A NEW „CULT OF LABOR": STRESS AND CRISIS AMONG ROMANIAN WORKERS[1]

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ANALYSIS OF WORK AND WORKERS IN ROMANIA TODAY

This essay compares how active and unemployed Romanian Jiu Valley miners and Făgăraș region chemical workers, interpret and respond to post-socialist decline, which takes the form of increasing unemployment, falling standards of living, and especially stress in work and family, and problems of health and general welfare[2]. The essay is part of a larger project concerned with the relation of labor and health perceptions among these regional populations. Using survey, ethnographic, observational, and interview data, we asked if the actual conditions of labor in each zone in this time of crisis affects worker senses of control over their lives and if this, in turn, influences perceptions about health, the body, and physicality in general.

As is painfully apparent, the decline in Jiu Valley and Făgăraș workers' lives, if not among workers through Romania today, has „stressed out" both groups. Life is hard and people are bitter. However, to understand and perhaps address such stress, we must first consider the social and cultural particularities of each region and how regional populations respond to the forces and pressures of the country's economic crisis. In fact, our research suggests that variations in culture resulting from the specific way by which workers are incorporated into regional production systems result in highly variable responses to crisis both within and between regions. Below we describe the differential integration of labor and how this is perceived and acted on by diverse groups, focusing on domestic arrangements, political responses, and attitudes and actions related to unemployment.

Workers' lives are not often thought relevant for detailed social scientific examination in contemporary East Europe, let alone Romania. To speak of workers today, after forty years of socialist class and „cult of labor" (*cultul muncii*) rhetoric, one runs risk of being accused of Communist sympathies

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[2] Research was carried out in summer and fall 1999 and summer 2000, and included work place observations, questionnaire administration and interviews in the cities of Făgăraș, Orașul Victoria, and throughout the Jiu Valley, concentrating on the Lonea, Aninoasa, and Lupeni mines.

or, at the very least of irrelevance (cf. Gardawski and Gąciarz et al 1999). However, in our estimation, the social and economic difficuties besetting contemporary Romania absolutely justifies putting social science and even ethnographic practices, like thick description, cultural relativism, and *in situ* analysis, to practical use. And there are few social issues with which social science must grapple as compelling as the condition of the laboring classes. If anything, the generalized malaise of Romania's workers today defines a new „cult of labor" shaped by anger, fear, and above all, stress.

To probe the diverse perceptions and responses to such stress, however, we feel an engaged social science of labor needs three qualities. First, it must be critical and focus on the nature, causes, and responses to existing social problems. Second, it must be comparative and seek to understand social variation and how and why different groups constitute their social realities in different ways. Third, it must be contextual. In this time of crisis, we can no longer afford the luxury of restricting fieldwork to bounded communities or discrete customs. Instead, communities and customs must be considered as operating within regional, national, and international political economic contexts and social forces. With this approach in mind we offer the following discussion on the diverse nature of Romanian worker communities and their lives in crisis.

CONTRASTING REGIONAL LABOR SYSTEMS

On the surface, the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș regions share many similarities that characterize their circumstances throughout socialism and post-socialism. In the socialist years both regions prospered from a concentrated mono-industrial production base, hard-coal mining in the Jiu Valley and chemical manufacture and processing in the Făgăraș zone. Their successes drew labor from other Romanian regions. However, in post-socialism, because of that concentration of industry, both regions have been targeted for extensive economic restructuring, the results of which now having produced devastating unemployment and active labor movements.

Today, as is well known, the Jiu Valley mining industry (*minerit*) is reeling from two rounds of mass layoffs spurred by worker „contract buy-outs" (*disponibilizare*) that offered lump-sum severance packages to miners of from twelve to twenty months of pay in addition to regular unemployment benefits. The buy-outs enabled closure of two of thirteen mines, threaten an unspecified additional number today, and have decreased *minerit* employees from roughly 42,000 in 1997 to 18,216 today[3]. The largest part of the unemployed miners now sits idle in the Jiu Valley towns, their benefits running out in December 1999. As discussed below, many idled miners who had immigrated to the region, used part of their severance pay to return to their areas of origin, chiefly Moldavia. However, they returned to the Jiu when their prospects did not pan out. Similarly, in the three factories of the Făgăraș region[4] the number of employees declined precipitously from a total of 17,239 in 1989 to 5,636 today. While many of these laid-off workers have immigrated to Italy, both legally and illegally, most remain in the region seeking other sources of livelihood.

High unemployment and steep rises in the cost of living have galvanized labor's anger in both regions. Jiu Valley miners are, of course, infamous for the periodic *mineriade* and actual and threatened marches on Bucharest. Despite the renown this brings, these actions have been eclipsed by miner grie-

[3] There were 53,446 employed in the *minerit* in 1989.

[4] These include the Nitramonia Chemical Company and the UPRUC Chemical Outfits company from Făgăraș and the Viromet Chemical Company from Orașul Victoria.

vances against local mine administrations. Făgăraș factory unions and workers have also participated in labor actions at both national and local levels. In part to stem such actions and address economic needs the Romanian government has named the Jiu Valley a „disfavored zone." Făgăraș' appeal for this status, though merited according to the criteria set forth in the law[5] has not, as yet been approved.

Still, despite these broad similarities, the differential integration of labor into local life has shaped specific local cultural practices, and contributes to diverse socio-economic responses to disfavor and post-socialist decline. In the Jiu Valley, mining is the near sole livelihood and thoroughly dominates regional mentalities. The distinctiveness of the mine in regional life thus contributes to the production of a number of symbolic oppositions separating the mine and miners from other social groups. Specifically mining culture encouraged collectivity among miners and intensified polarized relations between miners and superiors, between active and unemployed miners, in gender relations, and in the views of politics and the state between miners and others. Contradictorily, though polarization spawned by mining creates an angry labor force, such polarization also arrests miner economic responses. Rather than diverse strategies of adaptation to economic crisis, the miners largely demand rebuilding the mining industry or replacing mining with other occupations equally as lucrative or identity producing.

In contrast, in Făgăraș, sources of labor and income have always been diffused. While the chemical plants were the chief regional employer, Făgăraș workers, to a much greater extent, have access to rural village occupations and resources. They also have a range of other alternatives which they perceive as more readily available to them, including emigration. This then contributes positively to the elevation of labor as an end in itself, to somewhat calmer labor relations, a greater degree of equal economic participation of men and women and hence more stable, if still troubled, domestic relationships. At the same time, however, the scramble for access to the diverse resource base of the region generates an endemic competition between workers and gives rise to greater interpersonal jealousy. How these situations developed, are understood, and responded to by workers – the discourses of disfavor and despair – are the focuses to which we now turn.

