# POVERTY, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF INDUSTRIALIZATIONIN CENTRAL EUROPE. THE CASE OF THE ROMANIAN CARPATHIANS

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I read that every known superstition of the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool.

(Bram Stoker, Dracula, 1897)

We work, we don't think! (slogan launched during the Jiu Valley miners' strikes of 1990)

There is still too much nature in Romania.

(Constantin Noica)

What happens when terrifically imaginative, highly adaptable Evil — some recycled, revamped Evil — has overnight spawned an even fiercer society than that which played dead in order to survive? When the whole communist nomenklatura has turned into the nouveaux riches? When the mafia replaces the party? When the losers of yesteryear are turned into the programmed apes of today? When there is no more resistance — when there is nothing but exile? When it's all too late.

(film director Lucian Pintilie)

## 1. Activating Tropes for political interventions

This paper dwells in a large space of encounter between theorizing poverty and the poverty of theorizing, through operating with 'theory' as means for [and end of] activating tropes as, and for, political interventions. In the first part I explain how the paper weaves that space of encounter (the theoretical tools), why it weaves it on (and for) a vigorously located empirical background (the South-eastern Carpathians), and what the stakes of the whole enterprise are.

Within this project, the theme of the poverty of theorizing enrolls the theorizing of poverty along at least two energizing chains. The first of these may be introduced through Thrift's observation, prompted by the work of Norretranders!:

We do not consider the fact that there is more information in an experience than in an account of it. It is the account that we consider to be information. But

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the whole basis of such an account is information that is discarded. Only after information has been discarded can a situation become an event people can talk about. The total situation we find ourselves in at any given time is precisely one we cannot provide an account of: we can give an account of it only when it has 'collapsed' into an event through the discarding of information.

It allows me to account for my positionality, to express some dissatisfaction with existing literature about Eastern Europe, to explain how and why the empirical background has been chosen, and to signal from the outset the paper's narrative mode, one which is committed and commits to (the signifiers of) performativity, embodiment, and (more-than-phenomenological) relational thinking. I was born in 1978 in Bucharest, Romania, just at the end of what Romanians often call 'Ceauşescu's good period'. In 1979, my family moved to the west of the country, in Transylvania, and it is there that I lived until 2000, when coming to England for postgraduate studies. The South-eastern Carpathians (synonymous with the Romanian Carpathians) are, in a number of ways, the axis of Romania and have a surface of 66,000, which means 27.8% of the whole country. Two of their branches distinguish Transylvania from the rest of the territory, and this has always fuelled the geopolitical imagination of and about a contested historical region.

And poverty comes in here, in that the average gross product of Transylvania is double to the rest of the country, the Carpathians being the imbricated upland of passage where this disparity negotiates its hybridity.

My first memories as a child come from the 'dark period of Ceauşescu'—the 1980s, when its project of total utopian engineering had been both highly accelerated and brought to a level of detail that went well into the defensible frontiers of 'bare life'2. I spent most of my vacations in a provincial town called Orāṣtie, in the county of Hunedoara, which encompasses the lands where Southern Carpathians (or the Alps of Transylvania) meet the Western Carpathians (the South-eastern Carpathians are disposed at the centre of Romania, in the shape of a triangle the three branches of which are the Eastern Carpathians, Southern Carpathians, and Western Carpathians), lands rich in resources that range from coal to gold. My relatives there have lived the typical life of average Romanians, as they hadn't been involved in 'grand' politics during communism (whereas my parents were involved), and they aren't involved now, after the 1989 Revolution, either.

This initial experiential baggage was then enriched during my undergraduate studies in geography, as the curricula stipulated a lot of fieldwork, and as fieldwork was almost always synonym with fieldwork in the Carpathians. 'Carpathian' experiences are still being added to my be(come)ing, as most of my research interests intersect the environmental<sup>3</sup>, economic, and social geographies of postsocialist transformations (Simandan, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c), and most of my work involves getting down to specifics, doing intensive research attuned to particular locations (see also Agnew, 2000, Mitchell, 2001), especially those of

my past exfoliations<sup>4</sup>. The inevitable failure to fully translate the richness of situations/experiences onto 'scientific' accounts is nevertheless sweetened by comparing these undertakings of intense personal-cum-political commitment with the all-too-frequent studies about Eastern Europe in general, seen from somewhere 'above', usually through the comfortable, impoverished lens of analyzing statistics, and for the neutral purpose of seeing how this or that theory works 'there'<sup>5</sup>.

