had a political, ideological element, as the new communist regime was trying to make a clear break with the largely agricultural past, perceived as backwardness, and to put forward the idea of progress through the efforts of the working class². The discrepancy between the official propaganda extolling the virtues of the working class as the engine of 'progress', transformation, 'modernisation', and the actual size of the working class compared to the predominantly peasant population meant that the creation of a true working class was a primary concern for the regime.

The 'industrialization' of the country meant that hundreds of thousands of people from the countryside were offered jobs in the new industries, especially the 'heavy industry', a priority at that time for the planned centralised economy of the communist regime. While in some cases this migration was accompanied by the building of entirely new towns around a massive industrial plant (some of these industrial conglomerates would employ over 60.000 workers³), in the case of the capital, Bucharest, it meant

¹ According to the Romanian National Office for Statistics

² For a similar argument in the case of Poland, see Misztal and Misztal (1984)

³ The so-called 'factory towns', that sprung up throughout communist countries, where, as Misztal and Misztal (1984, p325) claim, "the industrial sector finances and sponsors more than 60% of all major urban services, such as nursery schools, day care centres, and hospitals"; the privatisation of large parts of the

building at a very fast rate massive neighbourhoods composed of blocks of flats outside the old, historical centre.

Within the span of two decades the population of the town had trebled, with the 'newcomers' living in 'blocks' (Bucharest Townhall website)⁴. In 1993, three years after the fall of the communist regime, 12.7% of the economically active population of Romania was concentrated in Bucharest. This construction policy has tried to keep up with the influx of population in Bucharest (that lasted throughout the 60s and the 70s); between 1945 and 1964, 80641 apartments were built, and this number increased to 446100 apartments between 1965 and 1984. New neighbourhoods appeared on the map of Bucharest, including Drumul Taberei (63000 flats) and Titan (90000 flats)⁵, from which two study areas were respectively selected (Bucharest Townhall website).

"Despite the egalitarian ideology, state socialist east European housing was inequitably distributed", with the "best quality and most subsidised housing...was allocated to bureaucrats and the white-collar workers of the intelligentsia" (Pichler-Milanovich 1996, p119-120).

In the late 70s and 80s, a 'restructuring' or 'demolition' policy was initiated, consisting of demolishing of the older, historical part of the town, and of the older neighbourhoods made up of detached houses, and replacing them with new 'blocks' – combined with a displacement of the population.

This 'relocation' of an important part of the population from the detached houses to 'blocks' was generally perceived as a traumatic event by those concerned, as the population to be relocated had no saying in whether their house should be demolished or not, and the process itself was on rather short notice. The relocation policy was seen in dissident circles as a serious abuse perpetrated by an authoritarian regime along with other unpopular measures and at a time of serious shortage. The forced alteration of the urban landscape was perceived by many as a premeditated act of humiliation and harassment, a brutal attempt at re-writing history, as it touched not only the older neighbourhoods, but many historical monuments (from old royal buildings to monasteries

industrial sector after 1989, or simply the closing down of inefficient units, meant that these towns were affected by mass unemployment and a withdrawal of the aforementioned services.

⁴ The industrial manufacturing and assembly sector in Bucharest was employing 39.700 workers in 1950; in 1983 the number rose to over 97.000 (Bucharest Townhall website)

and churches) as well. This was interpreted by dissident voices⁶ as an attempt to erase the symbols of the past in order to replace them with monuments glorifying the communist present, and above all the person of the president. This clashed with the official propaganda that presented the demolition policy as a beautifying and modernising project concerning Bucharest, and which portrayed blocks as efficient and modern units of living.

An important development of the post-communist era consists of increased residential mobility. During communism, many flats were allocated by state institutions and the residents had the status of tenants of the state; therefore they could not sell the flat. Also, the legislation in place limited the number of flats a family could possess to one. This situation was translated in low residential mobility: among my respondents, many had lived in the same flat since the day it was allocated to them – usually the 1960s.

New legislation was passed by the post-communist government, allowing state tenants to buy their flats and the lifting of restrictions on property purchasing after the fall of communism was accompanied by a massive expansion of the property market. As mentioned, during the communist regime a large part of the housing stock was owned by the state, with the residents paying rent to the state (a rather symbolic amount), and the costs of electricity, water and heating were subsidised, hence relatively low. During the early 1990s, almost all state-owned flats were bought by their current residents under the new legislation that granted very advantageous buying conditions (low prices and the possibility to pay over a few years), therefore at present most flats are privately owned. The inequalities in the distribution of flats during communism were perpetuated in the post-communist period of privatisation of housing, meaning that the best-quality flats, in the best locations became the property of a higher income, higher education stratum of the population (Pichler-Milanovich 1996).

One of the major problems of the past years is the increase in the prices of fuel and services generally. Combined with the inefficient distribution of heating and water

⁵ The 1992 census registered a total of 109194 blocks in Bucharest, with 760751 flats and 1803635 rooms.

⁶ See the campaign fought by Radio Free Europe in the 1980s to publicise the moves of the communist regime in Romania, and the ensuing responses of the West (mainly protests regarding the demolishing of churches).

(due to loss in the system of distribution), this means that many families are faced with very high bills. When the family cannot pay the bill, there is the possibility of a deferral (their share will be covered from the common block fund), and the family is in debt. If the debt spirals (a few consecutive months), the family might find it impossible to cover it, in which case the block association has the right to sue them in order to recover the due amount. Often this leads to the flat of the family in debt being sold so as to repay the debt.

The organisation of the block

Blocks are organised as formal associations. They have a formal block committee, a president, and an administrator – the latter is a paid position. The block administrator is elected by the committee of residents and is responsible for the running of the block. He/she collects the fixed amount every family has to pay for the ‘block fund’, destined to cover the costs of repairs and improvements regarding the block (fixing the roof, plumbing, fixing the pavement in front of the block, painting the staircase, etc.). The administrator also receives the bill that service suppliers (centralised heating and hot water⁷ for all blocks, and cold water in certain cases) issue for the whole block and calculates the contribution of each family (taking into account number of family members, number of days the flat was empty, etc.) and collects the due amount from each family – which often involves paying visits repeatedly to families that are not paying on time and using various persuasion techniques. It is the responsibility of the block administrator to contact the local authorities for various services that are provided for free (but the lack of funds means that many local authorities are unable to perform them), such as painting the parking spaces, fixing the ornamental fences between blocks, fixing the public lighting, or providing seeds to be planted in the green spaces.

Various formal meetings require the residents to gather in order to take decisions regarding the fate of the block. During these meetings residents decide how the money

⁷ The centralised heating system consists of hot water distributed from a few plants in Bucharest through a network of pipes to all blocks, where it is pumped into individual radiators; according to the law, the temperature at the point of the radiator cannot go below a certain level, but in practice distributors have problems in providing this temperature, to the discontent of block users.

(the block fund) should be spent: repairing a leaking roof, or replacing a segment of rusty plumbing, or fixing the lift.

The section above has briefly introduced some elements that help locate the concerns and articulations respondents perform – as detailed in the analysis chapters. An additional element that needs mentioning is the fact that new block neighbourhoods were built at the periphery of the old Bucharest – which can be placed in the context of prevalent representations of the centre-periphery contrast. Stan (2001) points to the negative meanings routinely associated with the periphery of Romanian towns: poverty, insalubrious, unsafe environment, high crime; in contrast, the town centre is where the cultural, social and economic aspects of life are concentrated, and it legitimately represents the town in the symbolic realm.

The meaning of living in a ‘block’ or in a ‘house’ (an apartment in a block of flats in a periphery area, or a detached house with a garden in a central ‘old’ neighbourhood) can be located into a historical and symbolic background, with implications for the possibilities for the construction of individual and group identities.

The study areas: description

The areas the research focused on are one detached houses neighbourhood and two ‘block’ neighbourhoods. Bucharest has a mix of these types of accommodation, with the older ‘houses’ neighbourhoods generally occupying the central part of the town, and the newer ‘block’ neighbourhoods built starting with the early 1960s towards the periphery of Bucharest. The ‘block’ neighbourhoods occupy the largest part of Bucharest and are densely populated. Some have a better reputation than others, and areas within each of them rank differently according to their perceived qualities and desirability among residents.

Cotroceni (C)

The detached house neighbourhood is called Cotroceni (C), and has a good reputation within the town. It was built in the 1930s and the initial population was represented by

medical doctors and their families; overall, bourgeois families inhabited the area. In the more recent times, including after 1990, a large part of the residents were professionals; C also has a large retired population.

The two 'block' neighbourhoods investigated are within the Drumul Taberei (DT) and Titan (T) areas; they are relatively new, built between the mid-1960s and the 1980s. They comprise exclusively blocks of flats, or 'blocks', the term used by the population, that at first glance seem quite similar, 4 to 10 floors high. Some of these 'blocks' are connected, resulting in rows of terraced 'blocks' of up to 20 staircases. The study neighbourhoods have different reputations: the one in DT is more central, with more expensive flats than the one in T. A mix of professions is represented among residents, but overall in the DT study area there are more professionals than in the T area.

Titan (T)

The oldest construction wave represents the birth of the area: the first blocks were four story blocks made of bricks as opposed to the newer 10 story blocks, built in between the older ones, using pre-fabricated units. The study area is an 'old' block neighbourhood, among the first ones in the town, being built in the 'first wave' of the 1960s. The 1970s and 1980s saw the 'cramming' process, where new, taller blocks were built in between the older ones, increasing the density of the population; also, the city continued to expand, meaning that the study area became 'central' compared to the newer neighbourhoods raised beyond it. The construction of the underground meant fast links to both the peripheral industrial platforms (where many working places are located) and the city centre (where the shopping areas and main administrative institutions are to be found).

Initially, the neighbourhood housed mainly skilled workers, engineers, personnel employed in the massive adjacent industrial platform, consisting of several factories and research units, and also Bucharest families that were on a waiting list for state-owned housing (those living in crowded conditions were on the list, such as younger families in multigenerational households - priority was given according to the number of children, age, etc.). Later on they accommodated families from older neighbourhoods in the centre

town that had been demolished. The newer blocks were a response to the continuing housing shortage and were built very fast, with less attention paid to details like interior and exterior finish, insulation, allocated green spaces, etc.

Drumul Taberei (DT)

DT is again an 'old' block area, built starting with the 1960s. It has clear boundaries and the shape of a horseshoe. The neighbourhoods within DT were named (informally) after the bus stops along the public transport lines that go across DT, following the horseshoe or loop trajectory. The study area is a 'central' neighbourhood, in the sense that it is placed at the beginning of DT and closer to the centre of the town. The residents tend to have a better material situation than in the T study area, as testified by the number of expensive cars owned by residents. Many of the flats in the area were allocated to military cadres⁸, with the higher positions (such as army generals) located closer to the centre town, and the inferior ranks closer to the periphery. Therefore families of employees of the Armed forces are still strongly represented in the area. Apart from this category of residents, professionals and blue collar workers co-habit within block units.

Sampling

Respondents were contacted through friends and acquaintances, in a snowballing process. The final sample on which the analysis is based consists of 21 respondents in C, 29 in the DT study area and 22 in the T study area. Also, some of the pilot interviews included respondents that did not belong to the study areas, but nevertheless their accounts (a total of 6 respondents) were included in the analysis of processes of production of the social through processes of articulation, including the struggle over meaning⁹. Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes, but also in pubs, parks and the workplace. They were tape recorded and then transcribed.

⁸ The local stadium is home to the Steaua Bucharest football team, which under the communist regime used to be known as the Army team.

The sampling aimed covering a variety of characteristics such as age groups, gender, occupation and material status¹⁰. Respondents were contacted through friends, relatives and acquaintances, in a form of snowball sampling.

The sample does not contain very poor or extremely rich respondents, due to access and ethical issues. The 'new rich' stratum is very difficult to investigate by an outsider, while the most vulnerable members of society are usually most 'open' or exposed to being researched and exoticised for Western audiences, which raises ethical issues. Therefore most chosen respondents have an average material situation, that allows them a 'decent' lifestyle according to local definitions, or at least they 'cope' financially, and some are successful professionals with high incomes.

Considerations regarding fieldwork and reflexivity issues

Poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist writings have unveiled the concept of scientifically neutral research as untenable, and have deconstructed the observer-observed relationship, pointing to the fact that the researcher cannot be a neutral agent, and her identity cannot be separated from the research process; moreover, the data and analysis bear the mark of this relationship between 'the researched' and an embodied, gendered and racialised researcher (Haraway 1991, Turner 2000, Letherby 2002). Mumby (1993, p4) points to the necessity to "acknowledge the extent to which, as theorists and researchers, we are never neutral, dispassionate observers of behaviour but are always heavily implicated in the construction of the narratives...that provide insights to the social reality that we inhabit".

Qualitative research has often been framed as "a colonizing discourse of the 'Other'", which "both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others" (Fine 1994, p70). In discussing qualitative research with focus on race, Ladner (1971, pVII) captures the power relations between the researcher and the researched: "It has been argued that the relationship between the researcher and his subject, by

⁹ The respondents are designated in the analysis chapters by their residential area (C, DT, T, P for pilot interviews that are not included in the final study areas) and a number, followed by gender and age. For example, C12, f42 means the respondent number 12 in the Cotroceni sample, a 42 years old female.

¹⁰ See the annex containing a list of respondents.

definition, resembles that of the oppressor and the oppressed, because it is the oppressor who defines the problem, the nature of the research, and, to some extent, the quality of interaction between him and his subjects”.

Porter and Catt (1993) detail the issue of the authorial standpoint of the researcher, and its difficult relation to the multitude of voices that the study captures. Speaking about and for others while trying to allow other voices to be heard is a delicate endeavour. An inevitable process of othering occurs in qualitative research, as any research involves some form of representation on the part of the researcher in relation to the researched. Nevertheless, there are different forms of dealing with this responsibility, with different consequences in a political and ethical realm, which Fine (1994, p74) spells out:

“When we write essays about subjugated Others as if they were a homogenous mass..., free-floating and severed from contexts of oppression, and as if we were neutral transmitters of voices and stories, we tilt toward a narrative strategy that reproduces Othering on, despite, or even ‘for’. When we construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relation with/for/despite those who have been contained as Others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering”.

The act of research needs to be located in a landscape of power relations and knowledge production. As Punch (1994, p84) puts it, “politics suffuses all social scientific research...By politics I mean everything from the micropolitics of personal relations to the cultures and resources of research units and universities, the powers and policies of government research departments, and ultimately even the hand...of the central state itself”.

The interviewing process during fieldwork reflected the issues raised above, concerning differentials of power between the interviewer and respondents, the impact of the embodied and gendered personality of the interviewer, and the difficulties in avoiding forms of othering.

Contacting and interviewing respondents was a process in which relations of power were played out in various ways. The authority of the researcher was established mainly through belonging to a Western academic institution, which offset the

disadvantage of gender as a less prestigious identity feature and which did not conform to the expected stereotype of the 'researcher' as male¹¹.

Respondents insisted usually on a reciprocal exchange, and used their position (I needed their cooperation) as a tool to set the terms of the interaction. Many respondents felt more comfortable with a 'friendly chat' rather than the idea of an 'interview' (which is a foreign concept among most Romanians, more familiar with surveys as a form of sociological investigation). This meant that a certain rapport had to be established, in order for the interview to take place and for respondents to be comfortable with disclosing personal circumstances and thoughts. This type of rapport was facilitated by the fact that respondents were contacted through friends and acquaintances – a first level of trust was established fairly fast.

What I call throughout the thesis 'the respondents' accounts' are actually produced in a negotiated relationship between researcher and respondent, a process that fosters forms of mutual deceit and manipulation – insofar as all interviewing involves impression management¹². In order to establish a more ethical relationship (although ethical issues in qualitative research are a thorny topic¹³), I offered a lot of information about myself, my personal circumstances, opinions and aspirations, as this seemed a more balanced exchange, and many respondents subtly or overtly insisted on it. Also, an aspect that built a level of reciprocity in the interviewing process referred to the fact that respondents were allowed to talk for as long as they wanted, and to bring in stories and comments that were not directly related to the questions asked; this strategy actually proved to be very useful, as it provided a lot of material for analysis: all stories were related to issues of identity and positioning, contained appraisals of the social reality and put across a wealth of articulations.

I have felt during the phases of this research the weight of Punch's (1994, p85) affirmation that "fieldwork is definitely not a soft option, but, rather, it represents a demanding craft that involves both coping with multiple negotiations and continually

¹¹ For a similar experience see Ladino (2002): she looks at the interviewee's response to a researcher that did not conform to their expectations of what a researcher should be like (white westerner in her case) and details how she was pushed into adopting an identity that local respondents saw fit. Also, see Oakley (1981) on the implications of her being a woman and feminist on methodological issues.

¹² For a discussion, see Punch (1994)

dealing with ethical dilemmas”¹⁴. Some interviews lasted over 3 hours, and some were conducted over a few meetings.

The research has made me aware of the impossibility of the transparent researcher that can be written out of the text and the importance (both methodologically and analytically) of the researcher as a person, of her identity, in the research process. The production of data was dependent of the interaction between interviewer and respondent: this process took place in the context of an interaction as exchange, mutual appraisal, involving a delicate balance of trust, sympathy and rejection.

¹³ See Truman (2003) for an analysis of the incongruities between formal ethical regulation of research, and the experiences of research participants.

¹⁴ Punch (1994, p85) details the “stress, the deep personal involvement, the role conflicts the physical and mental effort, the drudgery and discomfort” that fieldwork often entails, listing a number of cases of field research where these issues were prominent.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRODUCTION OF THE SOCIAL: DISLOCATION AND SUTURE IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETIES

Conceptualising the dimensions of 'change' and social dislocation

The issue of social change after 1989 in Eastern Europe provided social scientists with endless material for analysis and commentary. How to best conceptualise what happened after the disintegration of communism (as well as inquiry into the causes of this rather unexpected collapse) is still part of a heated debate in the expanding field of post-communist studies. One of the questions raised concerns the magnitude and nature of the rupture. These societies have witnessed obvious economic and political changes, together with cultural, normative transformations. The texture of everyday life has been substantially modified, and for many people the social landscape has turned into something profoundly unfamiliar and disorienting.

In the early 1990s, after many years of isolation (this is especially true in the case of Romania, one of the most closed-off countries in Eastern Europe) the media broadcasted images and the shops introduced products many people were not familiar with. As a result, many people felt inadequate and uncomfortable with their surroundings: the routines of everyday life, that were grounded amongst others in a certain consumption landscape, were deeply altered; skills that had helped citizens get by became obsolete.

An “entire scaffolding of normal routines, trusted assumptions and certainties has collapsed, whose intrinsically equivocal nature nevertheless provided a basis for stabilised everyday habits” (Thomas in Segert and Zierke 2000, p241). A continuous struggle for the routinisation of everyday life in order to manage and reduce anxiety ensued in post-communist societies, and it was still visible during my fieldwork in Bucharest: many respondents expressed the belief that events are happening sometimes too fast to allow for medium and long-term plans, and for even the installation of

routines, with resulting high anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed by the quick (and often unpredictable) succession of events, and not being able to cope or keep up.

Accounts from fieldwork distinguish between a past (before 1989) and a present characterised by distinct 'time modes'¹. The new era is seen as having a different structure and texture of time. While the past temporal order had a flat, predictable quality, the present one is fast and unpredictable. Because of this acceleration and different texture of time, the structure of daily life is deeply modified. A constant theme in interviews is the need for time to catch up with things, to be on top of the events, to keep informed about changes in the legislation (e.g. property, employment laws and new 'rights') and more generally about the job market, the financial market, the political arena. An adjustment to this new speed is indispensable for social success; being in tune with the pace of changes allows social actors to take strategic decisions for their future wellbeing.

It is not only the texture of 'time' that has changed, but aspects of language as well: ways of talking about oneself and the social have become outdated. Tellingly, the populations of Eastern Europe had to adopt a whole new vocabulary in order to make sense of the new developments. The vocabulary of the market and economic transition, coupled with that of democratic reform and institutions (introduced by governmental institutions and international organisations and analysts) has penetrated most areas of social life. The general feeling was that Romanians had to learn a new language in order to understand the transformation of their societies and the realities of their lives (literally so in the case of more technical terms pertaining to market institutions, finance, or banking that had no correspondent in Romanian, and therefore English is used). Cultural changes are partly effected through language; "many of these social changes do not just involve language, but are constituted to a certain extent by changes in language practices...attempts to engineer the direction of change increasingly include attempts to change language practices" (Fairclough 1992, p6).

Alternatively, one can point to the fact that the post-communist period was marked by important elements of continuity: for example, the idea that social and

¹ For a discussion of the different temporal organisations characterising state socialism and capitalism, see Verdery (1996)

material status have been completely reworked after 1989 is a debatable one (much of the literature focuses on the transmission of advantage from the communist period, as discussed in chapter one). The comment 'it's the same people in power, nothing has changed at the top' appears frequently in my interviews. Also, "[o]ne should not overlook...the extent to which institutional and cultural aspects of the former systems survived the transformation and continue to shape present-day social practices", as Outhwaite and Ray (2005, p18) state.

Nevertheless, what happened after 1989 has been described mainly in terms of a socioeconomic breakdown. The accompanying collective breakdown of orientation, the dispersion of meaning as dominant discourses lost their power to define and order social reality, are though equally important dimensions of change. The general disappointment (of Western institutions and local elites) around the slow take up of Eastern European societies in relation to transition and reform, the perceived 'messiness' of local forms of democracy and market economy betray a schematic and teleological view of change as implementation of the 'right' forms of socio-political and economic organization and crucially underestimate the impact of this loss of meaning and the discursive struggle to re-structure the social in which local social actors are caught.

It is pertinent to examine how new discursive structures have displaced the ones set in place during the communist rule, engendering a society-wide reworking of meanings and practices. New discourses are producing the social in Romania, by assigning dominant meanings and valuative connotations to the social and by setting in motion practices that take on various forms, from official governmental policies and creation of institutions, to everyday behaviour of individuals. Through the framework of these discursive formations with a reality-defining power, social actors make sense of societal changes, think and act, therefore participating in the production of the social.

All these changes have taken place over only a few years, a short time if one looks at the effort necessary for the withdrawing and subsequent reinvesting of meaning in the 'objects' that constitute social life – a transformation of categories of knowing and fixing of meaning in new configurations. "The 'necessity' and 'objectivity' of the social would depend on the establishment of a stable hegemony, with periods of 'organic crisis' characterized as those in which the basic hegemonic articulations weaken and an

increasing number of social elements assume the character of floating signifiers”, in the words of Laclau (1990, p28).

A discursive approach (as detailed in chapter 2) helps explain the ‘disorienting’ features of everyday life, a common theme in post-communist societies that have found themselves at the intersection of competing discourses and possibilities for reality-making, and the salience of identity in these societies, the massive identity-work that is required here.² There has been a dismantling of a system of discourses and practices or routines that placed people in certain relationships and defined their identity. New discourses offer new subject positions, while old subject positions have disappeared.

I will explore the idea of social change as change in discursive systems by drawing on the concepts of discursive field, articulatory practices and hegemonising discourses, as developed by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and Laclau (1990). The field of discursivity, as detailed in chapter 2, consists of floating signifiers or ‘elements’, the meaning of which various articulatory practices try to fix into discursive structures – but only a partial fixation of meaning is possible, due to the surplus of meaning characterising the field of discursivity. It is in this field of discursivity that multiple competing discourses are articulated; the social takes shape through articulations in a discursive space. When a (partial) fixation is obtained in competition with other attempts to fix meaning differently, a hegemonic articulation emerges. This fixation is permanently threatened with disruption; “Discursive systems of social relations are subject to change due to the impact of social conflict and political struggles” (Torfing 1999, p89).

Through my study I try to capture aspects of the production of the ‘Romanian’ social space following a generalized dislocation of existing discourses and the consecutive loss of their structuring and reality-defining power. In the case of Romanian society, a system of signification collapsed after 1989. As indicated by Torfing (*ibid.*, p148), “dislocation refers to the emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be

² This can be seen as a much more acute version of the erosion of stable identities associated with the postmodern condition and the shift to reflexive life-projects in the Western world – as illustrated in the work of Giddens (1990, 1991), Bauman (1992, 1993), Harvey (1989), etc.

represented, symbolized, or in other ways domesticated by the discursive structure – which therefore is disrupted”.

A discursive approach to social change takes into account the way certain discourses organising the social space during the communist period have gradually lost their power to define reality, to fix the meaning of social identities, concepts and objects. Many of them were rigidly structured discourses that did not manage to domesticate or integrate a growing array of events, despite the efforts of the communist elite to articulate a hegemonic system of discourses – these efforts were strongly antagonised and ultimately destabilised by other formations (local dissident discourses, discourses associated with the capitalist order and proposing different ways of understanding the social, through concepts such as free market, consumption, individualism, freedom of speech, etc.).

This gradual withering of some of the discourses producing the social under the communist rule made it possible for a growing questioning of the existent social order, as alternative meanings crept in, in the form of antagonistic articulations. The disintegration of a range of discourses was precipitated after December 1989 by the fall of a multitude of institutions (that had anchored discourses associated with the communist formation by enforcing certain conceptualisations, practices and routines – e.g. party structures, state institutions), meaning that the identities, objects and concepts forming ‘the social’ became just elements or floating signifiers in the field of the social in need of a widespread re-articulation.

The old system of articulations

This section introduces a short overview of the discourses associated with the communist order so as to subsequently highlight the processes of reattribution of meaning in the post-communist representational landscape. Until December 1989, the discursive field of the Romanian society was dominated by a multitude of articulations and nodal points that could be grouped under the signifier ‘communist discourse’ and by the various resistance discourses it engendered. Between them, those created the system of differences that the actors utilised for making sense of social reality in the sense that their agonistic framings

of the relevant social phenomena, of human nature, of principles of societal organisation and the place of individuals and collectivities within society established a 'grid of intelligibility' of the social and moral order for the communist citizens.

The norms and values - of good and bad, of the just society, of appropriate and 'just' social hierarchies (or rather social equality), the relationship between state and citizens, allocation of resources, of rewards and status among citizens - codified within the communist discourse - were inextricably connected to a plethora of practices, applied and reinforced in daily life. That is, the fundamental representations of the communist discourse, based on interpretations of Marxist-Leninist teachings and emanating from sources connected to the Communist Party, were supported by State institutions, taught and implemented in school and during 'patriotic' activities outside school, in the workplace, through the media, and reinforced through various mechanisms of social control.

The main traits of the communist discourses articulated an egalitarian vision of society (composed not of hierarchical classes, but of three social groups: the workers, the peasants and the intellectuals, all working together to bring their specific and indispensable contribution to the maintenance and progress of society, within the parameters and goals set by the Party), with an egalitarian distribution of resources and with shared societal goals, where collective interests were more important than personal gain. Notions of public property, collective welfare and central planning and control were also central to the communist discourse. The individual was conceptualised as embedded in networks of social relationships, interdependence and obligations towards the collective, and the notion of duty and responsibility towards others and the state featured prominently; this discourse set a certain relationship between the citizen and the state: while the citizen had the duty to work in order to fulfil the plans of the centralised state economy and to follow the guidelines issued by the Party concerning most areas of her life, the state had the duty to provide for the citizen³.

Apart from this sweeping conceptualisation of the individual within the social order that created a general base for concepts of the self or subjectivities, more specific

³ On the issue of a 'social contract' under the Ceausescu regime in Romania, see Sampson (1986)

discursive strands of the communist discourse in relation to work and occupations, gender, family, age, ethnicity did articulate more fleshed-out subject-positions.

Broadly speaking, the normative representation of the individual that was created within the communist discourse saw people as motivated by social concerns and social goals rather than individual self-interest, and considering the interests of the collective before their own. Competition was present, but mainly in the form of friendly competition between productive units or collectives rather than between individuals. This was translated in daily life in a variety of practices; for example, in schools classes were engaged in a ‘competition’ to produce the best results (be they grades or fulfilling of recycling quotas or ‘voluntary’ work), with the best pupils in the class tutoring some of the weaker pupils during breaks and after hours as part of a collective effort based on ideas of solidarity – the purpose of the competition was the motivation of students and overall better results for the school, as success was judged at the level of the collective rather than in individual terms.

The material shortages of everyday life during the last couple of decades of the communist regime were compensated for in various degrees through *blat* practices; as shown in chapter 1, these practices cut to a certain extent across lines of occupation and status, redistributing resources and affecting notions of status and inequality. Therefore they have indirectly blurred social hierarchies and promoted an understanding of the individual as engaged in social relations of mutual dependence and surviving through the use of networks, features that were compatible with the ideas of equality and the position of individuals at the core of the communist discourse – possibly contributing to the egalitarian ethos and reinforcing the conceptualisation of people as reciprocally attached, part of a web of social relations, duties and dependencies.

This is not to say that there were not strong divisions within Romanian society that the communist discourse glossed over or simply denied, not only between the party elite and the masses, as often presented, but within these ‘masses’, for example between workers and intellectuals, or along ethnic and gender lines, or between rural-urban environments – all serving as a basis for inequality and differentiation (as discussed in chapter one). The point I am arguing is that overall a certain image of equality and ‘togetherness’ managed to emerge through the communist discourse and daily practices

and was integrated to a certain extent in the way people thought about themselves and the surrounding social world (as supported by accounts of the past contained in interviews; many reactions to the present situation serve to put in focus this more egalitarian ethos of the past).

In parallel, resistance discourses were forged, contesting the meaning the communist discourse had attributed to the social order, and therefore contesting the principles and criteria for the ordering of society upheld by the communist discourse. For example, intellectuals were disputing the importance of manual work in relation to intellectual work⁴, families were holding on to and passing down to their children 'traditional values' that involved strict social boundaries among groups hierarchically ordered, and gender roles. Additionally, some of the definitions of social reality contained in the communist discourse were belied by everyday life – e.g. shortages, bad quality of life, unsatisfied consumption needs and economic backwardness became the accepted reality that diverged from the worldview articulated within the communist discourse, which stipulated well-being and prosperity. The discursive landscape of the communist Romania was characterised by discursive struggles.

As George and Wilding (1994, p4) put it, “where the content of ideology is incompatible with people’s experience, its hold is tentative and superficial. This is shown by the example of Eastern Europe”. In Romania, the communist definition of reality as prosperous and fulfilling was progressively undermined (by opposing notions of the good life and prosperity that drew on images of the Western world), and in this way a breach was created on which dissident discourses could be grounded - and, some authors argue, provided the basis for action that ultimately brought about the demise of the system⁵.

After 1989, with the collapse of communism, the discourses associated with that particular form of societal organisation have lost ground. The dislocation of the dominant *communist discourses* that had structured the Romanian society (through concepts, norms and practices) for more than 40 years happened almost overnight, a process facilitated by the disintegration of the institutional arrangements that had maintained and reinforced it.

⁴ See Fuller (2000) for an account of the anti-egalitarian ethos of Eastern European intellectuals.

⁵ Tismaneanu (1990) details the role of the 'civil society' throughout Eastern Europe in the demise of the communist system (equating civil society with dissident intellectuals) and Lane (1996, p137, 164) drawing on the work of Goldfarb, talks about the 'alternative critical culture' or 'counterculture' of the intellectual stratum as a form of resistance in communist regimes.

For individuals and collectivities that meant the disappearing of a system of meaning that had formed the lens for understanding their lives, personal trajectories, professional and extra-professional activities, and relationships over a long period of time – constituted by the dominant communist discourses, but also by resistance discourses formulated in reaction to communist ways of conceptualising and organising society.

Both communist and resistance discourses have lost their foundation: the specific resistance discourses were articulated in the specific historical, institutional context of the communist era, and were structured specifically in reaction to and as a form of resistance to the communist discourse.

The change in discourses producing the social under communism had a major impact on individual and group subjectivities. “To deploy a particular discourse of subjectivity is not simply a matter of representing a subject; in practice, it simultaneously constitutes the kinds of subjects that are meaningfully embedded in the discourse itself” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998, p226). That is, these discourses have constituted the norms of intelligibility within which people could work out their own sense of identity. As it will be argued below, a change in discourses has produced changes of the meaning of these subject-positions (and more generally changes in the understanding of the social). Many of the subject positions that were made available within the discourses in Romanian communist society had disappeared. For example, the conscientious communist worker taking pride in fulfilling the five-year plan, the party cadre politically educating the population, the dissident building self-esteem and identity around an idea of moral integrity (not giving in to the pressures of the regime to collaborate) are all significant past social identities that have lost meaning abruptly. The network of discipline the state (including the party and the secret police) imposed on the population, and which was a strong mechanism of fashioning subjects in the governing process of the communist order, has disintegrated rapidly. With it, constraints which translated as everyday routines that ordered a large part of the public and private life have disappeared as well, resulting in an initial and short lived feeling of freedom, followed by anxiety and struggles to recreate routines and to ground identities.

In the early 1990s the ground was left open for alternative ways of meaningfully organising the social world in Romania, under circumstances of substantial social

dislocation. New discourses had to hegemonise the social space, mainly by providing conceptual guidelines and norms for the political and economic re-organization of society, but also at a more micro level. A fixation of meaning was needed regarding how to envision the individual and her relationship with others and society, including ideas of human nature, and social hierarchies and solidarities, sociality and association. A reworking of the normative underpinnings of society was needed as well – new criteria for social stratification and social worth (tied with notions of distribution of rewards in society) had to emerge as the ones upheld during the communist period faded.

What now? The role of the mythical space

As Outhwaite and Ray (2005) put it, it seemed that after 1989 everything was tossed up in the air but fell down in familiar patterns of social and economic organization – meaning that post-communist countries have largely adopted Western political and economic forms. In opposition to theories of ‘convergence’ as deterministic views of social change through ‘laws’ of social evolution or the natural superiority of the Western model, I propose an account of the adoption of capitalism and democracy in Eastern Europe that draws on the notion of mythical space (Laclau 1990) and focuses on configurations of discourses and operations of power that made possible certain social evolutions while precluding others.

“The ‘work’ of myth is to suture that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation. Thus, the effectiveness of myth is essentially hegemonic: it involves forming a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements” (ibid., p61). According to Laclau, as a social group suffers dislocations in its customary practices, it will propose measures to overcome them; they constitute an ideal model, the mythical space of a possible social order. The mythical space has a dual and split identity: its own literal content, the proposed new order, and metaphorical representation or symbol of fullness. As argued by Laclau, “[t]he discourse of a ‘new order’ is often accepted by several sectors, not because they particularly like its content but because it is the discourse of *an* order, of something that is presented as a credible alternative to a crisis and a generalized dislocation” (66). Of course, not any discourse

will be accepted: it must be credible, and fit in with basic principles of world intelligibility of a group. But the more the system of norms and beliefs that grounds the organisation of the group is dislocated, the wider “the areas of social life that must be reorganized by a mythical space” (ibid.).

This remark is particularly pertinent in the case of Eastern European countries, including Romania. As I have argued above, the fall of communism has represented a moment of profound and generalised dislocation, a dismantling of life routines and principles and normative underpinnings of societal organisation (including the polity and economy). A new principle of ordering the social was needed, and the mythical space in the form of certain discourses provided it. These discourses can be grouped under the label ‘need to catch up with the West’, or ‘return to Europe’, and their main signifiers were ‘capitalism’ and ‘democracy’. They represented in the early 1990s forms of fullness – the exact, literal content was secondary to the promise to suture the dislocation - and they managed to bring about and legitimise a new social order. In other words, these discourses have managed to hegemonise the social, at least in the period immediately after the fall of the old order. They have provided new points of identification, and grounded new subjectivities.

As a “principle of reading of a given situation” (p61), the mythical space defined the state of affairs post-1989 as collapse of an ‘evil’ system and the need to move away from its legacy, and towards a ‘good’, or ‘appropriate’ socio-economic order. The project of ‘catching up with the West’ was the first principle of societal reorganisation and mobilisation that sutured the generalised social dislocation. Its role in the production of the social has not stopped there though: as mentioned, catching up involves adoption of ‘democracy’ and ‘capitalism’ (seen as the very ‘essence’ of the West), but the exact meaning of these signifiers was not fixed. The production of the social proceeded in the years following the collapse of communism through the effort and struggle to invest signifiers with specific meanings, accompanied by the creation of policies, laws, institutions – a whole range of practices inseparable from ‘the struggle over meaning’. Social actors in Romania (from powerful institutions to ordinary citizens) have contributed the production of the social by engaging in articulatory practices involving a wide array of signifiers like democracy, freedom, market, social rights, social duties,

competition, work, solidarity, meritocracy, human nature, the state, the West, etc. It can be argued that competing articulations have been formulated, and that some are more powerful than others in deciding the shape of the social.

An overview of chapters examining the production of the social in Romania

The analysis in part two of this thesis (chapters 6-8) will try to illuminate some of the ways the social is produced in contemporary Romania, using concepts of place/space, as detailed in chapter 3.

It has been asserted that a mythical space sutured the social in the aftermath of the fall of communism and the disintegration of its discursive regime. The next chapter (chapter 6) engages with its conditions of possibility, in the form of a hierarchical positioning of places (namely the West and Eastern Europe). This positioning has implications on the type of knowledge and representation that are produced in and about the locations of the West and of Eastern Europe, and it is effected through a powerful discourse of backwardness of the latter in relation to the former. This discourse will be detailed throughout chapter 6 and its impact assessed; one of its main effects is on the shape of the mythical space which has managed to suture the social dislocation in post-communist Romania.

This first step of production of the social through a mythical space is followed by what has been described above as 'the struggle over meaning', the investment of signifiers with a more precise content. This process of fixing connotations, as another dimension of the production of the social, is the focus of the analysis in chapter 7.

Are there dominant articulations emerging through this struggle over meaning? What do they look like? What criteria for organising society, moral principles, guides for being do they put forward? What subject positions do they create? These questions are at the core of the analysis on the production of the social in chapter 8.

CHAPTER 6

POSITIONING OF EASTERN EUROPE THROUGH THE BACKWARDNESS DISCOURSE, AND THE NEW SOCIETAL PROJECT OF CATCHING UP WITH THE WEST

Introduction

This chapter discusses the issues of discursive production and social change through the frame of hierarchically interconnected spaces/places. By this I mean a discursive creation of the West and Eastern Europe through the particular positions they are made to occupy in a mutually defining relation and the impact this has on the production of the social in post-communist Eastern Europe.

I am aware of the problems associated with employing the term ‘the West’ which could be seen as imposing a homogeneity on a diverse range of entities – the West is a very mobile construct and I will not detail here the array of meanings it has embodied; as Said (2003, pxii) put it, “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other...these supreme fictions lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion”. I am rather looking at more or less explicit understandings of ‘the West’ that the centres of power and knowledge production utilise as their intellectual, cultural, political location or grounding. ‘Eastern Europe’ itself is far from being a homogenous entity: the use of terminologies for the region (Eastern Europe, Central Europe, Central Eastern Europe, Central and Southern Eastern Europe, etc.) can be linked to attempts to classify the region in normative terms – a ‘moral’ battle; Eastern European states try to distinguish themselves from one another through a very active discursive production of difference¹.

¹ See Kurti (1997) on the ‘making’ of Central Europe as an entity different from Eastern Europe and ‘closer’ to Western Europe.

The discursive construction of 'places' is a process that gives a place its identity through boundary-setting, procedures of classification (similarities and differences), and attempts to invest the 'space' so delimited with specific meanings that ensure its specificity. This process is supplemented by the operations of discourses in the form of institutions, practices, values, norms, everyday life, which are mapped onto the 'place'. Social agents take this space as the meaningful horizon of their actions, reinforcing the progressive imbibing of the place with specific meanings, institutions and 'ways of doing things' (or 'culture'). New discourses that keep this construct alive constantly emerge.

It has been asserted (in chapter 3) that one of the ways discourses shape sites is by placing them in particular configurations and fixing the meaning of the relationship between them: "Articulatory practices take place not only within given social and political spaces, but between them" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p140). In the sections below I will look at a set of articulations involved in defining the West and Romania (the latter being part of a larger construct, namely 'Eastern Europe') and the nature of their relationship. The particular identity and positioning of Eastern Europe in relation to the West is maintained and reinforced through a 'backwardness' discourse on Eastern Europe in which both the West and Eastern Europe participate - although under conditions of differential power linked to different resources. Around the nodal point of 'backwardness' a discursive regime was established, and reinforced by a set of practices, including academic writings, policy recommendations, etc.

This discourse is central to the understanding of the production of the social after the fall of communism, as it has anchored, or made easier the articulation of other discourses. It is inextricable from the particular form taken by the mythical space that has sutured the post-1989 social dislocation (the societal project of 'catching up with the West', formulated under the generic term 'transition'). Generally, the relative acceptance and legitimisation of the West (or, more precisely, of locally produced representations of the West) as the model to follow by a large number of social actors in post-communist Romania (a representation created within the backwardness discourse) is connected to the specific discursive configurations hegemonising the Romanian social space from 1989 onwards.

The production of knowledge on Eastern Europe in the West: representations under the discursive regime of 'backwardness'

“Foucault’s work on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation of social reality, in particular, has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which a certain order of discourses produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making impossible others” (Escobar 1995, p5). This section addresses such an order of discourse and the modes of thinking and being it engenders. I am going to look at some of the processes through which the identity of ‘Romania’ (as part of Eastern Europe) has been constituted in a field of unequal power relations – e.g. economic and political power (entailing differentials in the power of symbolic representation, or the capacity to signify) in relation to ‘the West’. The construction of Romania as a distinct location with a specific socio-cultural identity is the result of representations produced in the ‘West’ and of ‘local’ efforts of defining and fixing the meaning of this construct as an object of discourse.

I will not provide here a genealogy of the idea of the West² and of its role in the dynamics of knowledge production and in the creation of the identities of locations (both Western and non-Western) but just acknowledge, along with a wealth of authors, that “from the late nineteenth century,... the West, became a *central* idea, a ubiquitous category in the articulation of the modern world” (Bonnett 2004, p25). In the contemporary world, it is highly difficult to construct identities outside a West-Other relation.