LABOR AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE MINERIT

Miners experience decline in polarized ways. Enmeshed in an intense collectivity by virtue of the particular qualities of work in the mines, they nonetheless see this waning in response to post-socialist change. Though they are enraged in response to the failing mining industry they are still incapable of joint, purposeful action. Their pretensions to solidarity are shaped by the nature of mining, the special position the miners occupied in the socialist state, and the current treatment of

[5] On the basis of the Romanian government's Ordonanța de Urgența, 24/1998, a disfavored zone meets at least one of the following conditions: 1) mono-industrial production profile which employed at least 50% of the labor force; 2) mining zone where workers were released by collective termination of their work contract; 3) collective termination of the work contract affects at least 25% of the local work force; 4) an unemployment rate at least 25% higher than the national rate; 5) a poor communications and transportation infrastructure. According to many, the Ordonance on Disfavored Zones was passed specifically to address the political volatility of the Jiu Valley. Whether or not the case, the Jiu Valley was first to receive this designation. Regarding Făgăraș, as late as mid-November 1999, they were still submitting documents to the government center at Alba Iulia responsible for review. Făgăraș officials were convinced they could not be denied such status. However, they were still chagrined at the time the process took and the possibility that political considerations might slow down their application or limit the programs for which they qualify.

miners in Romanian political discourse. However, miner unity today is torn by increasing distinctions between segments of the mining population that have grown in response to recent miner political actions and the buy-outs of the last years.

Jiu Valley miner solidarity first grows from the cultural mystique bonding those who work under the earth's surface. The stark boundary between the underground and the earth's surface, expectations of sudden death, and the brutal conditions of mine labor all encourage a common identity. This was further supported during socialism by the material supports the group received and the literary and journalistic manipulation of miner images to promote the socialist cult of labor (Bârgău I. 1984, Pospai M. 1978). Today the blanket critique of miners in national media has replaced socialist attentions. Such criticism (see, for example, Perjovschi D. 1999) encourages miners to believe they are scapegoats for their industry's decline and the country's social and economic malaise. However, *mineriade* to the contrary, this common outlook and anger neither translate into effective action nor even shared understanding of needed steps to overcome decline. Despite popular opinion and scholarship speaking of diverse types of miners as a largely homogenous group (cf. Lamarso Group 1998, Larionescu M. et al 1999), miners are a differentiated lot whose unity is eroded in various ways, but especially by social and cultural distinctions in the mine division of labor.

Until the massive lay-offs of 1997 divided those with and without work, the major distinction between miners separated those who work beneath the earth at the coalface (*mineri la front*), with the *mineri la întreținere*, i.e. those employed in surface and auxiliary mine occupations like signalman, mechanic, explosives expert (*artificier*), or transporter. In fact, legendary miner solidarity is really only found at the coalface, where work is most dangerous. There, depending on qualifications, one is a miner, assistant miner, wagon tender, or unqualified worker. For safety and production's sake, and at potential loss of pay and life, at the work site (*abataj*) all team members respond to the miner's demands. Below, then, when we speak of miners, we refer to *mineri la front*, unless otherwise indicated.

The separation of underground *(subteran)* and surface and *mineri la front* and *mineri la întreținere* is also evident in miner behavior outside the mine. Thus, though miners and auxiliaries take part in the same brigade, after the shift work team solidarity is embellished by bouts of drinking and a particular etiquette of behavior at the bar. In this coalface teams remain together, but generally separated from other groups. Drinking and smoking also symbolize the passage from work to non-work, from underground to surface. Thus, when most miners leave the mine they first light up a cigarette. When they had money, it was the rare end of a shift not marked with a round of drinking where all were expected to contribute in turn.

In contrast to coalface miners, for all intents and purposes, auxiliaries live and work in separate worlds. They have greater mobility during their workday and hence a slightly greater sense of control over their labor. They have their own dressing areas (*vestiar*). They often drink among themselves after their shifts. They have different levels of education. There are even rural-urban differences as auxiliaries are often men (and some women) from villages upland from Jiu Valley cities[6]. These villagers call themselves and are called by others „Momârlani," a term derived from Hungarian for „those left behind," as their presence in the Valley dates, by some accounts, even to Dacian settle-

6 Many people assume the Jiu Valley to be rural though it is one of the most urbanized Romanian zones.

ments[7]. Momârlani work mainly at mines close to rural areas[8]. As peasant-workers they have access to rural products, but need time for that production. Consequently, they are known to often give mine administrators rural produce to gain employment at surface work sites or to leave the mine for the household in times of intense agricultural activity.

Though miners and auxiliaries aver mutual respect, considerable social distance has recently developed between the two groups. The crisis in the cost of living has especially prompted mutual recrimination as, since the disponibilization, miners contrast their working conditions with the easier ones for auxiliaries. Meanwhile auxiliaries decry their lower salaries compared to miners, even though they say they face equally dangerous work conditions. Most important, the potential unity of these groups breaks down over the differential participation of miners and auxiliaries in the various *mineriade*. The former wax poetic about Miron Cozma and readily aver their participation in former *mineriade*. However, auxiliaries claim to have either not participated at all or to have been forced to participate. To a person they state that such labor actions were a great mistake.

The spatial and symbolic separation of the mine from earth's surface also separates the mine and the household, the miner and his wife, and thus limits shared economic strategizing. June Nash saw the division of labor between Bolivian tin miners and their wives as symbiotic, integrative, and effective in helping galvanize and organize oppositional labor action (Nash J.1979). However in the Jiu, though miners and their wives are mutually interdependent, their relationship is separate, often distant, and often lacking effective communication. They have different interests, friends, conversations, avocations, and household responsibilities. Miners' wives, for example, are the main opposition to their husbands' drinking. Some show up at the mines or the bar on paydays to take their husband's pay packet and give them a small amount for drink. So separate are their realms that stories abound of poor communication between miners and their wives resulting in domestic problems. A recent variation tells of how both employed spouses separately decided to accept the buy-out at their workplace and neglected to tell their partner, resulting in the family losing access to all income sources at the same time.

Shared economic strategizing is also restricted as miners' wives have generally not worked, even though about 20% of the employees in the entire Jiu Valley *minerit*, including coal preparation facilities, are women. Besides the lack of other employment except mining in the Jiu Valley, work for women was not necessary since miner salaries were, until recently, sufficient by themselves to support a family. Also, miner families often had large numbers of children, requiring women's attention. But even when miners' wives worked they were also criticized. One wife of a Lupeni miner who worked at the Lupeni mine offices said:

At work I always had problems. They would tell me that 'your husband works at the mine, so (I) should stay home.' I don't know what worth this discussion had. It mainly created divergences between me and my colleagues... that I was greedier because I worked at the mine. I certainly don't agree with this, because I was hired here even before my husband was.

CULTURAL OPPOSITION IN AND ABOUT THE JIU VALLEY MINERIT

Aside from the growing separation between miners and auxiliaries and men and women in the Jiu Valley, the conceptual dis-

[7] According to Vasile Şoflău, the appellation Momârlani, is not exclusively a term restricted to the Jiu Valley but is also used by and about other mainly rural populations in the larger region, such as in Ţara Haţegului to the north.

[8] These mainly include Lonea, Livezeni, Valea de Braz and Uricani.

tinctiveness of the mine and miners also contributes to differential explanations for the *minerit's* decline among Jiu Valley populations. These contradictory discourses distinguish the bulk of today's mining population who arrived in the Valley in three post-1977 volleys of immigration from non-miners, others who arrived before the advent of the socialist period, and those settling in the Valley right after World War II through the 1960s. In dividing the region's population in this way such discursive differences keep tensions high in the Valley, deprive miners of political and economic allies, and reinforce their view that they are being unfairly scapegoated.