The second energizing chain that produces the space of encounter between theorizing poverty/the poverty of theorizing might be summed up in the observation that the poverty of theorizing poverty is at the very heart of what constitutes poverty. This implies a postmodern account of poverty, as summarized by Yapa<sup>6</sup>:

The concept of poverty is an abstract discursive convention that aggregates a large number of states of material deprivation related to food, clothing, shelter, health care, transportation, and so on. This taken-for-granted aggregation has permitted us to present poverty as an economic problem arising from lack of income. That economism in turn has allowed us to equate poverty with underdevelopment, making economic development the unquestioned and obvious solution to the problem...instead of asking the abstract question — why are poor people poor? — it is better to ask substantive questions as to why some people in particular places do not have adequate access to basic goods...the scarcity of these basic goods is socially constructed at each node of a nexus of production relations...even the categories describing the nodes of the nexus...are not concrete sectors in the world; they too are discursive entities constructed to enable a conversation about poverty. Each so-called node of the nexus is completely determined by, and constituted from, the other nodes. The 'real' world of poverty cannot provide answers as to which of these nodes is most important...the belief is...that if we uncover the 'true' causes of poverty, then we can adopt the right course of action. But there are no such things called the 'true' causes of poverty, and therefore, there is no single right course of action, certainly not one that is amenable to poverty policy.

It alerts us of the danger of big categories (state, science, economy, capitalism; and see Walters, 1999, Sayer, 2001) and grand narratives (development, emancipation), which make the fight against poverty seems to have little chances of success, as it would require the overthrow of (apparently) robust, almost invincible systems (e.g. capitalism). In our case, both the socialist and the postsocialist state are approached as fallible, contingent networks of practices of governmentality (Hannah, 1997, Levy, 1999), incapable of erasing the powerful sites of resistance inhabiting each of us ('bare life') and the associative tactics of the everyday life. In turn, these sites can mobilize the subjects to actively challenge a given constellation of governmental practices, to fight for a better life. This postmodern view of poverty also signals the difference place makes in what counts as scarcity, signal assumed in this paper by refusing the multinational

or national levels of analysis and by focusing instead in the unfolding of poverty within the Carpathian area only, area individualized by its topological, climatic, biogeographic, and human dimensions (Pop. 2000).

Another point Yapa makes is the aggregate nature of poverty, constituted and reproduced in more than a single node of the nexus of social relations. The title of this paper embraces this perspective by using the verb 'to deal with' environmental and economic change, a verb which invites a relational thinking of poverty, as forming a cultural circuit performed with material effects and affects. In this light, the questions 'Who deals with poverty?', 'Why poverty is dealt with?', and 'How poverty is dealt with?' (see Kharkhordin, 1995, 2001, Jowitt, 1992) have more than one answer and those answers are necessarily timespecific and place-specific<sup>7</sup>. This paper doesn't go in depth with a cartography of possible answers, but just hopes to unsettle ways of thinking of and about poverty in the Southern Carpathians, unsettling necessitated by a responsible aesthetics of 'becoming', and to enhance further political maneuvers8.

### 2. Poverty has led to freedom, but is freedom leading to poverty? Some incongruities of sorts in the Romanian Carpathians

The first quotation which opened this paper shed some light on the role the Carpathians have played at least since Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) in the cultural circuit of European imaginative geographies, as a space of fugitive incarceration where Otherness is produced, but never fully mobilized.

In what follows I'm interested in another cultural circuit, that of poverty, acknowledging, however, its intersections with the first mentioned. Dracula's figure allows me also to introduce in the account a much-needed character, notably the last devilish ruler of Romania — the dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu (1964-1989), not rarely associated with Dracula for his cynicism. And they are both woven into the imaginative geographies of the Southern Carpathians, for their castles built there, for their deeds exfoliated there, and for the empowering symbolism, so well exploited by writers and novelists. To be sure, writer Octavian Paler launched a very popular expression for ridiculing Ceausescu, calling him the 'genius of the Carpathians'. Whereas people from these upland areas surely didn't regret him in the optimistic days of late December 1989, when his regime was overthrown through a revolution/coup d'Etat, in the subsequent years of postsocialist transformations many of them begun to see, in retrospect, his times as a Golden Age. His philosophy of practices of governmentality was based on giving people 'circus' (propaganda) rather than 'bread' (basic needs - food, light, warmth), for 'bread' was consumption and his desire was to maximize investments by all means, may them be cynical, so as too put the country on a trajectory of unprecedented development and to launch it as an important independent actor in the international arena.

