Transitions to Adulthood in Romania: A Diachronic and Intergenerational Approach to Mobility Regimes

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Abstract

Although internal and international mobility are two phenomena that have long involved the Romanian population, they have rarely been studied as interrelated. Different forms of mobility have assumed such social relevance in local contexts that they also play an important role in young men's transition to adulthood. In this article, I demonstrate how domestic and international mobility are interconnected in the local system of meanings of young men growing up in three different historical periods: in the 1970s, in the 1990s and in the last ten years. Young men consider their mobility or immobility practices in continuity, but also in contrast to those of the previous generations. Their choices are particularly complex today because mobility patterns have become more diverse, encompassing additional internal and international destinations, short term and circular migration, as well as onward and return migration.

Keywords: Regimes of mobility, Youth transitions, Generations, Internal migration, International migration, Romania

Introduction

This article contributes to the debate on the transition to adulthood in societies with high rates of migration, exploring the nexus between geographical and social mobility and the ethnographic connections between international and internal migration in Romania from the 1970s to today, two widely present phenomena yet little studied with regard to their mutual relations. I will focus on the symbolic dimensions and values that are associated with mobility, through the life experiences and perspectives of young men, analysing how, in different historical phases, mobility has been related to accessing adulthood. Although various mobility practices were present in all of the periods analysed, their symbolic weight has changed. Internal and international mobility have always been linked in people's imaginaries; thus, although they have been sub-ject to different hierarchies over time, all types of mobility were evoked by my interlocutors.

Recent anthropological studies analyse the relationship between the life cycle and mobility in departure contexts from a youth perspective, especially in Africa (Gaibazzi 2011 for the Gambia, degli Uberti 2014 for Senegal, Vacchiano and Jimenez 2012 for Morocco). Many of these studies have analysed the ideas and practices of youth with respect to international migration (Azaola 2012, Crivello 2011), while others have focused on internal migration (Herrera and Sahn 2013, Gavonel 2017). In this study, I adopt the recent theoretical stance proposed by some scholars (Riccio 2016; King and Skeldon 2010) to not consider internal and international migration separately, but rather as interlinked processes that can occur within a person's lifetime. I focus on the diverse forms and importance that mobil-

ity takes throughout a young person's biography. These may change according to the social groups and geographical areas considered (Pelican 2013).

The concept of mobility is more inclusive than that of migration because it has the capacity for studying movement at vastly different scales (regional, national, international). Furthermore, mobility studies have given importance to the long-run temporal approach because they "theorise migration as co-constituted historically and geographically in the production of human relations within specific temporal and spatial contexts" (Hickey and Yeoh 2016, 649).

The recent 'mobilities turn' in migration studies has highlighted the need to analyse the relationship between social and geographic mobility, as the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. In an initial phase, mobility scholars described mobility as a form of emancipation generating new cosmopolitan identities (Canzler *et al.* 2008). Geographical mobility was placed in opposition to immobility, the latter seen as the lesser of the two. However, later work has shown that physical hypermobility could generate socially downward mobility and that physical immobility could produce a strong social mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). Furthermore, people choose to move towards specific destinations not least depending on their expectations of social mobility (Cresswell 2010). As Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) explain, "analysing mobilities thus involves examining many consequences for different peoples and places located in what we might call the fast and slow lanes of social life. There is the proliferation of places, technologies and 'gates' that enhance the mobilities of some while reinforcing the immobilities, or demobilizations, of others" (2006, 11).

Intergenerational transmission is another relevant aspect in the study of mobility. Ideas about mobility are communicated first and foremost within the family. Many youth grow up in families that are created through migration and that have transnational forms where some members are located in one country, and other members in others (Baldassar and Merla 2013). This experience has a strong impact on young people as they grow up (Mazzucato and Schans 2011) and in later life stages (Moskal and Tyrrell 2016). Studies have shown that when parents worked abroad, the propensity for young people to migrate is much higher (Cohen 2004). In societies where different mobility patterns prevail (regional, national, international), young people experience these different realities first and foremost through their parents. It is thus important to understand how, depending on the historical moment, these different mobility experiences get transmitted to young people.

This article thus employs three axes of analysis: the connection between internal and international migration; the relationship between geographical and social mobility; and intergenerational transmission of mobility experiences. It also uses two fundamental theoretical concepts, that of "cultures of migration" and that of "regimes of mobility". These concepts were useful to analyse youth mobilities in three different periods: the communist regime, the 1990s and the current period.