The non-mining and pre-1977 Jiu Valley population largely agree with the received wisdom that mining's decline dates to the socialist period. They especially blame the poor quality of the people who arrived at that time to work in the mines. According to this view, which we could term „Moldavian Orientalism" (cf. Said E. 1975), the mines began to decline as socialist practices encouraged shoddy labor. However, this was exacerbated after 1977 by immigration of poorly educated, minimally motivated, and socially troubled populations from other Romanian regions, mainly Moldavia. They were sent to the Jiu to dilute miner political unrest that erupted in a strike in early August 1977. This strike closed the mines and forced Nicolae Ceaușescu to travel to Petroșani to address miner concerns (Velica I. and Schreter C. 1993: 188-89). Many immigrants to the Valley, unable to adapt to the rigors of mining, left soon after arriving causing the number of mine workers to fluctuate wildly. This resulted in Ceaușescu's policy to use the military in the mines to stabilize the size of the workforce to maintain production. The instability of mining district populations resulted in a decline in the quality of production, even as the state bought political peace by raising miner salaries, expanding their benefits, and decreasing the time and requirements necessary for them to qualify for higher paying, more responsible positions in the mines.

According to the non-miner discourse, the remnants of this in-migrating, socially and culturally backward population form the bulk of those who work today in the *subteran* and who continue to receive large salaries for inefficient work in an outmoded and ecologically unsound production system. Worried about their declining privileges, they are said to be easily manipulated by leaders like former and current president Ion Iliescu or the charismatic, demagogic Cozma, now in prison for 18 years for his part in the miners' threat to the Romanian government in 1991. Most recently in the so-called *mineriade* of early 1999, outsiders say that miners were whipped into a frenzy as the state failed to meet their unrealistic economic demands to keep the mines open and miner salaries high.

The non-miner discourse also contrasts the post-1977 period with Jiu Valley and *minerit* culture developed by entrepreneurs and workers from Austro-Hungarian ethnic groups from the late eighteenth century (Baron M. 1998). According to this notion, the region's past was one of relative economic and cultural well-being. The private mines were generous to workers and mining became the occupation of choice and family tradition. Community life, too, was elevated by the *minerit*. Local bands played in town squares. Theatre groups entertained miners and their families. Ethnic peace reigned between the diverse Valley groups – Poles, Czechs, Magyars, Szeklers, Germans, Jews, and Romanians. Though the industry was not without its tensions and conflicts, such as the ambiguous Lupeni miners strike of 1929 (Oprea I. 1970, Țic N.1977, Velica I. 1999) by and large these are de-emphasized as socialist aberrations.

Contrasting these views, the historical horizons of most *mineri la front*, date to the 1980s and the „good life" of late socialism. Moldavian immigrants talk of how their labor expanded the *minerit* and was critical for Romania's becoming an industrialized nation. Before 1989, they say, their jobs were assured, miner salaries were deservedly among the highest in the country, and their expenditures supported

the entire Valley population. Even the shortages of Ceaușescu's last years do not seem all that daunting to miners in light of present-day difficulties. As one former miner said:

If we have anything in our house today it is from the time of Ceaușescu. But now all that we accumulated before we must sell in order to survive. In the time of Ceaușescu our country even had enough to give food to others. But now us Romanians are starving because of this improper reform.

Another miner, a work team head from Lupeni, focused on the richness of culture during Ceaușescu's days. Then, he says,

We had all kinds of wonderful things. We went on picnics together. We had good food at the mines. We had sports teams that the miners supported. We would get cheap tickets to come to the games where there was a holiday atmosphere. The big teams would even come and play. But now no one really goes to the games much anymore. They haven't the money or the spirit.

Hearing over and over how they are to blame for mining's difficulties, most miners today see themselves as scapegoats for failed government reforms in the mining sector. They particularly feel that Romania's recent governments consciously discriminate against the Jiu Valley and point to, among other things, the cost of water, the corruption of political and economic processes, and various broken promises, such as President Constantinescu's to maintain mining jobs and expand other employment, made during his visit of November 1998. To hear most miners tell it, mining would do fine if Romania's governments would let it. Though they decry the conditions in which they work, in some mines reminiscent of the nineteenth century, miners claim that policies that close factories and reduce the country's need for energy sit at the heart of their problems. They also claim that the government is in thrall to international agencies like the World Bank and IMF, which forces it to restrict Romanian production and thus limit the country's need for coal.

However, the general condemnation of the government for the *minerit*'s problems fails to translate into generalized action. The miners lack support in their own communities where they are pariahs whom non-miners blame for the poor view of the Jiu Valley by the rest of the country. Since the last *mineriada*, unity between miners and auxiliaries is increasingly questionable. And domestic conditions only promote frustration but little in the way of solutions. Thus, the over-whelming sentiment which miners feel is betrayal (Friedman J.1999) and their over-whelming response recrimination against self and colleagues. In particular, the meaning of the mining life has inexorably changed though miners seek to hold on to it even though they sense its certain decline.

MINER RESPONSES TO CRISIS

In the tensioned post-disponibilization environment miner self-conceptions and social relations are deteriorating and miner culture is arrested by the perpetual disquiet, uncertainty, and sense of abandonment widespread through the Valley. The miners show clear recognition that their communities and relations are in disarray. They readily contrast life today to their late socialist political and economic salad days when they were treated as the crème of Romania's industrial workers and brought all Romania to a standstill. A common miner complaint thus concerns how, in the past, their pay was „in first or second place in the whole nation, but now we are lucky if we are in tenth place." They also comment on how today people look at them as animals[9] but before, as one former mine union leader said:

[9] The animalistic quality of miners' lives was especially portrayed in the documentary *„Prea Tîrziu"* (Too Late). Though many actual miners were filmed and the movie caused a great sensation in the Jiu Valley, it is largely seen as a scurrilous denigration of the miners and their culture. Among other things it depicted murders in the mine that never happened and showed the miners in the most dehumanized way, including a scene of mass nudity in their shower after a shift.

We miners had respect. Not only did we have good salaries but also people in Romania looked up to us for challenging the regime (i.e., in 1977). All of Romania even waited for us to take the first action to bring down the regime. But when the train of the revolution left the station we miners weren't on it, and we haven't had the respect of the country since then.

Miners don't disagree that the *mineriade* had deleterious affects on how they are perceived within society. However, they suggest that these negative perceptions are due to purposeful media distortion of what went on during the *mineriade* rather than actual reality. This view especially concerns the last mass march of the miners, which ended in negotiation at the Cozie Monastery. In regards the march, the miners say that nearly all the Romanian working people supported their attempts to preserve their jobs, but that the government and media tried to sow fear among the people by a skewed selection of images and interviews. The miners also suggest that they were gassed and shot at by government troops so the government could show the World Bank and IMF they were serious about reform.