Lay people generally liked his grand dreams, got used to not having freedom, and had he decided to secure enough 'bread' for them, they wouldn't have overthrown his regime. But in the last four years of his government (1985–1989), the obsession with saving the money from 'bread' for investments and for paying the country's external debt reached the absurd and scarcity of basic needs became so pervasive that chronic poverty eventually led people to change a set of practices of government that revealed to be so contingent in a moment (1989) when almost everybody thought of them as being powerful and very much resilient. Unbearable poverty led to freedom in the late 1980s, but people found out soon that for most of them the freedom of the 1990s meant a way back, to an even more difficult-to-bear poverty, more difficult because this time the lack of bread wasn't accompanied by the circus so well practiced by Ceauşescu's regime9. There were many actants enrolled in the heterogeneous and ever-changing practices of quasi-materialized mythologies constituting this circus, but people have been most receptive to three of them.

Political scientist Alina Mungiu (1995), after broad qualitative research undertaken in the mid-1990s, found that lay people had a good memory of Ceauşescu, deploring as the only (!) bad thing of his era the lack of basic needs, whilst admiring him for having been: a) a big builder (i.e. imposing high rates of development/growth, 'constructions'), b) concerned with justice for the many, not for the few, c) a patriot, who made Romania respected in the world at that time. These three more-than-myths built around his name are heterogeneous objects made of (and making) discourses, materialities, imaginative geographies, tactics of survival, and networks of territorial mobilization.

In what follows, I will take a glance at each of these more-than-myths within the Carpathian area, seeing them as part of the cultural circuit of poverty, before and after 1989. The interest will be directed to their material effects on the environment and the economy, on the way they have been mobilized as parts of the circuit of poverty, and on the way they have been resisted by people, despite (or because of) being involved in their subject formations.

## 2.1. Industrialization and poverty

Before the advent of communism, in 1947, Romania was starting its process of modernization and industrialization, but its pace was well below the one imposed by communists. Many Romanian intellectuals, attuned to the Zeitgeist of those times, which included an understanding of the nation as an 'organic community' (following Herder), and a desire for speeding the processes of modernization, adopted a radical political position that consisted of both expressing a dissatisfaction with the too conservative and parochial essence of 'Romanianness' and an urge for mobilizing all energies in order to overcome this condition and to change the destiny of the country.

For example, philosopher Emil Cioran (born at Rāṣinari, in the Southern Carpathians) wrote the influential book 'Romania's transfiguration', Constantin Noica expressed these ideas and desires in his 'Philosophical Journal' (see the quotation at the beginning), and both of them in their youth applauded the extreme right party (the Legion Movement) which was pleading for a radical transformation of the country. These feelings of being marginal, backward, and inadequate have haunted Romanian culture and politics ever since, and Ceauşescu's commitment to putting into practice the grand dreams of national metamorphosis brought him the admiration of the people, both during and after his regime.

In times when Western economies were shifting from Fordism to Post-Fordism and the knowledge economy was emerging as a successor to the traditional economy based on heavy industry, the Romanian communist regime inadequately prioritized in its plans of development the amazing growth of heavy (and polluting) industry. To give just two examples, whereas in 1938 the production of steel was 280,000 tons and of sulphuric acid 440,000 tons, in 1985 production raised to 13,790,000 tons of steel and 1,830,000 tons of sulphuric acid<sup>10</sup>. Crucial to this development was activating all the internal resources of the country, so as to avoid too many importations of raw resources (coal, iron, energy, sulph, etc.) and this explains why the Carpathians had been at the very centre of mobilizing people, materials, and other non-humans in the fast-growing and totaling network of development.

To be exact, there were already some resource exploitations and some industries in the Carpathians, before the advent of the communists, but their size was small, and they had a very localized impact, whereas the key aspect brought about by the communist strategy had been the activation of the whole landscape for, and through, development: geologists were investigating in detail and mapping all possible resources, engineers and economists were projecting integrated strategies of growth, engaging all actants in 'national systems' (e.g. the national system of energy, with many nodes in the Carpathians, linked all cities and almost all villages of the country; 'the national transportation system', etc. Each branch of the industry was guided, surveyed, and linked with the others through so-called 'centrals' — centers of calculation situated in Bucharest, the place where the practices of governmentality had their headquarters)<sup>11</sup>.