There is a dominant mode of representation of Eastern Europe in a variety of sites of knowledge production that range across Western academic environments, governmental institutions, international agencies and the mass media. Very few studies on Eastern Europe reflect an understanding of these societies on their own terms. The overwhelming majority of writings, reports, and analyses concerning Eastern Europe are rooted in a type of understanding and produce representations which I associate with a neo-colonial approach. Post-colonial theory³ has detailed the ways in which the non-

² For discussions on the topic, see Patterson (1997), Bessis (2003), Bonnet (2004), Hall and Gieben(1992)

³ As exemplified by the work of A. Memmi (1967), E.Said (2003), H.Bhabha (1994), G.C.Spivak (1994)

western world was thought (and at the same time acted upon) by identifying issues of knowledge-production in the West about non-European (colonised) countries that can be applied to Eastern Europe (and Romania). Said's *Orientalism* (2003) and studies done within the same vein (for example Mudimbe's (1988) *The Invention of Africa*) are particularly relevant to the case of Eastern Europe. For example, Todorova (1994) has applied the tools of post-colonial analysis in her work exposing the 'orientalising' approach to the Balkans. One of the points that post-colonial studies emphasise is the ways in which non-western cultures have been created and used as Others in the process of building the identity of Western Europe. It can be argued that Eastern Europe has been and still is such an 'other' in relation to which the identity of the West emerges, through the construction and attribution of different traits.

As mentioned, the dominant mode of representation of Romania as part of Eastern Europe can be subsumed under the nodal point of 'backwardness', inseparable from parallel and contrasting representations of the West. The system of differences through which notions of 'the West' and 'Eastern Europe' have emerged and been filled with various attributes or meanings has a long history. Kurti (1997) traces a scholarly backwardness discourse in relation to the east of Europe as early as the sixteenth century (through Western travellers' diaries); more recently, Chirot's (1989) edited book bears the title *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe*. Backwardness in this context generally implies a historical evolution frame in which Eastern Europe is 'behind' Western Europe, and preserves features of social and political organisation that the West had parted with earlier on, together with 'exotic' cultural traits, habits and customs.

The aspect I will focus on in this analysis is the way the fall of communism has allowed for new meanings to be invested attached to the backwardness master-signifier. These new meanings and articulations have been invested by a range of social agents in concrete strategies and policies, with a strong impact on the shape social change took in post-communist Eastern Europe.

'Backwardness' after 1989 has been permeated with understandings of Eastern European countries as not fully capitalist and democratic, and hampered by residual economic, political and cultural structures or routines (legacies of the past). As I will show, the communist period is seen as responsible for not only the absence of 'normal'

institutions, but also for the creation of a 'culture' and habits that impact on the present 'reform' of these societies. The backwardness discourse in the post-communist era is formulated mostly around a certain portrayal of the communist past as 'abnormal' or 'wrong', and of the present as 'deficient', while at the same time drawing on understandings of Eastern Europe that refer to its pre-communist past (untamed ethnicity and nationalism, and lack of political and cultural institutions similar to the ones in the West).

Economic, political and cultural aspects of backwardness; 'communist man'

I will present a rather brief selection of the massive output from a field of social sciences dominated by political science and economics and from political institutions that contribute towards this backwardness discourse in the post-communist era (usually with the former producing conceptualisations, analyses and recommendations on which the latter will be basing policies). To refer more concretely to Romania, most studies produced in the West subsume various societal developments under the analysis of economic and political activities, which are mapped out and compared against a detailed grid of indices that are supposed to operationalise concepts linked to market economy and liberal democracy, merging into a dominant discourse that imposes 'true', 'valid' definitions of the situation – with strong political implications.

The general tone of the debate is summarised by the lines: "flawed and incomplete transition from authoritarian rule" (Gallagher 1995, p7). The past is often portrayed through imagery like 'darkness' and 'deep sleep'. "In the last decade of the twentieth century Romania is emerging yet again from darkness" (Patterson 1994, p1); 'a shattered country' is in a process of "picking up the pieces" (ibid., p21) and 'rebuilding the ship at sea'. These constructions treat the communist past (around forty-five years of local history) as a historical error to be erased, 'freezing' the country's trajectory – which has the effect of placing Romania in the past of Western Europe - a common trope through which colonial writings construct the different as 'primitive'.

This understanding of the past where everything was 'wrong' and which needs to be discarded is used to articulate a 'deficit' metaphor to represent the contemporary

social reality of the country. For example, sections in Shen's (1997) book *The Restructuring of Romania's Economy: a Paradigm of Flexibility and Adaptability* bear titles like: "Obstacles to Reform", "Structural Rigidity", "Financial Passivity and Dependency", "Functional Aberration", "Plan-induced Inefficiencies", "Institutional Deficiencies", "Financial Inadequacy" and "Political and Social Instability".

This type of diagnosis resonates with most documents produced by the World Bank and the IMF, bodies that focus on the economic, market-related institutional features. This 'economistic' discourse about Romania sees it as under-developed in relation to parameters established in very different 'Western' contexts (an ideal-typical West is taken as the norm and end-point of development processes), and in need of 'help' in order to 'catch up' through 'reform'. EU institutions as well monitor the reform on various levels (economy, the judicial system, human rights situation, etc. – as detailed in the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession that candidate countries have to fulfil).

On the political front, the country is depicted as having an imperfect or incomplete democracy. Schopflin (2001, p110) in examining EU policies towards the eastward enlargement states that "the overt goal was the far-reaching reconstruction of post-Communist systems into an ideal-typical European democracy"; he goes on to argue that "Anglo-Saxon analyses of post-Communism are frequently, persistently, and understandably hampered by the analysts' own cultural baggage...which they elevate to immanent yardsticks for the measurement of the success and failure of democracy under post-Communism" (ibid., p111).

This is complemented by other 'cultural' analyses of the region that posit Eastern Europe as the container of a fundamentally different culture (political mainly, but also more generally norms and values) - which allows for metaphors of 'clash of civilisations' to emerge. Appadurai (1988) points to some characteristics of the anthropological discipline that are relevant in this context (insofar as Eastern European societies are constructed as 'Others'): the tendency to conflate place and culture and assumptions about "the boundedness of cultural units and the confinement of the varieties of human consciousness within those boundaries" (ibid., p36), with the effect of locking cultures and local actors into 'places', and overtones of moral and intellectual incarceration (the local people as prisoners of their modes of thought).

This tendency is visible through a variety of considerations that also construct the type of person that inhabits post-communist societies. “Society under communism was characterized by the dearth of intermediate associations, the almost complete absence of a ‘public realm’, a culture of victimization and political helplessness, an intolerance for dissenting views, an inability to negotiate and compromise, and the existence of atomized individuals and families disconnected from larger society” (Kunioka and Woller 1999, p581) – this is typical of the descriptions of society under communism in political science and sociology texts. The type of person created by such a society is seen as characterised by alienation, political passivity, distrust, lack of civic skills, lack of forms of community apart from family and ethnic and religious groups, cynicism. Paldam and Svendsen (2000, p6) detail the effects of communist policies on local subjects: “some totalitarian regimes have killed and jailed a sizable fraction of the population, often in the form of wavelike purges that took a dramatic momentum of their own. This has created a strong atmosphere of fear and distrust leading into paranoia. Those who live through such periods tend to be changed. They have thoroughly learned to trust nobody, to obey authority, and take no initiative of their own”. Gallagher (1995, p5) writes in the same vein:

“Erich Fromm, the social psychologist, identified various social types who are uncomfortable with freedom, illiberal in their attitudes, and happiest with a centrally-directed, strong state which lays down how they should think and behave. These types exist in all societies, but the stress on conformity and discipline in behaviour and thought patterns that was a feature of communist rule perhaps made authoritarian-minded citizens more numerous than elsewhere”.

All the above descriptions put forward the assumption that the political and economic arrangements of the past in Eastern Europe have produced a breed of people characterised by dependency, lack of initiative and entrepreneurship, apathy, anomie, anti-individualism, distrust and incapable of independent, critical, even ‘rational’ thinking. ‘Communist man’ takes shape as a subject position in the backwardness discourse: a deficient type of person, who lacks the traits that its Western counterparts possess. These negative qualities are seen as having survived in the present, as inherited ‘mentalities’, norms and values of individuals and groups that stand in the way of reform

and progress; the fields of social sciences and post-communist studies abound with 'cultural legacy' theories that reinforce this particular understanding of the people in Eastern European countries.

In parallel with this type of analysis, there are alternative ways of portraying Eastern European societies: for example, Rose and collaborators at Strathclyde University have produced a wealth of studies (Rose 1999, 2000, Rose et al. 1998) that highlight the resourcefulness of people in Russia in the context of everyday life survival strategies; Ledeneva (1997) has brought into focus the complex system of networking - *blat* - characterising Russian society (and all shortage-ridden Eastern European societies) and the levels of trust, co-operation and reciprocity necessary for its functioning. These type of studies focus on the inventiveness and strategies necessary for getting-by in these societies, as opposed to prevalent images of dependency and apathy, and on notions of trust, solidarity and co-operation within networks, in contrast to dominant concepts of anomie or social atomisation in relation to Eastern European societies. Nevertheless, this alternative image of Eastern Europe is rather marginal in the discourse of the social sciences and international agencies.

Apart from 'communist man' (seen as a product of the communist era that did not disappear with the collapse of communism and that has problems in adapting to a liberal capitalist society), other deep seated and 'older' cultural traits of Eastern Europeans are constructed in the social sciences literature, among which ethnic and religious passions are prominent. As far as ethnic identity is concerned, Eastern Europe has been constantly associated in academic, diplomatic and mass media discourses with the rise of new nationalisms, or neo-tribalism, ethnic unrest and intolerance. These constructions build on other conceptualisations, such as nationalism theory, that categorises national identity in ethnic and civic types, with the civic being Western and the ethnic Eastern European (Spohn 2003, Gellner 1983). In Western Europe "nation was defined in legal-historical terms", while Eastern European nationalisms, "although often using the language of universalism, were exclusionary and often ethnically defined,

basing state sovereignty not on individual citizenship, but on collective ethnicity” (Blokker 2003, p5)⁴.

The expected upsurge in ethnic and religious conflicts that was a major concern across the social sciences (Holmes 1995) points to modes of imagining Eastern Europe compatible with an essentialist view of cultural traits – which are perpetuated through decades or even centuries irrespective of other societal and regime changes. Mestrovic (1993, p9), drawing on notions such as ‘social character’ (similar to ‘habits of the heart’, in the Tocquevillian tradition) states that “even if Communism is a modernist doctrine, it failed to modernize or change dramatically the medieval mind-set of the people it ruled. Almost as Communism fell in 1989, the Communist nations stepped back into history and did not make appreciable strides in becoming like the West. Nationalism, ethnocentrism, fundamentalism, Balkanization...returned with a vengeance”. Whether ethnocentrism and nationalism did take the front seat in Eastern European countries and interfere with the implementation of democratic institutions and the free market is a debatable issue. It could be argued that, with the exception of ex-Yugoslavia, Eastern European countries have witnessed levels of interethnic conflict comparable with the ‘social unrest’ manifestations throughout the West (inter-racial clashes, anti-immigrant demonstrations and confrontations, the northern Ireland and Basque separatist movements).

Cultural legacy theories: conceptual tools and implications

All the traits presented above (some constructed as products of the communist era, others as having roots in the more distant past, but all part of the backwardness discourse) play into the representation of the forms society and social change took post-1989. They flesh

⁴ See Hutchinson (2003) for an argument that the ‘civic’ nations actually rely on ethnic tropes; he illustrated this in the case of France, ‘the first civic and modern society’: the French revolution was imbued with ethnic understandings (France and its “special mission to Europe, as heir of the Roman and Carolingian civilisations... War and invasion almost immediately nationalised the Revolution” p39; “even the exemplary civic nation then rests on an ethnic substratum” p40). Also, national myths and ethnicity issues pervade the discourse of politicians in ‘civic’ nations, pointing to fundamental cultural values or traits that need defending in the face of various threats (see the debates over wearing the Muslim veil in France or on immigration and asylum seekers in the UK).

out the notion of 'cultural legacy' that is pivotal in the articulation of 'backwardness' in the context of the post-communist period. Gilberg (1992) formulates a typical argument that relies on notions of cultural legacy: "are the relative slowness and lack of success of the Romanian democratization the result of regime policies and views, the debilitating heritage of the Ceausescu era, the authoritarian nature of mass attitudes, or all the above?". Similarly, in referring to the destruction of civil society during the communist regime, it is argued that "this legacy persists in contemporary political cultures and is manifested in learned helplessness, receptivity to paternalism, and a confrontational attitude toward conflict" (Gibson 2001, p52). The implications of old 'habits' for the present are clearly drawn out by formulations falling under the 'cultural legacy' type of reasoning: "nations populated by such individuals... that lack an active civic culture will be less able to either democratise or effect economic modernization" (Kunioka and Woller 1999, p581).

I will illustrate one of the ways backwardness and 'lack' or 'deficiency' are articulated together by addressing an important conceptual tool in cultural legacy theories, namely 'social capital' as formulated by Putnam (1993, 2000), which has recently enjoyed a wide popularity among social scientists and policy-makers alike. Social capital is defined as "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions" (Putnam 1993, p167).

Putnam addresses indirectly Eastern Europe in the book that introduced the concept of social capital to larger audiences: "the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited stock of social capital" (Putnam 1993, p183). This is a formulation that illustrates the points made above in relation to the backwardness discourse that depicts the present as 'lack' and explains it through features of the past (communist and procommunist) as cultural legacy – with the implicit reference to Western traits as the norm against which this assessment is made. Putnam's analysis links social capital to a host of societal outcomes such as the functioning of institutions and of democracy generally, but also of the economy - it "bolsters the performance of the polity and economy" (1993, p176). "One of the more important consequences of state socialism in

the region was the almost complete destruction of the institutions of civil society and other forms of social capital. Falling victim to the centralizing powers of the state were farms, businesses, unions, churches, the press, all forms of voluntary organization, the family” (Kunioka and Woller 1999, p581). The logical implications are that a lack of social capital (characteristic in Eastern European societies) is seen as related to slow progress in the democratic and economic fields.

The concept of social capital has been intensively used by social scientists: high levels of social capital have been related to almost everything from levels of crime to good health, in what must be one of the most conceptually confused fields within the social sciences, as social capital becomes coextensive with ‘society’ and is often measured through the outcomes it is supposed to engender⁵.

Despite this conceptual imprecision and the impossibility of disentangling its components, the mechanisms through which it is supposed to influence social outcomes and effects, social capital has become a central explanatory tool in relation to Eastern Europe and generally the developing world. The World Bank website on social capital regarded it as a powerful weapon in the fight against poverty around the world (www.worldbank.org/poverty). Programmes were implemented with the purpose to strengthen social capital in societies with weak civic traditions (in the case of Romania it took the shape of the Social Development Fund).

Social capital theory has been used both to predict support for democratic procedures in Eastern Europe, and to explain post-hoc the degree of success of the reform. In the case of Eastern Europe, lack of social capital was one of the explanations put forward (by theorists and policy-makers) for the disappointingly slow and difficult transition to a market economy and political liberalism, the ‘missing link’. As mentioned above, the difficult operation of democracy in Eastern Europe is linked to the lack of a functional and healthy civic society with intersecting voluntary organisations that could ‘teach’ the participants the habits and rules of democracy. These explanations often reflect a reductionist understanding of the social: when the unruly developments do not fit into the predictory matrix of economic equations, the ‘social’ is to blame (economic laws and calculations are scientific and correct, therefore ‘society’ must be ‘faulty’).

⁵ For a critique of the concept, its uses and the power relations that keep it alive, see Fine (2001)

Exemplary of this type of thinking is the following quote, in the context of a discussion on the plummeting of macroeconomic indicators (GDP) and standards of life in 'transition countries': "The logical explanation is that *something intangible is missing*. Maybe the 70 to 45 years of socialism destroyed some X, which is hard to rebuild. Often it is argued that X is 'initiative', 'business knowledge' or even the 'spirit of capitalism'. However, such proposals seem without a theoretical basis. We argue that X is social capital" (Paldam and Svendsen 2000, p2, emphasis in original).

The definition of social capital with its emphasis on voluntary groups also leads to the dismissal of other forms of association and trust found in Eastern European societies. A different emphasis of the definition would allow the unearthing of features compatible with democracy: for example, Gibson (2001) finds in his study that Russians have important private social networks characterised by high trust, which are constantly overlooked by analyses focused on formal organisations, and which could in theory be the precursors of a vibrant civil society. Frequently, the forms of social capital identified in post-communist societies, based on the presence of social networks, are seen as being of the wrong kind: 'anti-modern' for Rose (1999) or 'negative social capital' for Paldam and Svendsen (2000) - which emerges from the 'grey' and 'black' networks found in the communist economies, working illegally alongside the official economy.

To sum up, cultural legacy theories, among which the concept of social capital occupies a prominent position, state that mentalities and routines acquired in the past are hard to shift and they have a brake effect on any type of social reform (reform of the economy, introduction of liberal democracy and rule of law, etc.).

Some voices (e.g. Holmes 1995) urge us to look for explanations in relation to the slow and often unpredictable change away from 'cultural legacy'. Rather than placing so much emphasis on the habits of the past, inherited values and attitudes, one should focus on the present and the crisis of governability: "postcommunist studies should shift its investigative agenda away from contemplating cultural traditions toward discovering the way these countries are now being governed" (Holmes 1995, p30). Holmes points to the difficulties of state agencies to govern effectively, to coordinate the infrastructure (from education and health to the judicial, energy and transport) and keep under control illegal

activities (prostitution, crime, trafficking, etc.). This position stands in contrast to the typical 'cultural legacy' proposition presented below:

“Certainly, the experience of two generations of rigid state paternalism has created large groups of citizens ill equipped to cope well with the demands of an open and competitive society where individuals have far greater responsibility for their own lives, where the rules are more complicated and the risks for the unenterprising correspondingly greater than they were under communism” (Gallagher 1995, p5).

It can be argued that by comparison to Eastern European post-communist societies, most western citizens enjoy relatively safe and predictable life trajectories, in stable societies, with variable amounts of safety nets; in post-communist societies on the other hand, the 'rules of the game' are constantly changing and formal rules or laws are not reinforced, and citizens cannot rely on state-provided safety nets. Under these conditions, survival skills are sharpened and entrepreneurial practices take on a prominent role.

Rejecting or challenging a position such as the one expressed in the previous quote would entail commentators focusing less on attitudes towards the transition to capitalism – as captured by a wealth of surveys – and on identifying inherited mentalities, and more on everyday life contexts (for example, the frequent law changes in the domains of property, banking, taxation, investment, privatisation, restitution of property, that have left the ordinary citizen disoriented and without the possibility of making long-term plans). This approach suggests that it is not the case that apathetic and unenterprising individuals refuse to contribute to the successful advancement of capitalism, but that Eastern European citizens have operated under circumstances of frequent and radical change and uncertainty, without safety nets and a “lack of effective and accountable structures of government” (Holmes 1995, p40).

Reforming Eastern Europe: the consequences of a regime of representation

The backwardness discourse creates the West as a norm, a model against which Eastern Europe is compared and assessed – reinforcing a hierarchical positioning. This particular regime of representation is creating the ground and limits for imagining the evolution and

goals of Eastern European societies, which have taken the form of 'transition'⁶ to capitalism and democracy; it also makes difficult the articulation of alternative ways of thinking about social change. The ubiquitous terms associated with the post-1989 period, both in the West and Eastern Europe, were 'transition' and 'reform', meaning a remoulding of political and economic institutions in a 'Western' form.

In the West, throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s an intermeshing of policy and academic intellectual production regarding 'societies in transition' supported each other and reinforced the backwardness discourse. Policies were based on understandings that social scientists had created in relation to Eastern Europe, and experts explored the implementation, impact and success of these policies and subsequent societal changes during the 'transition' using images and concepts that fit into the 'backwardness' frame.

A direct implication of the regime of representation created by the backwardness discourse in the process of 'transition' is the legitimisation of knowledge and expertise claims on the part of Western individuals and agencies. As the aim of the transition was discursively fixed as achievement of free market and democracy, after 1989 the West took an active stance on the change of Eastern Europe and set out to 'help' the building of capitalism and democracy. "As the societies of Eastern Europe emerge from the wreckage of forty years of Leninism, they need help in building democratic structures and market economies. Their needs are pressing, but the task is enormous and the timescale for change is long. What can the West do?" asks Rollo (1990, p1) in a book characterised by a patronising, self-righteous tone. Interventions ranged from 'cultural exchanges' to more serious attempts at social engineering (structural adjustment programmes). Numerous assistance and 'know how transfer' programmes enacted understandings of Eastern Europe in terms of the inadequacy of local knowledges and practices. Cooperation programmes as well, although based on the notion of partnership, were performed from unequal positions. The figure of the Western expert or consultant became ubiquitous throughout Eastern Europe. The rush of Western experts towards

⁶ The term transition is rejected by many social scientists. It implies that change after 1989 had a clear end-point – a simplistic, teleological view of social transformation. As Verdery (1996) points out in the case of Romania, the result of transformation could have taken a variety of shapes that do not overlap with Western institutions. In the case of the ex-soviet republics, especially Russia, the local socio-economic formations (captured by terms such as 'predatory capitalism') hardly fit into Western ideal-typical forms, and analysts still debate whether they are compatible with Western capitalism and democracy.

Eastern Europe, including Romania, is well documented: it involved a vast array of consultancy firms, EU programmes of technical assistance (PHARE and TACIS) and 'knowledge sharing and partnership building' or 'institutional strengthening' (components of the World Bank Social Development Fund for Romania); the transfer of knowledge extended to educational programmes and professional training (e.g. the British Council's involvement in training top civil servants through MA programmes in the UK, Chevening scholarships, Open Society Foundation programmes, etc.) with the result that a whole local elite has been trained abroad over the past decade. Thunborg (1997) details the ideologically-imbued USA strategies and goals in official and non-governmental aid programmes for Eastern Europe.

These activities were and are based on assumptions about the lack of knowledge or naivety of Eastern Europeans across a wide range of socio-economic issues (from a general lack of understanding of the functioning of the free market, to the lack of a more 'technical' grasp on issues of how to raise and invest capital, how to organise political parties and to conduct election campaigns), and about the expertise and experience of Western institutions in the same matters. This is illustrated by Howell's (1994, p4) comment on Eastern Europe: "[n]otions of international competitive advantage were not understood. Foreign capital and foreign assistance were widely seen as the saving combination, although few were really prepared to pay the price of having the interference and participation of the fund providers in their internal affairs". Howell (p61-62) also talks about the role of the expert and the resentment towards Western consultants, the "concern in eastern Europe for a phenomenon known as 'consultancy tourism' where consultants, often from small firms with no long-term interest in the countries concerned...zip in and out to undertake studies with little implementation and often questionable quality"⁷.

The dominant representations of the West and Eastern Europe were acted out beyond simple expert advice, recommendations and knowledge 'sharing'. They were the foundation on which a sustained programme of policies was designed and carried out, in

⁷ Howell (1994) singles out EU consultants and the internal practice of checking their plane tickets in order to make sure they have been indeed on assignment in Eastern Europe rather than on a beach in Southern Europe.

an effort to 'reform' societies and economies. Gowan (1995) points to the general tone of the debate which took place in the early 1990s, as communist regimes collapsed throughout Eastern Europe (*What is to be done?* is the paternalistic title of Jeffrey Sachs's famous article in *The Economist*, in January 1990): "It was about how the West should seek to reshape the life of the entire East European region" (Gowan 1995, p3-4). This assessment resonates with Bhabha's (1990, p75) description of the colonial discourse as "a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity"; there are similarities between the colonial project and the creation of Eastern Europe as a target for social engineering and reform.

In the debate about how to manage the Eastern European issue different positions emerged (while alternative models to neoliberal capitalism were never considered): for example, the World Bank and the IMF embraced shock therapy models, but there were voices that supported a more 'organic' development of liberal democracy and capitalism from the existing network of social institutions combined with open debates and negotiations (the new political and socio-economic order growing through the functioning of the civil society)⁸. Gowan (1995, p3) states that "Eastern Europe's market for policy ideas, suddenly open in 1989, was swiftly captured by an Anglo-American product with a liberal brand name", suggesting that the neo-liberal theory and practices of 'shock therapy' had a dominant position among conceptualisations of the reform. In 1990, the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs proposed and publicised measures for dealing with the post-communist situation (enthusiastically embraced by North American and British policy-makers and most Eastern European elites) consisting of 'shock therapy' as opposed to half-measures of reform or gradual change. This neo-liberal approach was in line with a specific view on globalisation and economic integration and was appropriated by the IMF as its main policy guide.

Shock therapy (involving the dismantling of previous social and economic institutions such as traditional trade agreements between Eastern European countries, generalised, fast privatisation, opening of Eastern European markets and direct competition with Western economies, adoption of certain financial mechanisms, etc.) was

⁸ As advocated by Dahrendorf (1990) in *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*.

portrayed as an inevitable and desirable course of action dictated by the logic of global capital. In the case of Romania, the governments in power in the early 1990s did not adopt the shock therapy strategy, delaying the privatisation of state-owned economic units and the dismantling of subsidies. As a result, Romania was seen as the bad, recalcitrant pupil of reform, while countries like Poland, which implemented earlier the recommendations of 'shock therapy', were constantly seen as 'the good pupil'.

The very term 'therapy' suggests that Eastern European countries were placed in the position of a sick patient whose only chance to recover was the acceptance of the remedy produced in 'Western' laboratories. This is one of the meanings that the 'backwardness' signifier acquired when used by Western institutions and actors. Also it illustrates the notion that a general concept or strategy can be applied indiscriminately across a variety of very different locations, each with specific circumstances a disembedding of the concepts from the context of relations in which they are created – an approach that many social scientists find problematic.

It is difficult to disentangle the discourses on how to reform Eastern Europe, but they all coagulate around the main signifiers of democracy, freedom and capitalism as free market and privatisation. What is unclear are the goals and priorities, which are the means and which are the ends in the equation of transformation: in some versions the primacy of economic reform is underlined, arguing that the rest will automatically follow, as free markets have the capacity to structure the socio-political aspects; in a slightly different version, the accent is on democracy and 'freedom' that depend on the implementation of the free market; or again, democracy and rule of law are the first priority, the basis on which viable capitalism (including the free market) can be built.

According to Pridham et al (1994, p1), "the policies of Western countries and international organisations have not always facilitated the building of democracy in that region, and indeed have not always been directed towards that goal". Additionally, there was a mismatch of interests of international funding institutions and Eastern European populations: the reform supported by the World Bank and the IMF for example was directed at improving macroeconomic indicators (such as the GDP), which are divorced from microeconomic or social aspects such as general standards of life, and especially

from the interrelated issues of individual and group identity, self-esteem, violence and crime, social solidarity, which were at the centre of local concerns.

Local contributions to the backwardness discourse and the 'return to Europe'

The preceding sections have identified a dominant mode of representation of Eastern Europe in the West, constructed around the nodal points of backwardness and deficiency, and some of its conceptual tools and policy consequences.

The backwardness discourse that contributes towards the creation of Romania as a 'place' and type of society (by defining its identity in certain terms) is intersecting with the 'local' efforts to fix the meaning of the 'place' and shape its identity. The next section details the contribution of local elites to the backwardness discourse, and the analysis will then address the outline of the societal restructuring project (a mythical space suturing the Romanian social space), in the light of the backwardness construct.

The Romanian elites have been engaged in a longstanding debate over the identity of Romania⁹, and the terms of this debate have always included 'the West' as referent. The vision of what Romanian society should look like has animated contrasting political projects that have been articulated under 'Westernising' or 'autochtonist'/'indigenist' discourses. In short, the identity of Romania has largely emerged through various positionings vis-à-vis the West (meaning mainly, but not only, 'Western Europe'). These have been (and are) flexible and strategic definitions (of both the West and Romania), changing with the context and with the goals of social actors, and legitimating a variety of other political and social projects.

The Transylvanian Latinist school (18th Century) tried to create and fix identity through the construction of difference, by emphasising the Latin origins of Romania in contrast with the surrounding Slavic countries ('an island of Latinity in a Slavic sea'). Definitions of Romania and political projects were formulated in the fight against foreign domination in the 19th century; they were followed by attempts to 'modernise' the newly independent country by the educated elites with access to power positions (the vast

⁹ See the mid-19th century modernisation debate in Romania and the nationalist project under the Romanian communist regime, as detailed by Verdery (1991); also the 'five stages of nationalism in eastern Europe' (Gellner 1991).

majority of whom had been instructed in Western academic institutions in Paris, Vienna or Berlin). One such attempt was the liberal model; “The liberal project was underpinned by various modes of legitimation, the principal mode being a ‘derived’ legitimation based on the Western societal model” and the implicit superiority of Western societies (Blokker 2003, p6). This local project used images of the West as rationalism, Enlightenment, industrialisation and urbanisation – and posited them as desirable features and the only way to modernity and social progress.

At the same time, an opposition in the name of local authenticity coupled with nostalgia for traditional communities was formulated by competing elites producing normative models of the social. This alternative political project, inspired by German romanticism (some of its main proponents, Eminescu and Maiorescu of the Junimea movement, were schooled in Germany), rejected the wholesale import of the Western model as incompatible with Romanian national (essential) characteristics, such as a rural ethos - in this version, the West cannot be a valid prototype of social organisation. Letting those essential features come into their own will lead to different political and cultural forms to the ones found in the West, through a ‘natural’, ‘organic’ process¹⁰. These representations and constructions of the Romanian nation and of the West were used in power struggles between elites in 19th and early 20th century Romania, in the process of deciding the path of development that the country took (Verdery 1991, Boia 2004).

Those oscillations between different uses of the West for local projects of social design continued in the communist period. Bonnett (2004) traces the ambivalent relationship of Eastern Europe with the West – the early communist modernising project of the Bolshevik revolution for example was based on notions of progress, rationality and science, secularism, equality and social equity, civilisation – which were also identified with the West. Later on a dissociation from the West occurred, as the latter was identified with materialism, greed, superficiality and instrumentality. In the case of Romania, in the 1980s in the official discourse the West became synonymous with poverty and social

¹⁰ It has been suggested that the adoption of the autochtonist model resulted from the acknowledgement on the part of the Romanian elites of the hopeless ‘backwardness’ of the country, hence the choice to drop out of the competition with the West and invest in ‘traditional’, authentic traits such as orthodoxy, national spirit etc. (see Blokker 1993).

injustice or inequality, unemployment, use of drugs, general social and cultural decay and greed (series of programmes in the Ceausescu era on national television entitled *From the World of Capital* abounded with grim images of homeless people, strikes and other forms of social unrest, drug users, queues for 'the soup of the poor', etc.).

The nationalist project took a particular turn during the years of the Ceausescu regime, which Verdery (1991) documents in a detailed analysis. Competing constructions of Romanian identity relied on notions of origins (Latin vs Dacia) and this dual origin was articulated in divergent discourses about Romania that emphasised (following political struggles) its links or belonging to Europe, or its difference from it and roots in something 'different' and authentic, or a combination of both European and authentic.

The cultural producers have been divided between those creating 'history' and representations in collaboration with and serving the purposes of the communist regime (which leaned towards an autochtonist model) and those resisting these representations and defending a 'European' affiliation (they tended to have dissident positions in relation to the regime). The intellectual elites were divided between the ones openly admiring and promoting the Western European cultural model and the ones participating in the Party discourse of nationhood, exulting specific autochthonous traits and rejecting the corrupt Western European cultural and moral values and principles of societal organisation.

The end of the communist regime has revived the process of identity creation through positioning in relation to the West (and other symbolic locations) under changed circumstances. Ways of framing identity that were repressed during the communist period emerged vigorously: Africa and Asia entered the discourse of identity, as an 'other' Romania must distance itself from¹¹. 'Asiatic despotism' for example was a reference point for the Romanian political scientist Tismaneanu (1999, p159) in opposition to Western democracy. A symbolic distancing from Russia was attempted by denouncing its Asiatic traits and its organic essence as non-European; these geographies of meaning that established hierarchies of 'places' as moral and 'cultural' locations had for purpose a certain positioning of Romania through relations of similarity and difference.

¹¹ See the use of Africa by Romanian intellectuals as symbol of lack of 'civilisation' and culture in Verdery 1991, p1-3

There is a high degree of convergence between 'Western' representations of Romania and the local discourses around Romanian society formulated by dissident intellectuals before 1989 and that are dominant after 1989. Rather than seeing the backwardness discourse as a foreign construction imposed by powerful actors on a passive, confused and victimised local population, the role of the local elites and population in supporting, internalising and legitimating it has to be acknowledged, as part of the interplay of the local and the West in producing dominant discourses - in the context of particular power relations.

For example, concepts such as social capital (which point to the 'lack' and deficiency of Eastern European countries) have been embraced by many Eastern European scholars as a valid explanatory tool along which thinking about their societies could fruitfully proceed¹².

Eastern European scholars have produced a wealth of images of deficiency and abnormality of the communist period by making comparisons to a Western model of democracy. An example is the way Tismaneanu (1999, p157) describes the struggles for power in the Romanian communist party: "Secretive, cliquish, programmatically deceptive, the decision-making process in this type of organizations is exactly the opposite of the presumably transparent, consensual and impersonally procedural systems of democratic politics". At the same time, the post-communist developments are seen as continuing to be 'deficient' in relation to the West. Plesu (2004) for example dwells on the 'grotesque' nature of the political scene in contemporary Romania, in contrast to the refined appearance of the Western politician, on the brutish and Balkanic local habits (gregariousness, lack of discipline, etc.).

Even the subject positions of the backwardness discourse are consolidated, because the local elites have converged with 'Western' theories on the portrayal of the 'communist man' surviving in the present (e.g. the Polish sociologist Sztompka 1995, or the Romanian writer Patapievici 1996) in the form of maladapted and recalcitrant workers, true obstacles to the socio-economic reform.

¹² An example is the conference entitled *Social Capital in the Balkans: the Missing Link?* organised in 2002 by the Blue Bird Social Inclusion Group and the Centre for Policy Studies at Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania, which attracted local and Western scholars.

“And yet we cannot return to Europe as long as our towns are dirty, our telephones dysfunctional, our political parties reactionary and parochial, and our mentalities sovietised. Europe is a measure, a purpose, a dream” (Jedlicki quoted in Kurti 1997, p29). This quote sums up the self-characterisation in terms of an unfavourable comparison with the West, taken as a norm, which local intellectual elites constantly reinforce.

It is evident that the backwardness discourse is not exclusively produced and imposed from Western locations: it is frequently endorsed by the local social actors, who bring their active contribution to this particular articulation.

Production of the social after 1989: ‘return to Europe’ or ‘catching up with the West’

As detailed previously, the fall of communism engendered widespread social dislocation in Eastern European countries. Following the conceptualisations of Laclau (1990), social dislocation is sutured by a mythical space. This section details the form this mythical space took in Romania (similarly to other Eastern European countries) – namely the discourse of ‘return to Europe’ or ‘catching up with the West’ which has hegemonised the social immediately after the fall of the communist regime.

The emergence of this particular mythical space cannot be separated from the context of other powerful representations and discourses, such as the backwardness discourse and the local production of national identity that has always proceeded in relation to the West. The fixing of meaning in a discursive field is dependent upon particular conditions of possibility (themselves of discursive nature). The interweaving of discourses and power relations between the spaces of the West and Romania can be seen as conditions of possibility, that allow some discourses to emerge and hegemonise the social space as operations of a mythical space.

It is difficult to separate these two discourses – ‘catching up with the West’ could be seen as an implicit meaning or effect within the backwardness discourse formulated in the post-communist period in Eastern Europe. Discourses articulate upon each other and meanings fixed by one discourse become available and will be integrated in other

discourses, with the effect of reinforcing concepts, objects and subject positions. The 'catching up with the West' discourse is heavily intertwined with the backwardness discourse and integrates concepts and subject positions fixed by the latter. While the backwardness discourse focuses on placing the West and Eastern Europe in a hierarchical relationship, with a 'deficient' Eastern Europe (in terms of societal institutions and habits, mentalities, 'culture' of the local people) lagging behind the West, the 'catching up with the West' discourse is its 'natural' extension, and it represents the form in which social change (the process of societal reform) is imagined and designed or planned, building on the strong normative component of the backwardness discourse (the West as the best model of social, political and economic organisation).

After the fall of communism an authoritative mode of representation of 'the local' in relation to the West has emerged throughout Eastern Europe, including Romania. The local elites have embraced an ideal-type 'Western model' of social and political organisation and adopted the backwardness discourse as a legitimate, accurate description of local social reality, accepting its prescriptions as well. While there was some resistance to this mode of representation which diminishes local experiences and alternative ways of organising social life¹³, the dominant narrative that has emerged is that of 'return to Europe' or 'taking up our place as a European society' in order to repair the rupture of history represented by the communist aggression. It reasserts and builds on a continuity with the pre-communist (i.e. capitalist and democratic) era and posits integration into the larger 'civilised' Europe as a natural process, which entails learning the lessons of democracy and leaving behind certain mentalities and ways of doing things as largely unsuitable for economic and democratic progress.

"On the diplomatic stage, the language of 'securing' a place within the West has become a common rhetorical formula. Any lingering memories of the once politically plural implications of Westernisation are not allowed to complicate the

¹³ There is evidence of local frustrated reactions at the ways the West is dealing with Eastern Europe: a marked disappointment with the hesitant EU integration, with the peripheral or second-class citizens status, and fears over national identity and the influence of the powerful Western culture and its potential to undermine traditional lifestyles. In a study of Polish identity based on surveys and questionnaires, Poles define themselves as more family-oriented, religious, patriotic and helpful to others than Westerns Europeans (Marody 2003 p 151) and also fear of the social outcomes of being part of the EU common market.

meaning of the 'security' being offered. The process of 'admission' is presented as an irrevocable political decision, a final closure not just on communism but on any other departure from late capitalism and its allied forms of democracy" (Bonnett 2004, p57).

The 'catching up with the West' discourse emphasises issues of societal reconstruction and emerges as the blueprint around which all political projects of the post-communist era must coalesce; a variety of social actors and institutions participate in articulatory practices that create this discourse, which is predominantly reinforced from positions of power.

The power of this mythical space ('catching up' or 'return to Europe/civilisation') in suturing the social, by providing the form of a new social order or social project, is testified by the ubiquity of its signifiers in contemporary Romania.

Politicians describe the goals of their mandate in terms of 'integration' into Western structures, and the success of their efforts is evaluated in terms of 'how much closer they brought us to the West'. In the earlier post-communist period, the falling behind IMF or World Bank standards (which meant postponement of loans) was widely commented upon in the media as failure of the government to manage the situation and steer the country in the right direction; alternatively, the NATO integration for example was seen as a resounding success of the government in power at the respective time; so was the removal of tourist visas for the Schengen space in the EU. At present the effort put into and the degree of success in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession is the yardstick according to which much of the activity of the governing institutions is assessed.

These discourses are propagated deeper into the social mass by tools such as policies and institutional infrastructure, which are bound to affect everyone on multiple levels. The discourse of 'catching up with the west' is reinforced by decisions and institutional restructuring, therefore penetrating all areas of both the public and the private. For example increases in the price of fuel, electricity and heating are justified in terms of 'alignment to European standards'. All sorts of economic initiatives are legitimised in this way – from closing down of factories to dismantling of welfare

programmes and institutional restructuring and policies; they are presented using some version of the vocabulary of alignment.

But this articulation of the desirable trajectory of economy, polity and society with 'becoming more western' is evident beyond governmental documents, speeches, and their reflection in the media. The economic elites are as well contributing to it, together with the intellectual elite.

For example, Andrei Plesu, a prominent Romanian thinker (that post-1989 has occupied positions such as Minister of External Affairs and Minister of Culture and Education), insists on the 'cultural' aspects of catching up with the West, on the necessary cultural changes that would permit a 'return to the distinguished European family'. (2004). At the same time, a leading political analyst like Stelian Tanase (1996) insists on the political and civic aspects and the need to build civil society in a Western form in order for local democracy to function.

They fall on a common trope among the Eastern European intelligentsia – the association of the West with anti-communism, and the blaming of policies and practices of the communist era for interrupting the natural capitalist development of these countries and producing non-civic citizens. Their writings resonate and overlap with the tone of the social debate in Romanian intellectual circles.

Broadly speaking, the 'catching up' discourse is formulated by the local technocrats, economists and political scientists in rather formal terms, dominated by generic concepts, or legalistic, technical terms. The accent is on the reform of the economy and privatisation, the strengthening of civil society and the rules of democratic elections and procedures. 'Society' is subsumed under the vague formulations 'social costs' of the reform, or 'mentalities', and the population is represented as a mass that will be reformed and re-educated through the introduction of democracy and the market.

Conclusion

To sum up some of the features and consequences of the 'backwardness' and 'transition as catching up with the West' discourses, they articulate together images of the

communist and pre-communist past, and a 'deficient' present as embodied in the functioning of democratic and market related institutions; this articulation includes/relies on notions of cultural legacy or habits that 'explain' the shortcomings of the present. It implicitly or explicitly posits the West as the norm against which society, polity and economy are assessed, and as the model Eastern Europe needs to follow; it produces prescriptions and legitimises a set of practices, including positions and policies in relation to the post-communist 'reform'. 'Backwardness' is firmly articulated with deficiency and flaws by reference to Western standards embodied in institutions and societal arrangements.

The communist period is generally considered a 'blip' in the history of Eastern European countries, therefore at the end of it these societies find themselves 'behind' the West, having lost decades of capitalist, democratic development. The Eastern European countries are placed somewhere in the past of the West – therefore legitimising the expert knowledge that various Western agencies (the EU, IMF, World Bank, NATO, individual Western governments, NGOs, consultancy firms, etc.) claim over these countries, and the implicit task of bringing them into the 'present', which leaves them open to administration, monitoring and control by these agencies and their experts. Local actors are objects represented by the experts as an undifferentiated mass in need of various types of help (assistance) and reformation or social engineering.

The backwardness and 'catching up' discourses are totalising modes of representation, which see knowledge and truth as objective and universal rather than power-and value-laden and subject to negotiation in the various sites of everyday life. They capture the nature of knowledge production on Eastern Europe, which is driven by assumptions of modernisation and progress (hence the emancipatory claims of many policies and strategies), convergence and integration in relation to a model which is an ideal-typical Western social, economic and political form of organisation. Eastern Europe is portrayed as caught in traditions and obsolete social practices, sometimes resisting change and progress – the 'local' to be reformed by the 'global' (part of an inevitable process of global convergence towards liberal democracy and market economy, where the 'global' is equated with Western traits and practices). The backwardness discourse on Eastern Europe can be placed in particular configurations of relations and invested with

additional specific meanings by social agents. As Foucault puts it, the virtually limitless field of the archive can never be described in its entirety: any particular configuration of relations we decide to investigate is only one among many possible as any discursive formation enters simultaneously several fields of relations in which it occupies different places and functions (Foucault 2002).