The miners not only feel bereft (or cheated) of support in society at large. Even their vaunted coalface solidarity has begun to erode under pressures of worker buy-outs, economic crisis, and political backlash. But though they recognize that the world they knew is no longer and that change is of utmost importance, their typical response shows them uncertain of directions to take and ultimately unconvinced of the *minerit*'s end. They are suspended, as it were, between the excesses of the past and the unknown, though almost certainly bleaker, future.

Political Responses: As indicated above, the storied activism of Jiu Valley miners of the last years is fast on the wane. Strafed and gassed by government troops in January 1999 as they marched toward Bucharest, their numbers reduced by two-thirds in the recent buy-outs, and hearing the critique from both society in general and their auxiliary colleagues in the mines about past political action, the miners are not soon likely to mount effective response to their decline. This is made more certain as relations between the miner's and their union, the „Liga Sindecatelor Miniere 'Valea Jiului,'" are also tensioned. Though many miners still speak of Cozma as a demigod, they are much less attracted to their current leaders who are now mainly seen as largely disinterested in workers' needs or as hopelessly corrupt and compromised.

Even miner local labor activism seems in eclipse. Despite the great number of strikes to replace local mine administrations over the last years, and the continuing high rate of turn-over in mine directors, it is interesting to note that miners' today neither blame specific mine administrations or even the National Anthracite Coal Company (CNH, formerly RAH)[10] for their problems. It is the national government and national politicians that are thought in collusion and behind their distress. National institutions such as CONEL, the electric power monopoly, or the Water Directory (Regia Apelor) are also culpable. More to the point, miner behavior in local strikes is also changed. Previously, the miner ethos required that when one mine struck, no matter the cause, so too would all other mines. If miners at one mine didn't know the precise reasons for their colleagues' labor action, to show their solidarity they still walked-out first and asked questions later. Today, however, such behavior is rarely evident. Active miners worry about their pay and especially job retention and there are few reasons that will prompt a strike in such conditions.

With no specific actions either likely or available to them to change their immediate

[10] The change in names is more than cosmetic. The newly-named „Companie" symbolizes a less nationalized profile than its precursor, the Regia Autonoma a Huilei .

situation, miners look to the past for answers and support. They have long supported Ion Iliescu for president and also, early on, favored Corneliu Vadim Tudor in the November 2000 election. According to them, life was better when Iliescu was president and Iliescu regularly promises the miners state intervention to keep the mines open. Furthermore only Iliescu, of all major party representatives, showed up at Miner's Day at Lupeni Mine in August 1999 for the 70th anniversary of the Lupeni strike. He spoke later at the monument to the 1929 strikers, as the crowd carried placards with slogans like „Criminal government, 1929-99," „Workers need workplaces," „Miner Unity," and „Freedom for Cozma." In his speech he emphasized the heroic quality of the miners for their past political actions and largely condemned the Constantinescu and CD government's failure to provide jobs in the mines. When I asked some older women why other politicians weren't there, they said that they had better not come or „we would beat them up for sure!"

Though President Iliescu is in a difficult position, both needing to support industrial restructuring while maintaining his commitments to Romania's workers, his promises, nonetheless, play on miner anxieties and smother other possible economic responses. In the main, miners wait for new mining jobs. What economic initiative there is only furthers developing social distinctions. Mine auxiliaries, with generally greater education and social pretensions, more often think of other solutions. They are the ones who more frequently seek emigration to Hungary for mining or other kinds of jobs. Momârlani meanwhile are less threatened by mine closure due to their rural incomes. Consequently, they neither supported the diverse *minerіade* nor do they see the vast conspiracy that other miners do in the restructuring of the *minerit*. Other miners, however, are generally angry at the state's failure to provide jobs, denigrate non-mining jobs, and are confused about steps available to secure other employment. They also have other occasionally fantasy responses to their predicament, like enthusiasm for investment in the Amway Corporation's consumer products pyramid sales scheme, frenzy over Euro-bingo, or even wistfulness about failed Caritas (see Verdery K.1996).

Socio-Cultural Responses to the Crisis in the Minerit: Translated to a personal and domestic level the current crisis has produced a range of problematic behavior in miner communities. The incidence of divorce and intrafamilial conflict, including violence and abuse, has especially increased. The crisis has also spawned a minor crime wave. Statistics from the local Judiciary office show that cases of family abandonment almost doubled to 63 in 1998-99, compared to 67 cases in the previous four years. Additionally, there were 27 cases of corporal crimes, such as felonious assault, in 1998-99, compared to 32 cases total in the previous five years. Incidents of prostitution and procuring also show up for the first time in post-disponibilization statistics (Judecătorie Petroşani 1999).

Miner households are thus under severe stress. Some families have begun to dissolve under economic pressures while others wilt under health problems. In particular the modern scissors produced by worker buy-outs and pressures from the rising cost of living especially threatens miner families. There has also been a slight increase in Jiu Valley divorce rates, from 463 cases in 1993 to 473 in 1998 and a decrease in the number of marriages from 407 in 1997 to 230 by October 1999. Even more people would divorce, people say, but for the prohibitive costs

Such changes erode the very sources of gender identity and family role expectations characterizing miner communities for a quarter century. Miners were men, through and through, with this identity supported and embellished both at work and in the household.

Work shaped the essential male identity. This was where a man expressed his true self.

As a man's powers waned over time miners often engaged in dangerous and difficult feats, often requiring hard physical labor, to show their younger colleagues their ardor and skill. Drinking too articulated with essential male group identities. When a man drinks, he is expected to keep up with others and to buy rounds in turn. Drinking with one's *ortaci* after a shift was also a symbol of having left the mine, and hence an affirmation of life itself. As a mine safety instructor clearly said,

Miners do not drink alone. A miner says, 'Only cattle drink water alone and have nothing to say to another.' Miners drink in groups and beer from the house does not have anywhere near the value as beer from the bar. Drinking beer at home is not good for miners.

Furthermore, if you don't drink, your *ortaci* will say that women, who show up on paydays to limit the money their husbands take with them to the bar, control you

Unlike their husbands, miners' wives were consumers. They valorized themselves by maintaining family standards of consumption, encouraging the children's schooling, and representing the family in surface, public spheres, instead of via their external labor. Miners brought in income and their wives budgeted and spent it. But these role expectations are rocked by the changing economic context of the Jiu Valley. And as neither husband nor wife is able to live up to these former standards and expectations, the images of themselves and each other are challenged and their relationships stressed.

Writing about stress Robert Sapolsky (1997: passim) shows how this generally affects a person's entire emotional, physical, and social balance. Stress acts on the hormones, suppresses biological immunities, facilitates disease vectors, and otherwise wreaks havoc on human social and physical organisms. As Sapolsky says (ibid: 205):

The keys to stress management involve not only gaining some sense of control or predictability in difficult situations, but also having outlets for frustration, social support, and affiliation.

But as is terribly apparent, those outlets for miners – in the first place one's labor, but also Cozma and the union, the *ortaci* at the bar, or even in local and national politics – have been thoroughly discredited, leaving miners with little possibility but to turn their stress and anger inward on themselves and on their families. Thus, as brief illustration, rates of emotional illnesses in miner communities have increased, though these are coupled with sharp declines in hospital self-admissions due to people's fears of taking medical leave lest one lose their job.