Just as nature tends to be mapped onto spaces designated as 'rural', so wildlife, the embodiment of a purified nature, is associated with those most rarefied of spaces designated as 'wilderness'...

In the 1970s, the regime (see Gibbs, Jonas, 2000) was very keen to show its concern for environmental issues, and a significant number of protected areas were created in the Carpathians. That was real 'nature', and by implication, all the rest had to bear the signs of the socialist culture. One of them included the radical transformation of the upland countryside, by trying to erase many 'unviable' small villages (Dumistracel, 1995) and to bring their population into larger villages, 'viable' and modernized via replacing many traditional

houses by blocks of flats made of concrete. Peasants were forced in some parts to put their lands together and to work them collectively, the regime helping them with the fruits of science so as to make intensive (and environmentally sustainable) agriculture: chemical fertilizers, mechanization, genetically modified seeds, new races of domestic animals, and the expertise of agricultural engineers, their role being to make sure that all the 'natural' potential was fully exploited, that the waste of nature had been turn into fertile gardens.

By the late 1980s, Ceauşescu became keen to show the superiority of communist agriculture and its huge rate of growth, and he did so by lying to the people and the international community with the help of statistics, for he knew how widely assumed it was that 'figures don't lie' 12. The newspapers were full of tables called 'the results of socialist competition' which showed the (fictional) increase in productivity per hectare for cereals, vegetables, etc. In 1989, the official information was that the country's total agricultural production was 60 million tons, whereas later it was revealed that it was of only approx. 18 million tons. The simulacra of agricultural development hit people badly, because exports were prioritized, so we were left with the missing 42 million tons, rather than with the real 18 million.

There was no unemployment at that time. People had incomes, but poverty was still everywhere and was induced by this accelerated development: firstly, this development had *impoverished the* 'environment', by both a) separating wilderness from 'culture' and destroying part of the rural cultural practices through the quasi-urbanization of some settlements, and b) widespread pollution caused by heavy industry (fighting pollution was not prioritized on the government's agenda, because it was considered an 'unproductive' issue<sup>13</sup>: almost all resources were allotted for fuelling further industrial growth). Two of the three most polluted Romanian cities (Baia Mare and Zlatna) belong to the Carpathians, not to mention all the other non-spectacular forms and sites of pollution<sup>14</sup>.

Secondly, it had impoverished people, for 'despite' economic growth (this is an incongruity of sorts), basic needs (food, clothes, electricity) were far from sufficient and of low quality (the stores were selling products that were not accepted for export because of too low quality), not to mention other dimensions of impoverishment pertaining to the quality of life, in general (e.g. often people were asked to work during weekends to realize the goals set by the five-year plans of development; the single television channel stopped broadcasting at 11 p.m., to make sure people would sleep enough to be productive the next day, etc.).

Thirdly, it had impoverished the *economic viability* of the country, by concentrating all resources for the development of heavy industry, neglecting hi-tech and other 'post-Fordist' industries. After 1989, this industrial heritage has been a burden rather than an asset for the governments trying to connect Romanian economic practices to the Western ones, and deindustrialization occurred at a large scale<sup>15</sup>.

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But people, instead of seeing the inadequate strategy of Ceauşescu's regime as the root-cause of this process, idealized his times, for what they remember is that then the word of the day was construction (positive associations with the myth of progress, and with leaving behind the parochial, marginal, rural, 'too natural', Romania of the pre-communist era), whereas nowadays what they see around is the (material and economic) dismantling of the socialist landscape (of concrete, steel, giant plants, and so on), to the construction of which they had in so many ways been a part.

But apart from having been left without a positive metanarrative of growth and development ('Romania's transfiguration'), many people in the Carpathians today feel poverty more acutely than hitherto, because then *all* were poor, whereas nowadays some have and most people don't have. Which brings us to the second 'more-than-myth' mobilized in the cultural circuit of poverty, namely justice.

#### 2.2. Justice and poverty

The idea of equality was the very centre of the communist discourse and its material effects ranged from the common ownership of land by local rural communities, and the ownership of almost all industries by the state (understood as delegate of the whole people; see also O'Neill, 2001) to the symbolic wearing of the same uniforms by pupils and students, so as to hide all signs of difference in wealth 16.