Although in Romania geographic mobility has involved both men and an increasing number of women (Piperno 2012, Vlase 2012), I decided to focus only on male mobility for two reasons: firstly, female mobility was not a major phenomenon in the years of socialism (Sandu 1984), and intergenerational comparison would not be possible. Secondly, the transition to adulthood has different timing according to gender; for this reason, including mobility trajectories for women is beyond the scope of this paper.

In my research I ask how mobility has historically affected youth's entrance into adulthood, what imaginaries are linked to mobility practices and how young men relate their experiences of mobility to those of their parents. In answering these questions by carving out both similarities and differences between the three time periods, I aim to demonstrate that, in societies with a high rate of mobility, ideas and values associated with mobility represent a culture that is

transmitted from generation to generation; they are the material and symbolic capital that young men use when they become adults. While there is no automatic transfer of models, young men creatively appropriate and renegotiate known models in economic and political contexts radically changed over the last fifty years.

In the first part of the article, I introduce the concept of "cultures of migration" and discuss its theoretical contribution to migration studies, as well as its links with the concept of "regimes of mobility." Then I present the connections between different forms of mobility in Romania during the three historical phases and the research methodology. The last part is devoted to the discussion of the results of my ethnographic research.

Cultures of migration, regimes of mobility and transition to adulthood

In studies on international migration, the concept of "culture of migration" has been established. Scholars dissatisfied with an exclusively economistic reading of migration proposed this concept in the early 1990s; it identifies the sets of meanings and values that, within a certain context, concern the migration process (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). Migration is part of everyday life, of the normality of various communities. In these communities, migration receives a substantially positive assessment that favours the decision to go abroad. Migration is a "culturally embedded" phenomenon, that is, not an isolated social phenomenon but rather one that must be connected to various other aspects of socio-cultural organization, in particular those related to status, socialization and the transition to adulthood. Some scholars have used the concept of "culture of migration" in connection with the concept of a "rite of passage" and have demonstrated how migration represents for the young a strongly symbolic and ritualized transition to adult age.

Chavez (1991), for example, used the model of initiation rites proposed by Van Gennep (1909) to describe the migration of young Mexicans

to California. Mexican undocumented migrants face the three phases – separation, transition and incorporation – but often they remain in a liminal condition, betwixt and between, for many years. For young nomadic shepherds in Somalia, the departure is strongly ritualized and their adult identity is built through travel (Rousseau *et al.* 1998). Congolese youngsters who migrate to Belgium realize a ritual of initiation to a new religion called *Kitendi* in which the body is socially promoted by clothing (De Clerq 2001).

The concept "culture of migration" points out the central role that the imaginary has in local societies. People's choices are not only influenced by direct experience, but they are often based on images circulating in their societies. As Salazar describes migration from Africa to Europe, he argues that often young people oppose their homeplace where things go wrong, in favor of someplace where everything is good: "The West does not just stand for better education and more money; it also means fame, victory, respect, and admiration. Young Africans in general have a strong desire to belong to this fantastic cosmopolis, to the promising world out there" (Salazar 2011, 589). These images are not only cultivated by migrants, but are produced by many subjects, mass media, politicians, and non-governmental organizations. They are not just about the act of migration but have a strong link with the perception that people have of their social contexts (Bal and Willems 2014).

The concept "culture of migration" has thus undoubtedly enriched anthropological reflection on migration processes; nevertheless, it has been overused (Viazzo and Zanotelli 2006) and has sometimes overlooked socio-political dimensions. The concept of "culture" has become something of a black box containing all the factors that do not make immediate economic sense and are thus defined as cultural, merely understood as unexplained adherence to a particular behaviour. This is a deterministic vision, which gives little value to subjective agency and which employs a logic of aggregation to explain the social practices of people.

People, in fact, adhere differently to systems of meanings and values. Phenomena described by mobility are nuanced and they vary – both practically and symbolically – in local contexts and in different historical moments. As shown by Pelican (2013), the meanings that people in countries of origin attribute to mobility are not homogeneous; they take shape differently within a single country at a particular point in time. These meanings should thus be placed in the context of the forms of political regulation that are present at different levels – regional, national and international. Attention to these dynamics is what prompted scholars to introduce the concept of "mobility regimes" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). It reflects "a notion of governmentality and hegemony in which there are constant struggles to understand, query, embody, celebrate and transform categories of similarity, difference, belonging and strangeness" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 7).