Worker Buy-Outs in the Jiu Valley: Unemployment and the Ends of Affinity: The chief factor behind fraying miner social relations was the state sponsored program of worker buy-outs. As discussed, Jiu Valley labor identities and social relations are based on the qualities of men's work in the mines and the distinction of miners and others. However, the voluntary lay-off of so many people through the buy-out program set in motion a whole chain of processes which called into question these prevailing relations and identities. Most important, the buy-outs created a new and more significant difference in the Jiu Valley population as it divided active miners and their families from ex-miners, the unemployed, and theirs.

Everything about the buy-out program is fraught with tension and uncertainty. The way that it was carried out first of all deepened suspicion between miners and the government, and between miners and mine administrators. It conceptually, socially, and economically divided those with and without work and also created mutual distrust between them, some even former work team colleagues. This program also had vast effects in the nature and organization of production in the mines with their own precise effects on *minerit* social relations (though this subject is beyond the immediate scope of this paper).

The first murky area concerns why those who left work actually accepted the buy-out in the first place, with questions about whether their actions were forced or volitional. Except for *Momârlani*, who left to work on their households full time and a few men nearing their retirement, most leaving the mines said they were either forced out or tricked into registering to participate. They speak of the severance money as „bait" (*momeală*) and say they were lied to and either promised other work or a chance to return to the mines after a few months of unemployment. One still-active miner, addressing both the coercive and uncertain aspects of the buy-out said:

The idea circulated that anyone with more than three charges of unmotivated work, or those who drank, would be kicked out...I heard a rumor about a list with the names of unmotivated workers scheduled to be let go from work... and people were constantly checking you out. Later this list changed. I don't know why, because there were also good guys (i.e. hard workers) on it.

In contrast to this perspective, most active miners, mine administrators, or non-miners suggest that those accepting the buy-out were simply motivated by greed or the desire to return to their region of origin. They point to the excessive spending of miners after they received their severance packets or also suggest that many, in fact, did leave for Moldavia or elsewhere. A very few, it is suggested, saw no future in the *minerit* or had better economic prospects for themselves outside mining. However, the truth is probably a multiple one, with specific reasons for one accepting the buy-out arrayed along a continuum. Some less capable workers were no doubt threatened with loss of job. Others lusted for quick riches. And *Momârlani* returned full-time to their rural estates. The chief engineer of one of the mines verified this more nuanced view of disponibilization when he challenged the idea of trickery but admitted:

Everyone had access to the same information and left of their own accord. Still, there was a bit of selection. We took aside good workers and asked them to reconsider, if we knew they were thinking of disponibilizing. But we didn't do anything to discourage bad workers from leaving.

More than the uncertainties surrounding the buy-out's cause, the unemployment of thousands of individuals in two years' time, all of whom who received sizable severance pay, undermined what remained of miners' traditional solidarity and sense of professional group membership. As one former Lonea miner said:

In the moment in which they started disponibilization I signed up on the list for transfers from the Transport section to an actual brigade...and in that moment I left, and didn't wait for them to tell me. But you know what it means to move to another location...it's like you've lost a part of your life.

Another former miner said:

As one who took the buy-out, I am no longer one of the fellows (ortac). Your fellows were like your wife. We would share everything and we would always reciprocate. Now you're alone; it's like you don't have a family.

The loss of identity provided by work also induced a sense of shame (*ruşine*). This was magnified as many of the newly unemployed miners derive largely from rural environments where labor is accorded special significance. When they returned to their natal communities they were stigmatized not only because they lost their jobs, but also were deprived of their identity as proper persons and of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977:89) in their social relations. One said of a good friend:

After he left the mine, he went back to Moldova, but there they sicced the dogs on him. Then his father told him 'You should have stayed at the mine until the director put a lock on the door of the place.'

The wife of an unemployed miner said:

(My husband) hasn't gone back to his village since he took the buy-out. You'd think he wasn't even (his parents') child any longer. We go back to my parents' place often, but my parents don't know he has left work.

The actual economic motivations, benefits, and losses of taking the buy-out also show how regional conditions shape responses to the crisis. Non-miners generally accuse those who left work of wildly inappropriate economic behavior. It is said that they rapidly spent their severance packets on luxury foods, clothing, and household appliances and did little else practical with the money. They also say that miners drank their severance pay away. However, while there were certainly excesses of spending, most bought-out families had no other sources of income and so used a large portion of severance pay for basic expenses. Furthermore, the families we interviewed typically had significant health problems and expenses that commanded a large portion of this income.

Finally there were few other possibilities for using one's severance pay. The bureaucratic and fiscal obstacles to start a business were as large then as now, and miner social relations, tight in the *subteran,* were shot-through with suspicion in light of day. Consequently, the few businesses begun went quickly bankrupt or fell apart due to mistrust and squabbling between business partners. Furthermore, those who sought to leave the Valley couldn't make money selling their apartments since the market suffered from over supply and negligible demand.

Given these economic conditions both active and bought-out miners see few alternatives to the *minerit.* Village part-time labor is limited as Momârlani largely satisfy their own needs. Some miners who left their work perform occasional labor for private businesses, but generally reject the low salaries and uncertain conditions in this work. Most now survive by economizing; collecting mushrooms and fruit from the forests, working in food stores for pay in kind, bringing food from the villages, house painting and other odd jobs, or more rarely emigration. Though people in the Jiu Valley speak of emigration, they often do so in unrealistic ways, such as the discourse of the Lupeni hunger strikers below, the Lonea fire fighter (*salvator miner*) or the Aninoasa assistant miner who only thought emigration a potential strategy if they won the lottery.

However, bought-out miners generally dismiss such strategies. They wait for occupations with salaries nearly as large as in the *minerit.* One example of this inertia comes from the Lupeni hunger strikers of autumn 1999. This group of 162 (originally 267), many „disponibilized" from the mine, waged their visible campaign at the monument to the 1929 strikes in the center of town. They threatened to immolate themselves, appealed to international organizations about the trampling of their human rights, and visited and had visits from high-level delegations. They chiefly demanded the right to work in good jobs, by which they meant those paying over one million lei per month. They claimed they would emigrate anywhere, including „Bulgaria, Albania, and Russia," so long as they received the right to such jobs. To be sure, they were occasionally promised jobs that didn't materialize, sometimes owning to a striker's Roma identity. However, they also frequently refused jobs of ½ to ¾ a miner's salary.

All told, then, the Jiu Valley at the Millennium is less tense than deflated. With buy-out benefits having ended in December 1999, there was general concern about possible political actions as winter turned to spring in 2000. However, even that did not develop as the miners see themselves as a spent political force. There is intense anger among some, but with Cozma in prison, and the miners torn by the buy-outs, there will be no organized, large-scale protest forthcoming. This is, in fact, a fortuitous development, since some investment has begun to trickle

into the region. Whether significant new economic opportunities will develop in response to the Valley's „Disfavored" status is unknown. To be sure, a concerted, even „multilateral" (to borrow a phrase from the Ceaușescu years) effort in jobs and job retraining, health care, infrastructure, is absolutely critical. To achieve this will require labor peace and a proactive work force. The first, unfortunately, has been achieved by considerable suffering. It is the second half of the equation that is more problematic.