After the revolution of 1989, given the institutional vacuum inherent to transitional periods, what emerged was what I called elsewhere (Simandan, 2002) 'the anti-legal' society, characterized by people's loss of faith in the act of justice and its institutions (politicians, judges, and policemen are believed, not without reason, to be amongst the most corrupted), by the general disrespect for the law, by the ease with which those who break the law manage to remain unpunished, and by the unfair distribution of wealth not towards those who work hard and legally, but to those who are cunning and courageous enough to break the laws for their own profit.

To give an example, the trade union of the miners from the Jiu Valley (Southern Carpathians) chose to fight for the security of the workplace and for increased incomes not by legal means, but by practicing what Câmpeanu (2001) called the exercise of 'illegal violence': they jumped the local scale of protest and went to Bucharest imposing their will by violent means<sup>17</sup>. Workers in other areas who chose the legal ways of union protest were much less successful in their collective bargaining.

But the marshland of transition so well depicted in the citation from film director Lucian Pintilie, at the beginning of the paper, has given people an acute sentiment of injustice not only because those who deserve the least (law-breakers, mafias) obtain the most wealth, but also because an older scar hiding deep histories of poverty and injustice has been reactivated. It is the problem of giving

back to the initial owners the properties confiscated by the communists in order to create collective property<sup>18</sup>.

It is a delicate issue, for at its heart lies a whole philosophy of justice: to privilege the 'sacredness' of property, and to restitute everything despite the newly emerging severe unequal relations, or to favor the ideal of an equal society and to give back to the initial owners only a part of what they (or rather their parents and grandparents) had? Until late in the 1990s, the second approach prevailed in Romania, but recently a series of laws have explicitly endorsed the first perspective. The Carpathians enter this discussion as many of the largest private properties of pre-communist Romania are there and now—shocking for many Romanians who have always been poor—they are reclaimed by their former proprietors. These include, among others, the former king Michael, who wants back his castles and forests, and a lady who brought papers to prove that her ancestors owned a whole mountain (The Parâng Mountains, a group of the Southern Carpathians), and who is asking the mountain back.

To be sure, the communist era was anything but perfectly just: firstly, the common ownership of land and industries was largely the outcome of stealing the hitherto private properties, theft well hidden by the propaganda; secondly, the regime privileged the proletariat, by investing in industrialization and urbanization, whereas other categories were disadvantaged (e.g. the peasants saw their lands taken, the intellectuals who opposed the regime were imprisoned and 're-educated'/tortured in the famous prison of Sighet (the Eastern Carpathians), access to good jobs and to higher education was very difficult for those who didn't have 'healthy origins', i.e. proletarian origins, etc.); thirdly, the so-called equality between men and women consisted in asking the latter to work both at 'work' and at home, whereas men didn't work at home given the patriarchal character of the Romanian culture; fourthly, the members of the nomenklatura enjoyed many privileges and Ceauşescu himself owned many residences and was building a \$ ten billion palace in Bucharest, called — cynically, but illustrative of the effectiveness of the practices of propaganda — the 'House of the People'.

Though unjust, the communist regime excelled in deploying strategies for hiding this. They included the strict control of the media (only the good things were told; on the contrary, after 1989, media was focused on the bad things, contributing to the acute feeling of injustice, corruption, and lack of morality), the manufacturing of a positive history of the party, and the stigmatization of those reluctant of communism as 'enemies of the people', 'reactionary forces', 'agents of imperialism', etc.

By and large, the injustices of communism were much less conspicuous to people than the 'just' sides of it. Among them, equality was crucial in making poverty bearable in all those years of deprivation. Conversely, the marshland of transition, by breaking this chief dimension of justice alongside two processes (the emergence of a new wealthy class by illegal means, in the context of an anti-

legal society, and, second, the undoing of the scar hiding unequal relations in pre-communist Romania, by retroceding properties to their initial owners), has made dealing with poverty much more painful than before. One of the 'morethan-myths' lubricating the cultural circuit of poverty and explaining the maintenance of the communist practices of governmentality for half-century has gone. Freedom has led to conspicuous poverty for many.

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With these thoughts in mind, we can now move to see how the Carpathians have been interpellated (L. Althusser) through the third more-than-myth, that of patriotism, and how the latter has performed its promiscuous encounters with poverty.