The backwardness discourse presented above is articulated slightly differently across theories in the social sciences or by the IMF and World Bank (which articulate it with a neo-liberal and globalising logic), or again by EU institutions (which integrate it in the strategies concerning the Eastern enlargement). Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of communism largely became a situation to be managed by Western agencies. It is difficult to separate between these actors and their projects, interests, actions and visions (as constructed in discourses), but the impact of these interventions to manage Eastern Europe must be acknowledged. At the intersection of economic theories of globalisation, discourses on the nature and role of the EU, the mission of the West in promoting and defending capitalism and democracy, on the one hand, and the backwardness discourse on Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the latter was created as a target for radical restructuring.

Most importantly, societal production in Eastern Europe emerged through these efforts, combined with the local response. Locally, 'catching up with the West' and 'return to Europe' are the master-signifiers of the new social order – which make use of local (strategic) understandings of the West as a model of cultural, political and economic organisation. The meaning of being Western in the 'catching up' discourse is a rather vague one. As Laclau (1990, 1993) put it, initially the mythical space does not need to have very detailed and specific traits, the form or project predominates over the content in the first phase of suturing the social.

The initial discourse of 'catching up' was organised around a few nodal points – rather vague signifiers: 'freedom' as a move away from communism, Western-style capitalism, democracy (subsequently, more precise meanings will be invested in these signifiers). These signifiers had different weight according to the agents of the articulation: for some the economic aspect is primordial (the introduction of market relations will structure all other aspects of society accordingly), for others the social-

political aspect, including 'local culture' (without a democratic polity, the market cannot function properly; vital for democracy is the existence of a strong civil society; the civil society has to be nurtured against persistent 'habits of the heart' or mentalities inherited from the past) – as illustrated in the work of Tanase (1996) and Plesu (2004).

The 'catching up' discourse forms the ground on which articulations are performed in the attempt to hegemonise the social – the other aspect of social production is a struggle over the meanings to be attached to signifiers, which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

PRODUCTION OF THE SOCIAL FROM BELOW: THE STRUGGLE OVER MEANING

Introduction

The previous chapter described a hegemonic articulation that structures the social in Romania by creating concepts and practices: ‘catching up with the West’ (or its variant ‘return to Europe’) through adoption of democracy and capitalism is a strong discourse that sets itself up as a unifying societal project. Its endorsement and diffusion by a wide array of social agents, coupled with the implementation of policies designed to reform society derived from this discourse means that it has a strong impact on the production of the social in Romania.

The nodal points of the ‘catching up’ discourse – free market and democracy – were the main concepts through which the social and social change were (and are still) thought and acted upon by the most powerful social agents; they were intensely diffused through the mass media – from TV news and innumerable talk-shows bringing together politicians, intellectuals, political analysts and financial experts – to daily newspapers.

The grasp this articulation has on people’s thoughts, conceptualisations and practices testifies its hegemonic status (it has managed to fix certain meanings in a relatively stable configuration). None of my respondents, friends or acquaintances seemed to envisage a societal trajectory outside the goal of ‘rejoining the West’ by the adoption of capitalism and democracy. The respondents were able to reflect on these transformations and sometimes to mount a powerful critique – while at the same time recognising that ‘there is no other way’; this again is evidence to the power of the dominant discourse to marginalize, or make difficult other ways of imagining and thinking about the social – at least not in the form of coherent alternative projects.

This chapter examines another level of production of the social, by ordinary people in the sites of everyday life. This is a level where less formalised articulations

compete to fix meanings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, social dislocation can be sutured initially by a discourse where the general form is more important than the specific content. To a certain extent, the main signifiers of the 'catching up with the West' are empty or vague signifiers, in the sense that the meanings of 'democracy', 'capitalism' or 'free market' and even 'the West' are not fully fixed – these objects of discourse have a range of meanings. Social production is proceeding through struggles to fill the signifiers with more definite meanings and to produce finer grained hegemonic articulations, ones that can frame the understandings and actions of social actors across all the dimensions of their social existence.

The identity of 'objects' that form the social emerges through these efforts of fixation and struggle, of defending a version as true and accurate and rejecting others. This chapter highlights the effort to invest the social with meaning through naming, describing, establishing similarities and differences, drawing boundaries between concepts and objects and placing them in systems of relations with other objects in order to fix their identity.

Through their accounts people produce articulations; their nature is contextual and strategic. The data offers access to the process of fixation of the signifiers or elements in the field of the discursive through struggle; it is possible to detect across these accounts the repeated, stable use of certain meanings in certain configurations – which point to processes of articulation in relatively stable forms, i.e. discourses. What follows is an analysis of this process of struggle over meaning that is central to the production of the social; it expands on the way people integrate the issues and questions on the changed nature of the social with going concerns – and on the articulations that are performed and through which the identity of concepts and objects is created; for example, the market cannot be thought of separately from its role in stratification and poverty and ideas of fairness or social justice, of human nature, and the role of the state: all of which are articulated in various configurations in most interviews.

The following analysis will draw on interview material; throughout these accounts three frames of reference tend to be employed by people in the process of making sense of social change and of filling with meaning the signifiers of the hegemonic discourse

(capitalism, freedom, democracy): the past, the Western world and 'place'(as concrete sites of everyday life).

Representations of the present are produced in most interviews through a parallel with 'the past' (namely the period before December 1989). Respondents construct simultaneously past and present, and it is usually through this contrast that the features of social life, or changes, are appraised. Perceptions of the present situation serve to reinterpret the past, and at the same time images of the past are the background against which the present is assessed in a process of double construction. Accounts of the past are strategic constructions, in the sense that they bring into focus the perceived problems and changes of today's society. "To confer new meanings onto the past is not necessarily to falsify it, but only to situate it within a broader interpretive scheme, one that may have been unavailable at the time of experience" (Freeman 2001, p291). This is why images of the past would probably have had a different shape in the very early 1990s (characterised by a violent rejection of communism and fresh memories of the 'suffering' endured, combined with a wave of enthusiasm and naïve optimism concerning the future), compared to the mid-1990s (where a rude awakening followed) and the period of the fieldwork (2002-2003). From the vantage point of the here and now certain facts and events of the past are selected and invested with meaning. They help the conceptualisation of the present.

Comparison with the past is used as a rhetorical technique differently by different age groups. It can be present throughout the interview as the main structuring theme of the account, or it can be mentioned in relation to punctual topics. For the respondents over 35 years old (that were over 22 years old in 1989, the year communism collapsed) a significant part – if not most of their lives has been spent under the old regime; therefore images of the past are often brought into the conversation as a method of accounting for the present. For those belonging to the generation over 50 years old at the time of the interviews, 'the past' tended to be a constant background presence in their accounts, sometimes explicit, other times implicit. 'The way things used to be' is a rhetorical device that highlights features of the present. A less conspicuous way of bringing in the past is by constructions of the type 'better' or 'worse' without explicitly specifying the reference frame for this assessment, which in fact is the past, as revealed by clarifying

questions. What is more surprising is the fact that the younger generation tends to use images of the past as well when explaining the present. The fact that young respondents who were 12 - 14 years old at the time when the communist era ended use representations of the past indicates that they are using representations of the past existing within their environment, produced mainly by family, friends and neighbours.

'The past' is split by most accounts into distinct periods under the communist regime: an early period (1950s to mid-1960s) characterised by active political repression, nationalisation of assets and persecutions; a middle period (late 1960s till late 1970s) when political relaxation followed and a satisfactory standard of life was achieved for many; and a late period (the 1980s) of progressive worsening, and severe shortages, from foodstuffs to electricity. The respondents tend to access one of these different 'periods' in order to discuss the present in a strategic, situated manner. People live very much in the present, which is a very demanding one, as they need to struggle and face daily reality, to plan and be informed about possibilities and fast changes, etc. Nevertheless, most of them cannot think about the present without the framework of the past – which is joined frequently by another framework – the West. Both explicitly and implicitly, the West as a normative point of reference appears in people's accounts, from discussions of what being 'civilised' means, to lifestyle and consumption issues and functioning of the free market.

The third frame of reference that accompanies people's accounts is represented by the sites of everyday experience: reflection on social change has a marked 'emplaced' nature. Discussions of new forms of poverty for example are always illustrated by concrete situations in one's neighbourhood – so are cases of rapid material improvement; the new work ethic of the present is exemplified through one's work colleagues. The place of residence and the workplace are privileged 'places' that anchor experience and provide the 'material' for social learning and reflection.

This chapter follows the ways the main signifiers of social change – as articulated in the discourse of 'catching up with the West' by implementing democracy and the free market (and a new 'culture' or habits) – are filled with meaning in everyday situations.

The meaning of democracy

Most interviewees produced understandings of democracy divergent from the one found in the media, intellectual and political speech (presented in the previous chapter). The latter lays a heavy accent on the necessity to revive or rather create a thriving civil society as a precondition for a functioning democracy (as well as for the functioning of state institutions) – which involves promoting voluntary organisations and all forms of association. These representations draw heavily on dominant understandings of communism as lack of freedom (political and some civic freedoms) and on the images of an atomised society poorly equipped to sustain a strong democracy – the word ‘fragile’ often appears in descriptions of the local situation, both by western experts and by local actors.

Some respondents acknowledge the existence of formal democracy in Romania,
We have our democracy, plenty of political parties...(DT10, f45)¹

Parties, parliament, this is democracy. (DT14, m38)

Democracy is being civilised, you cannot be a civilised country without democracy... if look around, you’ll see – the greatest countries have democracies.
(C4, f65)

They posit democracy as a normal state of affairs, an appropriate or ‘civilised’ form of political organisation. The meaning of democracy is fixed as a valuable, desirable feature, associated with a ‘civilised’ society, to be more precise, with the West.

At the same time, issues that deepen the meaning of ‘democracy’ are raised; one of the main alternative meanings that infiltrate this signifier is corruption (of those in positions of power, and transmitted down to ‘the last cog in the system’, the lowest ranking civil servants). The functioning of the political system and negative perceptions of politicians and state officials become the ground on which the previous meaning of democracy as ‘good’ is antagonised.

They all steal, they’re in power to get rich. (T4, m34)

¹ As described in chapter 4, respondents are identified by the area of residence (in this case Drumul Taberei) and a number within that area (10 respectively), followed by gender (female) and age (45 years old).

Democracy? Ha ha. It's all about them filling their bellies, what democracy? (T10, f48)

Democracy in this country is a joke. We vote, so what? We vote the same corrupt people that, no matter what party they come from, want nothing but get rich, use their position to get government contracts for their private companies, everyone knows that. (DT13, f64)

In this country, being a politician is the surest way to material success: they all have businesses, and they use our resources, our money, in their private business. Look what happened with banks: they never had to reimburse the loans, and they knew it from beginning. While the rest of us, we didn't have the courage to ask for loans – they wouldn't have given one to ordinary people anyway. (T14, m66)

The way I see it, no matter whom we vote, they have their hands tied: they have to do the IMF policies and that's that. (DT22, m31)

The decisions in this country are not in the hands of the ones we vote for. They're just some idiots trying to get rich while Europe makes the law. They're incompetent even at following it. (C12, m28)

The quotes above are characteristic of frequent articulations of democracy with corruption and incompetence of the political class. Also, the importance of the formal procedures that democracy is based on becomes more problematic when the politicians elected through these procedures are not actually exercising that much control over the governing process (as many respondents put it), therefore raising issues of sovereignty and legitimacy, and contesting the importance of formal rules as democracy when important decisions are taken elsewhere.

To sum up, democracy is often articulated with the Romanian political actuality (rather than formal meanings as expressed in political arrangements), and in this context it becomes associated with corruption, incompetence and heteronomy (external rule).

Despite some comments of the type

I don't know, I don't believe they are all crooks. Some are genuinely trying hard to do something for this country, to get us out of this situation. But it is not easy, you can't see results immediately. I bet there are some good people there, it can't be all bad... (DT7, f39),

the interviews contour a general lack of respect towards politicians; political and top state positions are seen as a platform towards getting rich through connections. These insights are corroborated by a wealth of studies in Eastern Europe and Romania (Stoica 2004) that

point to the phenomenon of siphoning off state resources by individuals in high state positions (resources invested in their private firms). The issue of corruption, well documented in the literature on Eastern Europe (e.g. Karklins 2002, Grodeland et al 1998), is one of the most prominent concerns of ordinary people, recurrently appearing in interviews.

It is not only the top echelons of the political class that are targeted by people's criticism. The local authorities (Bucharest's six sector mayors and their team) are generally judged in a way that brings together notions of functioning of democracy that include responsibility towards the electorate, accountability and efficiency (or fulfilment of electoral promises).

What has the local mayor done? I've sent them letters about the issue of parking spaces, about the need to do something with the fallen trees on my street, all sorts. No reply, they didn't do anything. Well, in Holland, where my son lives, all these things are taken care of by the local authorities. Tell me, why do I pay these taxes? (T19, f46)

I've petitioned the local mayor, because of the lighting in the street: it's too dark, and you stand a greater chance to be mugged or raped. They did it the following week – because it's a street where big names live. (C6, f52)

I've only asked for some of the metal fences they discarded after the refurbishment of the school, to use it around the block, why waste it? They didn't reply, so I just went to the local authorities, got an audience and asked them again. They said that if we take them ourselves before they are sent at the scrap yard, that's fine, but they can't send a team. So I did it – with a neighbour. (T15, f64)

No, of course I'm not happy with it [the children's derelict playground], but I never thought about sending petitions. I mean, to whom? They don't care... (DT10, f51)

The political class emerges as interested in their own private businesses and attempts to get richer, rather than serving the interests of the population. Is the political class useless or genuinely trying to get the country out of poverty under very stressful conditions? The general response to this question that respondents raise veers towards the incompetence, venality and self-interest of political actors and the ones who govern the country, which leads to a genuine questioning of the benefits or desirability of 'democracy' - at least in the form it has taken in Romania.

I don't see any difference. They say Ceausescu was a criminal because he starved us while he was basking in all sorts of goods and nice things. What about our distinguished governing class? The country is poor, people *really* starve, not like before, and they are shamelessly exposing their cars, houses, properties, holidays abroad, mistresses... (T10, f48)

Politicians get rich, that's democracy, this is the society we live in. (DT10, f51)

Changing forms of solidarity are highlighted as respondents voice their concerns regarding aspects of social change. From this perspective, democracy as political pluralism also means people that were previously part of the same group, are now in opposing political parties; rivalries around political convictions has dissolved the old us-them lines of solidarity, and has pulled old friends apart.

No, we're not good friends anymore. He's a social-democrat. (C11, m60)

He's gone completely nuts after 1989. He's with Vadim², I mean, how can he debase himself like that, hanging out with the lowest...(P3, m40)

A new line of division in the place of the old 'us' (the population) and 'them' (the communist top cadres) becomes relevant in Romanian society: the one between ordinary people versus corrupt politicians and state functionaries.

Just look at them, how full of themselves they are. Their fat ugly faces are full of satisfaction for how well they've done and of contempt for us... (DT12, m26)

They are all part of the same game, whether they are with the government or the opposition. You'd think they are in competing political parties, but actually they are all on the same luxury boat, while we're at shore. They just pretend to play the game, the only thing that matters is to be close to the power, irrespective of what party you're into. (C17, f58)

In conclusion, the articulation of democracy with a political class seen as corrupt and disinterested in working 'for the people' destabilises the 'positive' meanings of democracy as a 'civilised', normal feature, as the best way to govern. The disquieting remark 'it's not different from before' throws doubts on the advantages of adopting 'democracy' from the perspective of the poor and disempowered.

Meanings of freedom

² Vadim Tudor is the leader of a fiercely nationalist party, similar to the British National Party

'Freedom' was the word that exploded in December 1989 – 'we are free now' was the leitmotif of those days and months. Freedom had both the meaning of 'free from this specific dictatorship', free from constraints and laws of the past, free from oppressive political systems and practices, and a more general understanding as the societal condition under democracy and capitalism.

Freedom and democracy were strongly associated at the beginnings of the 1990s, but soon 'freedom' became the site of divergent meanings. In the political-intellectual discourse, freedom was understood as being able to choose one's rulers, from an array of political options crystallised into political parties with different platforms and positions. It also meant the ability to openly express opinions, and to criticise – free speech, together with an independent mass-media sector (civil and political rights). Ideas of freedom encompassed a re-positioning of the state in relation to society, less intervention and subsidising compared to the communist arrangements, and transfer of responsibilities towards the civil society – freedom from a paternalistic state. As under the communist society there was little distinction between the Party and the state, freedom from the grip of the communist party became extended in a chain of equivalence to freedom from the state more generally (separation of state from civil society).

For ordinary people, democracy and freedom were also associated, albeit in rather different forms:

Democracy means I'm free to do what I want! (T17, m29)

People think that because it's democracy, they are free to get drunk and shout if they want to. (C2, f61)

In a more general understanding, freedom has connotations like 'free to do things that I could not do before', which covers a very wide range of social activities.

Do I feel free? Freer? Ummm, yes. There are things I can do now... I've refurbished the whole house, painted it – I found original photos of the neighbourhood in the archives and restored the colour and everything. I couldn't have done this before... (C16, f57)

Oh, yes, we are freer, of course. We can travel, almost everyone has been abroad. I mean, among my friends. And... well, things that I can do in my spare time... (C6, f52)

But also the limits of this freedom are clearly drawn out: one is not free to do whatever one wishes. The new social order came with its restrictions and impositions, some coming from the functioning of the market – for example declining life standards imposed restrictions on what one was really able to do in this new environment in terms of consumption, leisure, socialising even, as all the above involve spending money.

I'm free to what? To starve? Freedom for what? Do I need this freedom? (DT4, f42)

They can take their freedom and shove it...it's poverty I care about, not freedom. (T1, f56)

We're all sinking into poverty, the state doesn't give a damn, but we're free... (ironic tone) (T13, f62)

They all say we're free now from all the horrible things we went through during Ceausescu. But with all this freedom... I cannot go to holidays anymore, or even go for beers like we were doing. What was so horrible about that, tell me? (T10, f48)

Freedom took on a huge variety of meanings, including resistance to the dominant understanding as a valued ideal, something individuals and society should strive for: freedom in itself is not desirable if accompanied by poverty or destitution; the articulation of freedom with poverty under conditions of the free market and retreat of the state in providing safety nets is dislocating the supposedly positive meanings of the concept.

Meanings of 'freedom' also take shape through reflections on one's relationships with the others, especially when living side by side is involved:

Now they beat their carpets at any time of the day, as opposed to the conventions we had before, when you could do it only between certain hours. Because 'they're free', you see? This freedom made people inconsiderate, you can not go to them and ask them politely to keep the noise down, because you risk to get a rude reply like 'I'm free to do whatever I want, lady, if you don't like it, go somewhere else, because I'll do whatever I please'. (P5, f30)

Ah, the music, it drives me mad, they play it loud late and I have to go to bed early because of my job, and I can't do anything about it...

Int: Have you tried talking to them about it?

What talking? They're free to do whatever they like in their flat, that's what they'll say. What they don't see is that the walls are so thin, so it really affects me. (T5, f31)

Yes, I had some...trouble with the neighbours. They're old and odd, they are not happy with me having people over for barbeques. They're envious probably, you know, old people... they did complain to my parents: 'C is making noise in the back garden with his friends...'. Well, that's their problem. It's *my* back garden, so... I'm free to use it as I want, I don't see why it concerns them. (C3, m27)

The quotes above reflect an aspect of freedom as lack of respect and consideration towards others, as well as freedom from previous social conventions, from certain social norms, from forms of social control. Freedom as freedom from previous conventions and compromises engendered by living together can be seen as a move away from the communist past, when community came before individual freedom and compromise within communal arrangements was a widespread societal feature (from the workplace and activities organised through it, like outings and holidays, to living arrangements and to participation in the formal structures of the party, school and workplace-based organisations).

Some respondents actively distanced themselves from the communist networks of relations and practices, from their normative underpinnings, from the social control element in the gaze of the co-workers, party cadres, neighbours, etc.

Yes, I would say we're definitely freer now. I mean, we're not entangled in all that mutual...doing things together, in the same way – and if you didn't do it as everyone else, someone would tell on you. (C13, f60)

Understandings of freedom delimit a 'private sphere' and curtail the rights of the others to interfere in it; usually the other signifier that helps articulating the meaning of this private sphere is private property: as long as one is within the confines of one's flat, house or garden, any behaviour is acceptable and intervention in the name of other norms rejected (despite the fact that most spaces are actually interconnected, not perfectly sealed, meaning one's acts will resonate beyond this sphere and affect others). These representations have important implications on ideas of commonality and practices of sharing, as the case-studies in contrasting neighbourhoods (chapters 9 and 10) will show.

There is a further element of freedom that stands out in relation to the past: freedom from responsibilities towards the others.

Well, I don't care about X. If they cannot pay their share of the bills, it's not my problem, is it. I'm free, I don't have to care about everyone. (T17, m29)

This element is part of an individualistic stance that many respondents embrace: being free means not having to care for others, freedom from solidarities.

One of the most important meanings of freedom revolves around choice allowed by the market.

I can choose what I want to buy (DT9, f25)

is a statement that was repeated in slightly different forms by many respondents. The issue of freedom of choice allowed by the market will be explored in the section below. Freedom tends to be constructed as the opposite of homogeneity; being 'different' is a trait through which some respondents valorise the present free market arrangements in contrast to the homogeneity of the past:

Well, the shops had just a few items, we used to have the same things, clothes and all, you know... you could barely choose how to look, you had to go through lots of trouble to find things that were a bit different, so that you wouldn't look like everyone else around you. It was annoying to see the same coat on four people in the office, this homogeneity. Some people tried hard to be a bit different, some accessories, or redoing the clothes a bit, if they had the skills. Well, now the shops are full, you just need the money. (C14, f63)

Another facet of freedom though appears in its articulation with lack of social control and order, chaotic societal organisation (anomie), and also unbridled human wickedness.

All this freedom means that no one does what they are supposed to, there is total chaos and disorganisation, no one obeys rules 'because they're free now', you see... (P1, m29)

Freedom went to the people's heads: look at how violent and evil they are. (DT10, f51)

The quotes presented here resonate with the classical debate in social thought around the meaning of liberty, as both lack of interference, usually from state agencies, and as regulation on the part of the government through laws and programmes aimed at enforcing freedoms – or negative and positive freedoms (e.g. Berlin's *Two concepts of liberty*). Freedom is profoundly entwined with governing: "freedom has been an objective of government, freedom has inspired the invention of a variety of technologies for governing" (Rose 1999, p67); at the same time, freedom has been conceptualised as

opposition to state planning and projects of social improvement and social reform (Rose 1999, p64).

In this light, the ambiguous embracing of freedom by some of the respondents, when articulated with social disorganisation and crime, points to the problems of the governing structures in defending positive freedoms that social thinkers have identified. In a move that reminds one of Marshall's (1992) ideas of citizenship, respondents posit the necessity of a modicum (which the state should provide through welfare programmes) in order to be free: this would enable them to lead a decent life (including being able to buy things apart from subsistence items like food, and to socialise with friends) and would give the notion of 'political rights' more credibility.

"But if we look at all those nations of the former Soviet bloc that are attempting to turn themselves into societies of freedom, we can perhaps begin to gauge something of the space between freedom as an ideal, as articulated in struggles against particular regimes of power, and freedom as a mode of organising and regulation: freedom here as a certain way of administering a population that depends upon the capacities of free individuals" (Rose 1999, p64).

In conclusion, the multiple and contrasting meanings of freedom gain shape through the ways social actors place the concept in relations with other issues - through processes of articulation: in some versions it is problematic because articulated with other social arrangements that engender poverty (like the free market and collapse of welfare programmes), or with societal disorganisation and proliferation of crime, or with more conflict, lack of respect in interpersonal relationships. In other accounts its status as a 'natural', 'good' thing emerges in articulation with private property, private sphere, human nature and less compromising, less 'forced' social relations (more choice in deciding the terms and the content of the interaction as opposed to past networks of dependencies) – an effect of free market relations. The market both enhances freedom (choices, opportunities) and limits it (everything has to be acquired through money, therefore lack of money is severely limiting opportunities).

The interviews also highlight the notion that freedom is not a valuable thing in itself, in the absence of a decent standard of living or within a society where the agencies of the state have problems in reinforcing the law and more generally in governing

efficiently. Freedom has no positive meaning to many of those affected by poverty. For these people affected by poverty for example, freedom is not some ideal beyond contestation – while many social science texts work with an implicit notion of freedom as an indisputable good, beyond questioning.

Meanings of capitalism: free market, private property, work, meritocracy, competition and ‘culture’ or habits

The media and public discourse are replete with a new vocabulary associated with the establishment of a new socio-economic order: terms like privatisation, competition, economic output, productivity, efficiency are constantly in use, from economic analysts to news presenters. One of the nodal points of the discourse of economic reform is private property as the pillar of capitalist relations. *Private property* as natural, good, and/or appropriate appeared as one of the most prominent articulations throughout the interviews.

One needs to have one’s own things: a house, or flat, at least. Your little plot of land (in the countryside), if that’s possible. (DT4, f42)

It’s like that: humans need to own their property. It’s the thing communists didn’t understand. (DT1, m64)

See, what the communists tried to do was against human nature. You cannot take one’s property away like that, and give them in exchange ‘state property-our property’ – how did the slogan go? People want their house and things... (C2, f61)

Ideas of human nature abound in articulation with property: private ownership appears as the natural instinct or human feature that was denied throughout the communist era, when ‘unnatural’ arrangements of collective or state ownership predominated. There are almost no voices that question the importance or necessity of personal private property – the meaning of the signifier seems to be rather clear-cut in people’s accounts as a good and desirable, something worth striving for. This translates into everyday concerns with owning something, especially flats and land; life strategies and efforts are coordinated by the desire to ‘own’, as previous obstructions to forms of ownership have been removed. The dominant mode of representation of private property is ‘return to normality’, ‘as

things should be' and the communist limitations of private ownership are presented in contrast as aberrations and gross abuse or violation of 'natural needs'.

However, private property acquires a knotty dimension when framed as '*privatisation*' of industrial assets and state companies. Personal private property in the form of flats and land is an unproblematic good, while privatisation of economic activities is not.

Accounts of the type

We must dismantle the inefficient economic units, that's the only way forward. Just that some don't want to accept it. (P4, m30)

You need to privatise, I suppose, because you cannot have an economy without private firms and companies, so the investors will never come unless there is privatisation. (T7, m34)

alternate with:

My neighbour is 'privatised', he has this stall in the market, selling biscuits. You know what he does? He buys them cheaper from those warehouses that sell in bulk and puts the price up in the market. What the hell is that? What is he doing? He's not producing anything, just moving things around. That's all the privatised ones do, they are not producing anything. What is that? Is this right? I don't know. I don't think so. Is this capitalism? It's easy to buy and sell the same stuff, but as long as you don't produce anything... (T9, f55)

Since they've privatised the company, everything went downwards. They didn't invest anything, just used the old equipment and made as much money as possible with no investment. Of course things are breaking down and all... they'll go bankrupt soon, that's for sure. They bought a decent company that had contracts with the West and all, it worked fine for so many years before, but they destroyed it in a few years, out of greed. (T14, m66)

They think if they privatise the factory, things will be better. I know who will get it, the bidding was faked, the buyer was decided beforehand, but they needed to respect the law so they dragged in a couple of phantom firms... anyway, the new owner buys it for next to nothing, he will sack most of the employees, then will try to get the most out of it before declaring bankruptcy, but by then he would have made a hefty profit without investing anything. And this is what is happening all over the country. In a few years we'll be completely ruined and with no productive capacities – because of the 'privatisation'. (T3, m34)

Privatisation appears in many interviews as foolish dismantling of factories and other production units, ridden with corruption, lack of respect towards the work of

generations that have built and used them, squandering of resources that could have been used otherwise. The well known debate of the 1990s ‘Should we privatise massive but inefficient plants for one dollar?’ has divided the population. Opinions were split between ‘Yes’ (and be grateful foreigners will take the problematic industrial plant off our hands and deal with it in a truly capitalist spirit and make it profitable or just do whatever is best with it, as they have the necessary experience and knowledge) and ‘No’ (we are being fooled by foreign interests, with a bit of effort these plants can be turned into something profitable – or at least, if they get privatised, they should go to Romanians: we shouldn’t sell our country away). The slogan ‘we’re not selling our country away’ was a powerful one in the 1990s and clashed with the view that the only way out of nation-level poverty is to sell. In the latter vision, the fact that foreigners will own an important part of the firms, factories, companies – from manufacture and industrial production to services – should not be a problem, it will just make us more ‘Western’.

See, if a German buys the company, what’s the problem? They will introduce more... German methods and rules, and educate the workers... they have to learn. (C2, f61)

We cannot keep on subsidising the mammoths. It’s a drain, someone should make them efficient, they are not efficient now. (DT22, m31)

If someone buys it, or invests in it, it should rather be a foreigner, because they have the money – who in Romania has this amount of money? And they can make it work, because they would have a company or something in their country that... they know how to ...well, invest and sell and all that. (DT26, f34)

Within the majority of interviewees’ accounts, participating in the capitalist game means supporting *efficiency* and accepting the Western competence as well. Efficiency is a higher order consideration compared to national ownership. But the articulation of efficiency with private enterprise as opposed to state-owned economic units is often resisted by pointing to the flaws of the private running of a business in contemporary Romania.

Respondents engage frequently with another of the most important signifiers of the specialist discourse on the market apart from efficiency, namely ‘*competition*’. The issue of competition is not so much addressed in the general terms of economic

competition as a principle of the free market, but rather in terms of everyday life experiences, especially linked to employment.

What has really changed is the way you need to really fight for jobs. (DT24, f31)

Lots of people, not so many jobs, so...yes, it's a competition. (DT7, f39)

I do feel we compete all the time. Sometimes I think twice before I tell my friends about the jobs I'm applying for, because you never know... I mean, I never tell them exactly what I have in mind, they might then want to go for the same [job]. (DT27, m32)

The image of scarce resources is often invoked in relation to competition, forging the powerful metaphor of survival in a hostile environment through ruthless competition.

It's like a jungle, teeth and claws... (T4, f43)

In the jungle we live in, one has to fight. (DT6, m28)

The law of the jungle, that's what it is. (C7, m64)

This construction invites reflection on the appropriate behaviour in a 'jungle'-type of society: what is the successful strategy for this type of competition, where lack of success in securing a reasonably paid job can mean 'ending up in the street'.

You cannot waste energy on the others, they have to do their own thing. (C12, m28)

The priorities are one's family and... that's it. The family. (T18, f27)

You can be polite and show some human decency, but most people feel they cannot afford that, it's everyone for himself. (DT20, f31)

Nobody cares about nobody, I can drop dead in the street or be sick, and people wouldn't stop.... This wouldn't have happened before, but people have changed, they care just for themselves and do not look around. At all. (DT13, f64)

There is a strong articulation of competition with individualism and less solidarity in social relations that is a constant feature in the interview material.

One of the most important articulations of the free market involves the concept of *choice* – across a range of fields (from consumption opportunities to the job market), as exemplified by the quotes below.

It has made a difference [the introduction of the free market] in the sense of what you can find in the shops: you can find everything now, food, products, it's there. Yes, in a way its nice to choose what you think suits you or the house... (DT5, f36)

I can buy things that express my individuality, not something that everyone else has. There are tons of things to choose from. And the little things that matter: I want my cereals with berries, not bananas. So I buy the berries. That's my taste... (C6, f52)

Now you can choose a job, move a bit around, try things. In the past you were allocated a position and you'd retire in the same position, no-one changed jobs or even workplaces. (C16, f57)

On the same topic, antagonistic articulations are formulated:

Well, yes, shops are full – of crap, by the way, but people are too stupid to tell, they don't even read the ingredients - so what? How many of us can afford to choose? You just go for the cheapest, always. (DT12, f36)

You don't choose jobs, you get what they throw at you. I have a MA and couldn't find anything decent. I'm a PA. The only thing I could find. It requires the competence of a 12 year old... and a good figure. (T6, f30)

The free market has reshuffled the meaning of *work*, occupations and professional careers.

You know how they were saying under communism: we pretend we're working and they pretend they're paying us. You cannot do that now, I mean if you work for private companies, you really have to work. I don't know what they do in state jobs, probably continue to waste time. (C15, f33)

People were taken aback by the changes, because now they have to work for good, that's why. And they can't get their heads around it. It's about hard work. (T20, m35)

With those lazy workers we'll never get in Europe, they need to learn how to work hard, not continue to steal and waste time. (C7, m64)

The quotes above reflect the crystallising of an understanding of work under capitalism as opposed to under communism that is characteristically embraced by younger, educated professionals and the ones working in the private sector. It also resonates with much of the literature on work and workers under communism, which typically insists on the laziness and lack of work ethics among workers.

But at the same time, there are voices contesting the association of capitalism with hard, efficient work, and of communism with waste, chaos and bad quality work.

I know so many people working for the private [firms] and they all complain about how much they have to work, but if you're close friends they're going to admit, maybe... how much time they waste, playing computer games and emailing and making coffees. (DT26, f34)

You know what my colleagues do? We all compete to show how serious and committed we are and stay late, I'm sick of this game, because I have a life, friends, and all this staying late is stupid, I mean there is no work, we just stay in the office pretending. There is this guy, he's single and the rising star of the department, a creepy character, he stays everyday till 10pm at least. Checking out porn sites. But all the boss sees is a guy that comes in at 8am and leaves at 10pm. He has a reputation already. Hard working, I mean. Even the porter commented on that. (DT11, f24)

Some respondents point to the lack of efficiency and waste that work under the new 'capitalist' conditions allows, especially office-based types of employment, as in the quotes above. In parallel to these comments, other respondents question the very purpose of jobs and of work that is not directed at production of tangible products – and which represent a major part of activities within capitalism.

These people in offices, what work do they do now? I mean, what do they produce? They spend hours on the telephone. I've worked hard for over 30 years in the factory, lenses and such glass equipment. What work is done now? All I see is smartly dressed young people with the mobile glued to their heads pretending it's important. If that is work, then what was what I did all my life? How would you call it? (T1, f56)

Look, after all, this country managed to produce and export things under communism, we were sending tractors and equipment all over the world. We were producing quality equipment, with those old tools and machines and everything. Now nothing functions any more, all sold, dismantled. We're producing crisps. What a waste. (T14, m66)

As throughout Eastern Europe, occupational prestige was radically altered by the transition to market economy and the advent of a private sector. On the one hand, jobs in the private sector tend to rank higher in assessments of desirability and prestige. On the other, certain positions within the state sector are still seen as preferable to any private job, as long as they offer stability, a good wage and sometimes access to other resources.

If you want a good job and a good wage, you must get a job with some private company, otherwise you'll starve. (T5, f31)

Working for the state is tough, because you can work 12 hours a day and the wage will still be not enough to make ends meet. Look at professors, and school teachers and all sorts of functionaries. (DT3, f76)

...the neighbours on both sides are quite well placed, respectable, solid people. They all work for some foreign companies, they are well off, look at the cars and all. (C15, f33)

Jobs in the private sector come and go, I mean they can close the factory the moment they think it's not that profitable and make everyone redundant. It's more difficult to get fired from a state job. (DT7, f39)

It's not so bad where I work, it's not as much money as in the private sector, but it's less stuck up and quite decent. I think the atmosphere at work is better than where I've worked previously (for a private firm) – and actually where I was I didn't make that much money... (DT16, f25)

As for setting up one's own business, the interviews made visible divergent evaluations associated with this choice.

Set up a business? Thought about it, but I'm not sure, you need backup, you need connections, otherwise you can lose everything. It's a very tricky environment, the law changes all the time, so you cannot count on anything, unless you have someone well placed to tell you when and how the law is changing. The successful ones have information that doesn't reach us, mortals. (DT17, m26)

I have my own dental practice, I've had financial help and my own savings, but I'm very happy with it. It's small, but we work well... took lots of effort, we're working longer shifts... yes, financially is going well, cannot complain. (DT25, f35)

I've really lost everything, not everything, but... the lifestyle is gone, the car, the rest... because I quit my old job and thought I had a really great business plan. I had the money, and a partner – a relative. A company supplying gas. In one year it became clear that we didn't know enough about things... we were put out of business by the local politician, he has as well a gas distribution company. I knew about it, but didn't know it was his, so I thought... we have better deals and will push them out... I mean, the company is not in his name, someone, a cousin, is in the papers. Didn't know... (DT29, m33)

The suspicions around the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur without bribing and 'being connected' are clearly spelled out, together with the issue of corruption and the

dubious combining of official positions and business. While some defend the possibility of setting up a business and becoming successful through honest work (rather than bribing and well-placed contacts), the dominant opinion is that one should have a 'strong backing' (connections) before taking this path.

The free market is articulated with *meritocracy* and 'just' distribution of rewards: jobs reflect social success. One has to use skills to survive and make it under the rules of the free market. Hard work will be rewarded, and the undeserving will sink. These representations around the free market are antagonised by voices that express doubts about the meritocratic principles embodied by the free market, which only reinforces previous advantages, is random and ultimately unfair. Honest work is not sufficient to keep one afloat.

The most prominent meaning of the market is related to *material conditions* and their impact on standards of life (consumption). It reflects the importance of this issue for daily life and concerns for the future, and the magnitude of the change the new social order has brought about in this respect. One of the first criteria/basis for assessing one's general situation and for grasping the surrounding social reality is through the lens of the material criterion. People assess their material situation in financial terms (sources of income and ability to cope with expenses), material possessions and consumption patterns.

The present, as constructed by comparison with the past, is one of increased or declining standards. The main yardstick for assessing the material situation is income (wage and other sources). How to make money or secure earnings seems to be the main concern of daily life for most people. Money has acquired a different meaning in the post-1989 Romanian society. Firstly, it has 'real' value because one's material well-being 'really' depends on it, as opposed to the past, when money was not of much use - under conditions of scarcity where products were obtained through '*blat*' rather than direct purchases (see chapter 1). Money now matters for securing social status.

'Money can buy you anything here', 'everything revolves around money' are leitmotifs of today's Romania. All individual efforts seem to converge towards getting more money.

People are obsessed with money. Everything is about money, about how much money you make. (DT8, m19)

I feel people look at me and assess me by how much I earn – I feel I have it written across my forehead. (T8, m30)

Throughout my interviews remarks converged around the fact that everything seems to be appraised through its value in money, everything can be bought, everything is a commodity. All respondents agreed on the fact that the symbolic and concrete meaning of money has changed, and that ‘money’ is the single most important factor influencing the quality of life in contemporary Romania.

Material possessions and consumption

The changing meanings of material possessions and the importance of consumption in relation to social status are at the centre on many interviewees’ concerns. This section looks at how these signifiers are interwoven in assessments of social change and of respondents’ situation, and how in the process they take on meanings by being articulated with other conceptualisations.

One of the most important material possessions for a person or family is the house or flat they own; they are correlated with quality of life and reflects one’s material situation. Residential trajectories bring together in comparison the past and the present and serve to map out this particular dimension of one’s material condition.

I’m building a house in the suburbs. I’m sick and tired of this block of flats I’ve lived in for almost 30 years. I’m finally in a position of getting something I really want – a decent house. It’s going to be made after my specifications, I have planned everything in detail... (P3, m40)

I cannot afford my own flat, obviously, I’m on a ‘normal’ wage. I live with my parents and for the moment it’s ok, but if I get married... I don’t know, it’s going to be difficult, all of us in a cramped flat. My parents had it allocated in the 70s I think, when I was born or something. I don’t have their luck... (P1, m29)

Apart from the house or flat, other material possessions are brought into discussion as evidence for the material situation people live in today. The past is variously pictured in this respect. For some, it is a period of relative comfort, when cars, furniture, house

appliances were affordable, when there was also the possibility of buying them in instalments, and wages allowed for making savings for these major items, ‘the ones that really count’; the acquisitions of the past are valorised by comparison with the difficulty to obtain the same items today (when the credit system is excluding the ones that need it most – people with low incomes). From this position the present for many is characterised by the impossibility to acquire what is deemed to be ‘important items’ – because of their prohibitive prices. This engenders in many respondents a feeling of frustration:

I went to the shop when my washing machine broke down, it was an old one... and realised that I couldn’t afford any of the ones in the shop. They were out of my range. ...nothing was out of my range before 1990. This was not a problem. Now it is... (T10, f48).

A different view on consumption and material possessions of the past is expressed by other respondents (generally they tend to be in the more well-off stratum of the population, but not always). They focus on the bad quality of the products available in the past, and on the shortages that made life difficult. Also, they emphasise the lack of choice in the old times, when products were few and standardised, so that many people ended up with the same appliances, the same furniture, the same clothes – while the present situation allows them to choose among a variety of products.

What I really appreciate in these new times, despite misery and corruption, is that my life has improved, I mean there are so many things that make my life easier because I can afford them, while before I could afford them, everyone could, but they just weren’t available. Like good shoes, I’ve always had problems in finding shoes that fit, they were designed by some imbecile that had no idea about a woman’s foot, didn’t care, and tens of thousands were produced: same model, no fit. (C8, f53)

An individual’s car is an important indicator of their material situation – a key status symbol.

I keep showing up at my workplace in this old Dacia car, and... can’t help thinking about what the others must think about me. I didn’t care too much when I was working at the newspaper, the others didn’t have much better cars, but here [a private firm] it’s different. (T8, m30)

I’ve put an order for a car, a SAAB. I’ve made a bank loan to get it.

Int: Don’t you have a car already?

