



Graduate School of Development Studies

**SITUATED MEANINGS OF RURALITY, AGEING, AND CARE IN  
ROMANIA'S TRANSITION:  
Perspectives from Spermezeu**

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper explores multiple dimensions of ageing and gender inequalities in rural Romania, in the context of failed market transition and EU integration. Articulated through different policy discourses and structures of inequalities, market transition has shaped the lived experiences of aging and livelihood, and has restricted the struggle of the elderly to defend particular meanings of rurality. The reconfiguration of practices and meanings of rurality obliterates other aspects of market-led transition—including the patterns of caring for the elderly, the caring practices of the elderly themselves, and the symbolic meanings of aging and care. Following Bourdieu's concepts of doxa, symbolic violence, and habitus, textual analysis of rural development and social policy shifts reveals that, in the absence of a strategic vision of its own rurality, Romania's social field of transition has been permeated by the doxa of Neoliberalism, which enforces a middle-aged, androcentric, and urban-oriented transition process. This doxa distorts many meanings and practices of rurality, and obscures or usurps heterodox opinions calling for a more humane and culturally contextualized transition. Distilling from the narratives of the elderly in a high-migration village in Transylvania, the fieldwork analysis will show how the elderly's notions of livelihood and well-being are embedded in a culturally specific habitus of rurality, which is based on an eco-centered worldview, centered around interrelationships (caring for and about others, the land, and the community). Juxtaposing this cultural habitus with the instrumental framing of the elderly in EU-led rural development policy illustrates how the power of representation misrecognizes some of the detrimental effects of migration and de-peasantization on the well-being of the elderly.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: SITUATING THE ELDERLY IN ROMANIA'S FAILED MARKET TRANSITION

### 1.1 The Phases and Failures of Market Transition

Romania's post-Communist transition has been characterized from most scholarly perspectives as one of the least stable and least successful of the CEEC transitions (see Heller, 1999; Schrieder et al, 2000; Alexandri, 2004). During this failed transition, the social positioning of the elderly has been shaped by a congruence of different social forces and institutional actors. Key to understanding rural poverty and the social position of the elderly is the land question, which surfaced immediately after the violent end to the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. An urgent political goal, land restitution was implemented with little thought to a long-term national agricultural strategy. When the land restitution was essentially complete in 2000, the average farm size was about 2 hectares, a unit too small for anything but subsistence production (Alexandri 2004, p. 55). Moreover, the Romanian state's political worries about quelling urban unrest kept agriculture prices artificially low to ensure food security, while continuing to prop up failing collectives, leading to runaway inflation and the collapse of farm incomes for smallholders (Verdery, 2003, p. 353). Ignoring social aspects of Romania's land question<sup>1</sup> the Neoliberal structural adjustment package instituted by the World Bank and IMF during the late 1990's drastically cut agriculture subsidies and liberalized prices, forcing smallholders to return to traditional tools and methods (David and Schafft, 2000; Dumitru 2002; Swinnen 2002).

In a parallel urban process, hasty dismantling and privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOE's) focused little attention on building the institutions that would help individuals adjust to the market system. Categories of workers were issued early retirement or laid off with several months' compensation, triggering a massive urban-rural internal migration to the villages, where the cost of living was lower and subsistence farming offered a labor-intensive livelihood (Sandu et al., 2004, p. 2).

Under conditions of sudden poverty and extreme inequality, the extended family farm became an essential social safety net (Heller, 1999; Brown and Schaft, 2000; Dumitru, 2002; Swinnen, 2002). In fact, without the institution of smallholder agriculture, "the country would have confronted mass unemployment and possibly social unrest of magnitude that would have rendered the continuation of market reforms a daunting task for the most daring of governments" (UNDP, 2007, p.26). Yet, the practice of peasant farming was seen by leaders of Neoliberal reform as a structural failure that "[froze] the highly fragmented land ownership pattern and compounded the problem of low income and disguised unemployment in the rural area" (Dumitru 2002, p. 18).

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<sup>1</sup> Critical cultural aspects include the symbolic significance of reclaiming ancestral property and the inheritance custom, which divides land equally among children.

After a decade of stalled reform, the policy shift to the EU accession guidelines was seen as the corrective to the economic failures and social distress of prolonged transition. Yet Romania entered the EU in 2007 on extremely unequal terms that definitively undermined the viability of smallholder farming. Diminished terms of trade caught subsistence farmers in a price scissors reminiscent of the early 1990's, while subsidies encouraging land consolidation favored younger farmers with larger assets.