As already stated, spatial mobility could have a central role during the difficult transition to adulthood (Thomson and Taylor 2005). In many economic and social contexts in transformation, such as the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, it is one of the main tools available to young people for achieving autonomy (Nugin 2014; Vultur 2004). The transition to adulthood consists of a process for young men of progressive recognition and mastery of autonomy and it always involves a conflictual dimension, a phase of distancing from the adult world followed by the reincorporation into it. In the past, the transitions were marked more sharply and were ritualized with greater force. One of the characteristics of youth trajectories in contemporary societies is their reversibility, the ability to come and go between youth and adulthood. Today, the lines marking the borders between youth and adulthood are much more fluid, and young people increasingly feel their lives to be discontinuous and reversible (Bynner 2005; Wyn *et al*. 2012). Young men are influenced by a culture of mobility, but their adherence to cultural patterns is always the result of a negotiation and can be reversible.

Internal and international mobilities interconnected

In order to situate my research, this section provides an overview on Romanian international and internal migrations from the socialist period until today. The literature in recent years is highly focused on the emergence of transnational circular forms of mobility (Anghel *et al.* 2016), thus giving less importance to internal mobility. In the still scarce literature on internal mobility (Kupiszewsky *et al.* 1997, Alexe *et al.* 2014), these migrations are rarely shown in direct relation to international migration. The interconnections between different forms of mobility, however, exist and deserve more attention.

In the socialist period, mobility was strongly controlled by the regime. Internal mobility was a response of the people to modernization plans, and it produced shifts at different scales, from the local scale to the interregional (Sandu 1984). International emigration in the socialist years concerned the ethnic minorities, such as Jews and Saxons who were repudiated by the socialist regime, or the irregular migration of asylum-seekers to Western Europe, who were highly stigmatized by official policies.

After 1989, scholars proposed a mobility periodization corresponding to the most important changes at the political and economic level (Baldwin-Edwards 2005). Immediately after the revolution (1990-1993), urban-rural migration was quite strong because of a sharp drop in employment in the cities. Internationally, ethnic minorities and asylum-seekers migrated especially to Germany and Israel (Bleahu & Grigoraş 2006). Shortly after 1993, Romanian migration to Germany nearly ceased and new destinations appeared. Migration reoriented towards France, Spain, Italy, and Greece. Internally, the flow from small towns to the countryside continued (Kupiszewsky *et al.* 1997).

Since 1997, scholars coined the phrases "settled in mobility" (Diminescu 2003), "incomplete migration" (Okólski 2001) and "lasting temporariness" (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2005) to describe a growing circular and often irregular international

migration. Within Romania, migration to rural areas almost quadrupled (Alexe *et al.* 2014).

In 2007, Romania became an EU member. After 2007, there was officially a period of restriction on the EU labour markets for Romanian citizens. Thereafter, Romanian migration reoriented again towards the Northern Europe. A number of Romanians from the first emigration countries moved to new countries of emigration, a phenomenon that scholars defined as "onward migration" (Ciobanu 2015). As for internal migration, there has been a growing polarization: the elderly and retirees migrate to rural areas, while young people migrate to the big cities (Alexe *et al.* 2014). Current mobility patterns have become more diverse, encompassing more internal and international destinations, short term and circular migration, onward migration, return migration and reemigration.

Considering different historical periods, mobility patterns had specific characteristics related to geographic distances and to duration of stay abroad. The Romanian political and economical situation influenced the young men's choices.

Methodology
Although the connections between different forms of mobility – domestic and international – emerge strongly in the biographies of individuals and households, there are few qualitative analyses of these interconnections, as if the phenomena were mutually exclusive. This article is based on ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews collected over seven years in several parts of eastern Romania. I collected thirty in-depth interviews among young men of the village of Marginea, in the Suceava province, and in the surrounding countryside between 2006 and 2008. All the interviewed men were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.[1] In addition to these young men, I interviewed forty adults and elderly people who lived in the same region, with previous experience of migration, and some with no experience of migration. During the same period, I interviewed other young Romanians and the parents of the young men, whom I had encountered in Romania, in Turin, Italy, one of the main international destinations for Romanian migration in that period.

In 2011, in collaboration with other colleagues (Sacchetto 2011), I interviewed thirty students attending the final year in high schools in four Romanian cities (Radauti and Suceava, in the northeast, Craiova in the south and Cluj-Napoca in central Romania). These new interviews allowed me to compare the perspectives of young men of the same age in different social contexts and with different experiences.

The choice to interview not only young men with rural backgrounds and not just those with experience of international migration allowed me on the one hand to avoid the "methodological ruralism" present in much of the research on Romanian international migration (Meeus 2012), and on the other the "migrant exceptionalism" present in many studies on migration (Hui 2016). Additionally, I completed participant observations among returnees in two locations in eastern Romania, Peatra Neamt and Bacau, in 2014.