Yes, it’s 2 years old, so I need a new one. (C12, m28)

I was ashamed with my car, I had to do something. The new one looks great, it has all sorts of accessories and airbags and everything. (C10, f53)

My colleague has got this new fancy car, really expensive model, but he's utterly unhappy, because of the plate number: people that know about these things can tell that the car was bought in leasing, not cash, so... he cannot show off to the ones that have forked out 30.000euros in cash for a car. (P4, m30)

I'm not buying the car from the local dealers. They say it's the same Renault, but I want mine brought directly from France. (C7, m64)

In conclusion, divergent images of the past and the present in relation to material possessions emerge. According to one's present material status, some experience the situation where certain (more expensive, but 'necessary') goods that were possible to acquire before are now out of their purchasing range (e.g. flats, washing machines, cars, furniture, fridge, etc.); the 'reliable' goods of the past have been replaced by flashy and expensive ones produced in the West. Others find today's diversity and quality of the offer superior and preferable to the past. Accordingly, some will valorise the social conditions of the past, the others will praise the 'better' present situation. Money emerges as a powerful structuring element both in dealing with the materiality of everyday life and in the symbolic realm. The changed societal conditions – i.e. adoption of the free market – have bestowed on money a dimension that it lacked in the previous era, when the absence of products in the state planned economy meant that money alone could not insure a good lifestyle – or social status for that matter. 'Money' is signified by the possessions people surround themselves with and strive for. Consumption has as well taken on new meanings in the present. If during communism certain practices of consumption were performed as small acts of resistance or defiance of the system and the values promoted by the communist discourse (from purchasing books, to foreign jeans, toiletries and cigarettes), in the capitalist order money, consumption and social status are brought together by pervasive articulations.

The issue of *poverty* figures prominently in representations of social life:

There is so much poverty around... (C2, f61)

This country is made up of paupers. (T7, m34)

Everywhere you look, you see misery, I don't know how people cope, there seems to be so much misery. (C1, m63)

All accounts seem to agree on the fact that, while communist standards of life were generally fairly low, poverty as such was not a mass phenomenon, or at least it was less visible. The magnitude of the phenomenon of poverty is seen as a relatively 'new' development in the Romanian society. Poverty can affect anyone, for example people that before 1990 were on the same material level find themselves now in divergent material positions, with some near the bottom of the income scale, and others financially comfortable or even well-off. Everyone seems to know a lot of people from their former social circle (friends, workmates, neighbours, relatives, acquaintances) that now live in conditions of scarcity.

This ex-colleague of mine, we were sharing an office in the publishing house. Poor thing, she's alone, she has no children, she probably has a miserable pension she cannot live on, and she needs medication. I've seen her the other day, she looked awful, she must be really poor. (C16, f57)

My cousin is poor. He has a full time job, he does work hard, but doesn't make any real money, he lives with his parents. I help him out sometimes with little sums of money, but I can't do more than that... (T20, m35)

You know what my niece does? She is a graduate, she did biology, but didn't find any job. She sells cheese in the open market, with all the peasants. She is in a desperate situation, and a relative has offered her this arrangement. Can you imagine? Selling cheese in the stinking market. It's so degrading. (T15, f62)

One of the ways poverty is made visible is through its emplaced forms and consumption patterns. Place-related features are used in the process through which people are working out their understanding and image of poverty. Places, areas, neighbourhoods have been all (but differently) affected by poverty. Neighbours that have lived in similar circumstances of relative material stability for tens of years find themselves pulled in diverging positions by the material factor. Poverty and material well-being are inscribed into the physicality of one's house of flat.

Meanings of the role and responsibility of the state

One of the most dramatic changes in the post-communist era regards the role of the state – responsibilities and involvement societal affairs. The most important features that interviewees point to are the problems the state has in controlling or managing aspects of social organisation, corruption and the collapse of welfare programmes.

The weakness of state institutions like the police are acutely felt, especially in relation to personal safety and crime:

The police? They are powerless, they are afraid themselves of the thieves: I've witnessed a situation with a person being harassed in the street and the police looking the other way to avoid getting involved. We're not protected at all. (C4, f65)

They've lost control, the state has no control over all the illegal stuff that has flourished. Like drugs and prostitution. Actually, I think they are involved, they are hand in hand with the crooks. Policemen protect the brothels, and every now and then there is a raid, for the eyes of the press, but no-one gets caught and things resume the next evening. (T11, m22)

The way the state handles the raising of tax comes under strong criticism from most respondents:

They complain that the budget is very small. This is because they let the big companies get away without paying tax. This is unfair: the rich ones walk away without paying taxes, only the poor get overtaxed. (DT21, m43)

What does the state do with the money? Nothing goes to health and education and culture, all goes to subsidising inefficient factories and keep the salaries of officials high. (T14, m66)

If the budget is so small that they cannot afford to subsidise medication that could save lives, how come they can afford those wages? Anyway, they are corrupt to the bone. (C8, f53)

People are starving, and what does the state do? Nothing, absolutely nothing. You know how much the monthly child benefit is? 30.000 lei [equivalent to one pound]. This is mockery, it's indecent: a litre of milk is 15.000, so... not to speak of clothes, books, stationery when they go to school... (DT12, f36)

This is...I don't know... it's not right, it's very disturbing. What world are we living in? with people starving in the street, families thrown out of their homes, living in a tent in the park, all that... you didn't have this before. People were not living in the street, families with children. Where is the state? In my opinion, the state should not allow for this to happen. (DT2, f65)

Meanings of state institutions and their responsibilities are combining to create images of weakness in the governing process (as in assuring safety and preventing crime), of corruption and impotence in the face of the tax-evading strategies of powerful companies. For many, the most disturbing feature is the failure of the state in preventing destitution and in ensuring a safety net.

Issues of redistribution and the role of the state are present in interviews, and they highlight the positions social actors take in relation to deeper matters of social justice – a vision of the social and of the place of individuals in it.

I don't see why I have to pay tax for certain things. Ok, health – that is acceptable, and education, I suppose. But I don't see why my earnings should go into subsidising the wages of the miners, for example, just because the government doesn't have the guts to close down the mines. Or on their benefits if they are made redundant. Everyone should look for a job, not stay home and wait for benefits to come. (C6, f52)

Where does my tax go? I don't know, in the wages of politicians? Certainly not in my child's school or my mother's pension. (T19, f46)

I don't care. I'm working hard, and I get no help, so why should unemployed people get benefits? Why don't they get jobs? (T2, f31)

These remarks illustrate some of the ways the social is thought, what images people use in order to make sense of the social, and the ways social solidarities are envisaged.

Conclusion

This chapter, based on an analysis of the interview data, has explored the ways people are engaging with the dominant discourse and its nodal points, from the perspective of lived experience and relevant concerns; it highlights the process of investing signifiers with meaning, the processes of fixation that emerge through struggle and resistance. Generally respondents rarely use terms like 'free market' – the situated meanings of the signifier 'free market' surfaces in interviews through discussions about their attempt to set up a private business, for example, or about the material status of the household; reflections around the market are couched in terms of 'business opportunities' and 'poverty' for example, and linked to concrete life circumstances.

Similarly, 'democracy' is engaged with as the present, lived political situation in Romania, rather than as an abstract concept of organising the polity. Therefore, the critique of the contemporary political arrangements and practices of the political class can indirectly destabilise understandings of democracy as 'something good' or 'necessary'. As for 'freedom', its meanings are articulated in contrasting constructions through association with, among others, individualism and independence, anomie, unsafe society, opportunities for improving one's life.

The 'free market' as the core of the capitalist order is not a uniformly 'good' arrangement, mainly because it is linked to poverty; the meritocratic principle that underscores it is both supported and contested throughout accounts: exposing the unmeritocratic aspects of Romanian society is a strategy for de-legitimising the arrangements of the free market, and so is the contesting of the appropriateness of privatisation (a central tenet of the market). Support or rejection of the free market comes also through the prism of consumption and material situation: the availability of products and the possession of goods are highly valued by some social actors, while others focus on the impossibility to acquire them, the frustrating experience of not affording what the market has to offer.

What is at stake in these debates in which people engage (the interview offers them the space to do so and encourages them to direct their reflections on their own circumstances and the process of social transformation) is the very nature of the social and the place of individuals in it. The analysis follows the main concerns and questions people ask in relation to society and themselves. Normative positions emerge and are invested in discussions on the principles of organising the social, ideas of 'the good society', and concepts of human nature.

The next chapter will continue the analysis of the production of the social by examining the emergence of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic articulations that incorporate the meanings discussed in the present chapter.

CHAPTER 8

NEW HEGEMONIC AND RESISTANCE ARTICULATIONS AND THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of the contours of the social in post-communist Romania by looking at a central concern regarding the social and one's place in it, namely the reshuffling of social hierarchies and changed nature of social ties. These insights are connected with the new shape of the discursive landscape in Romania which restructures the social, including hierarchies.

There is a wide debate in the social sciences about the dimensions of stratification in Eastern European communist countries – and the forms re-stratification has taken post-1989, which has been introduced in chapter one. This analysis is a contribution to the respective debate from a discursive perspective, based on fieldwork and interview material, and it tries to capture some of the ways the workings of discourses produce lines of social division, social categories with valuative connotations, and places them in hierarchical relations. In this process subject positions are constituted for social actors to occupy.

A dominant set of articulations is presented, together with the criteria for assigning individuals to subject positions, then counter-hegemonic articulations are analysed. Through the interplay of different subject positions, social actors' identities are constructed, a process which leaves variable spaces for the negotiation of these positionings.

The 'catching up with the West' discourse presented in chapter 6 has portrayed the social reality during the decade after 1989 as a transition period of rapid change and deprivation necessary in order to achieve economic development and prosperity comparable to Western standards; it has posited the necessity of dismantling the institutions of the previous era, the necessity for 'sacrifice' in order to catch up - therefore

it has legitimised inequality and impoverishment of some strata, and the declining standards of life for a large part of the population (concomitant with the accumulation of wealth among a minority). As discussed, this discourse has been supported by a multitude of institutions, from international agencies, to national successive governments, and the media – and has provided actors with a way of understanding and making sense of a variety of events. The impact of the media on everyday life in Romania cannot be underestimated, as “[t]he media represent and reflect human action, but they gradually acquire an independent ability to produce reality because their messages are incorporated and reproduced in social praxis, in a spiral which seems destined to feed upon itself and grow in a never-ending process” (Melucci 1997, p59).

The previous chapter has detailed some of the processes of filling empty signifiers (freedom and democracy, the market, choice, the West, etc.) with meaning; this investing of meaning occurs as people think about their daily life and position or identity - an emplaced, situational approach to making sense of the social, from which identity issues cannot be extricated. Similarly, social hierarchies, their criteria and multiple determinants, as well as the ties connecting people and the norms behind them, are engaged with in the process of reflecting on or accounting for one’s circumstances, trajectory and general positioning in the new hierarchies.

While defining social goals such as emulating the West through democracy, free market, free enterprise, and competition, the transition as ‘catching up’ discourse has facilitated the adoption of values, norms and models – articulated in the form of other dominant or hegemonic discourses.

The societal project of catching up through market reforms and democratisation has set in motion a series of policies, institutions and mechanisms that have filtered down to the level of conditions of everyday life. More generally, new discourses produce and structure society both at the level of beliefs, knowledge, concepts, symbols and at the level of material relations – that is to say that new symbolic, material and institutional relations of power mould the local lives. The discursive landscape provides the categories and constructs through which the social is known by social actors, the rules which they use to objectify social reality and constitute the life-worlds they inhabit. New articulations, promoted from dominant sites of power and reinforced by the media are

taking shape, infiltrating the everyday and becoming interwoven with practice, and taking up the form of common sense knowledge and behaviour.

The different discourses constituting the social provide new subject positions. Emergent culturally approved stereotypes or models of social success crystallise in everyday practices and forms of fashioning the self. A new moral framework within which everyday life is undertaken is imposing itself, together with new 'scripts' by which individuals have to live.

Structuring of the social through new lines of division, new categorisations, norms and values

One of the most relevant issues in the accounts of my respondents refers to stratification or divergent social evolutions post-1989. Uneven social evolutions are prompted by the fact that some social actors were able to 'transfer' and valorise their resources in the new contexts, while others found that their old 'resources' did not fare well in the new discursive context (e.g. old skills that are now useless). The new system of difference and hierarchisation, the values underlying it, its impact on issues of social solidarity and on personal and group identity, figure prominently in respondents' accounts.

The issue of stratification and new social hierarchies is narratively integrated with accounts of the changed nature and content of human relationships. Social ties are addressed in relation to the 'concrete' circle of friends, acquaintances and neighbours, and at the more abstract level of 'people in this society', as examples of 'what has changed' after 1989. Taking as an anchoring point one's life circumstances and experiences, respondents describe the changed nature of sociality, and again comparison with the past emerges as a prominent narrative device. Interviews are replete with statements of the type:

I had more friends before. Now people have been drawn into other things, or have changed. My friends have changed, there isn't any of the old feeling left.

Int: In what way have they changed?

...just different. Some got rich, and it's all about their business. Others, on the contrary, are not doing that well. So... we just don't feel comfortable together anymore, it's obvious. (C10, f53)

We used to do things together, go out together, or on holidays, or just weekend outings.

Int: Why did you stop doing it?

It just happened, people have other things to do, or prefer to do other things. Like stay in front of the TV. But it's also a matter of money, some of us cannot afford going out. And, to be honest, personally I'm embarrassed about inviting people over, because of the way the place looks. As you can see, it's old furniture and all. It really didn't matter before, it was a good place to get together and have some drinks or something, but now... I don't know, just don't feel like. People judge you. (T10, f48)

I lost contact [with the old friends/acquaintances] after 1990, I used to have a more active social life...

Int: So...what happened?

I'll tell you what. Some in the old group are politicians now, they have no time for us, and we really don't want to see them. A couple have made money, and you can imagine, it would be awkward to be together and ask questions... we all know how they've made the money, and they know we know. And someone, an old friend, is really poor now. Imagine us just sitting together or something. This guy, who's lost his job and struggles by giving private lessons, and the couple who got loans from Bancorex¹, tens of thousands of dollars, which they never had to reimburse. How would that be? What would we talk about? (T4, f43)

I kept some of the old friends, the ones I can still talk to. Because there are things that you need to have in common to be friends, some values and ideas. Otherwise you cannot be together. You need some common ground, you know? If one is into...let's say books and art, and the other can think of money as the most important thing in life, what common ground is there? None. (DT3, f76)

Social ties and forms of solidarity have been affected by social actors being discursively placed in different categories, characterised by different resources and different outlooks on life, divergent values. The metaphor of being 'pulled apart' frequently used by respondents indicates a clear understanding of the present as defined by re-stratification processes (and an implicit understanding of the past as more egalitarian).

What are the processes that push people in one or other 'position', how are these 'positions' that constitute social strata or categories defined, according to what criteria? Respondents manage to address these questions and offer responses in the context of talking about the fate of their friendships, quarrels with the neighbours, a colleague's new

¹ Bancorex was a Romanian state-owned bank that went bankrupt, famous for granting loans on a political clientelism basis

house and car or someone's trajectory from anti-communist dissident to prosperous businessman.

Across these accounts one can detect various overarching articulations, constantly used, in a rather stable configuration. Some are dominant articulations that bring together criteria for stratification, ideas of human nature, norms and values built into the social, others are resisting articulations, putting forward a different normative constellation that threatens with dislocation the meanings fixed by the former.

The analysis follows the way respondents engage with the signifiers of societal discourses by starting from personal, or everyday concerns – among which the issue of 'stratification' as symbolic allocation to different strata (with a clear 'material' dimension) is central – as a way to access wider articulations that touch upon the nature of capitalism, ideas of 'freedom' and social justice, and to offer insights into the normative societal landscape.

Hegemonic discourses

Issues of stratification are tied to the changes in the discursive landscape and in the nature of the codes, norms and values underpinning interpersonal relationships and ultimately the texture of the social fabric.

What seems to surface in contemporary Romania (and throughout Eastern Europe²) is a dominant discourse that articulates ideas about the nature of the social and of individuals, the 'appropriate' values that should guide individual action and social goals, notions of social worth – crystallised into criteria for social hierarchies.

People are in different strata, we belong to different strata.

Int: What sort of strata do you refer to?

Well, different... we don't belong to the same... I guess money, and what people do with it... (DT14, m38)

Society has polarised. It used to be more homogenous, that's for sure. (C13, f60)
Differences between people are very visible, you can see how big they are. And I don't mean just the fact that some are very rich and some very poor. (T7, m34)

² For an analysis with similar findings, see Ule (2001) in the case of Slovenia, and Szkudlarek (2005) and Buchowski (2005) for Poland.

Respondents articulate stratification with the emergence of the free market, which has allowed for sharp differences in material situation to surface. With the end of state control over the job market and private property, money becomes a strong criterion for assigning individuals to different categories.

No, it's not like before. Because people have come to realise that you cannot have everything planned by the state. They've tried, and what did it lead to? Didn't work. I know what they say, there is too much poverty because of the way things are organised now, with private property and private companies and competition for jobs. But that is it, you cannot have the past, you have to live in the present. (T20, m35)

These comments are illustrative of a widespread conceptualisation and acceptance of the centrality of free market arrangements as a societal structuring principle. Romanian society and ordinary life cannot be thought of as divorced from the workings of the market – in this sense the articulation of capitalism as the only viable socio-economic arrangement is a hegemonic one, which does not allow for other conceptualisations to take form or gain legitimacy.

Everyone can get a job if they work hard. Before you were given a job no matter your qualifications, and obviously the politically active were getting better deals than well trained, decent people. (T5, f31)

The new social arrangements are also associated with meritocracy – in contrast to the past system of allocating jobs and social rewards. Money and material status are seen as valid criteria for stratification, that bring this society in line with the 'civilised Western world'. Respondents defend this stance by reference to other values and norms – for example, material status is a just criterion because it reflects personal effort, hard work and entrepreneurship (hence a fair, meritocratic criterion). It is therefore a legitimate way of both shaping conditions of life and of awarding social status and recognition. Opportunities are open that did not exist before, including possibilities for material differentiation.

Of course they're envious, and they wish they could go back to the levelled, homogenised communist society, where we had the same income no matter how and what we worked. This can't be, we're not sheep, cannot be the same, and some will get more money and a better life, because they work hard... I spend 10 hours a day at work, it's not like money just happens to come to me... (P5, f30)

New “public definitions for the general desirability of occupations” (Wegener 1992, p 266) are worked out in contemporary Romania. The prestige of jobs tends to be assessed through their earning potential, while occupations that previously had some prestige are now looked down upon, because of their meagre earnings (teachers, performers, artists, etc.). A strongly materialistic outlook seems to be a generalised norm that channels life choices and individual aspirations. Goals in life, or ‘the things that matter’ for social actors, are overwhelmingly formulated in the material realm, which is consistently valorised. Material and financial situation, consumption and social status are emerging as the interlinked facets of stratification. Possessive individualism plays into this articulation, reinforcing it:

In my house I am the king. I have my things – which I have worked hard for. The world [Romania] is full of nobodies, people that don’t have anything, no proper clothes, no things in the household, I pity them, they are nobodies... (C7, m64)

The most important things for me? I don’t know, my... well, affording things. So my job is important, I couldn’t live on any job. And it’s important to have a good life, a car so that you don’t cram in the public transport, and a comfortable house, and the basic things... I don’t know, furniture, TV, electronic equipment, dishwasher, these things. If I have kids they need to go to a private kindergarten – because I don’t trust the state ones, obviously, with all the diseases and all... and bringing them up, that’s money. (DT27, m32)

What I want in life? This is a hard question. I just want... a job that pays well so that my family can have things. I probably want a nice lifestyle, being able to afford... holidays, going out, and...yes, that is it. (P3, m40)

Understandings of human behaviour that centre on self-interest and egoism are prominent, and images of social life as competition lend them support.

You can only take care of yourself. One should focus on oneself. (DT22, m31)

I feel the difference at the workplace. It’s the same position I’ve had for more than 20 years, but now it’s very different. People are very egoistic and competitive. Especially the younger ones. I can’t be an exception, I must protect my interests, otherwise others will take advantage of me, of my work. (DT4, f42)

Yes, I do feel sorry for all these people out there that cannot make ends meet. But you have to keep your focus and try to provide for yourself and family, if you have one. It’s a very tough society, some will not make it... And because it’s so tough people are less caring, less helpful. (C17, f58)

The norms underpinning social relations are highlighted in almost all interviews as 'something that has changed' in contemporary Romania, in comparison to the 'past'; images of individualism, self-interest and retreat from certain type of ties (while positing the family as the legitimate focus of one's concerns and efforts).

You cannot care about everyone, you know? It's their business after all how they make a living. I personally must concentrate on myself and my family... That's what everyone does. (C12, m28)

The relationships were important, people were caring about friends. Now it's definitely more a case of everyone for himself. (T3, m34)

To be honest, I don't have time for the others. All of it, I put it into my family. (T19, f46)

In the block neighbours used to have tight relations, exchanging and borrowing all the time. I suppose it was necessary then, but now I don't see the point. I like when people keep to themselves and don't bother you all the time with all sorts of requests. (DT29, m33)

Frequently, respondents mention that one cannot afford to waste too much time on polite small talk or irrelevant conversations (with neighbours, for example).

My neighbour would like to have a chat every day as I'm coming back from work, but I hate it. I just wish she left me alone, because I'm wasting time being polite to her, I'm doing a lot of work from home on top of my job... (DT 20, f31)

The leitmotif of lack of time (employed by the majority of respondents, be they employed professionals, housewives or retired persons) seems to become a marker of social worthiness. Not having time to waste reflects both adherence to the dominant materialistic discourse and its slogan 'time is money', and indicates peoples' commitment to engage in activities that could improve their material status (one's worthiness is tied up with the material situation). An image of personal merit as 'lack of time' or 'being busy' is part of an emerging cultural model that valorises the workplace and loyalty to the company (materialised in time spent on work). Lack of time is also invoked as the reason for reducing socialising activities: it rationalises unavailability and unwillingness to commit. The meaning of time is central to the new discourses, and it is articulated both with the individualistic and the materialistic outlooks.

In addition, respondents felt that they had to regulate and filter socialisation and interaction in order to demarcate the social group or stratum they belong to by interacting with people of a similar status or comparable social standing.

You can't just stop in the street and talk to everyone. I do socialise... in my circle. Some neighbours have invited me for celebrations or such things, but...

Int: Did you go?

No, I didn't. They are not my class. (DT1, m64)

I don't like my son interacting with certain types. He must find friends that are compatible, like same interests, same background, good family. What would he have in common with the others? (C16, f57)

The quotes presented above capture the normative aspect in conducting interpersonal relationships that tap into notions of appropriate human behaviour and the place of individuals in relation to society, which have been at the core of classical sociological debates on the subject of social ties and solidarity.

Ideas of social solidarity seem marginal in contemporary Romania in comparison with a normative ideal of privatised, self-sufficient and self-interested social relations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, notions of independence surface powerfully in the context of concepts of interpersonal relationships. By portraying autonomy as the most appropriate arrangement in the present 'capitalist' order, and interdependence and mutual exchanges as characteristic of the communist period, a contrast is set in place which has as result the valorisation of independence and clear boundaries (physical and social) at the expense of cooperative behaviour.

In a similar manner, social solidarity and social justice are articulated with 'imposed equality' or 'forced homogeneity' and with 'communism', as opposed to inequality being articulated with capitalism. The clear rupture with the past and the discarding (or devaluation) of everything associated with the 'old regime' that the new societal reconstruction project of 'catching up with the West' entails has as a consequence the discursive marginalisation (including both modes of thinking and practices) of a set of concepts and ways of doing things – of which cooperation, interdependence and egalitarianism are part.

Solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged becomes very problematic, as it is translated as personal loss or disadvantage. Helping others for example means sharing

resources (material or time), and in the present climate of possessive individualism this is often perceived as an unacceptable depleting of one's resources. This outlook is exemplified by the fierce defending of notions of 'private' resources (such as property: the flat, the garden, etc.) against any sharing claims, throughout respondents' accounts. Solidarity is seen as having no use as one has to protect personal interests in a world of competition; cumbersome relationships with people of inferior material status, for example, can entail demands for help or 'favours' – which in the long run are considered to work to one's disadvantage.

No, I am keeping it at the level of 'hello' and that's it. Because neighbours always know loads about you, so they know I earn well, and might come to me if they can't pay the water rates or god knows what... (DT29, m33)

Independence from social obligations (associated with the 'freedom' that the fall of communism has yielded) becomes a dominant normative ideal that has a deep influence on the way interpersonal relationships are conducted and the social is thought by individual actors. This is ultimately inseparable from the form the structuring of the social is taking, and from debates on social solidarity, cohesion - or social anomie in post-communist societies.

The new norms concerning interpersonal behaviour have transformed personal relationships and sociability, through their accent on individualism and independence rather than reliance on others in solving problems, through introducing a more contractual type of interaction as opposed to the personalised relationships of the past (necessary for obtaining preferential treatment in conditions of scarcity and building the *blat* network).

The appropriate shape of association or relations emerges through a distancing from gregariousness and openness to others as 'communist' or 'Balkanic', and an embracing of 'efficient', goal-oriented relationships, and discerning socialising with people of one's choice, constructed as closer to (what is perceived to be) a Western (and 'capitalist') cultural model of interaction.

The dominant discourse upholds a version of the individual as a self-contained unit (autonomous, independent) that must pursue her/his interest in all social transactions; boldness, initiative, competitiveness, and sometimes ruthlessness are principles that guide

‘appropriate’ and successful behavioural strategies. The way society recognises and rewards ‘talent’ or ‘competence’ is through material gains; material prosperity commands social respect and status; patterns of consumption make material status visible. Pecheux (1982) has emphasised the idea that discourses occur in dialogue, in contrast, and opposition to other discourses. Following this insight one might see the ideal of the enterprising and bounded individual in the dominant discourse as constructed in opposition to what is perceived to be the communist prototype - passive, dependent on the state and on other people.

The worldview sustained by the local dominant discourse sees society structured by competition for material gain (the marker of social status or position in social hierarchies), which produces winners and losers. The material status as signifier of success is one of the strongest themes through respondents’ accounts. This is a situation common in the post-communist landscape³.

Due to the representation of equality and capitalism as incompatible (insofar as equality is the core feature of communism), poverty and unemployment are mainly seen as unavoidable – and legitimised by the needs of the capitalist system. The anti-egalitarian view is articulated both as ‘anti-communism’ and as ‘freedom’. These articulations are present not only in my respondent’s accounts, but in popular, media and academic discourses. Wnuk-Lipinski (1992, p187-188) posits freedom and equality as ‘alternatives’ and asks: “Is then a society, which lived under communism for over four decades, prepared to live in more freedom at the cost of less equality?”. Preoteasa (2002) highlights the present tendency among Romanian intellectuals to de-legitimate notions of equality and social justice by their articulation with communism, while Fuller (2000, p594) points to a deeper propensity of Eastern European intellectuals towards inegalitarian principles, that took the form of a rejection of “‘dysfunctional’ wage-leveling policies under socialism”.

³ For example, Roberts et al (2002, p3) detail the definition of success that social actors use in Russia: “There are, of course, many ways of defining success. It may mean having a satisfying job, or one where an individual’s particular capabilities, maybe developed in education, are fully used. Nevertheless, the definition adopted here should not prove controversial. It means having a full-time job and a total income of at least 120\$ a month. Floundering means being in the labour market but without a full-time job...or working full-time for less than 50\$ a month”.

'Fairness' is a critical dimension in the context of representations of society. It is one of the most contested issues in respondents' accounts, as will be discussed in the next section. Fairness is sometimes linked to the existence of opportunities and to hard work, which give access to social success – an articulation with meritocracy. Meritocracy is a strong representation, where the 'best' (in terms of professional competence, skills, hard work) are rewarded in material terms and entitled to highest societal rewards. But this articulation has to impose itself against strong contesting alternatives.

The fact that the articulations and meanings they fix presented above have a hegemonic status is confirmed by their widespread acceptance as representations of the social order, and by the way they manage to impose principles of social organisation and to structure practices, both at institutional and everyday interaction levels. It can be argued that the dominant articulations perform a masculinisation of the social: sharing and compromise, open or more fluid boundaries are devalued in the general normative climate, while at the same time being culturally associated with feminine qualities – while private property, individualism and strict, rigid boundaries are culturally coded as masculine. Hegemonic articulations are bound up with and derive legitimacy from other powerful discourses concerning the developed, 'civilised', prosperous capitalist world ('the Western world') as the best possible world and are constructed through a distancing from or rejection of the communist past.

"Hegemony is not a type of articulation limited to the field of politics in its narrow sense, but it involves the construction of a new culture – and that affects all the levels where human beings shape their identity and their relations with the world (sexuality, the construction of the private, forms of entertainment, aesthetic pleasure, etc.). conceived in this way, hegemony is not, of course, hegemony of a party or of a subject, but of a vast ensemble of different operations and interventions that crystallize, however, in a certain configuration – in what Foucault calls a *dispositif*" (Laclau 1990, p189-190).

The dominant cluster of discourses on the social that claims to appropriately frame social facts and provides guides (motives and justifications) for action (a 'new culture') coagulates around the signifiers of *materialism* and *individualism*, and has the power to

marginalise alternative ways of thinking the social world. Nevertheless, there are counter-hegemonic articulations that oppose it.

Hegemonic articulations of gender, age and race

Before addressing these processes of resistance, I will briefly look at discursive strands in relation to **gender, age and ethnicity** and how they have been affected by the generalised changes in the discursive sphere.

The anti-feminist backlash after 1990, backed by a traditionalist view imposing 'acceptable' gender roles, a process that has been similar across ex-communist countries, has been well documented (Miroiu 1999, Smejkalova 2004, Watson 1993, Waylen 1994). The 'return' to a 'femininity' that the communist era had stripped women of by quasi-compulsory participation in the labour force on comparable terms with men is a new and powerful representation of gender roles. Essentialist notions of the 'natural' role of women and men are intertwined with characterisations of the more egalitarian past as aberrant and 'against nature'. Now that employment is not compulsory any longer, women can 'regain' their femininity by retreating into the realm of the household. A gendered reconfiguration of the social spaces is visible, with a tendency to position women and men in their 'suitable' places - the 'warm' home and the 'ruthless' market respectively.

On the other hand, representations of society as ruled by the market and competition, and the valorisation of the enterprising agent seeking to improve his/her life through a well-paid position, support an image of the working, active, economically independent woman, competing on the market and selling her skills. Women have to negotiate identity and choices within these dominant subject-positions available in relation to gender.

Another discursive turn is represented by an emerging ageist discourse, in the context of the valorising of work, competition and active struggling for survival, brought about by the dominant worldview; representations of pensioners and elderly people contain open hostility towards them: they are presented as 'useless', 'draining resources' and taking up too much 'space' – literally, in conditions of a housing shortage and

overcrowded public transport. While the communist discourse or propaganda promoted respect towards the elderly, and the conditions of everyday life allowed them a more powerful position (for example, as they had free time, they were able to queue for many hours a day, contributing to supplying the multi-generational household with foodstuffs), the new social normative order pushes them into powerlessness and silence.

The age or generational dimension of social change runs deep. It is evident that the ones hardest hit by the negative consequences of social restructuring are women (disproportionately represented in unemployment statistics) and the layer of the population over 45 years old, in manual and skilled jobs. Even when they manage to keep their jobs, many of the respondents in this age group seem to be most affected by the changing social ties.

Remarks about a shrinking social life bear a strong age group pattern. For the generation over 40-45 years old, the past is one of intense sociability as opposed to the present, when many declare that their social circle has considerably diminished, because the different social trajectories of the individuals in the former social circle have pulled them apart. Differences in material status, political choices, career and social success, together with differences in basic values that organise a person's actions and choices, means that older friendship ties are affected and the old patterns of shared social activities cannot be maintained. They also find it difficult to establish new friendships, to reconstruct their 'social circle'. The younger generation (under 40 years old) on the other side did not complain about levels of interaction with friends as much: many had thriving networks of friends and acquaintances and socialised often.

Apart from economic disadvantage (the difficulty in finding a job), and loss of a social circle of friends, 'loss of meaning' or 'value confusion' seem to affect the age group over 45 excessively. This is again evident in the interview material, as older respondents voiced their widespread feelings of inadequacy and loss.

A whole generation is indirectly portrayed as having lived the 'wrong' kind of life by strong discourses that devalue the communist period – the past is stripped of the possibility to offer positive identity supports. These respondents feel socially looked down upon because too much of their identity is tied up with the 'wrong' values, norms and ways of living, wrong life decisions and strategies (from the point of view of the new

social normative configuration); their life goals and accomplishments (part of processes of identity construction and appraisal) have been rendered irrelevant and futile, in the light of the new criteria for 'a well-lived life'. For example, the fact that they have not been able to enjoy for most of their lives (i.e. under communism) the leisure and consumption that the present offers opportunities for, defines their lives as deeply flawed. The delayed personal gratification norm, relative lack of social or professional ambition (compared again to the opportunities of the present), and modest levels of material accumulation – all are associated with the past and are constantly scorned and belittled by the younger generations.

The strong representation of 'communist man' exposed in a previous chapter has an impact on the way older and middle aged people imagine themselves and are perceived by others; a generation is tinted by these meanings of uselessness and rigidity, lack of initiative and skills in coping with the new arrangements.

This discursive positioning is met with both frustration and feelings of inadequacy. Older respondents consider overwhelmingly that they can still bring their contribution to social life and should not be pushed aside. Often, they are 'used' by the younger generation, especially in taking care of the grandchildren while both parents work, but do so without recognition: they are expected to take up parenting duties with no social visibility of their contribution.

Finally, an overtly racist discourse has surfaced – Romanian society has always been racist towards the roma minority, but there was a degree of censorship during communism which did not allow for such open manifestations of racism; however, under the newly acquired 'freedom of speech and opinion', racist views are legitimised and freely voiced. The existence of a free market combined with this racist discourse also means that the roma are not able to get jobs (as opposed to a situation of quasi-full employment during communism, which included the roma) and their situation is one of extreme deprivation and marginalisation. Part of the accession to the EU negotiations involved changes in legislation and politically correct measures that would protect the roma minority from overt discrimination (such as forbidding the 'roma need not apply' statement when advertising jobs), however, this has not been translated into changes in their socio-economic circumstances.

Resistance or counter-hegemonic articulations

The resisting articulations operate by trying to recuperate and valorise some aspects of the past and by de-legitimising the present, and generally by not allowing for the closure of meaning that the dominant discourses strive to achieve. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, it is impossible to think the social outside the market/capitalism. Resistance discourses do not propose a true alternative, but contest some of the meanings or claims of the dominant ones. An example of destabilising mechanism is to contest in varying degrees the legitimacy or necessity of present social arrangements, by appeal to contrasting moral principles and values.

Some articulations aim at displacing the materialistic outlook embodied in hegemonic norms and which dominate life strategies.

Money... it really cannot bring you the same satisfaction as... I don't know, people have money but only want to show off, it's not about being happy and doing something positive with it... it just serves to make the others feel like scum. (DT 5, f36)

You didn't need so much money to have fun. We were just going at lots of student parties and bringing drinks and all, it was great. I really had a great student life, I finished in time! Because now it's more difficult to do it when you're poor. I mean, we were going to the movies, or reading books, and didn't need much money for that. And we had holidays where we were cramming 6 people in a hotel room – and still having a ball. (T3, m34)

One of the major claims of the dominant discourse, material status as an acceptable or just criterion of social stratification, and the main one, is strongly contested – by a minority though.

Some respondents contest the desirability of having people separated into strata based on their earnings and material possessions, and suggest alternative criteria, such as education. They contribute to an articulation that rejects the role of material situation in separating between the worthy and the unworthy, between the successful and unsuccessful in Romanian society – therefore resisting the positions that this particular criterion creates and imparts. There are attempts to substitute the material/financial factor with other criteria for social differentiation and social status, like educational status:

The so-called new rich... I have a neighbour, he has opened a bar and makes loads of money, he has a new car, an enormous jeep, because he's a 'businessman'... really... I mean the guy didn't go to university, he hasn't got any education! (T7, m34)

Social actors try to indirectly challenge the hierarchies that the market imposes by destabilising the meaning of meritocracy, which is one of the devices legitimating the allocation of rewards (material prosperity and social success) in the context of a society ruled by the free market/competition. In Romanian society, while the high social status of successful (meaning wealthy) professionals is the norm, 'meritocracy' can take on unexpected and subversive meanings. In the popular opinion, the overwhelming majority of very rich, successful people have arrived in privileged positions through illegal, 'dodgy', corrupt activities – 'the main way of getting rich' – with a minority making it through hard work and 'playing by the rules' rather than by-passing them.

This guy, I don't know how he made his money, and I don't want to know. I mean, we know how they've all made it. Who's getting rich in Romania overnight? The cheats and the corrupted, they're on top... (C2, f61)

On the one hand, a critique of the supposedly meritocratic principle embodied in the functioning of the free market is mounted by positing social success as dependent on corruption (rather than honest work, as an ideal view of the role of the market would have it) and refusing to accept the latter as an appropriate, legitimate path to social/material success.

On the other hand, a more subtle dislocation of meaning occurs (which has the potential to destabilise understandings both of meritocracy and of how rewards are distributed in a market context), by a proper inclusion of corruption and illegal practices under a 'meritocratic' umbrella, as, after all, misappropriation of resources, corruption and dubious financial schemes require 'work', time, talent and effort as well. Practices like embezzlement, corruption, illegal operations, if resulting in material gain, can overlap with the 'meritocratic' principle.

People spit at the new rich in this neighbourhood and hate their guts, because they've made it, but all I can think is 'well done'. God, I wish I was clever enough to come up with some sort of scheme for making money, some legal or illegal stuff, like they did. But I'm not smart enough. (C5, f26).

Another point of resistance to dominant meanings coagulates around the form and content of relationships: images of decline in sociability and changed quality of social ties; explanations around this deterioration focus on the new societal arrangements and their impact on the way social actors conceptualise themselves and the others, the norms employed in interaction.

The present is portrayed as one of self-interested, cold, formal, impersonal market-type relations taking the place of more 'humane' and warm relations at society-level. Against individualism, indifference and selfishness a different norm is articulated, of human warmth, help, concern about the other and solidarity as 'desirable'.

Why can't we be nice to each other? We live among people, we're not savages in the woods. We cannot turn our back to the others, we might find ourselves at some point in a situation where we just need a kind word from the other. (DT13, f 64)

Ideas of human nature and of the good society are formulated: interaction is a basic feature of human nature, and without interpersonal exchanges one loses one's humanity, and creates an unpleasant, unkind if not cruel and mean social world.

Interaction and maintaining good relationships become vital for a good life and peace of mind – especially among neighbours.

My neighbours, I talk to them a lot, and try to have a kind word or just be polite when I meet them in the hallway, even if I'm back from work late. It's not only that good relations are a must in a block, you sometimes need your neighbours or depend on them for some help, but also it makes me feel better, the day seems brighter when I exchange a few words with them. (DT7, f 39)

Additionally, while for some anything they need can be obtained with money, and therefore they prefer 'contractual'-type relationships, for others networking and mutual services, or obtaining information through acquaintances, or building a clientele for one's business still necessitate a lot of interaction and actively cultivating a social network. The 'lack of need for each other' is constructed as a sign of the degrading of present day people's human nature rather than a sign of the functioning of the market and other institutions. The self-interested, egotistic human that tries to reduce interaction and exchange to a minimum is seen as the product of a hard life rather than the 'natural' capitalist citizen (examples of the kindness, friendliness of Westerners are used as proof that capitalism and 'humanity', helpfulness are not incompatible). Often respondents

bring together representations of society as ruthless, a harsh environment, and the ways this social reality has ‘changed’ people and turned them into selfish, mean humans.

I have a lot of problems with my neighbours, and it’s all started after 1990. Honest, they used to be decent folks, we never had fights, and now, you wouldn’t recognise them.

Int: How have they changed?

They are just mean, they do things... mean people, this situation has transformed them, all the poverty and misery and ... (T15, f64)

It can be said that resistance articulations put forward more relational notions of personhood that stand in contrast to the “self-contained individualism” (Sampson 1989, p1) espoused by the dominant view. Compromise and less shielded boundaries around the self, allowing the others a degree of access to one’s personal ‘space’, resources, property, time, are posited as ‘normal’ and beneficial in terms of both personal well-being and societal outcomes (less aggressiveness and conflict, more cooperation and cohesion).

Finally, a strong critique is aimed at the legitimising core of the new social order. ‘Catching up with the West’ by embarking on a societal restructuring around democratic and market institutions also implied reaching at some point a degree of generalised prosperity, comparable to the one the West enjoys. Therefore one of the central elements of the dominant discourse is the implicit promise of a ‘better’ life than under communism. ‘Capitalism’ in the form it is conceptualised in contemporary Romania cannot be separated from prosperity, because of its firm association with the West. Therefore the obvious impoverishment of large parts of the population is discursively used to de-legitimise the present social arrangements.

Many people live in atrocious conditions. They cannot afford to eat enough, not to talk about the appalling conditions in which they live – overcrowded shacks with no electricity or water, because they cannot afford a flat. They live off begging and little jobs. They don’t even send the children to school. That’s what we’ve been reduced to. Misery. (C14, f63)

What can be detected across many of these resisting accounts is the consistent use of some discursive constructs, which I will term communalist. They do not amount to counter-hegemonic discourses at societal level, but are mobilised in certain circumstances by social actors – a process which will be explored in more detail in the case-study

chapters 9 and 10. The communalist strand tends to emphasise notions of solidarity and cooperation as the appropriate ways of conducting social relations, together with a rejection of the idea of material inequality (especially in its extreme forms) as ‘natural’ and desirable, by emphasising its negative impact on the quality of social life. It tends to valorise certain aspects of the communist past in order to de-legitimise the normative core of the present discursive landscape.

Resistance articulations tend to be endorsed by the older generation, and by working class respondents, while the dominant ones are supported by intellectuals of all ages and predominantly by successful (usually young to middle aged) professionals.

The processes detailed above indicate the ways in which social actors formulate points of resistance or counter-hegemonic articulations in relation to what is perceived as a dominant cluster of discourses that produce and regulate the social, at normative and practice levels. Their efforts can be seen as tactics of destabilising meanings, but they do not coalesce into a strategy that would seriously threaten the dominant worldview (see the discussion on tactics vs strategy in the work of de Certeau in chapter 2).

Nevertheless, these articulations have the potential to question, de-naturalise and destabilise systems of signification beyond the Romanian context: they engage after all with signifiers like ‘capitalism’, ‘market’, ‘democracy’, ‘individualism’, which are relevant to Western thought and practice. The impact of ‘local voice’ on the production of knowledge in the West will be discussed in chapter 11.