LABOR RELATIONS IN THE FĂGĂRAȘ REGION

Compared to the Jiu Valley *minerit*, Făgăraș chemical workers have widely different responses to the current crisis, due mainly to the dispersion of labor throughout the regional production system. However, though Făgărașeni have greater access to a wider variety of resources than Jiu Valley miners, this also shapes challenges and problematic social relations by requiring individuals and households to scramble and compete for access to these resources in the current crisis. Compared to the collective anger, torpor, and anticipation of the unemployed mine worker, the tenor of Făgăraș society is that of constant stress, strategizing, and individuation.

The Făgăraș chemical industry began in the inter-war period with the founding of the Nitramonia Chemical works in 1922 (Herseni et al 1972). It expanded intensively after World War II when Nitramonia and the incipient Victoria Chemical Works, now renamed Viromet, were nationalized and renamed Combinatul Chimic Făgăraș and Combinatul Chimic Victoriei. The UPRUC factory was also built in the mid-1950s to manufacture fittings for use in the chemical industry. The three factories grew rapidly through the 1980s but since 1989 have declined steadily in numbers of workers. Victoria employed 4258 in 1982, fell to 4210 in 1989, and in 1998, after two rounds of disponibilization, only 2398 employees remained. Similarly, Nitramonia had its greatest number of employees, 8283, in 1989 but by 1999 this number had fallen to 2113[11]. The UPRUC in its first year, 1958, employed 318, achieved its greatest size in 1978 when it employed 4991, fell to 4746 in 1989 but by 1999 only 1070 employees were left.

These numbers tell only part of the story of economic decline. As of autumn 1999 the Viromet and Nitramonia plants continue to work three shifts to maintain various production processes, but UPRUC now works a single shift. Even that is too much for its dwindling work force, which are often sent home when the plant has insufficient orders. Similarly, Nitramonia and Viromet frequently furlough their workers. However, as some of their production is defense related and in the national interest, furloughed workers are only „technically unemployed" (*șomer tehnic*), and receive 75% of their salaries to stay home but available for immediate recall.

Unlike the Jiu Valley, a large number of Făgărașeni have access to non-industrial resources from the region's villages. In fact, both Făgăraș and Orașul Victoria and their surrounding hinterlands have long been tied together in a dense network of social and economic exchange. This is facilitated as the region is a compact one and its transportation infrastructure fairly well developed. Thus, Făgăraș families more readily adopt worker-peasant or peasant-worker strategies compared to the miners' singular preoccupation with the *minerit*. True, there are considerable numbers of individuals with few rural ties.

[11] These numbers actually appear slightly worse than they are. Both the Făgăraș and Victoria combines were separated into two enterprises and the number of workers on their payrolls decreased accordingly. Nitramonia is now paired with „Arsenalul Armatei" (formerly Rompiro) and Viromet with the Victoria Chemical Works. Both of these are special sections devoted to the production of military explosives. „Arsenalul" currently has about 800 employees while figures for VCW were not available.

More often, however, rural and urban workers maintain some kind of relationship and, in some instances, workers reside in the region's villages for all or part of the year. Village relations are a two-sided coin, however. They allow regional households somewhat more access to foodstuffs and provide a source for part-time income, but also require attention to these relations and considerable extra effort to access village production. Whereas the miner's local network stops at the bar after the shift or is maintained (less effectively) by women, in Făgăraș such relations are thus everyone's business.

Another key difference between Făgăraș and Jiu Valley production is the greater role of women in the former and what this implies for gender relations in general. Făgăraș region factories traditionally have made considerable use of women's labor. In fact, in the past, husbands and wives were often employed in the same factory, if not section, though this practice has declined with recent unemployment[12]. The incorporation of women into the region's factories changed female status from one of dependence to that where they are perceived as active agents of the family's well being. Furthermore, as women were integrated into the factory system, their presence made the factory less of a symbolic boundary and also de-emphasized the unity of work teams even as it facilitated more effective male-female relations. Thus relations between men and women in Făgăraș factories as well as in society generally were put more on an even keel. As one woman worker said:

We have pretty good relations at work and talk easily with both our men and women colleagues. We have men at our shift and we are all packers. We fill up sacks and they take them and put them in the trucks. We talk amongst ourselves about everything, what are we cooking, what work we are doing, how we are feeling.

Făgăraș women are also expected to contribute to family economic life in the midst of unemployment and the cost-of-living crisis. Unlike miner's wives, whose „stay-at-home" life is normal, Făgăraș women especially feel the pressure to bring in household income and are thus under considerable pressure to find gainful activity. However, because of the decline informal employment, they tend, then, to gravitate to the informal, illegal economy of the labor black market (*la negru*) where they are frequently caught in exploitative labor relations but have no recourse but to try to maintain their meager salaries. As one Făgăraș woman said:

Even if I make 400,000 lei a month that still helps us to do a little extra for the family. It pays for the telephone or the school field trip for one of the kids. It helps make life a little better, even though my work schedule means that I have to be away from home all the time and even when the children come home from school.

Another contradictory resource for Făgărașeni is their more generalized participation in labor-related emigration. The Făgăraș zone has a long history and tradition of emigration. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries Făgăraș youth, lacking other economic possibilities, streamed out of the region to Bucharest, other Romanian cities, but especially to the United States, where they formed the core Romanian population in cities in America's northeast and Midwest (Kideckel D. 1993). Today, the Făgărașeni destination of choice is Italy, where they often enter illegally guided by *călăuze*. True to regional form, both men and women work as guest workers, the former in construction and the latter as domestics.

[12] In 1989 at Viromet of 4,210 employees, 1,858 (44%) were women. In 1998 of 2,398, 916 (38%) were women. Corresponding data for Nitramonia were in 1989 8,283 total workers, with 3,184 (38%) women and for 1998, 2,168 total workers with 880 (41%) women. For UPRUC in 1999, of 1,070 workers 778 (73%) were men and 292 were women.

Făgărașeni believe they are so visible in the Roman economy, a prevailing joke in the region tells how Italians often ask people from Făgăraș where that „country" is, i.e. implying it is an independent state. Still, emigration is not without its costs. As in the past, it drives up prices for land and housing. To emigrate, either legally or illegally also costs a lot and intensifies family strategizing or economizing to enable one of their own to leave[13]. Next to alcoholism, labor emigration is mentioned as the most frequent causes of divorce. Furthermore, emigration increases invidiousness as those with access to emigrant remittances clearly live better than those without.

Thus, compared to the stark distinctions of Jiu Valley economics, the Făgăraș zone is much more ambiguous in its economic life. There are greater possibilities but greater demands, greater quality of life but greater jealousy. Like the miners, Făgăraș workers increasingly look back favorably to much of life under Ceaușescu. Unlike the miners who decry their loss of status in today's society compared to the Ceaușescu years, Făgăraș workers see job security as the most favorable aspect of the socialist system.