In selecting the interview sample, I paid particular attention to choosing people with different social and professional profiles who had different levels of schooling and a variety of family mobility experiences. Table 1 briefly summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of these respondents.[2]

In order to address the connections between different forms of mobilities, in the following sections I compare the experiences of men born into different historical periods: men born in the 1960s and who came of age in the 1980s; those born in the 1970s who became adults in the 1990s; and finally, men born in the 1990s who have entered adulthood in the past ten years.

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[1] To select my respondents, I used the United Nation's definition of 'youth' (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

[2] I changed the names of my respondents in order to protect them.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics

Name	Born	Education	Marital Status	Number of children	Current profession	Migration trajectories
Ilie	1955	8 years	Married	4	carpenter	1972-1976: Timisoara (Romania) 1980-1985: Bucharest (Romania) 1992-1994: Israel 1998-2014: Italy 2015-now: Suceava (Romania)
Dorin	1959	10 years	Married	2	bricklayer	1967-1987: Oradea (Romania) 2004-now: Italy
Cornel	1970	5 years	Married	2	owner of a grocery store	1994: Costanta and Oradea (Romania) 2001-now: Italy
Vasile	1972	University	Single	-	secondary school teacher	-
Gheorghe	1974	8 years	Married	1	electrician	1994-1996: Germany 1997-2000: Suceava (Romania) 2001-now: Italy
Vintila	1976	University	Married	2	journalist	1996-2000: Iasi (Romania)
Razvan	1994	Student in class 12	Single	-	student	-
Daniel	1995	Student in class 12	Single	-	student	Father in Italy (1999-2003) and in Germany (2005- now)
Dorel	1994	Student in class 12	Single	-	student	Mother in Italy (2000-2008)
Viorel	1992	University student	Single	-	student	-
Filip	1996	Student in class 12	Single	-	student	Mother in Spain (2000-2010)

Due to the time gap, the early experiences of mobility of the first and second cohort have been reconstructed through their narratives and personal and collective memories. Memory is never neutral and is conditioned by many factors, such as how much time has passed, the subjective disposition, and the experience. For the third cohort, I collected both narratives and observed their mobility practices. This crucial difference, in my material, however, did not obstruct my argument.

My research, although involving people from different regional backgrounds, has focused particularly on people born in the eastern part of Romania, Moldovan Romania, as the change of mobility regimes over the years has been particularly evident in this region. Although this article does not conduct an intraregional comparison, it is important to emphasize how significant the regional variable is; the mobility rates and domestic and international destinations are in fact very different within Romania. Western Romania, with low birth rates and a high level of economic development, has always been the destination for internal migration within Romania and since the 1990s has also become a target for international migration. Moldova, in the East of Romania, on the other hand, is a region that has always exhibited high rates of domestic and international emigration for several reasons: demographic growth higher than the rest of the country, scarcity of resources, few productive investments, and low growth rates. Mobility imaginaries are also very different. Western Romanians perceive themselves as more developed and sophisticated than their eastern compatriots, and mobility has never been a life strategy for them as it has been in Eastern Romania. The importance of mobilities for Moldovan young men is described in the following sections.

Transition to adulthood and mobility during communism

For current seventy-year-olds, the experiences of internal mobility in Romania were fundamental to their lives. In many rural villages in eastern

Romania, the majority of the male population was forced to migrate, since the collectivization policies and the reorganization of the agricultural sector left many families without the means for sustenance (Verdery 2003). Departures took place under two circumstances: military recruitment and seasonal work.

The young men left the countryside for longer or shorter periods in order to bring economic resources to their households. At the same time, they experienced contact with other areas that allowed them to define themselves, even on a symbolic level, as different from their parents. Leaving the parents' house allowed young men to accumulate material and social resources which were then the basis for their autonomy: economic independence and creation of a new family.

Leaving home was a highly ritualized moment. When a group of young men was departing for the first time for military service or to go to work, parties and dances were organized in the village center and unmarried girls were attending the events. These organized dances were an important chance for women and men to meet and know each other. The departure was celebrated along with the promises of coming back home.