Subject positions and negotiation of identity

Stratification (including material circumstances and poverty) and related issues of change in the form and nature of sociality and solidarities come to the fore as the main concerns around which thinking and understanding of the social coagulates. They are the main prism through which the social is thought and assessed by respondents, and they help establishing ‘moral’ positions: as exemplified above, people in everyday life circumstances formulate questions around the criteria according to which ‘stratification’, or separation of people in different strata proceeds, including ideas around the

distribution of rewards in society – accompanied by an assessment of the fairness or appropriateness of these processes which orients their actions. “Thus, those beliefs that we can dub as moral ones display a complex and integral relationship to moral values, standards and criteria, a relationship which shows up in the very practices of social life” (Jayyusi 1984, p15). In the process of reflecting on aspects of the social change, people are compelled to take a stand, to place themselves in a moral context, which intersects with the subject positions that discourses place them in.

Questions of ‘with whom do we belong’ or ‘What should we strive for?’, ‘What is the *good life* and the *right* goals to pursue?’ come to light as respondents reflect on the reconfigurations of social strata and the normative substratum of life projects. Positioning oneself in the new configurations is a very strong concern, which also highlights the decomposition of old solidarities and emergence of new ones. This positioning is effectuated through an interplay of the workings of discourses through assigning subject positions and the social actors’ own efforts to place themselves, or to resist being placed, in a certain ‘category’ or position.

It has been asserted that re-articulations in the social symbolic order are linked with the production of new subjects or identities: “the sense of self we come to live out is intimately connected to the kinds of social condition in which we are embedded” (Burr 1995, p110).

The new discourses mean also discourses of subjectivity, as they set the parameters for imagining, constructing and understanding oneself, and the practices and disciplines through which the subject is constructed. Foucault describes the process of subject formation that discourses carry out, by enacting relations of power. “This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects” (1983, p212).

The new discursive context (including elements of resistance) structures the available forms of recognition: “we are produced by acts of recognition deployed by self and others” (Bach 1993, p199). By producing knowledge, including normative assumptions, about the social and on how to place individuals in the edifice of the social,

discourses create subjects; knowledge-making practices (entangled with the operations of power) make possible acts of recognition which “bring the other into view as a subject” (Bach 1993, p201). This knowledge becomes socially organised and embodied in institutions, media, face-to-face interactions.

As stated above, there is a dominant discourse in post-communist Romania tying the individual to her identity or subject position, which tends to hierarchise the population according to the material criterion (and consumption associated with material status) - while the power of other discourses to stratify or classify is diminished. This results in social actors being roughly allocated to the ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ symbolic camps, with fine gradations within these categories. Also, strong representations of the ‘new man’ (competitive, flexible, self-centred and motivated by material gain) vs ‘communist man’ (stuck in past ways of seeing and acting in the world) that are promoted by the hegemonic articulations have to be negotiated (adopted or resisted).

Another aspect that plays into the formation of new subjectivities in Romania is the increased grounding of identity in consumption. Rose (1989) has described a shift in the locus of identity from work to consumption in the Western world, where

“The primary economic image offered to the modern citizen is not that of the producer but of the consumer. Through consumption we are urged to shape our lives by the use of our purchasing power. We are obliged to make our lives meaningful by selecting our personal lifestyle from those offered to us in advertising, soap operas, and films, to make sense of our existence by exercising our freedom to choose in a market in which one simultaneously purchases products and services, and assembles, manages, and markets oneself” (Rose 1989, p102).

Consumption as a signifying practice has a prominent role in contemporary Romanian society. Identity work as consumption practices was a visible feature during my fieldwork. As Eriksen (1995, p176) puts it, consumers are “conscious actors who appropriate the material culture of their environment to strengthen their own sense of personhood and identity. Viewed in this way, things become important elements in cultural projects; they objectify social relationships and hierarchies, are used in the articulation of self-identity...and contribute to defining social relationships”.

In chapter 2 I have identified some possibilities for forms of agency as identity-work actors can engage in at the intersection of discursive structures and constraints. For some social actors, identity-work is a matter of taking up a subject position, through processes of identification. “The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is ‘hailed’, but that the subject invests in the position” (Hall 1996, p6). Identification includes consumption patterns and various practices of the self that indicate the person fittingly occupies the respective subject position. In the case of the wealthy young professional, for example, who accepts both the system of categorisation and his place in it, being a ‘proper’ subject involves adopting and investing in a cultural model of consumption and behaviour that has taken almost standardised forms: items such as an expensive car and electronic equipment, the ‘proper’ holiday destinations, types of entertainment, including the type of restaurants and bars one has to frequent, and the type of sports one would do, in the right type of gyms. Effort is therefore put into performing as well as possible the ‘tasks’ and practices (behaviour, consumption) that are attached to and help to define the subject position.

For other social actors, processes of positioning involve dis-identification or negotiation, as they try to resist a certain subject position (or rather some aspects of it) by accessing others. This might involve a rejection of the system of categorisation, or a rejection of the subject position, or more often just trying to bring forward valorised aspects of one’s position and play down the devalued ones. This is made possible both by the existence of accepted normative frameworks (hegemonic articulations) that would give one a sense of his/her ‘position’, and by the nature of identity. As Mouffe (1988, p44) puts it, “we are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really, as the social relations in which we participate and the subject-positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those positions”.

This conceptualisation of the subject is compatible with that of self-in-process, “actively re-interpreting in the face of contingencies, and always confronted with new possibilities for making meaning” (Bach 1993, p193), which is helpful in making sense of the practices of identity-negotiation social actors engage in. Identities can be organised as distinct configurations: certain features or facets can be shifted in order to pursue

social strategies (Gregg 1991, p42), highlighting dimensions of the social actors' agency; according to different audiences or contexts different configurations are pulled out.

At the same time, there are limits to the possibilities for negotiation or reorganisation of identity-facets. The 'space of manoeuvre' within which social actors can reject or highlight chosen aspects of their multiple identity positions is dependent on both the context in which the individual acts and the resources on which she can draw.

Identity construction (or identification in the form of taking up a subject position) involves the active production of difference. "Like all signifying practices, it is subject to 'play', or *difference*... And since as a process it operated across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and making of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (Hall 1996, p3).

Under circumstances of threatened identities, processes of boundary-making intensify⁴. As the communist project of redesigning boundaries between social classes/hierarchies as prestige positions was abandoned, we witness active boundary construction in the new discursive context, captured in the interview material (this is not to say that social actors were not actively trying to displace some boundaries and reinstall others during communism, but at present new discursive and power resources are available, resulting in novel forms taken by social groups and the divisions among them). Some social actors will be more successful than others at navigating across positions, skilfully producing difference and similarities.

Social actors struggle to represent themselves within a certain context, a moral universe⁵; they attempt to fashion their identities in an acceptable or socially sanctioned way in relation to the new criteria and moral parameters of the discursive context, and they do so by using certain resources. In order to illustrate some of these processes and limits of identity production and negotiation in the contemporary post-communist discursive landscape, I will use 'place'- which can be conceptualised as both a context and a resource with an important role in identity production.

⁴ see the work of M. Douglas (1966)

⁵ Many authors have emphasised the ways identity is shaped in a moral context or sphere (see Douglas 1966, Potter and Wetherell (1987), Jacobson-Wilding 1983).

The relevance of place of residence for identity is more acute in the present context: before 1989 residential mobility was very low, most flats were assigned by the state, without much possibilities for choice on the part of the beneficiaries. Now that choice regarding the location and type of accommodation is possible, due to a flexible property market, place of residence becomes a matter of strategic choice and reflects in a different way from before on one's identity (under conditions of freedom of choice, there is an increased need to 'justify' why one lives in a given place or flat). Areas develop reputations (as representations that include the 'typical resident'), which create understandings around certain places being suitable for certain categories of people. This is prompted also by the emplacement of poverty and affluence: after 1989 many poor residents have been squeezed out from their place of residence, and other places have attracted exclusively a wealthy elite.

The next two chapters will explore the role and uses of one type of place, namely places of residence within Bucharest. I will look at social actors' identity work as they try to valorise some of their positions in the light of the dominant discourses and downplay or reconfigure other positions discourses allocate them to, by using 'resources' within certain contexts. These resources are represented by anything that can be placed into a system of relations with other elements within discourses, allowing for the valorisation of one's situation.

Three contrasting/distinct areas have been chosen, in order to explore and compare processes of identity-negotiation involving places that in principle would represent distinct contexts, with distinct potential resources.

CHAPTER 9

PLACE AND IDENTITY-WORK IN AN OLD BUCHAREST NEIGHBOURHOOD: THE CASE OF COTROCENI

The study-area Cotroceni

The previous chapter has proposed an approach to identity-work (identification, dis-identification, negotiation, positioning) as a form of agency that social actors can exercise to various degrees in the context of a strong dominant cluster of discourses that produce social reality, including the subject positions in relation to which actors have to carry out identity work. The signifying practices that are at the core of identity-work are dependent on contexts and resources – both of which gain meaning through their placing within discursive structures.

This chapter looks at place of residence as a context and resource for signifying practices and uses interview and observational material from fieldwork performed in the neighbourhood of Cotroceni (C). Discourses do not shape uniformly social spaces, because local contexts (local practices, norms and values, and any locally-specific features) interact or intersect with the deployment of discourses.

The analysis in this chapter details a few ways in which place-based contexts and resources allow for identity negotiation or identity-work, and the ‘techniques’ used by social actors. It is mainly based on accounts of the older residents of C, or the ‘old guard’ as sometimes they define themselves, and less on accounts from the new residents that have moved in over the past 5-6 years, and which are very well off families, or ‘the new rich’, meaning people whose high material status has been acquired over a relatively short period of time after 1989. The latter are mostly business people (company owners, entrepreneurs, etc.), a few prosperous, retired politicians that have combined political office with private enterprise and some very successful professionals (doctors, lawyers, financial consultants, sports stars).

Apart from an access issue (presented in the methodology chapter), the reason for conducting fewer interviews with newer residents is the fact that during discussions it became obvious that this category of people had a much less detailed account of the neighbourhood and placed much less emphasis on place as locus of identity compared to the long-term residents. Therefore, for the purpose of this investigation that looks at the role of place of residence in the negotiation of identity, long-term residents are the major source of data and the focus of the analysis. The newer residents tend to form a 'cosmopolitan', mobile and de-territorialised elite, for whom the workplace seems to have a major role in producing identity; relations with peers and colleagues figured prominently in their accounts, compared with neighbourly relationships.

The fact that the new residents are invariably very well off means that in the dominant, accepted hierarchy set out by the materialistic discourse, they occupy privileged positions (the 'winners' in the social transformation process). Their identity work seemed to be focused on adequately taking up the subject position the dominant discourse places them in (rather than dis-identification or other forms of negotiation), which merges privileged material situation and occupation (the source of this affluence). Therefore, identity work is represented by a striving to fulfil the role of the successful businessperson, or professional, as codified by accepted, generalised practices meant to make this position visible (e.g. consumption and leisure practices), contributing thus to its further crystallising.

In this process of identity-work, the symbolic resources represented by the job, firm or business (that are linked with material status) takes up a prominent role, while the place of residence is a rather marginal resource – in contrast with long-term residents, who constantly rely on place as a resource for negotiating identity positions.

The long term residents are not equally affluent: while their property is very expensive, their income is usually just above the average (or even average in many cases) by Bucharest standards¹; older or retired people make up for a large proportion of the long term residents, and this group cannot access the subject positions that the job market offers. This explains why place of residence becomes a crucial ingredient in the identity

¹ The average income in Bucharest is higher than in the rest of the country, as the capital attracts the most important private companies and concentrates a high number of well paid jobs.

of the 'old guard', facilitating a better, more prestigious positioning in the social hierarchies of value and worth than decent (but not remarkable) income and being retired (non-participation in the workforce) would allow.

Representations of place in the C interviews show constant similarities across the local sample, formed mainly of long-term residents, indicating the fact that a collective, pervasive articulation of the place exists and is accessed, circulated, re-produced by individual actors.

A general level of representation is subsumed under the nodal points of 'elite' or 'good quality' and 'civilised', which are filled with various, and sometimes divergent, meanings. Because of their open nature, these signifiers allow for flexible incorporations in the process of identity that negotiation residents perform. Through inscribing social signification onto places – a flexible and strategic endeavour - social actors use them as resources in the symbolic discursive economy.

The main signifying practice through which C as a place is constructed is the contrast with block areas, which are portrayed as a symbolic 'other' that exhibits all the negative traits that C is 'spared of' and lacks the positive features C embodies. Strategic plays of signification manage to associate the block areas with a wide array of meanings that are devalued by dominant worldviews - and conversely to imbue the representation of C with connotations that these discourses place highly in a hierarchy of values. Almost every feature that plays into the construction of C can be contrasted and positively evaluated in relation to corresponding features in block areas.

C is a detached house neighbourhood situated centrally in Bucharest, built in the 1930s. The geography of the area (enclosed by broad avenues, a river, the Botanical Garden and the ex-Royal Palace, now presidential residence) means that its boundaries are relatively clearly cut (they are portrayed as quasi-'natural' boundaries), offering reference points that allow for a relatively uncontested recognition by residents of these confines.

The elements used in the discursive making of C, as they have emerged from the analysis of the fieldwork data, and which can be contrasted to block areas refer to its geographical location, built form, its dwellers and their relationships, the local history, which have their meanings fixed and articulated together to create an image of special

status or prestige, a good quality and civilised place - of which the local moral order (local norms, values, practices) is an important ingredient.

The production of place: physical features

The *geographical location* anchors and facilitates symbolic constructions: the fact that C is placed in the centre of Bucharest, which is regarded generally as a high status location, as opposed to more peripheral block neighbourhoods, becomes a relevant ingredient in the representation of C.

I prefer to live in the centre town, despite the pollution and all. Not that the peripheries are cleaner, they are close to the industrial platforms, so it's not better, and on top of everything they are far from everything. I can walk home from the opera or theatre, they [periphery residents] have to take a bus. I have a friend - and she's not a nobody, she's a doctor - and she lives in the middle of nowhere... the last row of blocks in DT, you can see the corn fields from their window. Some people don't have any luck in life, poor thing, she's stuck in there... (C13, f60)

The quote above repeats a common derogatory way of assessing a place or flat in the 1990s; being close to the agricultural fields around Bucharest is an undesirable feature in a city where the periphery is associated with poorer, 'newer' residents (usually coming from small towns or the countryside), and less 'civilised' (far from cultural establishments, entertainment, shopping facilities, etc.)².

The *architectural features*, the presence of tree-lined streets and generally the perceived aesthetic values of C are a constant presence in the interviewees' accounts.

It is a beautiful area, the houses have historical value because of their architectural style... (C4, f65)

Every house is different...houses have individuality and can be recognised by their features. Some of them have names, like for example the boat house, the one at the intersection of two streets as you come from the market place, because it has a funny shape, it resembles a boat... (C18, f56)

Houses are described as 'unique' in a constant implicit or explicit comparison with block accommodation, which is frequently represented as ugly and standardised.

² These meanings began to change towards the end of the 1990s, as new residential neighbourhoods sprung up at the periphery of Bucharest, built by an economic elite emulating the American model of the suburb

Those people live in identical rows of flats, I don't know how they can recognise their own flat. They all look the same... (C1, m63)

I refuse to drive in their alleys because I get lost in that maze, it's crazy, everything looks the same...(C7, m64)

Well, it's very ugly. Blocks are just ugly, cubes of concrete, all the same. (C16, f57)

Most descriptions of blocks contain the word 'ugly'. Other frequent expressions to depict the block neighbourhoods are 'all concrete, no vegetation', 'oppressive', 'they don't have human proportions', 'they all look alike – one gets lost easily', 'matchboxes' (meaning fragile, tiny, uncomfortable dwellings), 'sardine tins' (small and overcrowded), 'dorms, not proper houses'.

Another observation concerns the lack of privacy – according to C respondents, block flats are badly insulated, and have thin walls, so one can hear what the neighbours are up to. An image of crowding and lack of comfort is put together, by the constant mentioning of the size, uniformity and aesthetics of the blocks, combined with the sheer size of the neighbourhoods and the sheer amount of people living there. This is articulated with lack of civilisation, and the impact on quality of life and of social relations: the block becomes an oppressive environment, unfriendly and unsuitable for 'normal, civilised' social relations.

Apart from block areas, the representations of C place it in relation to high status places, both similar older neighbourhoods and newly built residential areas where an economic elite has launched into building massive, sometimes extravagant dwellings. While the older neighbourhoods are considered of similar status, and positively appraised (they are close in both aspect and profile of residents to C) the new ones are systematically devalued.

I couldn't live in the new D area. Those houses are just... I don't know, ostentatious, they scream 'I have loads of money', but actually they are quite pathetic: money cannot buy taste...(C3, m27)

(because of limited space and urbanism legislation, it is impossible to built large villas in the central areas of the town); this has engendered a partial re-valorisation of the idea of periphery.

I definitely prefer this neighbourhood. It has a special atmosphere, not the 'cold' feeling of other places... those buildings are out of proportion, they just don't look good, too big and cold...(C8, f53)

Rather than some pretentious new villa...no, I like my house and the style of this neighbourhood. It is not arrogant, just comfortable, tasteful... and, well, made for a more elegant living. (C16, f57)

The C houses and flats are 'on a human scale', 'warm and cosy', suitable for comfortable living, as opposed to the more impressive villas in other high status areas, which are described as pompous, ostentatious, 'grandiose but without soul', or just 'bad taste' – making it easier to downplay the evident material prosperity they reflect and resist the articulation of conspicuous opulence with worthiness (aesthetic, social, moral, etc.). This creates a space for an attempt to associate 'moral-social worth' with taste, sophistication, more discreet but discerning consumption, as reflected in the house one inhabits, which means C residents can place their area high on a desirability scale and valorise its particular features and, indirectly, their position as C residents.

The *built environment* is a crucial element in the 'making' of the place: it is used as a marker of distinction and uniqueness, but also of 'adequate' urbanism and 'civilised' dwelling, impacting on the quality of life. Aesthetic meanings of C take shape in contrast with representations of blocks, which are reinforced by the discourse on civilisation and urbanism produced by architects and a part of the intellectual elite³, that problematises and stigmatises the block as an aesthetic and social issue to be managed (proposed 'solutions' range from painting blocks in colourful shades to demolishing them).

The specific arrangements in blocks (as described in the methodology chapter) are considered by C respondents to be a serious restriction of individual autonomy, a constant process of compromising at the expense of one's comfort. The problem of 'living in common', of sharing facilities and not being able to decide on certain issues without involving the neighbours, the lack of clear boundaries are appreciated as constrictive and

³ See the magazine *Arhitext Design*, and the discourse on the blocks (associated with ghetto and other unfavourable imagery, a 'problem' to be solved through ingenious architectural design and planning).

stifling⁴. Furthermore, since some of the space and facilities is not individually owned, but shared, this is seen as encouraging neglect.

I could never live like that, not being able to decide when and how much to heat up my house and leaving this matter to the local authorities...maybe I want the house to be hot. Maybe I want it cold and I shouldn't be forced into paying anyway...(C2, f61)

This is the most stupid system...dividing the bill like that. Not all people consume equally...let's say this guy goes for a few days away and leaves the water running – he doesn't care, he's not paying for it, but the whole 'block' is paying...it makes no sense and it encourages people not to care about the property – it's not really theirs, since it's common. (C17, f58)

It would drive me mad not to be able to decide something about space that belongs to me as well and to have to depend on my neighbours...if I want the staircase painted because it looks depressing to me and I'm ready to pay my share or even more, and the others don't agree or don't want to pay anything, this means I'll have to live on with the dirty, depressing staircase... it's not normal (C6, f52).

Another ingredient in the construction of place along the lines presented so far is the presence of *green spaces*, trees, gardens, parks, etc. Green spaces allow the creation of an image of the neighbourhood in opposition to the city and other block areas (noisy, polluted, mass of concrete, uncomfortable), as a more 'natural' environment, suited to human needs and 'human nature' (in contrast with the oppressive grey concrete that the blocks are made of). Within respondents' articulations, the greenery is directly linked to lower pollution, mental relaxation, civilised conditions of living and generally higher quality of life. The background that allows for the vegetation to become such a precious resource is a city characterised by few green spaces, very polluted, noisy and very hot in the summer – green spaces are seen as providing some protection from these factors, and as it will be detailed in the next chapter, they feature prominently in the symbolic construction of block areas as well.

⁴ Interestingly, many of the C residents live in similar conditions: some of the villas they inhabit are divided among a few families, as they are split in self-contained flats, that share the entrance hall, the garden, etc.. It could be argued that these villas pose similar problems of boundary-control and need to compromise (the contact and intimacy between just 2-3 families can be high, compared to a potentially more diffuse, dispersed, anonymous type of contact in blocks); nevertheless, the C residents describe their situation as radically different from that of block flats dwellers.

One of the most important things about this neighbourhood is its greenery. Where else do you find in Bucharest such beautiful green mature trees and gardens? The rest is just concrete and dust. No wonder people get ill in blocks.(C17, f58)

Yes, I do think this area influences my health, when I come back from work I just calm down walking through the neighbourhood. Just strolling around and seeing these trees and flowers changes one's frame of mind. (C8, f53)

I love the trees, the shade in summer, without them the asphalt would boil, like it does in block areas. (C11, m60)

To sum up, the idea of a certain type of (built) environment being more suitable for human needs and more 'civilised', 'natural' than others is a central device of production of difference and of placing the C neighbourhood and block areas in a clear contrast, with C being the one that can insure good levels of comfort and quality of life.

The *landmarks* mentioned by C residents help to build up an image of high status. The C Palace, the Botanical Garden, the Opera House, the University buildings, the Elefterie Cathedral, the new business centre are mentioned by residents when asked to describe the area, especially its boundaries. Through the consistent use of these landmarks to delimitate the neighbourhood, C appears surrounded by what are generally regarded as *prestigious sites*: the value of the place is enhanced by the incorporation of symbols whose weight is acknowledged by most Bucharest inhabitants (the city has only one Opera house, the C Palace is the official presidential residence, the Elefterie Cathedral is one of the largest orthodox churches in town, etc.).

Beyond a generalised mentioning, there are some differences in the way these symbols are used by respondents. They are selectively employed by different categories of people, part of an effort to create a certain image of the self. For example, proximity of the University and Opera, and the advantages of this proximity, are mentioned by people with 'intellectual and artistic aspirations', the 'refined and educated', while the new business centre with its futuristic architecture (hosting mostly foreign firms and banks, and a symbol of money, success and prosperity) is mentioned often by the young professional residents. The C Palace (ex-royal residence) is used in accounts both to make a link between oneself and the 'aristocratic elite that used to live here', in the case of older inhabitants, and as a signifier of power in abstract. The prestige and elite-quality of the place is enhanced by its symbolic location and also by mentioning that other

neighbourhoods lack the vicinity of such noteworthy sites. These *symbolic sites of power* (artistic-intellectual, financial and political power) are brought into discussion in residents' stories in a coherent process of articulating place and identity.

The *history* of C is also brought up in the construction of place. Residents will emphasise that their neighbourhood does have a past, it is not a 'new' place, as the block areas are. In the context of the massive demolition of the old city during the last period of the communist regime, this is one of the few older residential areas left, and this becomes a place-related resource which is discursively transformed into 'specialness' and 'value'. Various elements of the past are connected to create versions of the history of the place: why was it built, by whom, and for what type of residents; what characters inhabited it and what 'historical' events happened here (e.g. artistic movements and literary circles).

This neighbourhood was originally built for doctors, that's why the streets are called Pasteur, Melitescu, Paulescu... (C11, m60)

Most of the intellectual, or rather artistic elite could be found here. You have on the next street the Ghiata memorial house, but there are at least 4-5 houses around that were turned into museums because famous people have lived in it. (C12, m28)

In terms of use of history in building representations of C, there is a strong discursive effort to link C to the pre-communist period, when it was constructed. By connecting the neighbourhood to this past and valorising the latter as a 'golden period' in the national history, when the country was firmly engaged on a capitalist and democratic path, residents symbolically access the 'unspoilt' pre-communist period. Respondents often claim privileged knowledge regarding the 'right' ways of doing things (which is articulated as non-communist norms and practices), due to their location (physical, but also moral) in a 'non-communist' neighbourhood. Conversely, block dwellers are inextricably linked to communism and bear the imprint of communist policies and ways of thinking.

Place and 'the C resident'

The contrast with block residents

A further element that serves as basis for the production of place, through attribution of meanings and values, besides the built form, the landmarks and the history is *the type of people* that inhabit or have inhabited C. Respondents mention either individuals (relatively famous residents: artists, opera singers, writers, politicians, business-people, sport stars), or categories of people. These categories encompass material status (well off, incomes above the average, rich professionals, company-owners or directors), professional status (doctors, engineers, academics, politicians), educational status (most residents are described as 'educated', 'civilised', 'intellectuals'), that converge into a unified image of '*good quality people*' or 'elite'.

What type of people live here? Well, it's quality people, obviously. Compared to the average in Bucharest, they have a certain material situation... and also, educated. (C13, f60)

It's a neighbourhood of intellectuals. And the remaining of aristocratic families. You won't see here many workers – there might be some exceptions, but most residents are educated, and it shows. (C8, f53)

The level of civilisation in C is remarkable. The residents are overwhelmingly from a certain background, old families, and have the adequate manners, behaviour and all that. (C15, f33)

What's different in this neighbourhood is that it has only elite people, really educated, or from good families, or with good jobs. It's not like in blocks where you have first generation urban dwellers, or, to put it bluntly, peasants turned workers. (C7, m64)

The 'aristocratic' or intellectual or bourgeois origins and nature of the locals are brought forward while simultaneously looking down on the working class or peasant origins of the population that lives in blocks.

Some of the old social divisions of the pre-communist past (bourgeois vs workers and peasants), combined with divisions under communism (the intellectuals – workers divide) are mapped out onto places and identity forged through emplaced contrasts: peasants-workers are located in blocks and intellectuals or bourgeois families in residential areas like C (although many intellectuals live in blocks, this is regarded as an aberration and unfortunate situation).

Many C accounts strongly sustain the desirability and naturalness of strict social divisions (coupled with resentment over the 'forced equality' the communist regime tried

to achieve) and of a spatial divide as well to mark the social one: people of different social statuses should not live in close proximity. In this context, the block embodies an unnatural blurring of social distinctions (this representation is made possible by the contemporary discursive environment that normalises the notion of social hierarchies in contrast to the communist experiment of social equality).

Some respondents, especially older and born in C (some are descendents of the families that had built the houses in the 1920s and 1930s, therefore the house had ‘stayed in the family for generations’), referred to the fact that the majority of block inhabitants are ‘newer’ residents of the town, pertaining to a different social stratum. A few respondents talked of themselves as members of a quasi-aristocratic class, belonging to a sophisticated, ‘superior’ culture – in contrast with the ‘peasants turned factory workers’ within a single generation who live in the blocks.

You know, it takes generations to create a civilised person. It’s not like you can start wearing all of the sudden elegant shoes when you’re born into the countryside, they don’t fit. It takes generations for the shape of the foot and calves to change so that you can wear elegant shoes, you see what I’m saying? It’s like that with everything. Manners, language, education. Cannot be achieved by a family just by moving into Bucharest. (C7, m64)

The majority of C respondents consider that the people that ‘poured into’ Bucharest from the 1950s on⁵ were totally different from the original residents of Bucharest in the sense that they were not accustomed to living in a big town and they brought with them values, behaviour and ways of life from the rural setting that were incompatible with ‘civilised’ urban living. Respondents from C also blame the degradation of the town in appearance and spirit (from ‘civilised’, artistically thriving, cosmopolite, pleasant, comfortable place to ugly, unfriendly and unsafe, ‘un-civilised’, not worthy of being a capital) on this massive migration of ‘un-civilised’ population of peasants/workers, that have outnumbered by far the original residents, who are the repositories of the true urban culture.

They are the ones that have made this town so dirty: they spit and they throw papers and cigarettes in the street, they push you in the street and don’t say sorry, they don’t know how to behave properly...(C1, m63).

⁵ They were part of the massive industrialisation effort started by the communist regime, that created a wealth of jobs in the industrial, manufacturing sector; the workers were offered flats in the newly built blocks.

In conclusion, the long-term residents of C negotiate their identity by creating a contrast with block areas and emplacing social distinctions: a civilised elite in C (old bourgeoisie and the remaining of the aristocracy; intellectuals and respectable professionals) and peasant-workers in blocks. Apart from this major axis of difference, there is another relevant category of people they have to create identity in relation to, namely the new residents of C.

The contrast with the ‘new rich’

An important aspect of C is the rapid turn-over, as mentioned in chapter 4, with between 20% and 30% of the population having been replaced over the past 5-6 years, and a new type of residents moving in (usually very rich professionals, business-people or politicians).

The relationship between the older and more recent residents is not without problems. The new residents consider the older ones to be too nose-y, sometimes haughty and often embittered or resentful because they are not as rich and cannot afford certain items. The ‘newcomers’ can be aware of the disapproval by the old guard of their consumption and tastes, which they dismiss by defining the latter as just envious, and looking down upon their material situation.

I don’t like the neighbours too much. They are pensioners and all day long keep an eye on my house: who goes in and out, what have we bought, all that. They are very curious and sometimes make remarks like ‘I see you’re refurbishing the bathroom’... obviously envious because they cannot afford to improve their house. (C19, m39)

The neighbours? I don’t have much contact, because they are... they judge you, I feel they appraise my expenditure, the things I buy. Even if they are not poor, they exude this sourness...(C21, m25)

On average though, the new inhabitants seem less concerned with their neighbours and place of residence in comparison to the ‘old guard’. As mentioned, for this category place of residence tends to figure less prominently in the overall production of their identity, and their accounts of place and neighbourly relationships tend to be less detailed.

In contrast, for many 'old guard' residents the relationship with their 'new rich' neighbours is an important source of tension, and they try to find ways of managing the influx of new residents and its impact on the image of the place and their own identity. The superior material status of the newcomers is a threat and a visible issue that has to be dealt with: while the inhabitants of other areas can be more easily dismissed as 'new rich in pompous and tasteless neighbourhoods', this strategic manoeuvre cannot be applied in the same way to 'new rich' living in the 'refined' C area.

A lot of the hostility of the 'old guard' towards the new residents stems from the fact that the latter have moved into houses that 'old guard' people had to sell, usually because they could not afford the maintenance. Many of the poorest of the long-term residents had moved out by the time of the interviews, usually into a block flat (with the difference in money ensuring a relatively comfortable life) and their houses had been refurbished by the new owners.

X had to move out, into some block flat. He was a good friend... so shameful, good people have to go, and who takes their place? The rude new rich. It's not fair. (C13, f60)

Educated people have to leave, it's unacceptable, they have lived here all their lives. But now intellectuals are nobodies. Educated people have to leave and some businessperson moves in. What next? Some tanned guy⁶ moving into my house? I'd rather die than see that happening (C1, m63).

The resentment of the 'old guard' towards the new residents is also constructed around the conspicuous display of wealth the latter are seen as guilty of. More than bad-taste, the lifestyle of the rich is interpreted as a direct offence – a sign of the problematic relationship between these different categories of residents.

The new neighbours are truly awful. They have a young son, who is a typical new rich spoiled brat. He has loud parties at weekends, in the garden, and they often do barbeques. You can feel the smell of food... it's quite insulting. I cannot afford meat too often, and these new rich just throw their wealth in our faces. Disgraceful, there are so many families around, older people, living on a pension... they do not deserve this, being humiliated like that. (C8, f53)

Therefore the old guard's identity work incorporates the 'new rich' in distinct and opposed ways. On one level, they try to discredit the new residents (that are higher placed

⁶ Euphemism for Roma person

in the social hierarchies due to their material situation) by pointing to their lack of manners and downplaying the importance of money and consumption of luxury items.

I don't know what occupation they're into, some business probably. They are rich, judging by the car, but they aren't very refined. She looks a bit flashy, and he is a monosyllabic, brutish guy. (C18, f56).

This form of identity work relies on devaluing the position of the new rich by proposing alternative criteria for social worth (refined tastes, good education, family background) and de-legitimising their belonging to the place, as the definition of the 'sort of people that live here' has to be protected.

The contesting of the legitimate belonging of the newcomers (through the prism of their perceived characteristics and cultural baggage in terms of values, norms, etc.) is a technique for claiming exclusivity to the definition of place and protecting a certain type of identity grounded in this definition.

The family that moved in the next house are new rich. I don't know what sort of background they have, but they don't look too educated to me. They seem more interested in watching TV than going to the theatre...(C14, f63)

It pains me to see this kind of people moving in. They don't belong here! This is not their kind of neighbourhood, it is not a neighbourhood for new rich where they can show off. Why didn't they choose a new villa in the suburbs? (C14, f63)

Concomitantly, the 'old guard' tries to forge a 'legitimate belonging' narrative for themselves, that builds mainly on length of residence (although on closer scrutiny some of the self-defined old guard did only move in a few years before the wave of newer residents), family links, and fitting the 'moral profile' of the area (a point detailed in the next section).

Int: So, how long have you lived here?

All my life. It's the family house.

Int: Were you born here?

No, I was born in a different town, my family moved here after the war.

Int: Your son mentioned living abroad and in Constanta⁷...

Yes, I worked for six-seven years in Algeria. Then, shortly after returning to Romania, we moved to Constanta.

Int: For a short period, or...?

For about 10 years.

⁷ A city in Romania by the seaside

Int: So...you didn't actually live here for quite a long period...
...This is my house! (C7, m64)

I'm an old resident...

Int: When did you move in?

Well, 8 years ago, but my father had a house here, so... I belong here, in a way.
(C6, f52)

An alternative way of diffusing the threat that the 'new rich' represent (apart from de-legitimising their belonging) is to integrate them under the terms established by the 'old guard', a type of assimilation that would not change the identity of the place and local values and practices. A condescending attitude is often put forward, together with the belief that the new residents will inevitably 'adapt' to the local norms and values and adopt 'adequate' or 'refined' manners and habits.

They will have to adapt, you cannot live here and continue to behave as you did before. They will learn that we do not tolerate certain behaviours. (C1, m63)

Yes, they will change, I think. It will take some time, but... the place will change them; it's our way or their way... some have already understood how they must behave, and they are polite, keep themselves to themselves, do not make noise...
(C4, f65)

But at the same time there is another level of identity work in relation to the new residents that the old guard performs, which takes on a very different form. The process of identity negotiation reveals its strategic and contextual nature as the same 'new rich' that were thought little of in the accounts above become a 'resource' for enhancing the prestige image of C in certain circumstances, and their contribution to local improvement is acknowledged.

It is a rich neighbourhood, with a situation above the average. Look at the people that have moved in, they are an elite. (C2, f61)

Yes, they have refurbished many of the old decaying houses, it is true. The street looks prosperous, new paint, landscaped gardens, it has changed. A few years ago it was a bit run down, but new money has poured in. (C16, f67)

The presence of very well off neighbours in the midst of the 'old guard' is at the same time a threat and a resource. In the local context, their identity is threatened by the new rich neighbours, therefore identity work focuses on contesting, de-legitimising their privileged position. At the same time, in a general societal situation where the material

criterion is the main principle behind value hierarchies, the fact that many of the residents are 'new rich' is used, in circumstances or contexts usually outside the local, to extend the signifier 'rich' to the whole area and to local residents in general: being a C resident is invested with the meaning 'very well off'. When the old guard residents position themselves in relation to other residents of Bucharest, they incorporate selectively traits of the newcomers (i.e. exceptional material conditions, prestigious occupation such as businessman) in constructing the image of the local resident.

We have now [in the C neighbourhood] plenty of people that own their own business – and I don't mean some small enterprise, but really successful ones, with foreign partners. (C6, f52)

The property prices are going up in C, in part because of the rich people. It's good, in a way, they impose a certain standard, the way houses look, the cars they drive, the image of the area has changed. (C15, f33)

Although conflicts, antipathies and looking down on various neighbours (be it because they are either 'new rich' or 'impoverished', not educated and mannered enough, or pretentious, etc.) emerge during interviews, it is usually as a more 'private', confidential type of information, while the 'public' type of account invariably builds on the recurrent image of 'good quality' and 'privileged' residents. This image also rests on the discursive exclusion of poverty, low social status individuals, and problem-families among the local inhabitants (alcoholism, domestic violence, delinquency, etc.) from representations of the place. These issues are absent from accounts about the place and become visible only in informal conversations, outside the tape recorded version, and only when the interviewer is perceived as an insider. They are also mentioned by respondents that are themselves 'outsiders' (e.g. the sales assistant at the local shop, not a resident but spending most of the day in the area dealing with the residents).

The general image that emerges in the 'old guard' accounts creates 'the typical C resident' as a special, privileged type of person (through educational status, material status, occupational status, social origins, manners). The contrast with the population of block areas is clear-cut (despite the difficulties in accommodating the fact that many intellectuals, or people of 'good family and origin' live there) and plays into the valorisation of the C resident. As for the newcomers in C, a strategic, dual work of appropriation and exclusion is deployed. They are either excluded from the position of

'proper' C resident, or included under the signifier of 'quality people', together with the 'old guard', glossing over internal divisions.

As far as the new residents are concerned, the image of C – including the profile of the local resident - is not such a central tool for identity production. For some new residents, C is just a neighbourhood that adequately caters for their needs.

Int: How did you choose C to move in?

I chose it because it is quiet, clean, and the school is good. I'm not interested in socialising with the neighbours, and they seem to keep to themselves, which is rather good. I did consider about 3 neighbourhoods in Bucharest that would fit my criteria, and I ended up here because the estate agents were quick at arranging it. (C19, m39)

The new residents' representations of C are encompassed by a general understanding as 'adequate' to their material and professional position – in contrast to the 'old guard', they generally do not engage in a detailed account of the place and its meaning in their lives. C is a 'good' or 'adequate' place because it offers a certain standard of living (large, detached houses with gardens), tranquillity, and neighbours that do not present problems; these depictions do not clash with the good quality, high prestige and specialness image that long term residents create.

For other new residents though, the reputation of the neighbourhood as populated by an intellectual, cultured elite was a trait they actively invested into. These cases of direct use of the image of the C resident to valorise their identity are accompanied by keenness to integrate, and to sustain the image created by the old guard.

I wanted my children to grow up in an old neighbourhood, to be in contact with cultured people, rather than new rich... you know, educated ones. (C20, f34)

I could have chosen other areas, but this one is much more distinguished. There is a quality about it, if you only look at the people in the street, it's obvious they come from good families, old academics and doctors and engineers, they are not rich, but they have a refined air about them. (C15, f33)

This aspect highlights the ways place of residence can be a symbolic resource for identity negotiation in a variety of situations; for some new residents, representations of the place can be used in order to add sophistication to their image and take off some of the rough edges of the 'new rich' signifier.

An important issue in relation to the profile of the C resident regards the roma minority. One ubiquitously mentioned aspect in all cases of symbolic construction of place is the absence of Roma population as marker of the quality of the place – reflected in reputation of area, house prices, etc. Virtually all C respondents have mentioned the existence of ‘gypsy families’ as an undesirable presence: among the qualities of a place, the lack of Roma families in the neighbourhood was a prominent one and a source of pride.

It’s s good neighbourhood, we don’t have gypsies here. (C8, f53)

We’ve kept the gypsies away. They don’t fit in here, I don’t think they would even like it here, it’s so different to what they are used to, to what they like. (C14, f63)

The local moral and interactional order

An important aspect of place (in relation to identity) is its moral dimension. Places are defined in terms of what type of social relationships they foster, what are the norms and values embodied in these relationships, in attitudes and behaviours or practices prevalent in the place. Layers of normative stances, beliefs and attitudes are strategically, flexibly articulated into overarching representations of the place – in the form of the ‘spirit’ or ‘ethos’ of the place. They build upon the image of the typical resident and depend on the similar processes of selective exclusion and inclusion, and distancing from a significant other – the block areas.

Accounts of conflicts and their resolution, everyday life interactions, the exchanges and relationships between neighbours and what guides them are interwoven in the narrative of place (against the background of ‘special’, ‘quality’ people) help to contour the local moral order, as they highlight the local values and norms. Once again the social relationships and their normative framework are depicted in direct relation and contrast with the perceptions on the ways things are done in block communities.

The local moral order gains substance through creating a sharp distinction with ‘block culture’, the signifier under which the norms and practices in block areas are grouped. The construction of the ‘block resident’ in terms of social origins and

occupational status⁸ is extended onto the normative-valuative underpinnings of social interaction, behaviour and more generally everyday practices.

The components of this 'block culture' are constructed around inappropriate amounts of contact (either too high or too low), informality of relationships; gregariousness; diminished respect for one's private space, intrusiveness, frequent exchanges of an instrumental type (lending and borrowing of different items), rather than based on other sort of affinities – in short, 'abnormal types of social interaction'.

Levels of interaction in blocks are portrayed as either intense contacts prompted by the communal use of space, or alienating because of lack of human contact.

All day long bumping into each other, neighbours popping in, too much contact...(C18, f56)

It's a lonely environment, everyone behind their doors, they come tired from work and retire in their flats, people are not in touch with each other, they don't exchange a few words, it's so... solitary (C4, f65)

At the same time, in C the neighbourly interaction is seen as qualitatively 'different' – just the 'right' amount of contact. Neighbourly relationships are pleasant and civilised, as suited to the type of people living here.

We have... how should I put it? Almost British type of relations, that's the norm. We just say hello and we are polite, but that's it, no gossiping in front of the door. It's civilised. (C16, f57)

People in blocks quarrel all day long... so many people, some from different categories, living in a small area... (C14, f63)

Block areas become the symbolic repository of a variety of social problems and high crime, explained by the higher density of people in a restricted space, and also by the mixed social background and cultural givens of the block residents – this making for tense and conflictual relations, and allows for a contrasting depiction of the C neighbourly atmosphere, where the lack of conflicts ensures a peaceful, quiet environment.

⁸ A more delicate issue is that of the intellectuals and professionals who live in 'blocks' – while they obviously belong to the same social group, and in many cases are close friends of the C respondents, they are perceived as living in conditions below their status, and more or less explicitly pitied for their situation.

The local relations in C are of mutual respect and respect of privacy, and *not* of the intrusive, vulgar, gregarious, informal type encountered in blocks.

We don't pop at each other's doors whenever we feel like, there is concern for privacy and personal space. It's not like in blocks where they just think they can come in whenever...(C2, f61)

The 'block culture' is characterised by the fact that the invasion of privacy is more frequent and more acceptable – a different cultural norm regulating the entering of private space. The neighbour can knock on your door anytime, for a visit or a chat, without previous warning, while in the C neighbourhood this goes against the etiquette: people are supposed to phone first, or to wait for a more formal invitation. Meeting up in the street or garden and chatting can and does happen spontaneously and is an entirely different matter from a house visit. The issue of lack of discretion is frequently invoked in C accounts: in a 'block' everyone tries to find out as many personal details about the neighbour as possible, and it is more difficult to shun unwanted attention or inquisitiveness; social control and surveillance are seen as central to 'block life'.