At the same time, the opening of the EU borders encouraged circular migration (primarily of the youth) as an important source of development funding. Intensification and feminization of semi-regular circular migration flows since 2002 have begun to erode the intergenerational care system on which the elderly rely, especially in the absence of liveable pensions and erosion of state social supports. As a consequence of these social forces, transition has positioned many rural elderly in a situation of material vulnerability and insecurity, while simultaneously devaluating a meaningful livelihood.

## 1.2 The Social Construction of the Elderly in the Shifting Discourses of Transition

The social positions and lived experiences of the elderly are shaped throughout transition by their social construction in policy discourses. As will be explored in greater depth, using Bourdieu's tools of analysis, the dominant EU discourse is rooted in a Neoliberal agenda, which converges three biases: (a) a market- and middle-aged bias that emphasizes productivity, obliterating the experiences of ageing and dependence (b) an androcentric bias in social policy, expressed through the naturalization of care and externalization of its costs onto the cultural domain, and (c) a construction of rurality that is market-oriented and culturally standardized to a Western European vision. Viewed through these lenses, and situated within the context of drawn-out economic instability and fiscal deficits, the elderly in transition policy have been invisible in discourse or constructed in negative or distorted ways.

In the policy discussion on failed rural transformation, older peasants are represented as backward, deficient in human capital, unproductive,<sup>2</sup> and an obstacle to reconsolidating land into more efficient holdings. In debates on pension reform, the elderly have been represented as a numbers in "demographic time bomb" and a drain on social resources. In the discourse on migration, the care needs and caring activities of the elderly have remained invisible, while their contributions in facilitating migration and in holding together transnational families have been undervalued.

EU-led rural development policy and market-drive migration are radically realigning rural space, commodifying and reevaluating rural assets, and transforming social relations. Marginalized by dominant discourses, however, the rural elderly have limited policy or political space in the social field of transition to the influence the direction of rural change. Visible but inaudible in Romania's

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<sup>2</sup> Around 40% of the population is employed in agriculture, which accounts for 15% of the country's GDP. In the EU-15 countries in 1999, 2.5% of the population produced an output of 202.8 billion euros, Romania's output was 4.4 billion (Swinnen, 2002).

quest for economic growth, the elderly's quieter struggles to preserve a meaningful rural livelihood have gone unnoticed. This paper brings the symbolic struggles and social contributions of the elderly to the fore, to explore the culturally specific meanings of rurality, ageing, and caring not captured in the dominant discourse.

### **1.3 Research Objectives:**

1. To bring the voices of an unrepresented group to the debates on ageing and rural development in Europe.
2. To demonstrate the symbolic violence attendant with the market-driven reframing of rurality and the invisibility of the eco-centered habitus of ageing peasants.
3. To argue for an intrinsically human-centered rural development discussion that views human beings as bearers of identity and culture, who are interrelated through relationships of care.

### **1.4 Research Questions:**

1. How have the dominant discourses shaping rural development and social policy constructed the elderly and their well-being? What voices are included and excluded in the dominant policy discourse? How does the discourse envision the migration-development nexus?
2. What are the situated meanings of rurality and well-being in the ageing process for various residents of the high-migration village of Spermezeu? How do different actors conceptualize migration?
3. What are the consequences for the elderly of the misrepresentation of rurality in policy, within the context of intensive migration and EU-led rural transformation?

### **1.5 Relevance and Justification:**

Studying migration and rural transformation from the perspective of the elderly has empirical, theoretical, and ethical validity. As indicated, the rural elderly are a demographically significant group in Romania, but they have been made objects rather than agents of development and are still too often portrayed as welfare system drains rather than valuable human beings. This paper builds on feminist literatures on care, welfare state restructuring, and transnational migration and care chains, in which the experiences of older age have been peripheral (Calasanti et al, 2006, p.14). Though elder care itself is a key site of study in welfare debates, relatively few studies have considered the perspectives of elderly care receivers or the involvement of older parents in migration care chains. Little has been written to date about the care drain in Eastern Europe (Bettio et al, 2004; Kofman, 2006; Piperno 2007; Da Roit, 2007). Applying Bourdieu's concept of habitus to the older peasant livelihood, this paper will enrich these literatures by expanding the

meanings of care to encompass caring for livelihood, land, and the spiritualized assets that constitute the eco-centered peasant habitus. In this way, it sharpens Bourdieu's critique of the symbolic violence attendant with the 'harmonious' project of EU expansion.

## 1.6 Epistemological Lenses and Analytical Tools

The questions raised by this research are grounded in the feminist epistemological stance of situated knowledge, indicating that the meanings assigned to a given phenomenon reflect the knower's social location (Anderson, 2000). The first part of this research is therefore an analysis of key texts, distilling how transition discourses reflect the social position and agenda of the institution, and its relation to other knowers in the field. Key texts include the Pre-Accession Impact Studies (PAIS) series, commissioned prior to EU integration; the Romanian National Agriculture Strategy; policy strategies of the European Commission; the 2007 Human Development Report for Romania; rural sociology and economics studies on transition; and reports from the Romanian Academic Society and other Romanian scholars.