These young men lived at a distance for quite some time, separated from their communities of origin, and they shared this experience in all-male groups. Those experiences of mobility strengthened their gender identity. The contact with the broader world was also a contact with objects and ideas they had only dreamed about until then. By migrating to the big cities, young men changed their attitudes and consumption habits. Ilie, at the age of seventeen, migrated with his brother to the Timisoara region and worked there as an agricultural labourer:

> In 1974, I came back from Timisoara with long hair. When my father saw me, he did not want to let me in, could not accept me like that. He called the police to make me cut it. Whenever a guy like me arrived, everyone commented that he had made a lot of money […] We were the terror of all those who remained in the village. At the Saturday dances the

girls always chose those of us who had been away. (Ilie, born in 1955, 8 classes completed, carpenter in Italy)

While young men spent long periods outside of their home villages, it was in the home village where they participated in festivities and showed off their new consumer goods. They sought and found recognition in the social space of the community from which they had departed. The mobility experiences also became instrumental in finding a wife.

Internal migration and international migration were often interconnected. A small number of the young men who migrated within Romania later undertook international migration. Those who went to work in the cities near the borders in Western Romania came into contact with new social realities, and these contacts were fundamental in the decision to undertake international migration. International migration was regarded by young men as a subsequent step following the internal migration, but it was often considered to be too radical a break because the risk of being unable to return was great. Practical information on international destinations was still limited and filtered by few direct personal contacts.

Dorin, at the age of eighteen, left his village and settled in western Romania where he worked as a mason for several years. After the fall of the regime he returned to his native village and then emigrated again to Italy, where he currently lives. Contacts from the internal mobility facilitated his latter international migration.

> When we left the village, there were four of us, peers, and we all went to Timisoara to work in construction. Living there we gathered a lot of information. My cousin Mihai knew a Romanian girl who had contacts with the Red Cross in Yugoslavia, and so they decided to leave together. I was afraid to go and I preferred to go back home… Once the revolution ended, I decided to leave Romania; I've been lucky at that time because my cousin Mihai was already living in Italy and he helped me. (Dorin, born in 1959, 10 classes completed, bricklayer in Italy)

The socialist regime produced polarized public representations of internal and international migration. Internal migrants were depicted as "good migrants," because they constituted a workforce which had participated in the great socialist industrialization of the country. For the socialist regime, the international migrants were considered "bad migrants", and were accused of national treason and doomed to public oblivion. However, in the communities of origin popular representations of the young emigrants were far more nuanced. All migrants were said to be "*în strainatate*" (abroad) (Kligman 1988), regardless of geographic distance.

> People in our village were saying that all of us were abroad whereas my situation was very different from my cousin Mihai's one. Since he left for Yugoslavia, we didn't receive any news from him for a long time. The Police controlled all the letters that my aunt was receiving; my aunt lost her serenity and she had to work in the cooperative for her son too. During public speeches, the Secretary of the Party was often referring to those young men who betrayed Romania pursuing a false dream of the Western world. (Dorin, born in 1959, 10 classes completed, bricklayer in Italy)

Due to the regime's negative stance, international migrants experienced a condition of social suspension over long periods of time. These young men could not return to their starting location and communications were difficult; thus, they did not achieve any social reintegration in their communities of origin. International migration led to a break with the familial and social context of the departure location. The socialist state exercised strong control over mobilities but also over their meaning. Internal migration was supported and promoted by the regime's policies, while international migration was discouraged. Young men internalized these arguments and assessed their geographical mobility trajectories within Romania positively, whereas international mobility was often looked upon with suspicion or fear.

Transition to adulthood and mobility in the 1990s

Young men born in the 1970s entered adulthood at a time of profound changes, both political and

economic. These young men witnessed the disintegration of the socialist state and the great social uncertainty that followed. International migration had an important role in coping with the lack of resources and it allowed the men of this generation to achieve autonomy and to define their own specific identity. Cornel was one of the first emigrants from Marginea to arrive in Italy in 1994. Before arriving in Italy, he had experience working in the south and west of Romania and currently lives in Turin, where he owns a grocery store and where his two children were born.

> In 1994 I was twenty-four years old. In Romania there was nothing to do, I had spent a few months in western Romania as a bricklayer but all the worksites were blocked. I still had to do my military service, and if I left for Italy nobody could come and take me. My father did not want me to leave, he hid my passport, but then I convinced him and he gave me his blessing. (Cornel, born in 1970, 5 classes completed, owner of a grocery store in Italy)

For these young men, traveling abroad represented an act of rupture with the established order. Departure made it possible to avoid military service, which was perceived at the time as a tyranny by an intrusive state power. Instead of being a key requirement for entry into adulthood, the years of military service only expanded the transition period, and this resulted in a totally different attitude of young men in relation to military service. They didn't consider it something that would guarantee social prestige anymore; rather, it would be something to avoid (Kay 2006).