They all keep an eye on the neighbour's flat and goings. When I visit my friend in the block, there are at least a few neighbours that stop to talk to me, to pry on me, and inquire whom I'm visiting. When I ring, sometimes her neighbour comes out to see who's visiting... they are unbearable. It's not their business! (C18, f56)

The fact that many block residents have to meet in their flats to raise and solve common problems is a typical trait of the 'block culture', a sign of interdependence and lack of autonomy, of mixing the private space of the home with public 'block issues'.

This articulation of block culture with intrusiveness and lack of control over social interaction incorporates exchanges among neighbours, which in the C residents' accounts are described as 'quasi-compulsory': part of the 'block culture' is being immersed in a network of intense exchange, a 'demanding' environment, with lots of 'pressure' to enter in all sorts of relationships and exchanging objects and favours.

In contrast, C is presented as the site of a harmonious cohabitation based on limited, controlled interaction, characterised by choice (with whom and over what to interact), a situation made possible by the similar background of the residents and the local normative contours.

The nature of the exchanges is posited as being different: while in C the typical (and appropriate) exchanges would be over recipes, flower bulbs or seeds and a friendly chat, among the 'block' residents anything could be the object of exchange, from house items (tools, flour, eggs, etc.) to money and favours (e.g. driving someone to the town, or using personal connections to help a neighbour – putting him/her in contact with a good doctor or lawyer, or making a phone call on his/her behalf to a police acquaintance to sort out a fine or more serious matters).

While among C residents these kind of favours and exchanges were performed as well, they were presented as less frequent, and reserved generally for 'emergency situations' – not a routine practice, not part of the local way of doing things.

I don't feel comfortable about going to my neighbour and ask for salt or sugar... I just wait until the shops open and eat something else in the meantime. In a block is not like that, people would immediately go over to the neighbours to ask for salt... well, that's what they normally do over there, that's how they are...(C14, f63)

This categorising of practices of neighbourly interaction - more restrained and 'civilised' in C and 'vulgar' or invasive in block areas – is part of the effort to produce distinct moral orders and to ground identities in these normative constructs. Many respondents have linked this 'different' 'block culture' to 'working class' or 'peasant' values: the informality of the contact, the different etiquette when it comes to interacting with the neighbours, the different norms dictating what is the appropriate object of an exchange or request. The rules governing behaviour in a block are constructed by C respondents as partly derived from the precariousness of life for the working class (mutual help networks are considered a feature of working class ways of life) and also partly derived from the peasant culture, with its emphasis on mutual dependence and reciprocal help.

These people come from the countryside, so they are used to this way of doing things together...(C7, m64)

People in blocks, in general, are poorer than in C. Of course, there are exceptions, rich people, academics, politicians living in block flats. But generally they are poorer workers, so they always need something, their wage doesn't stretch till the end of the month, so they need to borrow foodstuffs, money, till the next pay. (C13, f60)

C residents are keen to distance themselves from these forms of exchange and reciprocity, by articulating together ‘peasant’ and worker culture with mutual help and the norm of lending a hand to those in need. Moreover, reciprocity and helping out are discursively placed in the category of *blat* practices – which cannot be disentangled from the communist period. Again, the devaluing association of blocks with communism is reinforced.

The norms of the interaction in C are constructed around ideas of independence, non-intrusion, self-reliance, and they restrict exchanges to people perceived as ‘equals’ in terms of status and background. C residents generally place great emphasis on their ability to keep clear, regulated boundaries between the private realm of the home and public demands and interaction. A defended private realm, control over private property are central to ‘civilised’ living and to the identity of C (and they as seen as lacking in ‘block culture’).

All the traits of the local moral-normative order and local practices presented above as they come forward in C-based accounts are integrated into an overarching representation of ‘high quality of life’, ‘civilised standards of interaction’, and the content of these norms is compatible with features that dominant discourses appraise positively.

This image reveals a certain normative homogeneity within the old guard C residents (in terms of ideals, worldviews, values, etc.) sustained and circulated through networks of relationships and reinforced through processes of social control (gossip, exclusion/inclusion in local cliques, etc.). The contacts between residents (in the form of the greeting in the street, casual talk or gossip in the garden or the house, informal spontaneous exchanges of remarks over one’s dog or child, or more formal visits between neighbours, the ‘talking over a coffee’ ritual, or concrete instances of help or borrowing/lending) reinforce, in a more or less overt way, this common representation and create solidarities and collective identities.

The local interactional order in C has an important role in fleshing out subject positions; it is constituted through established practices informed by norms and values that are worked out in time among the same people and families that pictured themselves somehow bounded to each other because of residential immobility. On the one hand,

place allows one to take on new (locally-specific) subject positions, that can be incorporated and used for identity work. On the other hand, the residents perform through daily interaction the role of the C resident, displaying the characteristics and behaviours that fit into/constitute this profile; importantly, place provides an audience that supports this performance, and validates the representations that it embodies. The residents of C support the idea of 'specialness' in their everyday interaction and through their conversations and practices keep alive the image of elite and superiority over the residents of other areas.

The case of Mrs X (DT2, f65)

The case presented below illustrates some of the issues of identity building in relation to place.

The X family moved from C to DT in 1996. In the early 1990s, the family borrowed money from friends abroad and purchased the flat above theirs in a two-storey villa in C, then rented out both flats to a private company that would use them as offices, and moved into a cheaper flat in DT (rented from a private landlord). After a few years, the substantial income from renting out the C flats was used to purchase two DT flats (one for the respective family, and another one for their 30 years old son and his family) and subsidise the dental practice of the son. Ms X details the effects of this move on her life and identity.

How is it [to live in a block in DT]? Horrible. Horrible. Look at me, I am a wreck. I'm on antidepressants. Honestly, my life is over. I did it for my son, otherwise I would have never, do you hear me, never moved out of C. It's the place where I was born, and where I belong. All the happy times of my life were spent there. As a young doctor, I had to go and practise in the countryside for a few years. And it wasn't easy, but every weekend I would be home in C, and recharging my batteries, seeing my friends. And then I moved back to C for good. And I was the soul of the neighbourhood. My parties were legendary, even during communism, we would gather, play music, and everyone would bring something, alcohol, nice cigarettes, nice food, whatever people had access to. And I knew many of them since childhood, so those were strong bonds, we were all of us from similar families and backgrounds, a certain category, you understand... Everyone knew me, and I had time for everyone. On my way back from work I was sometimes spending more than an hour chatting with people met in the street, and my greatest pleasure was to have people around for coffee, or go to their places for a chat, and discuss things, listen to music, play cards.

Int: How about the new neighbours?

What about them? I don't know them. I don't want to know them. They are horrible, uneducated people, what on earth would I discuss with them? I didn't tell anyone in the block I'm a doctor, because you know how these people are, rude peasants, they would knock at my door at midnight for whatever problem they have... No, I don't want to see these neighbours, they treat me with a familiarity that makes me sick. They call me 'lady neighbour', which I loathe. My husband doesn't understand, but then he isn't from C, he was born in a block neighbourhood himself. Everything about this place repulses me. These people... they do not understand how uncivilised and pathetic they are – even the decent ones. There are decent neighbours, like the administrator – he's not educated, but he is polite, and helpful, and correct. Yes. But some of the people in the block are just brutes. The whole idea of the block makes me ill. How it looks, the people, mostly the people, so many poor ones, they don't have anything. It's just so...awful. And I know I will die here, I cannot return to C, we cannot afford. Our only source of income would disappear, and my son... anyway, my only wish is to die in a hospital, a decent place, and to go to the cemetery straight from the morgue of the hospital. I'm adamant about it. And I've told my family: do not let me die in the block, my last wish is for you to take me to the hospital and not let me die here. I hate the block so much...

The following extract is from an interview with a neighbour of the X family, living in the same block of apartments in DT.

Int: Do you know your neighbour, Mrs X?

Yes, a bit, we do not have much contact. They seem decent. The husband makes a bit too much fuss about his car, he looks very important polishing it, but she's ok.

Int: Do you know their occupation?

...no, they are retired, I think.

Int: What do you think about your neighbours in the block generally? What sort of occupations are they into?

Generally, good families. Quite a few are well-off, doctors and a lawyer, a painter, and also mechanics, and factory workers, and some work in retail. I would say most are educated. Lots of retired professors and teachers.

The case of Mrs X highlights issues around the intertwining of identity and place of residence, in the form of a conflation of home, neighbourhood and identity. Martin and Mohanty (1986, p208-209) discuss this type of situation: “[t]he relationship between the loss of community and the loss of self is crucial. To the extent that identity is collapsed with home and community and based on homogeneity and comfort, on skin, blood and heart, the giving up of home will necessarily mean giving up of self and vice versa”.

The identity of Mrs X was constructed to a substantial degree around being a C resident, with all which this implies, including a contrast with 'inferior' block areas, therefore she finds it extremely difficult to re-cast and use her new place of residence as a valid resource for identity-negotiation. The fact that the profile of the C area and of its residents are constructed by opposition to block areas means that Mrs X (who sees herself as 'belonging' to C despite her moving) cannot accept any of the traits of DT as positive, valuable features. She refuses to participate in any type of relationships with the new neighbours so as not to be part of the despised 'block culture'.

The role of the neighbourhood 'audience' is central: her new fellow residents do not support the articulations through which the identity of C is shaped, in opposition with block areas - therefore the power of these articulations in creating representations is lost. Additionally, the reality of the block contradicts the typical depictions in C respondents' accounts: the fact that there are plenty of 'intellectuals' living in the same block destabilises the articulation of block with 'worker-peasant' dwellers, on which the identity of C as a contrasting neighbourhood of 'educated' people rests. The new neighbours do not support Mrs X's 'superior status' narrative.

This case also points to the limitations of identity-work using place of residence. The constructs on which the identity of C is based and which are produced locally have a limited 'validity': audiences outside C might strongly resist these representations and impede a stable articulation or closure of meaning in the form C residents strive to achieve.

Conclusion

This analysis has focused on identity work carried out in relation to the place of residence - through the production of representations of C by the local residents, combined with strong identification with the place and forging a narrative of legitimate belonging.

The production of place as a locus of identity takes place in a discursive environment that allows for certain features to be defined as valuable or desirable, and at the same time offers the normative background against which other places can be

constructed and negatively evaluated – a technique of construction of difference that is heavily used in forging the ‘profile’ of C.

The two major axes of place-based identity work for the ‘old guard’ residents are the block areas and the rich residents that have moved into C more recently. Representations of C operate a strategic distancing from the block areas (and also from the ‘new rich’ suburban areas). C is mainly constructed as a clear reverse of traits that blocks are invested with, from physical aspect to type of residents, norms and practices. As for the ‘new rich’ in C, they are strategically included or excluded (portrayed as ‘not fitting in’) from representations of the place, through the situated articulations that old guard residents perform.

CHAPTER 10

IDENTITY-WORK IN RELATION TO PLACE IN BLOCK NEIGHBOURHOODS: THE CASE OF TITAN AND DRUMUL TABEREI

Block areas in Bucharest

The areas of Titan (T) and Drumul Taberei (DT) are block areas. They are large units in terms of both population and area, and they are made up of smaller areas or neighbourhoods. The following analysis is based on accounts from respondents living in neighbourhoods in each of these areas respectively.

The production of place through representations and practices intersects with the production of identity. This chapter looks at identity-work performed by DT and T respondents which uses (constructs of) place of residence to negotiate the dominant subject positions presented in chapter 8.

Representations of block neighbourhoods have been intermeshed with various societal discourses and socio-economic processes: in the 1960s for example, blocks were seen as a symbol of progress and salubrious accommodation, with facilities that older houses lacked (modern bathrooms and kitchens, hot water and heating centrally distributed as opposed to wood-fired heating systems, etc.). As one respondent put it,

In the 1960s and 1970s everyone wanted to live in a block, it was fashionable and modern, and those having received a flat through their workplace were looking down on us, still living in old houses. Well, now it's the other way around! (C17, 54, female)

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the shortages intensified, and blocks were deprived of adequate heating, electricity, and their physical infrastructure entered a process of premature decay, resulting in a shift in the perceptions around them. This was coupled with the demolition policy that erased most of the 'old Bucharest', and displaced residents without their consent (they were allocated flats in blocks), which intensified the symbolic rejection of blocks by segments of the population, as they became equated with

the communist regime and its abusive impositions. Dissident intellectuals in the communist era, for example, have portrayed the block as a symbol of communism and breaking of the human spirit, remoulding of humans by communist distorted standards.

Blocks came to be seen, to a certain extent, as tools of oppression during the communist regime, where the population was better 'controlled' because of the lack of autonomy from the central distribution system (as the providers of water, heating and electricity, under the strict control of the regime, could at the push of a button stop their distribution for tens of thousands of families - a frequent practice in the last years of the regime).

At present, an important aspect concerning the 'block' study areas is the fact that, in contrast to the C neighbourhood, there is much more 'knowledge' or representations being produced about 'blocks', converging from numerous, powerful sites, such as the mass media, intellectual and 'new rich' milieus, etc.

Newspapers, opinion magazines, TV talk-shows and even academic journals post-1989 have devoted entire issues to the 'block problem' and 'homo blocus' (the typical resident of the block). Blocks are seen as an unfortunate solution that the communists had to implement in response to the high demands for accommodation from the 1950s on. The 'lack of vision' which has accompanied the construction of block neighbourhoods is now blamed for a variety of ills, from lack of parking space to conflicts and youth gangs¹. Moreover, this type of discourse puts forward the notion that living in blocks has created a special breed of humans – 'homo blocus'² that are unable to recognise the values of individualism and private property and has stifled civicness and initiative. In chapter 6 the image of the 'communist man' as constructed in the backwardness discourse has been detailed; the profile of the block resident reproduces the same traits: blocks are after all seen as the 'natural environment' of 'communist man'.

This type of portrayal of blocks and of their inhabitants is refuted by respondents in DT and T through their depictions of 'block life'. As the analysis below will show, most individual accounts challenge this representation and focus on the degree of

¹ At the same time, these type of accounts tend to ignore the fact that bad planning is not an exclusively 'communist' feature; in the Western world as well, plenty of residential accommodation was built in a way that now engenders serious problems.

² This expression appeared in the Romanian journal 'Dilema' (1999) – an issue devoted to 'the block issue'.

independence that a block allows, on the pleasant and useful nature of social relations in blocks, and on the amount of initiative and self-organisation that life in blocks actually requires.

At the time of the fieldwork, degrading or negative images of block life were frequent in public accounts – a feature that can potentially interfere with the ways block dwellers use their place of residence to ground identity in a valorising way. The media constantly presents blocks as problem-ridden, difficult places to live in, through relentless accounts of eviction situations, spectacular neighbourly conflicts, bad services, disintegrating buildings, the heating issue, rising costs of maintenance and services.

The pressing issue of the rising costs associated with living in a block (where the charges for heating, electricity and water for a flat often surpass the income of the family living in it, especially in the winter months) has led to new problems for block dwellers³. As the bill for most of these services is issued for the whole block rather than individual flats, having residents who can not afford to pay means that the rest of the neighbours have to come up with the remaining sum, if they want to avoid the whole block being disconnected from the heating system or water supply. If the families in debt (the so-called 'datornici') do not come up with the money within a certain period of time (subject to negotiation with both the block administration and the suppliers), the block organisation has no other option but to sue them in order to recover the due amount. As a result, the 'datornici' families have to sell the flat; with the remaining money after the block organisation has been paid, they usually purchase a smaller, cheaper flat, in a less desirable neighbourhood. Often though, the value of their flat barely covers the amount of the debt, in which case they become homeless.

It is through this process that segregation between and homogenising within residential areas has occurred in the post-communist period, especially after the mid-1990s. The issue of evicted families is frequently mentioned in DT and T interviews, and points to the difficult and often painful manner in which it is dealt with by the block community, and to the underlying practices of solidarity or individualism (and the ways they are related to changes in the discursive structures).

³ It is a problem that started in the late 1990s, as a result of various policies that increased the price of fuel (including withdrawals of state subsidies) to unprecedented levels.

The symbolic construction of place in block areas proceeds through similar moves as in C, by attributing signification, among others, to the built environment, location, services, amenities, and residential composition, creating 'local character' in a valorising manner.

Discursive deployment of the built environment, services and local history

The C residents' representation of blocks emphasised their homogeneity, an image that is not familiar at all to block residents⁴. The idea of sameness does not make sense for the inhabitants of blocks, who apply the same techniques of place production as in C: the creation of distinctions and the investing of differences with meanings. The environment of the block provides the 'material' that will be integrated in symbolic form in the construction of place.

The study area within T

The study neighbourhood within the larger T area is formed of mostly four storey blocks among which some ten storey blocks were later interposed. It is placed near an underground station, and is bordered by a large avenue on one side and a big park on the other.

A first step in creating this place is establishing of boundaries: residents delimit their area from the neighbouring ones on the basis of perceived characteristics of the built environment and of the inhabitants.

Our neighbourhood, how is it different? Well, it's part of T, but then T is really big, with many neighbourhoods. This one is among the best. Best quality of the blocks, if you look at how spacious flats are. (T16, f61)

Where I live in T is a good area, a few streets down it's different, you have more destitute families, truant children that hang out in front of the block all day... their parents barely cope financially, too many worries about tomorrow, so they cannot keep them in check. It's not the case here, where people are not exactly struggling. (T7, f30)

The physical characteristics are used in a process of contrasting and comparison with other areas: the creation of place involves careful positioning in relation to other sites. On

⁴ Also, C residents tend to talk about 'blocks' indiscriminately – they rarely acknowledge that there are significant differences between various block areas.

the first level there is the location of the particular block the respondent lives in within the neighbourhood (the characteristics of the block and the period it belongs to, as this location within the history of the area has specific consequences); on the next level, the neighbourhood is positioned within the bigger area of T (through a process of comparative evaluation, an effort to elicit the uniqueness of the respective neighbourhood within an area of blocks); on a third level, the residents look at T as a major area within the city of Bucharest, and appraise it in relation to the city centre, but mostly in relation to similar large block areas (like DT).

In the case of T, the built environment and history are intertwined as the blocks have been built in distinct ‘waves’ starting with the late 1960s. This history of the neighbourhood – consisting of successive construction periods – is inscribed in the distinct shapes the neighbourhood took, in the recognisable traits the place displays (buildings, green spaces, parking lots, the park, etc.). The oldest construction wave consisted of four storey blocks made of bricks as opposed to the newer 10 storey blocks, built in between and further away from the older ones, using lower-quality pre-fabricated units.

Our blocks were built in the ‘first wave’, the 1960s, 1967 I think is the exact year. Things were done properly then... (T1, f56)

As you can see, these blocks are well-designed, with a clear architectural vision, that respected the need for open space, light and green areas; what was built afterwards, and especially in the 1980s, is a completely different story: everything was done hastily, and it shows. (T19, f46)

For our block they have used good quality building materials; it’s brick, not pre-fabricated units; these blocks have emerged from the ‘77 earthquake unscathed – the new ones were not up yet back then, I’m sure they would have crashed. (T3, m34)

The period the block was built represents a major reference point in assessing the appearance, value and benefits the place can offer. The preponderance of older four storey, good quality blocks (as opposed to much of the block accommodation throughout Bucharest famed for its low quality and fast degradation rate) is one of the main factors that give the neighbourhood in T its distinctiveness and also the reputation of a decent, desirable place to live.

There are in the neighbourhood newer blocks as well, this one there was built in a few months, honestly. I've watched them constructing it from my kitchen window. Ten storeys. This is not a solid block, I've seen how sloppy they were. But, thank god, they didn't build too many of those here, they didn't spoil the look of the place. (T10, f48)

This is a nice neighbourhood, it doesn't overwhelm you – because the blocks are mostly four storey high. The newer parts of T are very different: it's all tall blocks, with no green spaces in between, crammed, so that they could stack people in them...(T4, f43)

In the Bucharest landscape, most of T is portrayed as a 'good', desirable area.

T and DT are good neighbourhoods, mostly quality flats. Look at the X neighbourhood: it was built much later, and it shows serious signs of deterioration. (T7, m34)

Another component that shapes the image of the place is the green areas. The neighbourhood is described constantly as 'green' and pleasant. The space in between blocks has allowed for front and back green spaces to emerge, surrounding the blocks. Most alleys between blocks are lined by trees. Many of the green spaces are enclosed, and the residents have planted trees, flowers, etc. Some are better taken care of than others, and in a few cases much work has been put into transforming the green space into a landscaped garden, with benches, barbecues, flowers. Some of the residents bring chairs out and use these gardens to relax in the hot summer days. Most find the sight of green space from their window or balcony comforting, and also an antidote to the pollution and noise of the city.

Look at this green space I have under my window... I do take care of it, together with a few other neighbours. It's worth it, it's not only a relaxing thing to do, but also the smell of flowers coming through the window, especially at night, in the summer, is priceless. It fills me with happiness, washes away bad thoughts... (T21, f60)

It makes a huge difference, having this sort of greenery around. When I come back from work, I take a shower and then spend some time in the balcony, staring at the trees and flowers. It's such a contrast, there is no noise here, and less polluted, the trees stop some of the fumes. (T11, m22)

The presence of green space is one of the strongest markers of what a place has to offer in terms of quality of life. Every single interviewee from the study area within T has mentioned at the top of the list of reasons for liking the place or for enjoying living there

the 'green factor'. What makes the place unique is the proximity of a large park - it is the one thing none of the other block neighbourhoods in Bucharest has, in the opinion of the T residents.

This place has an advantage over all other neighbourhoods – the T park, one of the largest in Bucharest. You know, a trip there is almost like...a little holiday. I know, other areas have their parks too, but they cannot compare with ours, which has a lake, boats, an island... (T5, f31)

A further factor that contributes to the image of the study neighbourhood in T is the *social aspect*: by comparison with other areas, the study area is portrayed as a 'good', 'quiet' area, meaning sheltered from violent social problems which plague many of the surrounding neighbourhoods (gangs, children and youth over whom the family has lost control, drug addicts, domestic violence, serious fights and discord between neighbours, poverty and squalor). The study area appears as an oasis of relative prosperity and tranquillity in a larger area made up of contrasting neighbourhoods – some affluent and others impoverished and dangerous (the so-called ghettos).

In the ghettos...the police don't go, it's very poor, unemployed people, families with children, and the kids and youngsters are into drugs. Discarded syringes everywhere... it's truly dangerous. I didn't believe such a place exists near where I live, but I've seen them myself. (T6, f30)

Throughout accounts, the respondents from the study area employ discursive techniques to delimitate and separate it from the impoverished ones, which, although just across the boulevard, belong to a 'different world' that the interviewed residents do not come in contact with. Some of these contrasting surrounding neighbourhoods are portrayed as 'problem areas', unsafe, where one does not venture in the evening, others are just 'poor workers' blocks', inhabited by more destitute families, that display the signs of poverty (the hallways are poorly maintained, the walls are covered in obscene inscriptions, the lighting is dim, the lift is not working because the residents cannot afford the repair costs, etc.). This process of symbolically delimiting one's neighbourhood from the surrounding 'different' ones is to be understood in terms of the issue of identity in relation to place.

The study area within DT

DT as well is an ‘old’ block area, built in the 1960s. One aspect that sets DT apart from T is the fact that it is perceived as being more homogenous, and therefore the distinctiveness of the neighbourhoods within it is somehow less marked: there are no ghetto-areas in DT to provide a major contrast, and therefore the individuality of neighbourhoods does not come across as strongly.

The study area is portrayed as a ‘good quality’ block neighbourhood, with large, airy flats and green spaces. The location is important, as desirability of a place is assessed in terms of access to the town centre⁵, which puts this neighbourhood in DT in an advantageous position compared to more ‘peripheral’ block areas. The physical features of the place are valorised, in a manner similar to the other study neighbourhoods. DT is seen as having unique, special qualities that set it apart in the landscape of Bucharest and place it in an elite position among block areas.

In contrast to the neighbourhood in T, DT enjoys a more glamorous image: the local residents struggle to impose a representation that, beyond good quality accommodation, encompasses lifestyle-enhancing traits. Apart from the greenery and the local park, DT has the benefit of the (recently privatised) swimming pool, good restaurants, tennis grounds, sports hall, and lots of bars. This permits a ‘better’ lifestyle, compared to other places, and an intense local social life – this particular aspect was put forward by the younger respondents, most of them young professionals.

I go out a lot. I eat out a lot, without spending that much money. Because the local restaurants offer great quality stuff, and the waitress knows us, and... I just enjoy going with my wife after a particularly tough day at work. (DT6, m28)

Everything I need is here. The tennis courts are good, the bars cater for all types of pockets: it’s not like in most block neighbourhoods where they only have cheap, nasty drinking places. You find in DT top of the range stuff, and less expensive as well. I’m not ashamed to come here for after-work drinks with my office mates. (DT21, m34)

⁵ Most of the shopping and leisure centres are located in the town centre, as well as most administrative or bureaucratic institutions, and the majority of white-collar jobs.

How often? I do go out everyday. To meet friends. We just get a beer, and spend time together in some open air bar, or if it's cold, in one of the local drinking places. (DT23, f30)

The existence of a 'neighbourhood social life' was emphasised as a unique feature:

My friends in T don't have any place like that to get together, they do it in people's houses, which is not great, because you just want to go out sometimes, to feel you're in a different place. And sometimes they just take the subway to go centre-town, which is time consuming and expensive... I'm really glad I live here. It's a great place. (DT24, f34)

For other residents, other place-specific aspects took priority, such as the shops, the open market or the medical centres.

What I appreciate about this area is the quality of products in the open market – they do not rip you off like in the town centre, pensioners can have a more decent, healthy diet here than in other parts of the town, and the fact that the clinic is close by, and the doctors very competent, and they have state of the art machinery and all... (DT3, f76)

In general, the good quality of life in DT is ensured by spacious, good quality flats in blocks that are not crammed together, but also by facilities and a thriving 'use' of what the place has to offer in terms of entertainment and leisure.

Residents constantly highlight the excellent quality of the local services and facilities, and the fact that they do not depend on the town centre for shopping, healthcare, socialising. This represents a way of positing DT as a self-sufficient area, a move which aims at erasing the 'dependency' or subaltern status of block areas in relation to the town centre.

The use of 'local history' as a means of associating the area with significant periods of the past is a technique that both DT and T respondents deploy. Both study neighbourhoods were erected in the 1960s. By locating their area with the late 1960s, respondents make a connection with a part of the communist past when lifestyles were more pleasurable, the quality of life higher compared to later times, a period of progress and hope. DT especially, at the time, constituted an exemplary marrying of rational planning and quality.

Historical time is used to separate the DT and T study neighbourhoods from other newer block areas, which are associated with the more recent communist period, when living standards deteriorated and shortages plagued everyday life, and the dream of a better life was replaced by despair at being run by a ruthless dictator.

This selective articulation of the built form with historical circumstances or intervals plays into the representation of the study neighbourhoods.

Constructing the profile of the local resident in the T and DT study areas

The ‘quality’ of the residents is central to locally produced representations of the study neighbourhood in T. The inhabitants are generally seen as respectable families and of a certain material status: most poor families have been squeezed out, because of the impossibility to pay their share of the maintenance bills (generally they have sold their flat and moved out of the study neighbourhood). The lack of ‘datornici’ is one of the clearest indicators of the status of a residential area:

When I bought the flat, first thing I went in the block hallway to check the list of residents⁶ - and they didn’t have any ‘datornici’. It’s a good block, everyone can pay, so that’s one worry less for me. (T3, m34)

We had some problems with a couple of families who couldn’t afford the maintenance. In the end, they were evicted, it went very fast, poor things...if they would reinforce the legislation with this speed in other areas, this country would get out of crisis much faster. Now it’s only good families left. (T16, f61)

Residents define themselves as coping financially, with many families above the average income.

The neighbours? Not very rich, not very poor either. We do not have high state dignitaries among us, but we do not have very poor families either. (T21, f60)

There are some poorer families, and some well-off professionals as well, the type that buy expensive cars and all. (T14, m66)

The presence of young professionals (preferably working for foreign companies) is a symbolic resource that is used to raise the profile of the area and of the local resident.

⁶ The list is displayed in the block entrance hall, with the names of all residents and their status regarding the payment of various block bills.

This category of residents buy flats in the area, refurbish them and contribute to all block expenses without accumulating arrears. The fact that well-off people choose to buy flats in the area reflects on the image of the place.

The guy that moved upstairs paid in cash, 30.000 Euros. It's a two bedroom flat, and he refurbished it to high standards. And he's not an exception. Many people with money have bought flats here. (T2, f31)

Areas such as the study neighbourhood in T are considered an acceptable residence for young professionals; the first step in one's residential trajectory that accompanies material success is moving out of the parents' house and acquiring a flat – in a decent block neighbourhood (flats in old residential areas tend to be very expensive, beyond the means of young professionals; besides they are too big usually, more suitable as family homes). Only later on, as their income increases, and they have a family, children, they are expected in the general normative context to move in a bigger, 'proper' house, which at the time of conducting interviews included big block apartments, but mostly newly built villas, or flats in new developments in the suburbs of Bucharest.

In the meantime, the material status of this category of young professionals becomes a resource in creating valorising representations of the place, despite them being a minority among T residents.

While there are many intellectuals and professionals living in T blocks, they tend to work in the less lucrative state sector, and they are invoked less as a symbol of quality and prestige (which was the case in the C neighbourhood), and more as just nice, decent folks. At the same time, the same signifier of 'decent', 'respectable' applies to working class residents.

The neighbours are decent people. All categories, from waiters to engineers. But there isn't much difference here between us – the professor upstairs earns as much as my son, who is a mechanic. We discuss together in the evenings in front of the block about all sorts of things, politics especially. (T22, m56)

I've never made a fuss about me being an engineer and my neighbours just workers. No, what matters is being a decent person, a good neighbour. (T14, m66)

What sort of people live here? Well, all sorts, more and less educated, but most are respectful people, that you can depend on, helpful, and they take good care of the flat. (T4, f43)

The image of the resident in the study area within T coalesces under 'respectable and decent people' signifier, and her/his main qualities are defined in terms of how they contribute to a pleasant lifestyle in the block. This contribution has a wide range of meanings, which include, among others, being helpful and polite, taking good care of the property, paying the block bill in time, lack of arrogance, chatting to the others, and respect of privacy.

The accent in all accounts is placed on the importance of living in relative harmony: the respondents in the T study area took pride in the fact that neighbours were (usually) reasonable enough to reach the necessary compromises, and there was enough common ground among residents for a shared understanding to emerge; the fact that they tended to broadly agree on ways of doing things allowed for the cohabitation to be pleasant or at least less stressful.

Representations of 'the DT resident', or 'what sort of people live here' that emanate from the study area within DT focus around the signifiers 'elite people' and 'good mix of people'. On the one hand, many well-off people continue to live in the area, along with respected academics, politicians, doctors, lawyers, etc. The fact that respectable, successful professionals and business-people choose to live here and consider the neighbourhood a suitable place for their position is a strongly valorising feature, which grounds a prestigious collective image. A few ministers and highly placed officials come from this DT area. On the other hand, although the study neighbourhood contained a high proportion of intellectuals and professionals, the composition in terms of occupation is rather mixed, and includes skilled manual and clerical; this characteristic is often described as 'a good mix of people'.

Again, the residents' qualities that make DT a good place to live in and that are built into representations of the place are material and professional status, and, equally important, 'decency' and respect. Like the study area in T, DT is seen as 'good to live in' because 'quiet', meaning lacking social problems and major conflicts - due to the type of people living there. There are almost no mentions of 'datornici' in the DT study area, indicating a higher material standard on average than in the T neighbourhood.

DT is perceived more as an elite neighbourhood in the landscape of Bucharest block areas, with more ‘educated’ people than in T.

The local moral order

Neighbourly relations expose both a harmonious side of the local interaction, and also divergences between visions on how to do things, or what the appropriate behaviour is. The blocks make visible the clash of norms that govern people’s daily practices, and more generally life goals, and the criteria employed to evaluate people’s position and behaviours.

The norms regarding neighbourliness in both T and DT oscillate between help and non-interference. Both types of interaction are placed in a moral context, therefore the characterisation of local relations can always be related to the larger normative background that dominant discourses set out.

Some respondents draw out traits of the ‘block life’ that reaffirm the dominant individualistic ethos, with its emphasis on autonomy and self-interest.

I think there are advantages to living in a block. If the block is ‘clean’, without ‘datornici’, of course. You can be totally independent. All the problems get sorted for you by the block administrator, so you don’t have to worry about the roof leaking... it’s their problem. (T18, f27)

Well, they say in the block you have to talk to everyone, but really that is a matter of choice. If you want, you can stop and make friends with the neighbours, tell them how your day was, all that. But if you don’t, a ‘hello’ will do, and a firm hint you’re not into small talk, if they are too nosy. (DT12, f36)

In this rendering, autonomy and freedom are possible within block arrangements, and so is the control of boundaries and the choice with whom to interact.

The flat is my territory, and I’ve always made it very clear to the rest of the neighbours. We don’t chat in my flat, but outside. (DT17, m26)

You know, I come from a detached house. So I was a bit wary about moving in this flat [after getting married]. I thought I would have to fend off nosy neighbours, but it’s not that at all, everyone is reserved, so you can choose whether you want to push the relationship towards friendship or not. I have a couple of very close friends by now, but that’s it. The rest are not my type. (T5, f31)

Sometimes, respondents stress the regulated (as opposed to informal) relationships that prevail in their block, the lack of neighbourly interference, as a positive trait, more in line with a 'civilised' type of interaction, and with the dominant societal norms.

No, it's not informal, on the contrary, everything is very polite and planned. Block meetings are scheduled in advance, and agreed upon, and otherwise people don't chit chat, or ask for things from neighbours, unless of course they happen to be really good friends. (DT4, f42)

This rejection of informality is usually accompanied by a refutation of the norm of mutual help and reciprocity – the latter is associated with the danger of interdependence, or 'too close' relations.

I don't know, I wouldn't borrow and... this type of things. It is a slippery slope, you get dragged into relationships, and then expectations are built. It's better to keep this type of relations for the family and close friends. (DT20, f31)

I don't ask for help from neighbours. Only from family, I don't want to enter too close relations with the neighbours...because then they will ask for things... (DT29, m33)

The moral position that comes through in these interviews and that is enacted in the local system of relationships shows a reluctance to establish relations that can be associated with interference, mutual involvement and help, and an endorsement of norms of individualism. It also indicates the tendency towards a privatised lifestyle, and reluctance to enter reciprocal relations outside the narrow circle of the family and a few trusted friends.

At the same time, a divergent normative position is fleshed out in the DT and T interviews, based on the valorisation of interdependence, of close contact and informality of neighbourly relationships. This approach is advocated on the basis of its advantages – grouped under the signifiers of 'pleasant' or 'useful'.

It's nice to count on people, it makes your life easier. (T21, f60)

I don't mind close relationships, I've had close relationships with these people for so many years now, and that's what got me through some tough times. (T10, f48)

My husband spends lots of time chatting with the neighbours, it's part of the pleasant atmosphere of the neighbourhood, all these friendships. They are like family by now. (T13, f62)

Having good relations is very important, having people to ask little favours from, the neighbours are there for you if need arise, rather than the family. (DT27, m32)

These informal neighbourly relations, including reciprocal help and exchanges, are articulated with advantages that a privatised strategy would not yield, and with normative stances on 'the good person' in this society – sometimes in direct contrast with the self-centred, individualistic perspective of the dominant discourses.

I don't know how I would cope alone, I mean living in a detached house or something, without all these people nearby. I am a single woman, and these neighbours are all my help and comfort. I invest in the relationship, my door is open for help and I count on them to do the same. I don't earn much, and here I'm able to get things done by neighbours: from repairing the washing machine, to shifting the furniture around when I painted the walls. And so many other things... (DT7, f39)

I don't agree with this thing, that everyone seems to be into nowadays...it's not normal to retire in your flat the moment you come back from work and to refuse to acknowledge that you live among people. No, a good word here and there is more appropriate, if you think of yourself as a decent person. (DT13, f64)

A prominent way of portraying neighbourly relationships in the DT and T areas associates them with warmth, meaningful interaction, and personalised contact (as opposed to impersonal, contractual relationships). For many respondents the block and neighbourhood become a support structure that enhances the quality of life through the rewarding dimension of human interaction.

I am attached to these people, of course, we've been living in the block for more than 30 years now. We know each other's grandchildren, and talk about our families when we meet...People care about these things. (T14, m66)

I'm spending most evenings in the summer on the bench at the entrance of the block, and talk to people about us, about life, and about where this country is heading to. It's better than TV, we can argue and throw in a joke. (DT14, m38)

I'm spending most of the day at the office, and when I come back it's refreshing to be able to exchange some words with these people. They are kind and ask me about my day and also ask for advice on various matters. I'm happy to help if I can, because they do care about me, it's...different, not like my workmates. (DT16, f25)

As for norms at area level rather than in one's block, they seem to be diluted in T, while ostensible articulations are present in DT. In both areas DT and T norms were described both in a positive manner – what they consist of – and in negative one – by contrast with the norms in other areas, especially similar 'block neighbourhoods' of 'inferior' standing: in this way norms of acceptable standards of behaviour are created through opposition.

The local norms that play into the construction of the study area in T as a particular type of place (and which are inextricably related to facets of personal identity) concern a 'decent' type of behaviour – meaning a degree of politeness, care for the environment (littering is frowned upon) and lack of aggressive shouting and domestic disputes. The latter are the characteristic of lower-standing neighbourhoods, the ones that foster stark deprivation, high delinquency, drugs problem, and therefore inappropriate for a 'decent' neighbourhood, like the study-area.

In the DT area, place-based norms in relation to social interaction include respect towards the neighbours, respect of privacy, but also openness and helpfulness, and a general attitude of trust – respondents trust the good intentions of most residents (the place is perceived as very safe); and the fact that they can get help in emergencies from anyone in the street. This helpfulness norm applies beyond the circle of close neighbours and is considered part of a 'civilised' behaviour. Other norms refer to conduct in public spaces (littering is usually sanctioned by remarks from the passing-by residents; making noise, shouting, swearing in public is disapproved of). Most importantly, 'showing off', meaning an attitude of superiority, because of one's material status, is discouraged. This is one of the most striking norms in the DT study area among young residents, and it is a strong symbolic resource in the attempt to negotiate subject positions in a predominantly materialistic normative environment.

People cannot come here and show off with their car or mobile, like they do in other neighbourhoods. We would just laugh at them. (DT28, f31)

The show-off type of new rich don't come here, at the local restaurants or bars. Or if they are new rich living here, they keep a low profile, maybe they go to show off in the centre town and throw money at the waitress, but here they are just decent. (DT24, f31)

We just don't care about one's money. What I like about DT is that you can stay at a bar with a beer for hours and you are treated with respect, you don't have to spend like mad. (DT22, m31)

Young adult DT residents in the study area work hard at discrediting the image of social success and worth as revolving around money and expensive items. They oppose this representation by re-defining value and worth around other features than material status and conspicuous consumption: being a good friend (including reciprocity, openness, trustworthiness), and having a 'decent' attitude take pre-eminence. The signifier 'decency' is here defined in opposition to the show-off attitude: it means lack of posing, bragging and flaunting expensive items.

I have a strong group of friends to count on, and moreover, I can count on their friends that I don't even know, that's how it works. If I need something, I have a lot of friends in the neighbourhood that will jump at my rescue. Even the ones with money are decent, they help if they can, and don't do all that posturing and flashing cars and credit cards stuff. (DT23, f30)

Identity and the local interactional order

A different level of identity negotiation by accessing a 'role' in the local system of relations is illustrated in block neighbourhoods – to a larger extent than the C area. Due to the specific arrangements in blocks there are 'roles' that need fulfilling, some formal and others informal. The formal roles are linked to the block administration, but apart from that there are duties and positions that some residents assume.

For example, coming up with proposals and initiatives about how to improve the block, what to do about the green spaces, the parking space, petitioning the local authorities and keeping an eye on the children at play are 'roles' – or subject positions in the local system of social relations - that diverse people can take up and invest in. The 'roles' one plays in the place of residence sometimes allow one to feel useful and needed, or to develop a sense of power. Through being skilled at negotiating and influencing outcomes or obtaining better services for the block (like choosing the cheapest cable company for example), certain residents will derive a sense of identity and self-worth from the processes that take place at block level.

The block itself is a local hierarchical system of relations – a respectable position in this block system represents a subject position that can interact with other positions that a person occupies.

In this way, some residents find locally-provided positions that will interfere with (and possibly dislocate to various extents) other subject positions in the societal context. This resource seems particularly useful for retired residents – as mentioned in a previous chapter, it is difficult to attach valorising connotations to the position of retiree in the current normative landscape dominated by an individualistic-materialistic outlook, where occupation (as a source of income and prestige) is an indicator of social worth. Older, retired people tend to be marginalised and devalued by this set of dominant articulations, but they can find a ‘niche’ for a more valorised subject position in the place of residence, in the local system of relations. Being able to show their competence at organising and managing block-related problems, and feeling useful and respected, is a way of mitigating the undesirable position societal discourses carve out for them.

The case studies below illustrate the claims regarding the ‘local roles’ block residents can take and that are involved in the negotiation of identity.

DT10, female, 51 years old – the block administrator

Ms M. is a block administrator in the DT study area. She is 51 years old, single with no children and had been made redundant two years earlier from a clerical job. She had tried to find other jobs, unsuccessfully, then accepted the position of block administrator.

When I was made redundant, I thought I’ll get another job soon, but it became clear that no-one would hire a middle aged woman. I was finished. I panicked a bit, and I was talking to my neighbours, and one said: ‘why don’t you take up the administrator position? It will be available soon’ and I said ‘but I know nothing about the block and suppliers and all that’. But... I did accept it. The block is full of young people with good jobs, so they don’t have any time, no-one was interested in becoming the administrator, so I thought I’ll do it! It’s a source of income, very little, but then I don’t spend much. The rest of the money comes from renting out a room in my flat to a student. Anyway, I had to learn everything! Look at me, at 50 I had to learn about plumbing, some accountancy,

about how to deal with the suppliers... you should see me dealing with them, I'm better than a lawyer! I save people lots of money because I know about plumbing and appliances, and I fix theirs, they would otherwise pay loads, but they can choose to give me a little – not money necessarily, some prefer to give me a nice bottle of wine, it's up to them, I don't ask, but people always feel indebted and want to offer something. Of course, if they are pensioners I'm doing it for free, I don't accept any offerings. And now I'm indispensable, that's what they say. Other blocks have problems with administrators that run off with all the residents' money for bills, lots of money, imagine hundreds of families, the money for a few month's heating, water, all that. It's happening a lot! While my neighbours know that they can trust me, I am completely honest.