#### 2.3. Patriotism and poverty

The patriotic rhetoric made poverty bearable through two distinct, but related registers of argument: firstly, accepting scarcity was seen as an essentially patriotic attitude, in the sense that the government was trying hard, by minimizing consumption and expenses with 'unproductive' areas (e.g. pollution) and maximizing investments, minimizing importations and maximizing exportations, to secure a better future for the country, future built alongside ideals of total independence, development through massive industrialization, territorial integrity, the shift from socialism to pure communism, and an important role on the global arena ('the great destiny of a small country').

Each citizen had to contribute to these cherished goals by working hard, diminishing consumption, and accepting the rationalizations imposed from above (e.g. each day, electricity was cut off for several hours — I remember hurrying to finish my homework for school in the afternoon, to avoid working in the evening by the light of the candle; when a good movie was on the TV, people prayed that electricity wouldn't be cut off just then). The regime enrolled each and every resource of the Carpathians in the national economic calculation, regardless of their quality and economic profitability, because of two things: first, to avoid imports, as the country's rulers wanted to completely eliminate external debt (which was seen as a means for subjection to external capitalist interests); second, because for them independence was synonym to being autarchic — even in the case of a boycott by the international community, the country would have managed on its own, by exploiting its internal resources and by having developed all the possible branches of an economy.

Geologists were assessing in detail the underground, cartographers were mapping the area at very large scales, so that the mountains could be vigorously enlisted into the economic networks of accelerated growth. After the revolution, the neo-liberal imperatives for efficiency put the government into a difficult position, as it was revealed that most of the mines in the Carpathians were not viable<sup>19</sup>. This is not so much because of poor technologies, as it is because the quality/concentration of mineral deposits is well below the international average.

In other words, although these mountains contain very diverse minerals, they are rich in rather poor mineral deposits, with some notable exceptions (very recently the village Rosia Montană has become famous for the discovery in its underground of the largest deposit of gold and silver in Europe).

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Offsprings of communist economic planning, the miners' communities and the regional economies brought about by mining, now face de-industrialization, economic decline, and acute social tensions. Not surprisingly, they feel abandoned, for whereas in Ceausescu's time they were praised as 'the spear peak of the working class' and were told that the whole economy rested on their shoulders, nowadays they are told they are a big burden for the economy, as instead of contributing to wealth creation they contribute to poverty perpetuation.

The second register of rhetorical intercourse between patriotism and poverty was even more radical and intense and could be summarized by the urge 'Forget poverty, the country is in danger!' which is another way of speaking of the myth of the besieged city/the myth of conspiracy, so often encountered in the political saga of modernity, not least because of its efficiency in mobilizing people and centralizing power (the myth of the Savior — Ceausescu, Milosević, Hitler goes hand in hand with the myth of the besieged city/country). In Romania's case, the myth was organized around the alleged danger of losing Transylvania again, due to the revisionist politics of Hungary<sup>20</sup>.

The Carpathians represent the limit between Transylvania and the rest of the country (also called the 'Old Kingdom'), and have been seen as a big problem because they constitute a natural limit, which could be so easily rhetorically enrolled in the arguments of revisionist politics. Transylvania became a part of Romania in 1918, but in 1940 its north-western area was taken back by Hungary, until 1944, fact which has substantially fuelled the general feeling that it still represents a threatened land and that one of the chief concerns of any Romanian government should be to minimize that threat. And Ceausescu's practices of governmentality have been unanimously acknowledged for being very creative, sustained, and effective in this respect<sup>21</sup>. As I will address the issue in more detail elsewhere, suffice to say that the (alleged) threat (it was a 'circus' to make people forget the lack of 'bread') was minimized by two related strategies.

The first was a reinscription (see also Seymour, 2000) of both the Carpathian landscape and the imaginative geographies of the Carpathians in order to achieve the historical legitimacy conferred by proving that in ancient times Transylvania was inhabited by the forerunners of the Romanians (the Dacians and the Romans), and that when the Hungarians arrived there (in the Middle Ages) they found the land of Transylvania inhabited by Romanians<sup>22</sup>. The reinscription included, among other things, the renaming of cities by their ancient Daco-Roman names (e.g. Cluj became Cluj-Napoca), huge investments in archaeological works (not limited to 'discovering' proofs: there was also the manufacturing of favourable historical evidence, which then was 'discovered'), fabrication of new 'adequate' historical, cultural, and geographical theories (e.g. despite

being mountains/an obvious barrier, the Carpathians have been theorized by Romanian scientists as having favored the unity of Romania and the preservation of Romanianness; another theory launched in 1974 argued that in pre-Ancient times, the Carpathians were the cultural heart of the European civilization, etc.)<sup>23</sup>.