The departure was highly ritualized, as in the socialist period. Many young men went to the monasteries to ask for blessings and prayers. In some cases, young men took little talismans with them on their migrations, such as pieces of fabric or blessed oil bottles which would protect them from danger.

Their trips also assumed the typical characteristics of a rite of passage, with critical moments at the border crossings, when young men faced the most difficult initiation tests. These tests, however, did not end upon arrival in the foreign

country, but continued throughout their engagement with the new social reality.

The experience of the first international migrants served as a model for those who stayed; they represented a link between distant worlds and often conveyed to family members, relatives and fellow villagers the information, knowledge and the practical know-how necessary for orienting oneself abroad. This led to a phenomenon involving ever more people each year. For the young men who migrated, the other European countries were a "hard-earned" destination, and they built their group identity around this perception of themselves as migrants and hard workers.

The young migrants, similar to their parents, began to transfer back home tangible signs of the new well-being they experienced abroad. Cars (Cingolani 2009), new foods, clothing, and "dream houses" (Moisa 2009), became markers of their new social identity and fuelled and strengthened practices of international mobility in many starting contexts. With the material and symbolic resources they accumulated abroad, these young men could enter adulthood; they became attractive on the marriage market and created a new families.

Although migration to the west and the south of Romania has not disappeared, for many years, young men have viewed it as a second-class mobility, diminishing its value in their descriptions of it. In the 1990s, internal mobility rarely ensured the kind of social mobility that had been produced over the years of socialism.

Vasile is a secondary school teacher in the town of Radauti, the only one in the family who never emigrated, relates to this:

> My family is split in two. Three brothers, the unlucky ones, in 1994 went to work in the west of Romania, while others went to Germany. It was not the same thing, because those who emigrated abroad are much better off today. (Vasile, born in 1972, teacher in Romania)

Young men in this period had various perceptions about the different mobility options. Romanian cities didn't have the same appeal as foreign

destinations. European countries were perceived as wealthy locations and places where a person's dreams would quickly come true. A popular saying easily expresses this common perception: "Italy is the country where you can find dogs with donuts tied to the tales". Furthermore, there was a hierarchy among European countries. Germany was the most appealing one, due to the favorable working conditions for Romanian workers. Italy and Spain followed Germany because they were considered the closest places for overlaps in cultural and linguistic characteristics, as well as countries where integration was easier than in others.

If we look at the intergenerational dynamics, we can identify two complementary processes. On one hand, young international migrants defined their behaviour as a break with respect to their parents' authority. On the other hand, young international migrants described their migration abroad as a continuation of their parents' internal migration.

Gheorghe is forty-four years old and since 1996 has lived in Turin, where he is an electrician. He likened his migration to Italy in the 1990s to the internal migration of his father in the 1970s and equated it with the same spirit of enterprise and attitude of resistance to the system:

> We leave home because the state always forgets about us. My dad did it, when he went onto a worksite because the communists had collectivized and removed them from their land, and I did it because the Romanian state no longer guaranteed us anything. (Gheorghe, born in 1974, 8 classes completed, electrician in Italy)

Although international migration was widespread and collectively shared, public institutions and the media have represented such behaviour in an ambivalent way. While in the early years, international migration went unnoticed in the media, it has become highly visible since the late 1990s. The press and Romanian television spread the concept of the *capsunaro* (strawberry pickers), used to describe the young men who emigrated to perform low-skilled jobs abroad and who, back in Romania, flaunt their prosper-

ity. Another widespread concept was that of the *euronavetisti* (European commuters) which described the intra-European mobility of young Romanians, with an obvious parallel to the internal mobility of the socialist past. This is an image with many shadows and hardly celebratory.

These emerging public representations have influenced the ideas on migration of young men, particularly those who have not emigrated. People with a high level of education are the most judgemental. Vintila was born in Radauti in 1976, attended the journalism institute in the city of Iasi, and is a local newspaper editor.

> At first there wasn't enough information on what was going on abroad and people living abroad would always tell good stories. Then the newspapers and the TV started to report stories of mistreatments and failures of Romanian that were abroad and we started to be more sceptical. I could have done like my cousins who all went to Spain and Italy, but instead I stayed. I wanted to try to establish myself here in Romania. (Vintila, born in 1976, university completed, journalist in Romania)

To sum up, in the transition years, international migration prevailed as a reaction from the bottom to the crushing state and socio-economic gyrations, whereas internal migration, from cities to the countryside, was a survival strategy. International migration, after becoming a common practice, also gradually produced articulate discourses and imaginaries within the departure communities.