I do a lot of things apart from the administrator tasks. I do the shopping for four of my ill, elderly neighbours. They don't have any family, and depend on me for their food. I really keep an eye on them, in case they need a doctor. And other things...I care about this block, so I always try to motivate people to do a bit of work on the green space of the block...

T12, male, 63 years old – the 'block pacifier'

Mr G is a retired person, living in the T study area, with his wife. He details here his skills at appeasing conflicts in his block.

I am retired now, I used to be a physical education teacher. I trained so many kids in the neighbourhood... I was in charge of the basketball team, and put a lot of effort into it. Nowadays I walk in the neighbourhood and meet them, and their families, and we always stop for a talk... because I'm this type of person, always open to listening to the other and offering advice. That's why in the block everyone calls me when there is a conflict: I am the one they turn to. I know how to negotiate with people and calm them down and make them reason. I never lose my temper and they respect me, therefore I can do it. So many cases of neighbourly conflict... some neighbours that were not even talking to each other anymore – I sorted them out, most of them, and created a nicer atmosphere in the block for everyone. It's a talent maybe that I have, but I also care about these people and I want us to live in a civilised environment.

DT12, female, 36 years old – the 'block nurse'

Mrs S is a 36 years old paediatric nurse, working in a Bucharest hospital.

At first I was annoyed, I remember, when people were knocking on my door for all sorts of problems and emergencies. But I've got used now, and it's part of

what I do in the block. Of course, I'm not happy when they wake me up in the middle of the night because the kid has a fever, but then I realise that they cannot do without my help. Ok, they can call for an ambulance, and it's gonna take 3 hours for it to arrive. So in the meantime they go mad with panic, and they come to me. I'm doing it because these are nice, well-behaved people. And they show respect for what I'm doing. In the hospital is different, you know, doctors treat us like... no respect. We do all the dirty jobs, and they take the under the table payments. From poor people, they don't have any problems with that, I would be ashamed to take money from a poor family with a sick child. But doctors don't care, and of course they wouldn't give us nurses anything. Do you know how much I earn? It's shameful. ...

When a neighbour calls 'Mrs Doctor, could you please give a shot to the kid, so that we don't have to take the bus to the clinic' – I do it.

These cases are just a few examples of the multitude of 'local roles' block residents sometimes take up: most of my respondents in these areas talked about some type of local responsibilities or activities performed in the neighbourhood.

The respondents above have found meaningful activities in the place of residence, that amount to subject positions in the local system of relations. The block administrator, apart from managing the block, has taken supplementary responsibilities in supporting her elderly neighbours; in this way she had found a niche, an alternative meaningful activity, that is recognised as valuable by the community she lives in, and that acts as a form of compensation for the loss of a position on the job market (and ensuing loss of status).

The block 'pacifier', called when conflicts get out of control, takes pride in his ability to play a significant part in the local context, one based on the respect he enjoys among residents and on his 'talent' – a talent that goes unnoticed in other contexts. As for the 'block nurse', she occupies as well an important position in the local web of relations. Her worth as a medically trained person is clearly acknowledged by the neighbours – who call her 'doctor' - and her locally earned respect has a great value in the context of being looked down on and being underpaid at her workplace, the hospital.

The place can offer resources for self-esteem and identity building that the larger society and an individual's (materially determined) position deny, through roles that are meaningful locally, in the block or street system of relations and local moral order.

Conclusion

Block residents use categorisation and the production of difference in similar ways to C residents in creating the identity of their area. They use the built form and the history of the place to create positive, valuable representations, that are supplemented by the image of the 'typical resident' and of the norms that guide practices in the place.

The normative structure of an area is part of the symbolic construction of place. While in DT it was possible to identify from the narratives of the place respondents offered some overarching shared normative ideas about 'how we do things here' and 'what sort of place this is' in terms of the prevalent values and norms, in T area-level norms seem to aggregate with more difficulty. As mentioned above, in the T area norms seem to have trouble in being extended and reinforced by residents beyond a small, circumscribed area - discussions on norms and values are restricted to the block. In DT, as opposed to T, respondents talk of a strong 'spirit of the place' and of their contribution to maintaining this 'spirit' (friendliness, openness, lack of posing and pretentiousness).

Therefore DT offers a stronger basis for identity negotiation (through belonging to a place-based collective identity) than T. One of the forms of collective identity based in DT is the 'young DT resident' which asserts the values of friendship and cooperation, mutual help and trust, the tendency to oblige when asked for help (as exemplified by my requests for finding more respondents) and a strong rejection of the 'show-off' attitude, meaning conspicuous display of material status. The practice of mocking and derision of behaviours associated with the financial elite helps young residents in various material situations (except the very wealthy) to ground a positive self-image that will be supported by the local residents and peers, in the context of massive societal pressures for measuring worth in terms of money and material status (the dominant articulations). The place-based moral order is a valuable resource for some residents to articulate alternative valorised aspects of their selves.

Also, the combination of perceived quality of the environment and of the residents engenders sentiments of pride and satisfaction with the place that is more visible in DT than in T – which indicates an enhanced role for DT as an alternative resource for identity-work.

The level of the block as a local context is also relevant for identity-work. Residents occupy symbolic positions in this setting, and they have the possibility to invest in these positions and to attach responsibilities to them and gain recognition for them. The local standing is a resource that is often used to mitigate a less worthy position in the workplace (or the lack of such a position, as in the case of retired residents). The block context can valorise skills that are just ordinary in the workplace: the skills of a nurse, or of an accountant that neighbours consult for their own problems, become highly valued expertise.

At the same time, in many situations respondents posit the world of the workplace as divorced from the place of residence – there are limits to the importing of workplace status in the neighbourhood context, where what matters is an income that allows the payment of the communal bill, and being a ‘good’ or decent neighbour. This approach makes for an egalitarian ethos, as far as the occupation of the neighbours is concerned; as norms of neighbourliness focus on good will and decency in all study-areas, the status of a person in the workplace is less relevant in relation to this norm - therefore the place of residence can act, to a certain extent, as an equaliser of status.

This analysis has highlighted the ways in which place of residence – or rather constructions of it that respondents create in a valorising effort – act as resources in negotiating identity, and has dwelled less on issues of exclusion and isolation among residents. Nevertheless, the latter are present and the ones affected by exclusion have unfortunately not been given a voice in this chapter (due to the nature of the sample and access issues).

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION: PLACE AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE SOCIAL; PLACE AND IDENTITY WORK

The analysis chapters 5 to 10 have used concepts of place as a structuring metaphor, and this chapter brings together different aspects of the generic relations between ‘place’ and ‘discourses’.

In the first part I will present some of the implications of the positioning of Eastern Europe in relation to the West on the production of knowledge, in both locations. On the one hand, at present the Romanian social space is being produced through processes that are firmly linked to the above mentioned hierarchical positioning. On the other hand, the local struggle over meaning has the potential to affect the ways aspects of the social are conceptualised in the West. Both facets of the relationship between the West and Eastern Europe are addressed, and the related issue of the (relational) identity of these places is examined. A final section of the first part of this chapter concerns the responsibility of knowledge producers, through the lens of developments in Eastern European countries.

The second part of the chapter examines a different aspect of the relation between the discursive and place (as place of residence), by bringing together insights from the analysis of the C, DT and T study areas. The chapter highlights in a comparative manner how place of residence plays into identity work in the context of dominant discourses and their subject positions. Notions of agency (in a discursive understanding of the social) will be discussed, in the light of research findings.

The West - Eastern Europe relation

This thesis attempts an exploration of the relationships between two locations, the West and Eastern Europe, at the level of discourse (and implicitly knowledge) circulation, of

exchange and mutual influences in terms of concepts, worldviews and cultural models. This section will draw out some of the possible outcomes and implications of this relation, while acknowledging that the field of articulations through which the West and Eastern Europe are constructed in relation to each other is structured by the nodal point of 'backwardness'.

The post-communist developments are a relevant field of investigation of the discursive relation between the West and Eastern Europe; they can potentially have an input in the debates on a range of topics, from the nature of capitalism and modernity, to forms of solidarity or individualisation in contemporary societies. These developments can be interpreted and used in various ways in theoretical and policy contexts, with diverse outcomes – hence the importance of the way they are represented.

The issue of circulation of knowledge and theories has been a matter of interest for various social thinkers. Said for example, according to Carter et al (1993, pxv), was “concerned with the locatedness and mobility of theory. He wandered ‘whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation’”.

This resonates with Foucault’s view on how discursive formations are incorporated in various contexts (which can refer to different ‘spaces’), leading to adjustments: “taken up again, placed, and interpreted in a new constellation, a given discursive formation may reveal new possibilities...; what we are dealing with is a modification in the principle of exclusion and the principle of possibility of choices; a modification that is due to an insertion in a new discursive constellation” (Foucault 2002, p75).

In the same vein, it can be said that articulations that are taken for granted in certain environments can be dislocated by the ‘surplus of meaning’ that other contexts bring – and this is particularly relevant in the relationships between the West and Eastern Europe, with the latter providing a distinct ‘context’.

The travelling or exchange of knowledge, concepts, theories and practices (of discourses in short) between the spaces of the West and Eastern Europe¹ is conditioned by a particular positioning of these spaces, effected through a discourse of backwardness. This discourse, produced both in the West and through local contributions, has been presented in chapter 6. The representations it creates, the practices it engenders have a significant impact on the particular form social change took after 1989 in Eastern Europe, and on the ways this change has been interpreted or framed at the level of theoretical insights. The backwardness discourse can be seen as an oppressive representational practice, as it rests on power relations that give unequal voice to the actors involved, and establishes hierarchical epistemic relationships between these actors engaged in the struggle over signification and meaning.

I will present below the impact of this discursive regime on a few levels: the production of the social in Eastern Europe after 1989, the ways the post-communist experience is interpreted, and the fixing of the identity of the West. The notion of responsibility of social scientists in producing knowledge will be also addressed through the lens of the backwardness discourse.

The production of the social in Eastern Europe

The production of the social in Romania and Eastern Europe has been driven by a societal project of ‘catching up with the West’, or ‘return to Europe’, which cannot be disentangled from the type of knowledge and understandings the backwardness discourse has created, as argued in chapter 6. Power operations, deployed through culture, “secure the authority to define the future” (Giroux 2004, p151-152); the hegemonic discourse of backwardness constrains the ways social actors imagine and act, therefore contributing to the shaping the social, including long-term societal projects.

Social change in Romania (and Eastern Europe) is taking place through the working of discourses that re-order the social and regulate the creation of knowledge and that are inseparable from socio-cultural and economic models associated with the West. It

¹ The West and Eastern Europe are themselves produced as distinct ‘places’ through the workings of discourses.

can be argued that social transformation is driven through different strategies, that range from a direct implementation of theories and policies devised in the West (such as the EU conditions for accession, or the World Bank and IMF reform programmes), to concepts and representations diffused by the media (films, documentaries, etc.). But at the same time the production of the social in Romania is not the result of a unidirectional travelling of theory and cultural models, but rather depends on the interaction between these models and the local context. The nature of this 'interaction' will be addressed in this chapter.

The positioning of Eastern Europe and the West defined through the backwardness discourse has had a clear impact on the 'social reconstruction' projects that all these countries have adopted, and which both at the level of governmental bodies and formal institutions, and at the level of everyday life projects (identity-forging) have taken the form of becoming Western-like. Local actors have employed in this process their own understandings and representations of the West (which Westerners might find inadequate or caricatural).

The *dominant societal articulations* in the form of materialistic and individualistic discourses, that have been documented throughout Eastern Europe, are correlated with the local social actors' outlook on social change (which, as mentioned, often means becoming western-like). It can be said that, as far as the discursive struggle is concerned, the field of signification is dominated by a materialistic, self-centred stance on life (contained in the new hegemonic articulations). This dominant articulation has a central role in forging *identities* (subject positions), and also in establishing the ways through which social actors can show their belonging to a certain position – mainly through *consumption patterns*. As the positions in the dominant discourse tend to be assigned along a material status criterion, consumption of certain socially sanctioned items (status symbols) is supposed to reflect this material condition.

The Western cultural models adopted (and adapted) in Romania have provided templates for how to fashion identity, such as the model of the professional, of the politician, of the private entrepreneur or businessperson, etc. Consumption patterns as well are heavily drawing on various (locally produced) images of the West, that in their turn are linked to the output of the media, from fashion and lifestyle magazines, to TV news, talk-shows and movies. The high status consumption items involved in reinforcing

identities tend to be ‘Western’ and their effect is assumed to make their owner more like a Westerner. The model of social success takes the West as its referent, and invests various products seen as quintessentially ‘Western’ with a special significance.

This materialistic outlook that is characteristic of the post-communist social landscape is joined by a reaffirmation of individualism (chapter 8). In discussing the case of Slovenia, Ule (2004, p162) emphasises the individualist stance as part of a neo-liberal ethos: “[p]ost-socialism also brought with it a resurgence of neo-liberal thinking with respect to the role of the market, which emphasises individual initiative, trust in oneself, and a strong sense of personal responsibility for one’s own life. The changing characteristic of transition processes also inevitably induces changes in the structure of private and family life”.

These new discourses have consequences for the *social strategies* that individuals adopt, such as forms of solidarity or privatisation of life. At the level of interpersonal relations, market relations made possible by the new arrangements have largely replaced other ties of reciprocity (like the *blat* in Romania): while the latter are frequently rejected through an association with communism (although they are still part of daily practices, as shown in chapter 10), the former have gained legitimacy. Authors have pointed to the trend towards an individualisation and privatisation of life in Eastern Europe: “life options remain highly structured and collectively determined, but people perceive these as individual options and seek solutions to them in private and isolated ways” (Ule 2004, p163) – public opinion surveys indicate an implosion towards privacy and the family, and many interviews testify a tendency to retreat from more solidaristic, or communal ways of acting.

The impact of these articulations can also be gauged in the changing forms of social cohesion and division – new lines of separation have been created, with new ‘us’ and new ‘them’, with a prominent dividing line along material criteria. ‘The rich’ and ‘the poor’ are such social groups demarcated by systems of categorisation; the workings of discourses have also created awareness around one’s position, by compelling people to identify themselves as belonging to such categories.

It can be said that the project of ‘catching up with the West’ has had an important impact on solidarities in Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the organisation of the social

space by a certain type of discourses (that are associated with the West) has led to the social divisions along material criteria described above. On the other hand, some of the consequences of Eastern European countries (including Romania) trying to become more Western and 'prove' their belonging to Europe have materialised as discriminatory practices. In Romania, for example, the resentment and discrimination towards the Roma minority has been couched in terms of 'their' role in slowing down the country's integration in European structures. Baltic countries have rushed to implement laws on foreign nationals and assert their fundamental difference from the Asiatic Russians (Bonnett 2004, p57) showing the eagerness to be part of 'Europe'. It seems that the dream of Europe (or of the West) has stimulated in Eastern European countries the need to find new ways of 'othering', which have engendered social exclusion and oppressive, discriminatory practices.

New articulations or discursive practices create new social divisions, social formations, but also 'potential sites of resistance' (Giroux 2004, p155). As discussed in chapters 7 and 8, the local actors have resisted and questioned the meaning and desirability of concepts like freedom, democracy and the free market, the prominence conferred to money and material status as valid base for social hierarchisation. This is a form of resistance to the dominant articulations that represents one type of local voice which engages with the West and the types of societal organisation (including system of values) the latter fosters. As Chakrabarty (2000, p16) put it, this voice can renew European thought "from and for the margins". The next section assesses the prospect of local voices or local social arrangements to have an input into the ways the social is thought.

The subversive potential of the 'local'; modes of framing the Eastern European experience and their implications

"[c]onflicts have a particular configuration that arises historically from the development of competing epistemic alignments and from the specific respects in which they come into conflict. Such conflict, however, spurs further investigations, articulations, and technical refinements. Conflict thus becomes the

locus for the continuing development and reorganization of knowledge.” (Rouse 1994, p110).

The quote above summarises the process of knowledge production through conflict between competing systems of articulations. In many respects, the West and Eastern Europe can be seen as sites where divergent discourses have been produced – this is evident in the distinct forms of social organisation associated to these sites, capitalism and communism respectively. The post-communist condition represents the aftermath of the confrontation between these divergent articulations, with the adoption of ‘Western’ forms which has prompted a reworking of the local established practices, modes of thought and ways of being. It is also a location for investigating the way knowledge is being reorganised.

The analysis chapters 7 and 8 have detailed a type of processes of further articulation and attribution of meaning to the signifiers of social change, as they emerge from people’s reflections on everyday life and their attempts to theorise the events surrounding them. This ‘diversion of meaning’ produced through local articulations can be seen as a form of resistance, in the sense that it impedes the fixing of meaning that other articulations (which are relatively established in the West) endeavour. Bhabha (1994, p2) has highlighted the transformatory potential of ‘peripheral’ spaces: “[t]he borderline engagements of cultural difference...may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress”.

The difficulties that the discourse of liberal democracy, for example, has in hegemonising the social space in Romania contains a subversive potential: they highlight the contingency of certain concepts (resisting a representation of democracy or the free market as ‘normal’, natural outcomes, due to laws of evolution), and the operations of power that are involved in its articulation. The local counter-hegemonic efforts have the potential to exoticise the West and its production of social reality, or its socio-cultural products, and to challenge its universalist claims. Local forms of knowledge, in other words, could ‘provincialise Europe’ (Chakrabarty 2000). The Eastern European experience has the potential to amount to a form of social critique through the de-naturalisation of concepts and practices that go relatively unquestioned in the West (such

as market and democracy); it could supply a vocabulary of critique of capitalism and democracy, by signifying “from the periphery of authorized power and privilege” (Bhabha 1994, p2).

Therefore when looking at local processes of meaning-making one has to try to evaluate their impact in destabilising other articulations – do these processes amount to an obstacle to Western forms of fixing of knowledge, or do they engender a modification or refinement of various paradigms and theories?

As mentioned above, the destabilising of meaning takes place through the situated use of concepts or meanings (that claim an universal status), and their contextual articulation in novel forms that ‘confound definitions’ (e.g. ‘democracy’ articulated with ‘freedom to do whatever one wants’), and through a more direct engagement with the way meaning is fixed in certain articulations (e.g. ‘capitalism as a worthy or superior type of economic arrangement because it brings material prosperity’ is countered with ‘capitalism means misery and it is not a superior or good form of organisation’)².

Social actors employ in everyday practices concepts and statements from a variety of discourses, in a strategic manner; “statements... are institutionalized, received, used, re-used, combined together” becoming “instruments for desire or interest, elements for a strategy” (Foucault 2002, p129).

These forms of appropriation of discourse tend to introduce and mix meanings – concepts are ‘adapted’ to fit individual social strategies, and they are modified from one context to another. The appropriation of symbols and their use in a modified form leads to the idea of subversive use: the initial meaning is altered and dislocated. Discourses originating in the West are variously appropriated, re-used and modified (as illustrated in chapter 7, that has detailed the overflowing with meaning of signifiers such as democracy, individualism or the free market), which, in a parallel with Butler’s parodic repetition or repetition with a difference³, can amount to a subversion of the dominant system of signification. This might mean that, if these local, “alternative domains of cultural intelligibility” (Butler 1990b, p145) are allowed to enter the space of the West,

² This type of direct challenge aimed at opposing (dominant) configurations of meaning tends to be produced by the ‘losers’ of social transformation, the most powerless social actors, rather than by the local elites.

³ For Butler (1990b), it refers to gender identity.

they might subvert the concepts, understandings and hierarchies created within the clusters of dominant discourses of modernity and capitalism.

The outcome of these destabilising interpretations though is linked to the backwardness discourse. The latter places firmly in a subaltern position alternative practices and knowledges, making it easy for them to be marginalised and discarded systematically. By defining them as 'inadequate', it de-legitimises them and weakens their potential to challenge dominant Western conceptualisations. At the moment these alternative claims do not seem to threaten the ways concepts and theories are produced and used in the West. In short, there are oppressive representational practices at work, underpinned by clear power relations, that constitute the background against which the fate of alternative representations is influenced or even decided. As Bhabha noted, "the culturally privileged Western elite... produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation" (1994, p20-21).

This discourse of the other creates understandings that encourage the dismissal (as 'inadequate') of anything that does not conform to approved types of knowledge. Another strategy social actors and knowledge-producers in the West tend to apply is to deflect the potential local critique of certain types of socio-economic arrangements by stating that the critique is actually applicable to the hybrid or distorted forms these arrangements have taken 'elsewhere' (including Eastern Europe), rather than to the forms of social organisation per se (meaning ideal-types, which tend to overlap with Western settings). For example, the critique of 'democracy' my respondents mounted by articulating it with corruption can be (and is) deflected by countless studies on the 'corrupt' nature of Eastern European societies, including the political structures. The implications of such studies are a portrayal of democracy in Eastern Europe as flawed – due to local circumstances that have altered 'typical' forms of democracy. In this way, Western forms of democracy are abstracted from their conditions of existence and reified as ideal-types, while local (Eastern European) democracy becomes a distorted version that can be legitimately critiqued on the basis of its divergence from the model – 'normal' functioning democracies in the West. The 'model' thus goes unquestioned: the implication of these strategies is a silencing of 'dissident' local voices, which cannot threaten the 'validity' and legitimacy of Western theoretical constructs, practices, etc.

This issue is part of a deeper question concerning the status of forms of social organisation, and more generally practices that have been developing in Eastern Europe – how are they conceptualised and represented?

The example above has exposed one way of framing phenomena (i.e. democracy), that is influenced by the backwardness regime of representation. This mode of framing can be applied to the whole range of Eastern European post-communist experiences, with the result of defining them as flawed versions (of some established model), or hybrids - an inevitable outcome of this particular regime of representation. This type of representation is for example embedded in the concept of ‘transition’, that has been liberally and largely unquestioningly used to think about and act on Eastern Europe. The ‘transition’ assumes some known end-point (in the form of ideal-type democracy and free market) in relation to which society has to be moulded, and that local ‘variations’ detract from.

The ways what happens in Eastern Europe in terms of social transformations is interpreted feeds into processes of knowledge production that are part of the relationship between the West and Eastern Europe, and that forge their relational identity.

Processes or sets of practices like ‘capitalism’, ‘free market’, ‘democracy’, ‘civil society’, ‘modernity’, etc. are frequently categorised according to ideal-types that have been established by an elaboration of the forms they have taken in the West. The contingency of these practices in the West is erased in the process, and they emerge as disembedded concepts, models or blueprints that, because of the very process of their formation, cannot accommodate concepts and objects constituted outside their scope. When they clash with the ‘local’, the effect is an ‘adaptation’ or modification of the models, and it can be represented in normative terms.

For example, the discussions in the literature around ‘capitalism’ in post-communist Eastern Europe bear the marks of this mode of approaching the local developments. While there is routine recognition that the West itself fosters a range of

capitalisms', the crux of the debates is to pin down the nature of Eastern European capitalism – which is ultimately done by implicit or explicit comparison to an ideal type⁴.

Representations of Eastern European forms of social (and economic, political) organisation as 'flawed' or problematic are prominent in the post-communist studies literature. Another type of representation of these local forms is subsumed by the signifier 'hybrid'; while it does not straightforwardly portray the local forms as 'defective', it is not without problems, because it can be seen as implying pure models, or authentic, genuine, in a word 'essential' forms (both on the side of the West and of Eastern European societies), that through interaction produce the 'hybrid'.

To sum up, most of the concepts used to describe and understand Eastern European realities are exclusionary through their constitution: they have been elaborated from specific circumstances in the West, therefore have limited 'covering power' (despite their pretensions to universality) and cannot account for phenomena outside the circumstances they are developed from.

To these types of representations I oppose one based on the relational creation of identities: following Laclau (1990), the identity of an object, a concept, or a practice is produced in relation to its context, therefore it is not adequate to try to grasp the identity of aspects of the social outside the contexts in which they emerge. The consequence of this approach that sees the identity of social phenomena as inseparable from the links through which it is formed, from the context in which it arises, is that these social phenomena ought to be studied in their own right, rather than assessed by a normative comparison to 'models'. For example, concepts such as 'democracy' or 'meritocracy' take form through the efforts to fix the meaning of signifiers – through practices of articulation (e.g. 'democracy as freedom to do what one wants'). Rather than defining the meanings they are filled with as 'wrong' ('democracy is *not* freedom for everyone to do what they want'), analyses should investigate the processes through which 'democracy' as a concept and a set of practices gains shape.

At the moment though, the dominant trend is not to assess post-communist phenomena in their own right, as the product of relations that include the West and the

⁴E.g., Ray (1997, p556) talks about unregulated capitalism, clientelism, informality in the case of post-communist societies, which can be seen as implicitly treating Western forms of capitalism as more rational and formal.

local, but as 'variations' of the model. This has for effect a reinforcing of the positioning of the West and Eastern Europe, which also shapes their identities.

Reinforcing the identity of the West

The backwardness discourse and the ways social change in Eastern Europe is framed reflect on the identity of the West. As it has been asserted above, identities are relational, therefore the identity of the West is inseparable from representations of Eastern Europe.

The fall of communism, followed by the swift strategy of 'catching up with the West', has fuelled self-understandings of the West that focus on notions of superiority, and a sense of confidence ('we were doing the right thing all along, now everyone else wants to be like us'). The 'end of history' debate points in the same direction: there are no alternatives left to liberal capitalism, with which the West is firmly associated. The backwardness discourse on Eastern Europe is strongly valorising the West (a 'model' to be emulated) and legitimises its approaches and choices.

Local descriptions of the 'natural' and desirable path for future evolution (social reconstruction projects) include notions of democracy and free market, therefore positing the West (the repository of these forms) as an ideal and a model and implicitly reinforcing the backwardness discourse. The European cultural and social model is looked up to by a range of thinkers (generally the ones that were marginalized under communism or dissidents). While the cultural-intellectual elites yearn after the European cultural model, the economic elites tend to put forward the north-American model of social and economic organisation as something that the society should strive for, and this implies a necessary change in local mentalities and ways of doing things (largely inadequate and responsible for the slow economic progress) along American models. In short, the local representations of the elites are very much in line with the discourse of the West on post-communist societies.

Representations produced by the 'backwardness' and 'catching up' discourses, embodied in courses of action, have outlined the identity of the West and Eastern Europe, their missions and trajectories. I will just give the example of the EU (a Western entity),

whose identity is constantly reshaped through internal struggle, but also by using representations of Eastern Europe – especially since the issue of eastward enlargement became a prominent one. By setting up the legal and economic criteria that candidate countries must satisfy in order to obtain EU membership ('the Copenhagen criteria'), the member countries have indirectly defined core features of the EU and have pointed to what the Eastern European countries lack or must alter in order to be integrated (articulating a variant of the 'catching up' discourse). The enlargement of 2004 was preceded by debates over the dangers and advantages of integrating Eastern European countries. On the one hand, the financial and political cohesion of the European Union appeared under threat: "differences in political institutions and cultural mentalities challenge the political coherence and cultural convergence of the European Union... the Eastern enlargement considerably strengthens the centrifugal and potentially fragmenting forces within an extended European governance regime" (Triandafyllidou and Spohn 2003, p7). On the other hand, the enlargement "strengthens the legitimacy of the European Union as a political project that promoted democracy and Western liberalism" (Triandafyllidou and Spohn 2003, p7). This assessment of the situation tends to emphasise the coherence of the EU project and homogeneity of political culture before enlargement, glossing over internal conflicts, power games and very different visions of social, economic and political organisation - Eastern Europe is the 'Other' against which a presumed unity of Western Europe can be constructed (in this case, via the EU). The enlargement also prompted articulations of the EU with democracy, economic globalisation and security. The rhetorics behind the Eastern enlargement included "the extension of democracy and human rights, enhancing economic progress, becoming a world actor, taking responsibility for European security" (Hutchinson 2003, p49). The debates around the enlargement issue have prompted a refining of the identity of the EU as an 'actor' among other world actors, with specific traits and a 'mission'.

The 2004 enlargement has not dismantled the backwardness representations of Eastern Europe: the integration has not transformed the new ten members into equal partners, but has perpetuated understandings of these countries as somehow 'deficient' in relation to the core countries and not yet deserving full membership rights. The 'catching up' metaphor is still alive; moreover, there is a tendency to use the EU enlargement as a

scapegoat in relation to “the sense of insecurity and social discontent, largely stemming from high unemployment” (Rehn 2005) the member states are facing.

Definitions of the West emanate both from Western agencies and from local actors. To give just a few examples, The IMF and World Bank articulate ‘the West’ within a neoliberal logic and with the discourse of globalisation. The NATO introduces a slightly different meaning of the West in the context of security, threat and geopolitical configurations that depend on the creation of meaningful ‘others’ – another way of dividing and ordering the world through attribution of significance. And, most importantly at the moment of doing the present research, the EU institutional structure conveys to the accession countries what it means to be European (which is a more specific case of being Western) by specifying a list of criteria these countries must complete in order to become a member – literally what it takes to be European in the EU understanding. In this way powerful articulations that establish what it means to be Western that are communicated to the Romanian elites (and not only) through the multiple agents that try to reshape Eastern Europe – their official positions and documents, their policy recommendations, the expert advice and ‘assistance’ or transfer of expertise programmes, direct meetings at different levels, etc.

The situation in Romania mirrors that in other Eastern European countries, and Russia; commenting on the position of the new leaders of Russia, Bonnett (2004, p59) comments: “The attributes of modernity are approached in a similar way to that found in most other countries, as facets of the seemingly natural and entwined processes of privatisation, democratization, and, increasingly, economic flexibility” – modernity and the West are again conflated”.

The other facet of the process through which the identity of the West as norm and signifier of ‘proper’ socio-economic arrangements is reinforced, is the impact on the identities of eastern European citizens and their sense of loss of pride and positive identity. The opening up of borders after 1990, under the circumstances of an abandoning of communism and readiness to ‘return to Europe’, and the popular discourses and policy moves that followed, had for effect making very visible the ‘inferior’ status of these people in relation to westerners, a humiliating situation from which official propaganda (and daily life under communism) had hitherto shielded them. What is under-estimated in

analyses of the region is the amount of resentment and humiliation fostered among post-communist citizens, and which was evident during my fieldwork, mainly among those who have not fared too well in the new capitalist order.

The responsibility of social scientists as producers of knowledge/representations

The process of reform of Eastern European countries is often directed from behind beneficent facades, draped under the respectability and legitimacy shroud provided by 'objective assessment' and scientific knowledge (such as the one behind economic imperatives and ineluctable laws) that define 'the only possible way' or the best way to effect social change. The regimes of truth and knowledge of these institutions, the operations of power, domination and self-serving policies under the façade of neutrality and objective reasoning should be addressed, together with the implications of their intervention on populations.

The points made above raise important questions around the implications of certain regimes of representation – and the responsibility of the ones involved in their production. These issues have been thoroughly addressed by post-colonial theory (that has for example shown how ways of representing the Other cannot be separated from colonial projects and their more sinister ramifications in the form of wars, slavery, genocide, famine, etc.). "Regimes of representation can be analysed as places of encounter where identities are constructed and also where violence is originated, symbolized, and managed" (Escobar 1995, p1).

This might seem unrelated to the situation of Eastern European countries, until one attempts to assess the impact of some policies forcefully implemented throughout the 'transition' period: statistics in the region highlight the reduction of life expectancy for some countries, the worsening of health indicators, increased infant mortality, etc. (Cockerman 1997). Gowan (1995) points to the tens of thousands of lives cut short by Western policies towards the East, especially the 'shock therapy' and structural adjustments (involving massive unemployment combined with a drastic reduction of welfare programmes) while questioning the inevitability of this course of action. By using the image of 'inevitable social costs', of the necessity for sacrifice in the name of

future prosperity, the transition discourse legitimised the stunting of concrete human lives and pre-empted a deep questioning of the validity of its underpinning conceptualisations.

The role and responsibility of social scientists in relation to developments in Eastern Europe should come under scrutiny. When the ‘shock therapy’ and other ‘recipes’ for improving economic indicators and bringing about ‘freedom’ were followed by a rapid slump in living standards and economic output, most explanations produced by social scientists focused on the ‘cultural legacy’, or ‘missing link’ that interfered with the proposed reforms: the local realities were blamed for the malfunctioning of strategies designed for ideal typical situations, rather than questioning the assumptions and theoretical models that these strategies embodied. In short, the way social scientists have described and explained the tribulations of the ‘transition’ period, using elements and understandings from the backwardness discourse, has legitimised practices and explained failures of Western-driven reforms. This exercise has constantly reinforced the positioning of the West and Eastern Europe as the norm versus the defective copy, plagued by inherited ‘inadequacies’ that prevent it from being truly Western (i.e. democratic and capitalist). The debates on the best economic arrangements (shock therapy vs gradual reform) and on the creation of democratic forms of government (democracy as ‘form’- procedures and technicalities, as opposed to ‘substance’ - value-orientations, practices, etc.), that have animated the intellectual and policy circles in the West and Eastern Europe, constantly reinforce the meanings of the ‘backwardness’ and ‘catching up’ discourses and produce stable articulations.

Place and identity-work

The second part of the analysis (chapters 9 and 10) has examined the ways place of residence is involved in the reorganisation of the social and of identities, through creating boundaries and difference. As discussed, the context for this examination is a widespread process of re-drawing symbolic boundaries between aspects of the social and between people/groups, of cultural redefinition. “Symbolic boundaries separate realms, creating

the contexts in which meaningful thought and action can take place” (Wuthnow et al 1984, p260).

The analysis of identity-work performed in relation to the place of residence is an illustration of how discourses are interwoven in people’s articulatory practices and how they intersect in constructs of ‘place’. It also exposes the flexibility, and contextual nature of these constructs, their strategic alignment in relation to the dominant articulations that order the social.

The study has drawn out the ways place of residence is ‘used’ by respondents in the study areas as an ingredient in their identity-work: place as symbolic construct (including physical traits and built environment, history, residents and local moral order) grounds identity claims through various practices of articulation; also, place as a niche of activity, performance and recognition in a local system of relations is entwined with one’s identity.

The residents of C (the old detached house neighbourhood) rely on a few major articulations as technique for producing the identity of their place of residence (which plays into their own identity). They create the block areas as an oppositional ‘other’, and articulate blocks with a variety of features. In this way, the identity of C emerges as the opposed of those features.

The master-signifier that they attach to blocks is ‘communism’, and the meanings invested in this signifier are diverse, such as: sameness, ugliness, lack of individuality, blurred status of private property, social control, communalism and sharing, levelling of social hierarchies and uncivilised, poor residents. All these traits gain negative connotations, mainly through their association to ‘communism’, as the latter is strongly rejected by the dominant discourses.

This technique also allows the residents to position features of their neighbourhood in a favourable light, by bringing them in line with the general normative prescriptions endorsed by hegemonic discourses (which are largely constructed as anticommunist): traits such as individuality or uniqueness, social interaction as ‘civilised’ (meaning usually not of the *blat*-type) are valorised in the new, accepted system of values. A powerful articulation performed by C residents puts together private property, defended boundaries around it, privacy, choice, control and independence or autonomy –

all the above have emerged as the 'new values' in the post-communist landscape, in a move of rejection of what was perceived as the essence of communism. Mirroring Merry's (1987, p57) observation "[p]rivacy is one measure of power in American society", C residents constantly assert their power to defend privacy and boundaries, and to control social interaction, by separating themselves from social strata of different status – an emplacing of social polarisation.

Another articulation through which representations of C in contrast with blocks were created consists of the natural-artificial divide, which relies on an essential notion of human nature: the appropriate or 'natural' environment for human dwelling, but also the 'natural' social divisions and their spatial materialisation. Blocks are artificial both because of their physical traits, and because they contain a 'mix' of categories. As C residents put it, what common interests and reasons for communicating can those socially different categories of people possibly have? The only things that bring those residents together are matters concerning the common management of the 'block' and this is an artificial link, not a 'natural' one, arisen from similarity of background, interest and outlook on life. The 'block' through its design and functioning is seen as 'forcing' people to cooperate and interact.

A different line of identity-work of C long term residents regards the 'new rich' buying property in C at an increased pace. "Everywhere, people own objects so deeply imbued with their identities that they make every effort to keep these symbolically vital assets to themselves, out of circulation, resisting all attempts by outsiders to acquire them" (Harrison 1999, p240). In the case of C residents, their own houses are such symbolic assets that identity largely rests on, and there is the threat of them being purchased by rich newcomers.

As the newcomers impose their definition of value and worth (in line with the material criterion of the dominant discourse), they threaten the aspect of the local moral order (and identities) that values educational level, family history or lineage, continuity of residence in the neighbourhood, and 'respectable professions' rather than income itself. The influx of 'newcomers' produces a restructuring of the collective identity of the 'old guard', as different reactions emerge. Two main strategies seem to be employed by 'old guard' residents. On the one hand, the new rich are denied legitimate belonging to the

place, they ‘do not deserve to live here’ – and representation of the place are constructed in order to exclude them (as they are built around a certain type of lifestyle and taste, educational status, tradition, continuity and length of residence, certain norms and values, non-conspicuous consumption, etc). On the other hand, residents use the prosperous image of the newcomers to boost the profile of the area, and include them in an all-encompassing local collective image of ‘privileged people’, that they access for forging personal identities. This latter strategy dissolves the division between the ‘new rich’ and ‘the old guard’ under a generic image of ‘good quality’, ‘privileged’ people and tends to be used when the reference group or audience is formed of non-residents (while the former strategy tends to be used ‘internally’, among old guard residents).

The residents of block neighbourhoods followed similar techniques of representing their place in a valorising way, relying though on different aspects – good quality of buildings and ‘decent’ residents. They tend to invest more in the ‘meaningful’ aspect of local social interaction and in their position in the local system of relations.

Although from the outside the neighbourhood might seem similar architecturally to other block areas, since blocks have been built according to similar specifications throughout Bucharest, the inhabitants stress differences that give their neighbourhood a distinct image in the landscape of Bucharest. Uniqueness is actively constructed and transmitted through descriptions and stories. Details become imbued with meaning, landmarks are set, boundaries drawn and streets and blocks are given ‘personality’ and described by their specific traits. This serves to counter-attack the image of sameness and lack of distinction projected on blocks – and the potential implications of this image on identity-building.

As a Romanian saying goes, ‘It is the people that make a place’ and this saying is used frequently in block areas to ‘compensate’ for the shortcomings of the built environment: the residents themselves makes the place special, and constructions of the place insist on the pleasant, useful and meaningful neighbourly relations they are part of. In what concerns social interaction, the ‘block’ is very flexibly articulated as allowing for both intense interaction and privacy. This discursive malleability means that block arrangements can be valorised both by respondents that adopt a more communalistic stance, and by the ones that support an individualistic worldview.

An important aspect of the representation of the place, as a dominant image of 'what sort of place this is', is encountered in the DT study area, where (mainly younger) residents organise their local practices around a certain image or understanding of the place as 'down to earth', 'friendly and open', and 'not tolerating flashy display of material status'. This means that, within their place of residence, they can access valorised subject positions (decent person, good friend, trusted neighbour) that are divorced from their material status – a resource for positive identity for less well-off residents.

As mentioned in chapter 10, respondents in block areas have to perform identity-work in relation of place of residence under the conditions of an existing powerful discourse on blocks, with negative undertones. The intellectual and media discourses portray the 'block' as problem-ridden, and tend to associate it with communism (the intellectual discourse) and with poverty (the media discourse). Based on my fieldwork in two major block areas in Bucharest, the positive representations of their place of residence that local respondents create are very powerful. They usually ignore the intellectual discourse, and when faced with the media discourse, they strongly contest and challenge it, by bringing counter-evidence (examples of rich and famous people that live in blocs) and emphasise the good quality of local relations (even if there are problems, the emotional fulfilment is central), the quality of local services, etc. Another technique of deflecting the negative media representations is to symbolically distance themselves from 'really poor' areas, which become an inferior 'other'.

To sum up, representations of place are relevant to identity insofar as respondents carry out associations between themselves and their place of residence (for example through narratives of belonging), or more straightforwardly, as they create subject positions ('the typical local resident').

The central technique for identity negotiation or identity work is the establishing of differences and boundaries, a process facilitated by 'place'. "Identity is relational and collective... Identity...is always connected to a series of differences that help it be what it is. The initial tendency is to describe the differences on which you depend in a way that gives privilege or priority to you" (Connolly 1991, pxiv). This tendency is illustrated by the symbolic construction of 'place' through articulatory practices - describing, naming,

qualifying and explaining features of the place, always in value-laden, normative terms, is a process intimately intertwined with the construction of identity; by 'choosing' certain aspects to describe the place (thus representing place), one performs a process of self-definition. Articulatory practices allow the production of identity by the symbolic association between place and oneself: "locales are imbued with personal and social meanings, and...symbolic locales can serve in turn as an important sign or locus of the self" (Hummon 1992, p258).

Place as context and resource for identity-work embraces a variety of guises: through processes of place construction, subject positions are created (in the form of the meaning of being a resident of that place), which again can be used to negotiate against other subject positions; personal roles or identities emerge situationally, in the context of relations with neighbours, which can be used to mitigate a stronger subject position; the place of residence can act as a social circle that provides recognition and supports certain facets of one's identity.

Place construction is involved in the creation of difference and boundaries, which are central to the construction of any identity. "Resources are expended in creating and maintaining them and many social activities may be understood as efforts to sharpen eroded boundaries, to redefine cultural distinctions, or as symptoms of ambiguous frameworks" (Wuthnow et al 1984, p261).

Ultimately, place of residence can be a site where the dominant discourse can be "drawn upon and re-invested with meaning to mobilize a counter-hegemonic claim" (Bach 1993, p196).