FĂGĂRAȘ RESPONSES

Political Responses: Like the miners, Făgăraș workers are in a period of declining labor activism and declining effectiveness of the labor actions they undertake. The reasons for this, however, again differ from that of the miners. Whereas the miners are increasingly inactive due to the torpor related to the buy-out program and increased social distance between categories of miners, in Făgăraș the diffusion of energies as people strategize to make their lives sits behind declining union activism. As one UPRUC worker suggested:

People are basically saturated (with the union) and they don't come to meetings any longer. People are divided. Not all are as worse off as others. There are some that live from other sources, from relations outside the factory. Many have children that have left to other countries. And it's sufficient for them to get sent $100 a month....Others have left the union because they think the dues are too large. Why should they give this money foolishly when nothing is done with it?

Actually, compared to the Jiu Valley's numerous local-level actions and *mineriade*, in the Făgăraș region only the UPRUC has seen extensive labor-management conflict and this as much because of bitter rivalry between two unions, one largely managerial and the other comprised of workers and a drawn-out complicated process of privatization. Nitramonia and Viromet unions are also taken up with internal issues, though management is not implicated. These unions also have a greater history of cooperation with management, Viromet especially. Additionally, at Nitramonia there is a section of workers who have joined the Jiu Valley Miner's union and with whom the main union frequently disagrees. Even so, it is especially interesting to note that Făgăraș workers from all the factories also resonate to Miron Cozma and the Jiu Valley *mineriade*. Făgăraș rank and file workers generally suggest that force and violence are inappropriate labor strategies, but nonetheless admire Cozma for attempting to preserve jobs in the Jiu Valley crisis.

Domestic Responses: As the household remains the institution most capable of organizing individuals to access labor and income resources, Făgăraș families and households retain considerable strength, at least on the surface, in the current crisis. Hard times force Făgărașeni to stick together, at the household level. For example, from 1976 to 1989, there were an average of 212 divorces per year registered at the Făgăraș judecătorie. This rate increased for 1990-1996 to 308 per year, but

[13] One estimate of the costs for illegal emigration is 3,000 Deutsch Marks, a huge expense for most families.

has declined again from 1997 to the present to 265. Cases of family abandonment have also steadily declined from 24 cases per year between 1976-1989 to 14 cases per year between 1989 and 1996, to 5 cases annually in the last three years[14]. The number of marriages, too, has kept pace with the years immediately following the revolution. In 1992 there were 442 marriages in Victoria, Făgăraş, and immediate villages and in 1998, 424 (Direcţia de Statistica 1999). August, in particular, is now a prime month for marriage. West European countries, Italy included, „close for vacation" then. Consequently, young Făgăraşeni, men mainly, return home to marry and then return to Italy. In summer 1999 there were 17 August marriages in one week.

Though Făgăraş households have been maintained, there are still disquieting indications of trouble beneath their surface togetherness. Women, in particular, are pressured in the current economic conditions and many in the region suggest problems of domestic abuse, mental and physical illness, and the entire range of social problems that comes with never-ending stress. Women who continue to work in the factories also now often speak of criticism by men for retaining their jobs.

Făgăraş network relations are also more precarious as they are caught between pressures for their attenuation and their maintenance. Like in the mining regions, the cost and stress of life in Romania has narrowed the groups of individuals with whom one interacts and severely limits the exchange relations on which Romanian social life is predicated. One Nitramonia worker described the conditions of network confusion:

We had friends until just a few years ago, but now we mainly stay in our house with ourselves. People can't afford to have friends these days. We can't afford vacations either. Before (1989), we went to the Black Sea all the time, but we haven't since 1990. The last wedding we attended was (five months previous) and the gift required that we save for three months. Last year, too, we were godparents (*naş*) for my wife's cousin, which cost us 7 million in last year's prices. Either way to be asked to be *naş* is a double-edged sword. If you refuse, it is shameful, and if you don't you set yourself back monetarily. We were the third family that the couple asked to be *naş* and we are hardly related to them. At least our god-children (*fini*) are in better shape than us. They are from a village and have a tractor and a brandy distillery.

Unemployment and the buy-outs in the Făgăraş Region: Făgăraşeni have also responded to the circumstances of their unemployment in a largely different manner than Jiu Valley miners. Whereas the miners were split apart by the intense and rapid process of the buy-outs, in Făgăraş there was less anger but more petty jealousy about the process. In some ways Făgăraşeni are more used to unemployment as it has steadily increased in the years since the Revolution. In the entire town of Făgăraş, with a population of about 45,000 of which about 20,000 were working during socialist years, there are now only about 5,000 people formally employed. Consequently, though there were some tensions associated with the earlier rounds of unemployment from 1990 through 1996, by the time of the first round of buy-outs unemployment had been so recurrent it had become normal.

The demography of Făgăraş disponibilization had been widely different from that which took place in the Jiu Valley. Young men hoping to go to Italy as guest workers and older individuals near their pensions were the prime participants in 1997 and 1998.

[14] Other statistical indicators of diverse social conditions in Făgăraş have remained virtually the same for the region from 1976, the first year for which we have this data, through the current period. For example the frequency of violent crimes and corporal offenses have shown only a slight increase as times have become increasingly more difficult, varying from 14 per year in the period 1976-1989 to 17 per year in 1990-1996, to 19 per year in the last three year (Judecatorie Făgăraş 1999).

In fact, there was such a widespread desire to take the buy-out in the region that unions and management worked hard to convince workers to remain. Jealousy arose in certain instances, where one was actively prevented from quitting work. Furthermore, the bought-out were also not so much differentiated ethnically or regionally from others in the general population. To be sure, there was a certain degree of manipulation of some Făgăraș workers, though the acrimony and the social distinction set in motion by the process paled in comparison to the Jiu Valley. As one chemical operator at Nitramonia said:

Before (disponibilization) they announced they were going to close our section and those who wanted to, should sign up for the disponibilization. They put a list on a desk in an office for those who wanted to sign up. It is normal that people were afraid that the section would close and, if they didn't sign up for the disponibilization they would just become unemployed. So they thought 'better the Ordonanța because then I can get a few extra million and get by one way or the other.' And so they signed up... willingly, unwillingly, they signed up to be disponibilized.

This situation, too, has changed in recent years. The current buy-out has begun to produce some of the same anger and destructiveness that characterize its results in the Jiu Valley. Now, despite the favored position of some regional factories that have been advanced to the list of the most-likely and successful targets of privatization (Anonymous 1999), the economic crisis has caused some of the factories to begin to close whole sections and to lay-off workers indefinitely causing considerable distress and a breakdown of collegial relations With the recent „buy-out" at the Viromet Chemical Company in Orașul Victoria, for example, according to a large number of workers interviewed, those who were able to retain their jobs were mainly relatives of people in power positions in the factory who traded on knowledge of their relationships to preserve their positions. One interview in summer 2000 was especially poignant. Then, a skilled worker, employed at the factory for close to twenty years, broke down and wept profusely during the interview over his bleak future. Not only was he slated to lose his job, but his wife, too, a secretary in a near-by village school, was also threatened with job loss due to the on-going restructuring in educational employment.