The second strategy aimed at materially increasing the unity of the country (transitivity of the network), making it a coherent, organic whole, with no internal intransitivities. This included heavy investments in tunnels, railways, motor ways that crossed the Carpathians (they were transformed so as to fit the myth that they were not a barrier) and basing vital nodes of the 'national systems' in the Carpathians (e.g. electricity networks; also the national defense strategy is based on the Carpathians as 'the ultimate fortress'), etc.

#### 3. Interstices of hope

In the final part of the paper, I would like to pay attention to two epistemological-cum-political aspects that have given substance and rationale to the whole undertaking. The first of them is about scale and regions. Instead of operating with an analysis at the national level, or following the established regional divisions of the country, I chose the Carpathians as a unit of analysis and applied a new understanding of scale (Simandan, 2001a) as contexts collapsed within the unit of analysis. In other words, there were no introductory paragraphs about Romania in general, but the country's story unfolded along the specific discussion concerning the Carpathians, and this narrative style was adopted in order to make obvious the interplay between 'epistemology' and 'ontology', the fact that the 'outside' (non-Carpathian areas) is always already within the 'inside' (in our case the Carpathians).

This aside, the Carpathians were chosen for they constitute what could be called a 'subaltern region', in the sense that they are not a 'normal' (historical, administrative) region to which geographical theorizing about regions could apply, but a heterogeneous assemblage that has 'natural' (physical geographical) contours, being nevertheless both 'cultural' and natural', and being mobilized in a host of discursive practices, including those of governmentality<sup>24</sup>.

The second aspect refers to the role performed by the Carpathians in this paper, as space of encounter between theorizing poverty and the poverty of theorizing, insisting on how poor accounts of, or about, poverty largely determine the reproduction of poverty. In this regard, a first danger is to operate with too narrow an understanding of poverty, as related to lack of income and to underdevelopment. Instead, this paper has attempted to unpack a cultural circuit of poverty in which so many unexpected, apparently unimportant things were revealed as playing for high stakes. A second danger, this time referring to (Romanian) intellectuals, is to practice the moralist discourse that blames lay people for lacking entrepreneurial spirit, moral sense, and commitment to hard

work, seeing them as monsters created through the technologies of the self that made (the Romanian version of) communism so 'reputed'25.

This danger, which so many academics couldn't so far avoid, mystifies the complex reality of the communist era and underestimates the possibility that lay people are nowadays in the above-depicted ways not because they have been transformed, re-configured by the all-pervasive forces of the communist hydra, but because they developed effective strategies of resistance, of accommodating their archipelago of dividual selves to the performance of communism, whilst still maintaining their humanness and freedom through those things recently theorized as 'the visceral' (Connolly, 1999), or 'bare life'. In Thrift's words (2000b, page 39), the latter is: ...that little space of time that is much of what we are, a space not so much at the edge of action as lighting the world. Of course, it is not really bare; bare life pulses with action. And it is not simple...this little space of time is a vast biopolitical domain, that blink between action and performance in which the world is pre-set by biological and cultural instincts which bear both extraordinary genealogical freight — and a potential for potentiality.

And the third danger in theorizing poverty concerns jeopardizing the potentiality for political action, by divorcing too much theory from practice, social science from politics and policies, our personal lives from our professional roles, and so on. In this paper, I have approached the act of theorizing as an activating of tropes for political intervention, and hence as a political undertaking in itself. Instead of blaming the Romanians (or other post-communist 'mutants') for what they came to be, like in the moralist discourses mentioned above. academics should rather focus their energies on changing the state of affairs with 'common' people, and not in spite of them. Gibson's recent action research (2001, p. 664) in a declining regional economy suggests interstices of hope for favorable transformation, ways out of the 'countries' (of theory) where it is 'always raining': can an entity such as a regional economy be seen as performed in and by technical, material, and discursive devices that constitute its relations? What, however, if there is a break in the network of relations constituting this performance? What might this mean for the durability of economic subjection and the potentiality of new becomings?...What might this mean for the subject now deprived of economic citizenship? Might this interruption caused by exclusion from a dominant economic calculus liberate new subjectivities and alternative forms of economic citizenship?...this break in the performativity of established regional economic relations does not destroy the legacy of a collective experience and the constitutive desire for a new kind of regional 'being'.

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#### **NOTES**

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