Coming of age in contemporary Romania

Romanians currently in their twenties are going through a new, different phase of history when compared to their parents' experiences. Romania has been part of Europe for more than ten years now, and was hit hard by the crisis that began in 2008; at the same time, certain areas of the economy show strong development. Labour market conditions in the traditional European emigration countries have dramatically worsened. In addition to economic difficulties in Romania, Romanian migrants have experienced rejection and sometimes explicit racism. In Italy, for example, between 2008 and 2009, Roma-

nians were subjected to violent political and media campaigns, comparable to those carried out against the Albanians in the early 1990s (Caritas Italiana 2010).

Some European countries have become, in the eyes of young men living in Romania, places with strong social uncertainty. The diffusion of mobility patterns does not mean that young men unconditionally and uncritically choose to migrate abroad. International mobility, although still a desirable option, is not a normative behaviour that automatically transmits within families (Perrotta 2011). For many, international migration is not always equivalent to social upward mobility, but rather, often dooms them to regression of social status.

These aspects are clear in many interviews I collected among high school students:

> Here, they talk a lot about Italy. They talk about what happened to other Romanians who have lost their jobs, who have not been paid, and even those who have relatives abroad say that is not easy. Hearing 'Romanian shit' on the street is not nice at all. And then there are many who return empty-handed, like the gypsies who only go back and forth. (Razvan, born in 1994, student in high school in Romania)

These words speak of a disenchantment and even a condemnation of forms of mobility towards localities where migrants feel threatened. The views of young men often echo the dominant discourses of the Romanian press and politicians, who, for example, have strongly criticized the Roma migration. The Romanian Roma are considered responsible for the negative image of the Romanians who went abroad and the reason for all the discriminations suffered by them (Cretu 2014).

The feeling of psychological insecurity is also linked to the changing economic conditions in destination countries. In Romania, as in many other European countries, the time of transition from youth to adulthood has expanded; and international mobility is no longer a guarantee of a linear process. Indeed, it could further delay the achievement of important objectives such as economic independence and family formation.

International mobility has lost both its novelty and the symbolic value it had for the generation currently in their forties. For these reasons, the departure of young men is no longer ritualized in the local communities.

Many young Romanians today express the desire to move abroad as tourists or as travellers for short periods, but not with the purpose of seeking employment. As in previous periods, a hierarchy emerges regarding international destinations, with certain countries appearing much more desirable than others. It is a new and evolving geographic imaginary, where the southern European countries occupy the lowest positions, while the United States, Canada and northern European countries occupy the highest ones (Cingolani 2016).

In their words, young men are at a critical distance from their parents' migration. Daniel's father emigrated to Italy in 1999 when he was four years old. In 2003, his father returned to Romania and is currently a seasonal worker in Germany. Daniel grew up with only his mother.

> To my father and those of his age it seemed that Europe was freedom, and perhaps in the beginning it was. Our parents worked like crazy but were not able to defend their rights. We want something else and we know that we have to find our way in the world, in our own way. (Daniel, born in 1995, student in high school in Romania)

Several young men criticized the choices made by their parents, yet many acknowledge the material advantages they have thanks to the sacrifices their parents made. As Ionela Vlase (2013) highlighted, the parents' international mobility often resulted in the social mobility of their children in Romania. Their savings allow their children to study in the best Romanian universities and start an independent life.

Social mobility, in the imaginary of young men, is today disconnected from international migration. A preference for shorter range and internal migration forms has reappeared because there is more employment and income security in some Romanian cities than in many other European localities. Dorel comes from a middle-class fam-

ily; his father is a postman, and his mother is an elementary school teacher. For some years, his mother worked in Italy, and her savings allowed him to study.

> Next year, when I finish high school here, I'll move and go to the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Cluj. It's a great university and I think with that degree it will be easy to find work. There is no point in going abroad without a safe objective. (Dorel, born in 1994, student in high school in Romania)

The discussion of professional career opportunities also overlaps with reflections on lifestyles and consumption that are no longer guaranteed exclusively through international migration:

> In large Romanian cities, the lifestyle, for those who have money, is the same as in other European cities. It's not like in the 1990s, when our parents didn't have anything here in Romania and had to bring everything from abroad. It's just a matter of finding your own space: it is difficult in Romania, just as it is difficult outside of Romania. (Daniel, born in 1995, student in high school in Romania)

One of the most important changes from the past is that, for the new generations, mobility is not always linked to autonomy. Today, mobility for many young men is an experience that allows you to acquire important cognitive tools but never allows you to become economically autonomous. Some young men, after spending short periods of study or work abroad, return to Romania and still live for a while in their parents' home.