Furthermore, there are also some of the same dis-information problems that made the Jiu Valley buy-outs so problematic. For example, while state regulations now discourage lump sum payments due to the past difficulties with the miner buy-outs, these were still available for workers able to attest to an actual investment possibility and file a business plan pursuant to that investment opportunity. However, workers were first lied to and told the buy-out would not happen and then were misinformed about the possibility of taking their severance in a lump sum payment, thus leaving those with some possibility of investment bereft of these chances as well.

This was especially harmful in the Făgăraș region since the uses and meaning of severance pay was also considerably different to Făgărașeni than to Jiu Valley miners. This money was almost exclusively used for basic household expenses or to contribute to a fund used by family members hoping to emigrate. Some people invested in cars to be able to more readily get to and from the villages with agricultural produce. Some people even bought tractors, but there are few reports of excessive luxury purchases, as in the Jiu Valley.

Though unemployed, Făgărașeni also continue to work. The labor black market is a profound problem in the region and an issue that has prompted the region's unions to join together in protest. They want employers to swear off hiring illegal labor and workers to agree to avoid such positions. People in the region also are more willing to participate in retraining programs and entertain other possibilities for the few resources that they have. Like the miners, though, they too are caught

up in the Euro-Bingo frenzy, though „winning the lottery" is less a part of their discourse on their lives than in the Jiu Valley. When posed the question as to what they would do with the money, if they won a large sum, to a person all spoke of diverse ideas for investment.

CONCLUSIONS

What does it matter, then, that those from the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș regions diverge in their socio-economic responses to stress and crisis? For one thing, most simplistically, addressing Romania's national socio-economic woes requires recognition of inter- and intra-regional variation. It is only through the nuanced approach of critical ethnographic analysis that distinct regional programs of investment and kinds and levels of state action can be developed. Without a fine-grained analytic approach to mitigating the effects of economic unemployment and the soaring cost of living, national and international agencies run the risk of either implementing wildly inappropriate policies (Ferguson J. 1994) or of allowing assistance to be hijacked by narrow groups of self-interested partisans (Wedel J. 1998). The application of critical social scientific analysis to ameliorating the effects of post-socialism, while no guarantee of programmatic success, at least holds out the promise of devising more precise programs to meet specific regional needs.

In this regard, it is apparent that the two regions under study here will require different emphases in their future development initiatives. Thus, labor law enforcement designed to limit „Black Market" abuses, important across the board, seems to be the more significant problem in Făgăraș than the Jiu Valley in the current period. Conversely, infrastructure investment is more significant there than in Făgăraș. Similarly, the creation of entirely new kinds of employment is more called for in the Jiu Valley (and no doubt, more problematic, given miner commitment to the *minerit*), while privatization and retooling the chemical plants would likely be more effective for Făgăraș. Făgărașeni, meanwhile, would likely be more receptive to job training programs than their Jiu Valley cousins. Equally significant, the public health and mental health challenges in the regions can only be addressed when we see the precise vectors and stresses under which diverse Romanian workers operate. The loss of identity and the angry group life of miners and bought-out miners do not bring about the same sort of personal crisis that the never-ending strategizing for resources, the personal jealousies, and the denigration of the Black market do for Făgăraș workers. Alcoholism in the Jiu Valley and in Făgăraș are, in fact, very different conditions, which require different approaches to their mitigation.

Still, the stress of post-socialism and related declines in health and general well-being is one sad commonality of both regions. Increasingly citizens of both regions suffer from early, untimely death, whose specter haunts these post-socialist communities. The discourse of death was everywhere in Făgăraș and the Jiu Valley and cries out for ethnographic understanding. However, to be ameliorative, critical social science must go beyond mere depiction of funereal practices and cemetery art and articulate death with the changing conditions and social relations of the living. The Jiu Valley miners, of course, know sudden death as a condition of their labor and live with it as a matter of pride. Miners, in fact, are more distressed about the possibilities of early death after retirement than that in the course of working in the mines. To retire with one's pension after 20 or more years in the *subteran* and then die within one or two years of your retirement, a not uncommon experience, was considered by miners ultimate illustration of their lives and fates and their denigration and abandonment by society.

In Făgăraș, the experience of death is, like the experience of unemployment, a steady drip. Cave-ins are replaced by aneurysms and

explosions by stroke. Here, too, like so much else in this troubled region, death and its meaning only signifies the sad growth of petty jealousies in the midst of crisis. The words of an UPRUC worker, struggling to maintain a life of dignity in the midst of disintegration, thus provide a fitting cap to our analysis and remind us of the true purposes of ethnographic research: understanding and responding to the human condition:

One of my buddies at work died at 43 and one of the shop foremen (*maistru*) was 41. He died of prostate cancer. About 20-25 of my acquaintances died in the last 4-5 years. The 36-year-old director of marketing at UPRUC died 2 years ago. Another neighbor died at 51 of cancer and then there was an 18-year-old kid who fell from a train. This kind of unexpected death is the worst for the family, because you have to get together the necessary money in just a day or two. If someone is sick for along time, then at least you can slowly get together money for the expenses that will follow. We think about and talk about death all the time at work. It can't help but affect our work. When you hear of someone dieing at 60 or 70, then you think he had a full life[15], but when one dies in their 30s or 40s, this is a great tragedy. When one of our colleagues dies we help in various ways. We dig the grave, we give money depending on what we can afford; but no one says anything if you can't give much, because we are all needy. A funeral costs a great deal of money. You usually invite 200 to a restaurant for soup, beer, and a second course. That used to be meat, but now it's mainly just potatoes and other vegetables. It is still expensive. The total cost of a funeral is about 7 million lei. But you don't change traditions, because people will laugh at you. It is better to bear the financial costs than have people talk about you behind your back.

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[15] Later I asked him whether he really thought 60 years a full life and he responded that he thought so. For a middle class American, such as the senior author, an admission that a 60 year life expectancy is a „full life," is a sad statement, indeed, and a true marker of the state of Romanian workers in post-socialism.

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the responses of two different groups of workers to Romania's economic crisis. In the literature on the East Central European transformation, where workers are discussed at all, they are described in largely homogenous terms. The groups discussed here, the miners of the Jiu Valley and the chemical workers of the Fagaras region, have many surface similarities including a mono-industrial profile, high unemployment, and extensive labor activism. However, research suggests that the specific way by which workers are incorporated into regional labor systems and the particulars of regional production result in highly variable responses to crisis both within and between regions. In the Jiu Valley, mining is the near sole livelihood. As the mine dominates regional mentalities it also shapes polarized relations between miners and superiors, between active and unemployed miners, in household relations, and in miner views of politics and the state. In contrast, in Fagaras sources of labor and income are diffused. While the chemical plants were the chief regional employer, Făgăraș workers, also have greater access to village occupations and resources and other alternatives, including emigration. This contributes to somewhat calmer labor relations, more stable domestic relationships, but greater interpersonal jealousy. Given the differences in these basic production systems, the paper goes on to analyze the nature of political and social responses to their economic problems and suggest different possibilities for intervention.