Some respondents use place in order to negotiate identity more than others. The ones that are unsuccessful socially (by the dominant criteria) tend to bring in place as a resource more often. For other respondents it is a marginal resource – for example young professionals (under 25-30 years old) invest much more in the workplace as locus of identity, they are formed as subjects predominantly in the context of the workplace and by the discourses that shape the job market. Dominant discourses shape understandings of social success and create a grid of 'indicators' through which achievement is assessed. According to this grid it is more important for young people to get a well paid job, to lead a certain life (eating out, drinking in expensive bars, expensive holidays) and acquire

status symbols such as an expensive foreign car – the house or flat and its location become relevant later on in their life course. For more established, older professionals, place of residence becomes a very important indicator of attainment, as it is part of the expectations around their social status: the dominant materialistic discourse, with its accent on material possessions and consumption, defines social success for a certain age group as including not only a well-paid job, but also a good quality house in a prestigious neighbourhood.

In summary, for different socio-economic and age groups, place matters in variable degrees. Place of residence is very important for the identity work of retired respondents, that have been cut off from other discursive contexts, with their particular resources, such as the workplace. It is also a considerable resource for respondents with an average or below average material situation. This category usually has resided in one place for a lengthy period of time, and upward residential mobility is out of the question. These respondents devote a lot of narrative effort to the construction of the neighbourhood as a ‘good, decent, desirable place’; not only that place is seen as intertwined with one’s image, one’s life trajectory, and with significant, meaningful events throughout one’s life – therefore with different aspects of one’s identity, but also one is tied to that place in the future as well, therefore the place will continue to be enmeshed with the subject positions a person occupies.

The nature of identity; forms of and limits to agency in identity-work

The analysis also contributes to the debate on the nature of identity. It has shown how the production of difference is essential to identity, and it supports the claim that identities are not essential, but strategic and positional – constructed across discourses that sometimes can be contradictory: this is why identities are heterogeneous, and can accommodate contradictory ideas, practices, and statements. Persons enter different relations, different contexts in which they perform their identity, meaning they access different subject positions. The ‘fractured self’ is a result of the proliferation of discourses and modes of thinking and being a person is immersed into.

This is not to say that subject positions all have an equal ‘weight’ – the existence of dominant or hegemonic discourses means that some potential subject positions are eliminated altogether, and others are made more difficult to access, or they are out of reach. The power of dominant discourses consists in locking individuals into subject positions, in making their navigation across positions more difficult. A perfect locking is never fully achieved though, because of the impossibility of total closure, as detailed in chapter 2.

The question that arises at this point refers to the extent to which individuals can ‘unlock’ themselves from strong subject positions, and under what circumstances – in other words, what are the limitations and conditions of possibility for the exercising of agency through identity-work?

As asserted throughout this thesis, the reconfiguration of the social in Romania after 1989 is driven by discourses which establish new criteria for social worth and new subject positions, new lines of division, especially between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ - rich and poor respectively. This means that individuals are assigned to socially recognised positions that try to fix their identity. Under these circumstances, for some social actors identity-work involves identification – and this tends to be the case of the ‘winners’, who through their practices attempt to attach themselves to the subject position they are assigned to; for others though – and they form the majority – identity-work involves trying to negotiate across the gradations of subject positions in various discourses, with the goal of accessing more valorised positions.

Identity-work is a crucial issue for a large part of the population. What pours forth in interviews is resentment over the less ‘advantageous’ positions people have been allocated to. In contemporary Romania, a widespread narrative of injustice and humiliation testifies the deep frustration and rancour many individuals feel towards the new social arrangements and the rejection (or devaluation) of identities they have been tied to (while also pointing to the tear in the social fabric). As Honneth (2001, p39) puts it, “in the self-description of those who see themselves as having been wrongly treated by others, the moral categories that play a dominant role are those – such as ‘insult’ or ‘humiliation’ – that refer to forms of disrespect, that is, to the denial of recognition. Negative concepts of this kind are used to designate behaviour that represents an

injustice...because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively". For this category of people, it is essential to be able to perform some form of negotiation across subject positions.

In addressing the nature of the practices of identity-work, the analysis is engaging with the sociological debates on the possibilities and forms of agency within a discursive understanding of the social, as presented in chapter 2. It is evident that the dominant articulations can not close identities, suture perfectly the subject: there are possibilities left for the social actor to negotiate across positions by using discourses in a situated manner, as exemplified by the analysis of the study-areas C, DT and T. Through the articulatory practices they carry out, many of the respondents that were positioned in less advantageous positions (the retired, the not-so-rich, etc.) have managed – to different degrees – to access more valorised positions, for example by producing representations of their place of residence that are positively sanctioned by the dominant or hegemonic discourses, combined with identification with place. The other form of identity-work discussed, which refers to taking up 'roles' in the local system of relations, can also be seen as an expression of agency – which is context-dependent.

The empirical investigation makes also evident the limitations of agency in the form of identity-work using place of residence. The difficulties of creating a valorised identity position for the ones assigned to less prestigious locations by the dominant discourse can be mitigated only to a certain extent by manoeuvres of moral positioning; the pain and frustration coming from the denial of recognition of certain identity aspects features as a major theme throughout interviews.

The analysis has made visible the central role of 'resources' in negotiating identity. Certain features of the place become 'resources' only if social actors are able to place them in discursive contexts where they are recognised as 'valuable' or 'positive' traits. If social actors do not have access to a dominant (or even alternative) system of values in which to place successfully features of their area, it is impossible to create any valorising representations. In this way, the 'freedom' to use place of residence is constricted by the discursive contexts in which social actors operate.

A related aspect of the limits of agency is the performance aspect of identity in the local moral and interactional order: "the question of identity...becomes inseparable

from the discrete, socially-situated events within which the performative struggle occurs” (Freeman 2001, p290). This occupying of subject positions in the local setting is dependent on recognition from the local ‘audience’. In this way, there are limits on the use of local, situated performances for identity-work; their reception by the audience is critical, as the audience can validate and support or sanction, reject and refuse to uphold certain identities put forward by the actor.

The general claim that these findings support refers to the context-bound nature of identity-work (more general discursive contexts and local moral and interactional orders, including the ‘audience’) – which is translated as a clear limit of agency. Tactics and forms of identity negotiation often cannot be transferred from one context to another, a sign of the limitations of identity-work performed by social actors trying to improve their positioning.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has used the analysis of fieldwork material from Bucharest, Romania in order to critically engage with theoretical debates in a number of fields. Concepts of ‘discourse’ and place’ have been interwoven throughout the analysis, in various guises.

This research has used notions of discourse, power and subjectivity, and has been informed by the various conceptualisations of agency presented in chapter 2 – an approach that integrates the enabling *and* constricting nature of discourses, their productive character (in creating the normative and conceptual parameters for understanding aspects of the social world and in creating subjectivities) with a range of methods, strategies, tactics employed by actors and groups that inevitably enter and ‘use’ discourses as they go about their daily activities.

“Discourses provide persons with coherent interpretive frameworks and discursive practices for constructing different social realities within which particular kinds of people reside, relationships prevail, and opportunities are likely to emerge... The discourses are conditions of possibility that provide us with the resources for constructing a limited array of social realities, and make other possibilities less available to us” (Miller and Fox 2004, p42-43). It follows that efforts of interpreting social processes and of self-creation always take place in discursive practical contexts, not outside them. Different social agents are differently positioned in relation to access and possibilities to shape discourses.

The negotiation of identity takes place within contexts shaped by discourses, including the hierarchies of relations that constitute subjectivities. ‘Agency’ does not mean operating outside discourses; social actors can be seen as being located at an intersection of discourses and ideas of agency imply the possibility of a degree of choice among them or negotiation across them; “each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (de Certeau 1984, pXI), which renders problematic a deterministic notion of complete domination through (a dominant) discourse and permits an exploration of this space of

· freedom or agency at the intersection of discourses, or the ‘room for manoeuvring’ actors have.

‘Place’ is featuring prominently in the present analysis, from the notion of space or location as intertwined with representation and implicated in knowledge production, to the social space of Romania and the processes through which it gains the present shape, and to place as locus of identity or resource for identity formation.

Issues of knowledge production as power- and value- laden have been highlighted through the example of the West as privileged producer of knowledge, and Eastern Europe as the object of knowledge and representation. A discursive approach has been proposed in order to grasp the nature of the hierarchical relationship between these two locations: their positioning is effected through a discourse of backwardness of Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the West, which has been detailed in chapter 6.

The same processes of knowledge production that positions Eastern Europe as backward and the West as an ideal to strive for, a blueprint for social transformation in post-communist societies, has partly fixed the identity of Eastern Europe and of the West (including the shaping of subjectivities in relation to place). Representations within knowledge production processes are inseparable from the production of the social (by production of the social I mean the working of discourses that construct the concepts, objects and identities forming the social – and it includes practices and institutions as sets of practices). This is why the production of the social in post-communist Romania has to be understood in the context of these discursively created larger positionings in relation to the West.

Chapter 5 puts forward an understanding of the post-communist condition as characterised by social dislocation and highlights the ‘loss of meaning’ confronting these societies, as systems of signification associated with the communist order have disappeared. The analysis captures the project of reconstitution of society (and economy, polity) in the form of a mythical space destined to suture the generalised dislocation. The particular form that this mythical space has taken, it has been asserted, can be understood in the context of the positioning mentioned above: the meanings invested in the West by dominant articulations has resulted in Eastern European social actors adopting a ‘return to Europe’ or ‘need to catch up with the West’ societal slogan (as a mythical space) – a

process detailed in chapter 6. The structuring of the 'social space' of Romanian society was examined by looking at the mythical space suturing the dislocation after the fall of the communist regime, and its consequences in terms of enabling further articulations (which are producing the social). To sum up, the West has a heavy impact on the constitution of societal meaning systems in Eastern Europe, a situation that reflects the power relations associated with representation and knowledge production, with articulatory practices that constitute meanings and identities in the field of the social.

Chapter 7 examines the subsequent process of investing with a literal content the signifiers of the mythical space (e.g. democracy and free market, the nodal points around which societal projects are forged). It looks at another level of production of the social, represented by a less formalised process of discursive production and articulations in which ordinary people engage while going about their daily business. In the sites of everyday life, discourses and practices intersect in an unregulated way, as social actors use (discursively produced) concepts and objects in a situational, strategic manner; they also bring their contribution to the widespread re-articulation through which the social is produced: they create and take up, circulate, comment on representations of the social – as Jager (2001) puts it, 'knit along' in the production of discourses. This production of the social 'from below', through struggle over the meanings of the main signifiers of the dominant discourse of 'catching up' shows how people place concepts and objects in systems of relations and contribute to the shaping of their identity – through techniques such as comparison with the past and contextualisation. Chapter 7 emphasises the element of struggle over the ways in which meanings get fixed, and highlights some of the difficulties in fixing the meanings of signifiers such as democracy, freedom, capitalism and market, meritocracy or work under capitalism.

Across social actors' accounts the deployment of some large-scale articulations was detected: the production of the social condenses into hegemonic articulations (and associated subject positions) and resistance ones, as discussed in chapter 8, that orient actors' understandings of the social world and of themselves. These hegemonic articulations claim what Mumby (1993, p2) calls "a monopoly over the rules for what counts as legitimate knowledge" and have the power to marginalise "social groups who have been largely disenfranchised in terms of their ability to shape our understanding of

the world”. It has been asserted that intense processes of re-stratification are rife in post-communist societies: the production of the social through the adoption of practices associated with ‘capitalism’ and the free market and of values and norms shaped by dominant discourses has resulted in the creation of new lines of division, new positions characterised by both different resources and different symbolic meanings. The main development in post-communist Romania in terms of production of the social has been the ‘polarisation’ of society (through the workings of the free market) and the embracing of an individualistic, materialistic, consumerist stance – as evident in the fieldwork material. People have been assigned to different positions and they acutely feel the ways in which they are being ‘pulled apart’.

The comment of Baudrillard (1994, p29) rings true throughout Eastern Europe: “Perhaps defrosted liberty is not so attractive as all that. And what if it turned out to be intent in just one thing: bartering itself off in a binge of cars and electrical goods, not to mention mind-bending drugs and pornography; that is, immediately trading itself off against Western liquid assets”.

One of the main impacts of social dislocation and social change have been on local identities: new discourses have rooted out old subject positions and rendered self-understandings obsolete; new articulations have created new subject positions, have attached them valiative undertones and have interwoven them into the new societal moral order. A very strong criterion for creating subject positions, that seems to supersede in importance other lines of stratification, refers to material status. It is around this signifier that most identity-work is performed, and chapters 9 and 10 have used another dimension of ‘place’ in order to investigate the ways that place of residence is used by social actors to negotiate identity – in relation to the aforementioned subject positions allocated through the dominant discourses in Romanian society. Place of residence has emerged as a relevant and flexible resource that social actors can use, with different degrees of success, in order to mitigate dominant positions.

The analysis chapters have detailed various forms of identity work. Through subjectivation, people are given subject positions in discourses from which they can speak meaningfully; also, they are active in taking on these positions and making themselves into subjects (techniques of the self). Alternatively, they are involved in the

negotiation of positions through strategies of redefining identity (which emerge at the intersection of a multitude of discourses), in the context of a dominant background discourse structuring social hierarchies (with clear criteria for designating winners and losers): social actors draw on alternative discourses to contest and de-legitimise the dominant one (an attempt to play discourses against each other that entails moral positioning); they 'highlight' other positions in other discourses that might compensate for the position in the dominant one; they also perform acts of disidentification, recognising the position assigned within discourses and rejecting it. Most of these strategies are dependent on the (significant) others' acceptance of one's 'performance': some identities are not sustainable in any locales, but are circumscribed to specific ones. The local social system of relations that areas of residence displays can represent an environment where certain forms of identity-work are supported – while the 'outside' does not provide such a 'benevolent' audience.

To sum up, the analysis has shown some of the ways social actors 'manoeuvre' among discourses, or the way they 'negotiate', 'subvert' them and the subject positions they are assigned within them.

The discussion chapter (chapter 11) raises the issue of production of the social in post-communist societies as struggle over meaning and the missed opportunity of local forms of knowledge to challenge modes of thought, conceptualisation of the social, to 'de-naturalise' the established articulations through which the West makes sense of the world. The chapter highlights the problematic way in which these articulations are imposed as universals (disembedded from specific conditions of existence) on other 'locations', through operations of power – and some of the consequences of this situation. The voice of some Romanian social actors (the ones that challenge the 'goodness' of Western forms of social, economic and political organisation) could have acted as 'petits recits' (Lyotard 1984) challenging dominant systems of knowledge, destabilising metanarratives (e.g. capitalism and development), but the power of the West to dismiss and silence such voices cannot be overlooked.

In the process the identity of the West as normative model is reinforced and Eastern Europe is further tied to its marginal, 'flawed carbon copy' position, a recipient of knowledge, rather than an actor with 'voice'.

Limitations of the data

This analysis was mainly based on fieldwork performed over a total period of 6 months in Bucharest, Romania, that involved interviews with 78 respondents and various forms of observation. The interviews have been supplemented with forms of fieldwork (resulting in extensive fieldnotes) that have tried to capture more general processes – discourses and articulations – as a form of control of the validity of inferences from my sample. Interviews have been interpreted so as to reveal the intersections of the social, cultural, personal and political.

The sample, as mentioned in chapter 4, contains predominantly respondents that are coping financially, therefore one of the dimensions missing in this research is the voice of the truly destitute and marginalised. Also, in the sample middle-aged and older respondents are over-represented (in comparison to their statistical societal distribution), but for the purposes of this research I consider this not to be a flaw: as the analysis has tried to capture how social change has affected identities, this category of respondents are a valuable source of information - they are the ones deepest affected by the discursive shift, and the ensuing societal reorganisation. Moreover, as identity in relation to place of residence was investigated, older residents that are retired, or middle aged respondents that have lost their job or experience an unstable position on the job market tend to provide more relevant data: place of residence is a resource for identity negotiation and a locus of symbolic investment to an extent that is not matched by the younger respondents, who tend to tie their identity to the workplace.

Finally, this analysis is a snapshot of the situation in 2002-2003 in Romania, and does not cover further developments. But this limitation of the claims in relation to what the analysis has captured is in line with an understanding of the social in flux, continuously reshaped through hegemonic struggles – what one can seize through this type of research is a moment in this struggle, and the analysis ‘freezes’ a process that continues beyond any attempt to capture the deployment of discursive articulations.

Bibliography

Agnew, J.A., Duncan, J.S. (eds) (1989) *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, Boston: Unwin Hyman

Agnew, J.A., Duncan, J.S (1989) Introduction, in Agnew, J.A., Duncan, J.S. (eds) *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, Boston: Unwin Hyman

Agnew, J.A (1989) The devaluation of Place in Social Science, in Agnew, J.A., Duncan, J.S. (eds) *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, Boston: Unwin Hyman

Albrow, M. (1996) *The Global Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Aligica, P.D. (2003) Operational Codes, Institutional Learning and the Optimistic Model of Post-communist Change. Conceptual Criticism and Empirical Challenges from a Romanian Case Study, *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, vol 36, p87-99

Altman, I. and Low, S.M. eds (1992) *Place Attachment*, New York: Plenum Press

Andersen, N.A. (2003) *Discursive Analytical Strategies: Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann*, Bristol: Polity Press.

Appadurai, A. (1988) Putting Hierarchy in Its Place, *Cultural Anthropology*, vol 3, no1, p. 36-49

Bach, M. (1993) Welfare Work: Discursive Conflicts and Narrative Possibilities, in Drover, P. and Kerans, G. eds *New Approaches to Welfare Theory*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar

Baudrillard, J. (1994) *The Illusion of the End*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Bauman, Z. (1992) *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London: Routledge

Bauman, Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell

Bauman, Z. (1997) *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Bauman, Z. (1998) *Globalization. The Human consequences*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1971) *Community Studies*, London: Allen and Unwin

- Benhabib, S. (1986) *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press
- Bessis, S. (2003) *Western Supremacy: Triumph of an Idea?* London: Zed
- Best, S. and Kellner, D. (1991) *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations*, London: Macmillan
- Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge
- Blokker, P. (2003) *Modernity in Romania: Nineteenth Century Liberalism and its Discontents*, EUI Working Paper SPS no.2003/2, Florence: European University Institute
- Boia, L. (2001) *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest: Central European University Press
- Bonnett, A. (2004) *The Idea of the West. Culture, Politics and History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) *The Forms of Capital*, in Richardson, J. (ed) *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction*, London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) The Myth of 'Globalisation' and the European Welfare State in *Acts of Resistance*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brown, W. (1995) *States of injury: power and freedom in late modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bruner, M.L. (2002) Taming 'Wild' Capitalism, *Discourse and Society* vol 13, no2, p167-184
- Bryant, C. and Mokrzycki, E eds (1994) *The New Great Transformation?* London: Routledge
- Bucharest Townhall website, URL www.pmb.ro, accessed on 10.01.2003
- Buchowski, M. (2005) The Exoticisation of New Others in the Neo-Liberal 'Scientific' Discourses in Poland, paper given at the *Dilemmas of the Post-Communist Condition* conference, 23-24 June 2005
- Bunce, V. (1999) *Subversive Institutions: the Design and the Destruction of Socialism*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press
- Burr, V. (1995) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge

Butler, J. (1990a) *Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse*, in Nicholson, L. ed *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge

Butler, J (1990b) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge.

Carter, E., Donald, J. and Squires, J. (1993) Introduction, in Carter, E., Donald, J. and Squires, J. eds *Space and Place. Theories of Identity and Location*, London: Lawrence and Wishart

Castells, M. (1977) *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, London: Edward Arnold

Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Chirot, D. ed (1989) *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press

Cockerman, W.C. (1997) The Social Determinants of the Decline of Life Expectancy in Russia and Eastern Europe: A Lifestyle Explanation, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 38, no.2 (p. 117-130)

Cohen, A.P. (1985) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Chichester: Ellis Horwood

Cox, T. and Mason, B. (1999) *Social and Economic Transformation in East Central Europe*, Cheltenham: Edward Edgar

Crow, G. and Rees, T. (1990) 'Winners' and 'Losers' in Social Transformations, *Sociological Research Online*, vol4, no1,
URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/2/crow-rees.html>

Dahrendorf, R. (1990) *Reflection on the Revolution in Europe*, New York: Random House

De Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press

Dennis, N. (1968) 'The Popularity of the Neighbourhood Community Idea', in Pahl, R.E. (ed) *Readings in Urban Sociology*, Oxford: Pergamon

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y. (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Dickens, P. (1990) *Urban Sociology: Society, Locality and Human Nature*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf

- Dirlik, A. (1996) *The Global in the Local*, in Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W. eds *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham: Duke University Press
- Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Eriksen, T.H. (1995) *Small Place, Large Issues*, London: Pluto Press
- Escobar, A. (1995) *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- Eyal, G., Szelenyi, I., Townsley, E. (1997) 'The Theory of Post-Communist Managerialism', in *New Left Review* 222, March-April, p60-92
- Eyal, G., Szelenyi, I., Townsley, E. (1998) *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe*, London: Verso
- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Fairclough, N. (2002) 'Language in New Capitalism', in *Discourse and Society*, vol13(2), p163-166
- Featherstone, M. (1990) 'Global Culture: An Introduction', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol7, p1-17, London: Sage
- Featherstone, M. (1996) Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity, in Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W. eds *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham: Duke University Press
- Fine, B. (2001) *Social Capital versus Social Theory*, London: Routledge
- Fine, M. (1994) Working the Hyphens. Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research, in Denzin, N.K and Lincoln, Y.S eds, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Gordon, C., Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Foucault, M. (1981) *The Order of Discourse* in Young, R. (ed) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Foucault, M. (1982) *The Subject and Power*, Afterword in Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foucault, M. (1991) *Questions of method* in Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller (eds.) *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*, Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

- Foucault, M. (2002, first published 1969) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge Classics
- Francis, R. (1983) Symbols, Images and Social Organization in Urban Sociology, in Pons, V. and Francis, R. eds *Urban Social Research: Problems and Prospects*, London: Routledge
- Freeman, M. (2001) From substance to story: Narrative, identity and the reconstruction of the self, in Brockmeier, Jens and Carbaugh, Donal (eds) (2001) *Narrative and Identity. Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company
- Fukuyama, F (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Hamish Hamilton
- Fulcher, J. (2000) Globalisation, the nation-state and global society, *The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fuller, L. (2000) Socialism and the Transition in East and Central Europe: The Homogeneity Paradigm, Class, and Economic Inefficiency, *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (p. 585-609)
- Gallagher, T. (1995) *Romania after Ceausescu. The Politics of Intolerance*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Gee, J P. (1999) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. Theory and Method*, London: Routledge
- Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Gellner, E. (1991) Nationalism and Politics in Eastern Europe, *New Left Review* vol189, p127-134
- George, V. and Wilding, P. (1994) *Welfare and Ideology*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Gibson, J.L. (2001) Social Networks, Civil Society, and the Prospects for Consolidation Russia's Democratic Transition, *American Journal of Political Science* vol 45, issue1, p51-68
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (1996) *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Giddens, A. (1973) *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, London: Hutchinson University Library
- Giddens, A. (1990) *Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press

- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Gieryn, T.F. (2000) A Space for Place in Sociology, *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (p. 463-496)
- Gilberg, T. (1992) Romanians and Democratic Values: Socialization after Communism, in Nelson, D.N. ed, *Romania after Tyranny*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press
- Giroux, H. A. (2004) *The Terror of Neoliberalism*, Boulder, Colorado and London: Paradigm
- Gottdiener, M. (1985) *The Social Production of Urban Space*, Austin: University of Texas Press
- Gowan, P. (1995) Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe, *New Left Review* vol 213, p3-60
- Gowan, P. (1996) Eastern Europe, Western Power and Neo-Liberalism, *New Left Review* vol 216, p129-140
- Gregg, G.S. (1991) *Self-Representation; Life Narrative Studies in Identity and Ideology*, London: Greenwood Press
- Gregory, D. and Urry, J. (eds) 1985, *Social relations and spatial structures*, Basingstoke : Macmillan
- Grodeland, A.B., Koshechkina, T.Y. and Miller, W.L. (1998) 'Foolish to Give and Yet Mode Foolish Not to Take' – In-depth Interviews with Post-Communist Citizens on Their Everyday Use of Bribes and Contacts, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol 50, no4, p651-677
- Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A. (1998) Analyzing Interpretive Practice, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. eds *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, London: Sage
- Gupta, A. and Fergusson, J. (1992) Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference, *Cultural Anthropology*, vol 7, no 1, p.6-23
- Gusfield, J.R. (1975) *Community, A Critical Response*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Gustafson, T. (1999) *Capitalism Russian-Style*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hall, S. (1996) Introduction. Who Needs Identity? In Hall, S. and du Gay, P. (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage

- Hall, S. and Gieben, B eds (1992) *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University
- Hall, S. and du Gay, P. (eds) (1996) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage
- Hanley, E. (2000) Self-Employment in Post-communist Eastern Europe: A Refuge from Poverty or a Road to Riches? *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, vol33, p379-402
- Hanley, E. and Treiman, D.J. (2004) Did the Transformation to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe Restore Pre-Communist Property Relations? *European Sociological Review*, vol 20, no3, p237-252
- Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association Books
- Harrison, S. (1999) Identity as a Scarce Resource, *Social Anthropology* vol 7, no3, p239-251
- Hartsock, N. (1990) Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women? in Nicholson, L. ed *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge
- Harvey, D. (1982) *The Limits to Capital*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Harvey, D. (1985) *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Harvey, D. (1993) From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity, in *Mapping the Futures. Local Cultures, Global Change*, eds Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G. and Tickner, L., London: Routledge
- Held, D. et al (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economy and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Holmes, S. (1995) Cultural Legacies or State Collapse Probing the Postcommunist Dilemma, paper delivered at Collegium Budapest, Public Lectures no 13, Budapest: Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Study
- Honneth, A. (2001) Personal Identity and Disrespect, in Seidman, S. and Alexander, J.C. eds, *The New Social Theory Reader*, London: Routledge
- Howell, J.M. (1994) *Understanding Eastern Europe. The Context of Change*, London: Kogan Page
- Hummon, D.M. (1992) Community Attachment. Local Sentiment and Sense of Place, in Altman, I. and Low, S.M. eds (1992) *Place Attachment*, New York: Plenum Press

- Hutchinson, J. (2003) Enduring Nations and the Illusions of European Integration, in Spohn, W. and Triandafyllidou, A. eds *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration*, London: Routledge
- Jacobson-Widding, A. (1983) Introduction, in *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural*, ed by Jacobson-Widding, A., Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell
- Jager, S. (2001) Discourse and Knowledge: Theory and Method, Aspects of a Critical Discourse and Dispositive Analysis in Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. eds *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage
- Jayyusi, Lena (1984) *Categorization and the Moral Order*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Jordan, B. (1993) Framing Claims and the Weapons of the Weak, in *New Approaches to Welfare Theory*, ed. by Drover, G. and Kerans, P. Aldershot: Edward Elgar
- Karkalins, R. (2002) Typology of Post-Communist Corruption, in *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol 49, no4, p22-32
- Kesler, C. (2003) Educational Stratification and Social Change: Evidence from German Unification, in *European Sociological Review*, vol19, no5, p467-482
- Kideckel, D.A. (1993) *The Solitude of Collectivism. Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and Beyond*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Konrad, G. and Szelenyi, I. (1991) Intellectuals and Domination in Post-Communist Societies, in Bourdieu, P. and Coleman, J.S. eds *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, Boulder: Westview Press
- Kolher Riessman, C. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Kotz, D. (2001) Is Russia Becoming Capitalist? *Science and Society*, summer 2001
- Kunioka, T. and Woller, G.M. (1999) In (a) Democracy we Trust: Social and Economic Determinants of Support for Democratic Procedures in Central and Eastern Europe, *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 28, p577-596
- Kurti, L. (1997) Globalisation and the Discourse of Otherness in the 'New' Eastern and Central Europe, in Modood, T. and Werbner, P. eds *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe. Racism, Identity and Community*, London: Zed Books
- Kurzman, C., Owens, L. (2002) The Sociology of Intellectuals, *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (p. 63-90)

- Laclau, E. (1993) Power and Representation, in *Politics, Theory, and Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Poster, M., New York: Columbia University Press
- Laclau, E and Mouffe, C. (2001[1985]) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (second ed), London: Verso
- Laclau, E. (1990) *New Reflections of the Revolution of Our Time*, London: Verso
- Ladino, C. (2002) 'You Make Yourself Sound So Important'. Fieldwork Experiences, Identity Construction, and Non-Western Researchers Abroad. *Sociological Research Online*, vol7, no4, URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/4/ladino.html>
- Ladner, J. (1971) *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday
- Lane, D. (1982) *The End of Social Inequality? Class, Status, and Power under State Socialism*, London: George Allen and Unwin
- Lane, D. (1996) *The Rise and Fall of State Socialism: Industrial Society and the Socialist State*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Lane, D. (1999) Review Essay: Transformation of State Socialism: From Communism to Chaotic Capitalism? *Sociology*, vol33, no2, p447-450
- Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space*, London: Sage
- Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Ledeneva, A.V. (1998) *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Lehterby, G. (2002) Claims and Disclaimers: Knowledge, Reflexivity and Representation in Feminist Research, *Sociological Research Online*, vol6, no3, URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/4/lehterby.html>
- Logan, J.R. and Molotch, H.L. (1987) *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Low, S.M. and Altman, I. (1992) Place Attachment. A Conceptual Inquiry, in Altman, I. and Low, S.M. eds (1992) *Place Attachment*, New York: Plenum Press
- Lyotard, J-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

- Magas, B. (1991) Nationalism and Politics in Eastern Europe: a Response to Ernest Gellner, *New Left Review* vol190, p138-144
- Marody, M. (2003) Polish Identity and Europeanisation, in Spohn, W and Triandalyllidou, A. eds. *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration. Changes in Boundary Construction between Western and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge
- Marshall, T.H. and Bottomore, T. (1992) *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press.
- Marchand, H.M., Runyan, A.S. (2000) *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, sites and resistances*, London: Routledge.
- Martin, B. and Mohanty, C.T. (1986) Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It?, in deLaurentis, T. (ed) *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Massey, D. (2004) Geographies of responsibility, *Geografiska Annaler*, 86B (1), p5-18.
- Melucci, A. (1997) Identity and Difference in a Globalized World, in Werbner, P. and Modood, T. eds, *Debating Cultural Hybridity. Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, London: Zed Books
- Memmi, A. (1967) *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston: Beacon Press
- Merry, S.E. (1987) Crowding, Conflict, and Neighbourhood Regulation, in Altman, I. and Wandersman, A. eds *Neighbourhood and Community Environments*, New York: Plenum
- Mestrovic, S.G. (1993) *Habits of the Balkan Heart: Social Character and the Fall of Communism*, College Station : Texas A&M University Press
- Miller, G. and Fox, K.J. (2004) Building Bridges: The Possibility of Analytical Dialogue between Ethnography, Conversational Analysis and Foucault, in Silverman, D ed *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, second edition, London: Sage
- Mills, S. (1997) *Discourse Analysis*, London: Routledge
- Miroiu, M. (1999) *Societatea Retro*, Bucharest: Editura Trei
- Misztal, B. and Misztal, B. (1984) Urban Social Problems in Poland. The Macrosocial Determinants, in *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, vol19 no3, p315-328

- Mouffe, C. (1988) *Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern*, in Ross, A. ed, *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Mudimbe (1988) *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Other of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Mumby, D.K (1993) Introduction, in Mumby, D.K.(ed) *Narrative and Social Control*, London: Sage
- Nandy, A. (1983) *The Intimate Self. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Nee, V. (1989) A Theory of Market Transition, in *American Sociological Review*, vol 56 no5, p663-81
- Oakley, A. (1981) Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In Roberts, H. (ed.) *Doing Feminist Research*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Open Society Foundation www.osf.ro
- Outhwaite, W. and Ray, L. (2005) *Social Theory and Postcommunism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Paldam, M. and Svendsen, G.T. (2000) *Missing Social Capital and the Transition on Eastern Europe*, Article manuscript preliminary version available from URL: <http://www.martin.paldam.dk>, accessed 10.07.2000
- Parkin, F. (1971) *Class Inequality and Political Order: Social Stratification in Capitalist and Communist Societies*, New York: Praeger
- Patapievici, H.R. (1996) *Politice*, Bucharest: Humanitas
- Patterson, T. C., 1997 *Inventing Western Civilization*, New York: Monthly Review Press
- Patterson, W. (1994) *Rebuilding Romania: Energy, Efficiency and the Economic Transition*, London: Earthscan Publications
- Pecheux, M. (1982) *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Pichler-Milanovich, N. (1996) Response to 'Comments on "The Role of Housing Policy in the Transformation Process in Central-East European Cities": Is Economic Efficiency the End-all?', in *Urban Studies*, vol33, no1, p117-123
- Plesu, A. (2004) *Obscenitatea Publica*, Bucharest: Humanitas
- Pons, V. (1975) *Imagery and Symbolism in Urban Society*, University of Hull

- Porter, W.M. and Catt, I.E. (1993) The Narcissistic Reflection of Communicative Power: Delusions of Progress Against Organizational Discrimination, in Mumby, D.K.(ed) *Narrative and Social Control*, London: Sage
- Potter, J. and Weatherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, London: Sage
- Poznanski, K.Z. (1992) *Constructing Capitalism. The Reemergence of Civil Society and Liberal Economy in the Post-Communist World*, Boulder, CO: Westview
- Preoteasa, I. (2002) Intellectuals and the Public Sphere in Post-communist Romania: a Discourse Analytical Perspective, *Discourse and Society*, vol 13, no2, p269-292
- Pridham, G., Herring, E. and Sanford, G. eds (1994) Introduction, in *Building Democracy. The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe*, London: Leicester University Press
- Proshansky, H.M., Fabian, A.K., Kaminoff, R. (1983) Place identity: Physical world socialization of the self, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, p57-84.
- Punch, M. (1994) Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research, in Denzin, N.K and Lincoln, Y.S eds, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Putnam, R. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon and Schuster
- Ray, L. (1997) Post-communism: Postmodernity or Modernity Revisited? In *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 48 no4, p543-560
- Rehn, O. (2005) EU Enlargement under Stress – the Policy of Consolidation, Conditionality and Communication, speech given at the Institute for European Policy, Berlin, 12 July 2005, available at URL <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction>
- Relph, E. (1976) *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion
- Rivlin, L. (1987) The neighbourhood, personal identity, and group affiliations, in Altman, I. and Wandersman, A. eds *Neighbourhood and Community Environments*, New York: Plenum
- Roberts, K., Osadchaya, G.I., Dsuzev, H.V., Gorodyanenko, V.G. and Tholen, J. (2002) Who Succeeds and Who Flounders? Young People in East Europe's Market Economies, *Sociological Research Online*, vol7, no4,
URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/4/reberts.html>

- Rollo, J.C.M. (1990) *The New Eastern Europe: Western Responses*, London: Pinter Publishers
- Rona-Tas, A. (1995) The Second Economy as a Subversive Force: the Erosion of Party Power in Hungary, in Walder, A. ed *The Waning of the Communist State: Economic Origins of Political Decline in Hungary and China*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Rose, N. (1990) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, New York: Routledge
- Rose, R. (2000) Getting Things Done in and Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia, in Dasgupta, P. and Serageldin, I. (eds) *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective*, Washington: World Bank
- Rose, R. (1999) *What Does Social Capital Add to Individual Welfare? An Empirical Analysis of Russia*, World Bank Social Capital Initiative, Working paper no23
- Rose, R. et al (1998) Social Capital in Civic and Stressful Societies, in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol32, no3, p85-111
- Rouse, J. (1994) Power/Knowledge, in Gutting, G. ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Said, E. (2003, first published 1978) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books
- Sampson, E.E. (1989) The Deconstruction of the Self, in *Texts of Identity*, ed. By Shotter, J. and Gergen, K.J., London: Sage
- Sampson, S.L. (1986) Regime and Society in Romania: Ceausescu's Social Contract, *International Journal of Rumanian Studies*, vol 5, p20-35
- Sarup, M. (1996) *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
- Savage, M. and Warde, A. (1994) *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity*, London: Macmillan
- Sawicki, J. (1994) Foucault, Feminism and Questions of Identity, in Gutting, G. ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Schopflin, G. (2001) Liberal Pluralism and Post-Communism, in Kymlicka, W. and Opalski, M. eds *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported?* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Scott, J.C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press
- Segert, A and Zierke, I. (2000) Metamorphosis of Habitus Among East Germans, in Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. eds *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Sciences*, London: Routledge
- Shen, R. (1997) *The Restructuring of Romania's Economy. A Paradigm of Flexibility and Adaptability*, London: Praeger
- Smejkalova, J. (2004) Feminist Sociology in the Czech Republic after 1989, *European Societies*, 6 (2), p169-180
- Smith, D. (1990) *Texts, Facts and Femininity. Exploring the Relations of Ruling*, London: Routledge
- Smith, N. (1993) Homeless/global: Scaling Places, in Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G. and Tickner, L. eds *Mapping the Futures. Local cultures, Global change*, London: Routledge
- Spivak, G. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' In Nelson, C., Grossberg, L. eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press.
- Spohn, W. and Triandafyllidou, A. (2003) eds. *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration. Changes in Boundary Constructions between Western and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge
- Stacey, M. (1969) The Myth of Community Studies, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 20, p134-145.
- Stan, A. (2001) Periferia Urbana Romaneasca: Ruptura si Continuitate, *Arhitext Design*, no2
- Staniszki, J. (1991) Political Capitalism in Poland, in *East European Politics and Societies*, vol 5, no1, p127-41
- Stark, D. (1990) Privatization in Hungary: From Plan to Market or from Plan to Clan? *East European Politics and Societies*, vol 4, no1, p351-92
- Stark, D. (1992) From System Identity to Organizational Diversity: Analyzing Social Change in Eastern Europe, *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 21 May (299-304)

Stoica, C.A. (2004) From Good Communists to Even Better Capitalists? Entrepreneurial Pathways in Post-Socialist Romania, *East European Politics and Societies*, vol 18, no2, p236-277

Suttles, G.D. (1972) *The Social Construction of Communities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Szelenyi, I. and Konrad, G. (1988) *Socialist Entrepreneurs*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Szelenyi, I. (1982) The Intelligentsia in the Class Structure of State-Socialist Societies, *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol.88, Supplement: Marxist Inquiries: Studies of Labor, Class, and States, S287-S326

Szelényi, S. (1998) *Equality by design : the grand experiment in de-stratification in socialist H . - Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press,*

Szkudlarek, T. (2005) Post-Communism and European Identity, paper given at the *Dilemmas of the Post-Communist Condition* conference, 23-24 June 2005

Sztompka, P. (1995) *The Sociology of Social Change*, Oxford: Blackwell

Tanase, S. (1996) *Revolutia ca Esec. Elite si Societate*, Iasi: Polirom

Tajfel, H. (1978) *Differentiation Between Groups*, London: Academic Press

Taylor, I., Evans, K. and Fraser, P. (1996) *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: Routledge

Thunborg, A. (1997) *Public and Non-Profit Interaction: U.S. Assistance to Eastern European Media 1989-1995*, Lund: Lund University Press

Tismaneanu, V. (1990) Eastern Europe: The Story the Media Missed, in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist*, vol 46, no2

Tismaneanu, V. (1999) Understanding National Stalinism: Reflections on Ceausescu's Socialism, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32, p155-173

Todorova, M. (1994) The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention, *Slavic Review*, 53 (2): 453-83

Torring, J. (1999) *New Theories of Discourse. The Work of Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*, Oxford: Blackwell

Triandafyllidou, A. and Spohn, W. (2003) Introduction, in Spohn, W. and Triandafyllidou, A. eds *Europeanisation, National Identities and Migration*, London: Routledge

- Tuan, Yi-Fu. (1980) Rootedness versus sense of place. *Landscape*, 24 (1), 3-8
- Truman, C. (2003) Ethics and the Ruling Relations of Research Production, *Sociological Research Online*, vol8, no1, URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/1/truman.html>
- Turner, A. (2000) Embodied Ethnography. Doing Culture, in *Social Anthropology*, vol8, no1, p51-60
- Ule, M. (2004) No Time for Complacency: Sociology after Socialism, *European Societies*, vol 6 no2, p159-166
- Verdery, K. (1991) *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Verdery, K. (1996) *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- Watts, M.J. (1992) Space for everything (a commentary), in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol 7, no1, p115-129
- Waylen, G. (1994) Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender relations in Transition Politics, *World Politics*, vol.46, no.3, p. 327-354
- Wegener, B. (1992) Concepts and Measurement of Prestige, *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (p. 253-280)
- Werlen, B. (1993) *Society, Action and Space: An alternative human geography* (transl by Gayna Walls), London: Routledge
- Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W. (1996) Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local, in Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W. eds (1996) *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham: Duke University Press
- Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W. eds (1996) *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Durham: Duke University Press
- Wnuk-Lipinski, E. (1992) Freedom or Equality: An Old Dilemma in a New Context, in Deacon, B. ed *Social Policy, Social Justice. Eastern Europe*, Aldershot: Avebury
- Wolff, L. (1994) *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press

Wuthnow, R., Hunter, J.D., Bergesen, A. and Kurzweil, E. (1984) *Cultural Analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas*. London: Routledge

Zizek, S. (1990) Eastern Europe's Republic of Gilead, in *New Left Review* 183, sept-oct, p50-62

APPENDIX
LIST OF
RESPONDENTS

COTROCENI

C1, m63
C2, f61
C3, m27
C4, f65
C5, f26
C6, f52
C7, m64
C8, f53
C9, m29
C10, f53
C11, m60
C12, m28
C13, f60
C14, f63
C15, f33
C16, f57
C17, f58
C18, f56
C19, m39
C20, f34
C21, m25

DRUMUL TABEREI

DT1, m64
DT2, f65
DT3, f76
DT4, f42
DT5, f36
DT6, m28
DT7, f39
DT8, m19
DT9, f25
DT10, f51
DT11, f24
DT12, f36
DT13, f64
DT14, m38
DT15, f36
DT16, f25
DT17, m26
DT18, f21
DT19, f22
DT20, f31
DT21, m34
DT22, m31
DT23, f30
DT24, f31
DT25, f35
DT26, f34
DT27, m32
DT28, f31
DT29, m33

TITAN

T1, f56
T2, f31
T3, m34
T4, f43
T5, f31
T6, f30
T7, m34
T8, m30
T9, f55
T10, f48
T11, m22
T12, m63
T13, f62
T14, m66
T15, f64
T16, f61
T17, m29
T18, f27
T19, f46
T20, m35
T21, f60
T22, m56