Many respondents are aware that opportunities for social mobility are distributed unequally in society and that not all people have the same chances of success, either in Romania or abroad. Filip is seventeen and comes from a middle-class family. His father is a farmer, and his mother worked as a caregiver for ten years in Spain:

> Our parents went abroad because there was little or nothing here. Now there is everything here; that is, there is a great choice, but many people can only stand by and watch without being able to consume. If you are born in a poor family is hard to

> successfully change. (Filip, born in 1996, student in high school in Romania)

These words clearly express that what worries many young men today is an involuntary social immobility (Carling 2002), which allows no vision for the future. Access to adulthood, which always involves a crossing of symbolic and material boundaries, is increasingly difficult. In this context, in recent years, internal migration, especially from the countryside to the cities, has come to represent an alternative to international mobility in a context of general social and economic uncertainty. The travel experience of the parents doesn't result directly into the mobility of their children, but it has an effect on their children's perceptions of living abroad. For this reason, it is possible to say that it still exists as a legacy on the culture of mobility among generations. This culture of mobility creates images of here and elsewhere, and young men build their projects on these images.

Conclusions

International and internal migration have occurred with varying intensity at different stages of Romanian contemporary history. At times, geopolitical conditions have made one option more viable and widespread among the population than the other, but these processes have always coexisted. Scholars have long maintained a separate analysis of internal and international migration, yet using a mobility studies approach, this study highlights the need to overcome the rigid divisions between the two. Such an approach allows for a long-term vision and an inclusive approach to study mobilities. This article has analysed how different forms of physical mobility and the imaginaries associated with them have resulted in various mobility regimes among young Romanians. These mobility regimes have had different characteristics in the different historical periods. During the communist period the state exercised strong control over mobilities, supporting internal migration and discouraging international migration; in the 1990s international migration prevailed as a

bottom-up strategy to survive the political and economic transformations in Romania; in the last period no mobility regime prevails anymore because social insecurity is widespread both at national and international level.

In this paper, I have focused on the forms of mobility in the Romanian Moldovan region, aware that the regional differences deserve further exploration. I focused my attention on imaginaries which guide individual actions. In different historical phases, mobilities have intersected with the processes of transition to adulthood among young Romanians. The experiences of three cohorts have been chosen for comparison, exploring aspects of continuity and difference.

For young men in the 1970s, physical mobility allowed them to accumulate relational skills and resources needed to start adult life; the steps towards adulthood were clearly marked and geographical mobility ensured social mobility. The departure of young men from home received a public recognition and was ritualized. Where international migration was present, it was a minority phenomenon and judged ambivalently by young men. It implied a break with sending communities, and not everyone had the necessary resources or desire to tackle a step so radical and full of uncertainties.

For young men in the 1990s, international mobility has had the same role that internal mobility had for the previous generation. This generation crossed geopolitical borders but also social boundaries in European destination countries; the act of migration was highly ritualized in the starting contexts. International migration enabled young men, at least in the early years, to improve their social position at home, especially if compared to those who did not migrate; internal migration did not stop but was rather perceived as a survival strategy; it lost its attractiveness and no longer guaranteed social prestige. Thus, in the juvenile imaginary, internal migration was ruled out. Young men of this generation viewed their international mobility ideally in continuity with that of their parents, considering it a fundamental step towards adulthood.

For young contemporary Romanians, paths to adulthood are much less defined and less linked to geographical mobility. These paths are no longer ritualized. Although intra-European borders have weakened, and the crossing is now easier, the social borders within societies have multiplied. There is a growing awareness among young men that international migration can produce social immobility, even a negative social mobility, and internal migration has once again become an option to ensure upward social mobility.

Returning to the initial claim, the life stories collected confirm that experiences of mobility have spread and have been reinforced in local contexts, along with ideas and images of elsewhere. Young men of every generation took advantage of this culture of mobility as they became adults. The transition to adulthood happened for each generation inside different mobility regimes; young men preferred internal mobility, international mobility or immobility depending on different historic periods. In all of the historical stages, the transition to adulthood involves a struggle with the parents' experience of mobility. The social institution in which cultures of mobility are transmitted is above all the family, but adherence to certain models may fluctuate. In this sense, it is important to highlight, in addition to the continuity from one generation to the other, the creativity and capacity for innovation that young men have always shown. It is in this respect that the meanings associated with mobility can be endorsed, but can also be challenged and negotiated, throughout the entire process of transition to adulthood. As I demonstrate, it is important to adopt a perspective that goes beyond "migrant exceptionalism" and that allows for an understanding of the mobility experience within broader social processes.

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