The second part of the research presents an analysis of fieldwork interviews and observations conducted in a high-migration village in Spermezeu, Romania. As a feminist researcher considering care and identity to be fundamental aspects of human well-being, the objective is to expose key value tensions and distortions in the discursive field of transition. To lessen the limitations and biases of being an outside researcher writing from the standpoint of others, two methods were adopted. First, a preliminary survey (of 20 people) based on Moser's Asset-Vulnerability Framework (Moser 1999, p. 8) was used to obtain objective insight into the "portfolio" of material and social assets of the elderly, which, presumably, would reduce their vulnerabilities, generating a multi-dimensional picture of the diverse social positioning of the elderly within the village.

Second, a critical narrative approach was used to interpret open-ended interviews,<sup>3</sup> focusing on how the lived experiences of villagers align with or contradict the dominant threads of discourse. This method exposes values and vulnerabilities that are invisible or misrepresented in policy (Biggs 2001). Interviews probed into land stewardship or employment; the subjective meanings of livelihood assets; the involvement of elderly in transnational families; rural development policies; land inheritance and care arrangements; and places and performances of cultural value. Twenty-nine older adults (17 women, 15 men) between the ages of 51 and 96 were interviewed. Eight young adults (between 26 and 44 years old); and several villages authorities were also interviewed.

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<sup>3</sup> The full transcriptions and then translations were typed out after the field research, with the help of Romanian assistants.

## CHAPTER TWO RURALITY AND AGEING IN ROMANIA'S TRANSITION: DISCERNING THE BOUNDARIES OF POWER IN A SOCIAL FIELD

This chapter places notions of rurality and ageing in transition, using concepts of the social field as tools to discern the boundaries of power relations and their interactions. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) introduced the concept of a social "field" as an alternative to classical ways of depicting a society as a container of a structure of classes, strata, or income groups. In his depiction, society is a configuration of various 'fields,' each governed by its internal rules, aims, claims, and values. The field is structured according to the distribution of resources among potential and actual agents in the field, who are defined in relation to each other, usually by their (un)equal possibilities of action. Mapping social spaces as symbolic spaces, Bourdieu shows that "objective relationships of power tend to reproduce themselves in relations of symbolic power." A struggle over objective resources is played out in the discursive field, where "what is at stake is the very representation of the social world and, in particular, the hierarchy within each of the fields and among the different fields" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.21).

Applying the concept of social field to Romania's transition helps illustrate key mechanisms in the post-Communist realignment of the economic, social, political and cultural spheres. Discerning the social locations and symbolic representations of the elderly within the social field of 'transition' will shed light on how the process of resource distribution—in which the redefinition of the rules plays a central role—is enacted through a covert and overt assignment of symbolic and material meanings to rural transformation as a process and as a state project.

### 2.1 Doxa, Social Fields, and Symbolic Violence

In this paper, "transition" signifies the post-1989 period of flux and instability arising from the realignment of social forces to achieve key goals of a) the dismantling of the Communist state, b) the swift imposition of a market-based system, and c) EU accession and integration. Conceptualized as a social field, "transition" is a complex cultural and discursive (battle)field, within which rurality, livelihood, care, ageing, and migration are "overlapping but distinct fields of behavior, each with its own logic" (McNay 1999, p. 102). Shifting policy representations of rurality and the elderly throughout transition are a discursive jostling for (symbolic and material) resource control among differently positioned actors and institutions within the related fields.

According to Bourdieu, when domination is not enacted through face-to-face interaction or by force, it works through institutionalized mechanisms, euphemisms, and symbolic (mis)representations to make a particular order socially legitimate. Domination becomes absolute when an established classification of the social world—supporting a specific agenda and interests—is elevated out of the discursive field, into the universe of the undiscussed/undisputed, attaining the status of a doxa. Doxa becomes a form of embodied and unquestioned knowledge (the "self-evidence of the common-sense world"), which has the power to shape agents' own sense of reality and limit their ability to recognize power and contest their social position (Risseeuw 1988, pp. 177-177).

As power names, defines, and classifies the social world in a particular way, it inflicts symbolic violence by simultaneously distorting, obliterating, or misrecognizing other classifications. Power thus produces sets of “bifurcated meanings”—those ascribed by the dominant, and those rendered invisible or unacceptable. In Bourdieu’s terms, domination occurs under “a veil of enchanted relationships,” which leads the subordinant to “misrecognize” the arbitrariness of the set social order and the power behind the particular naming of key relations. “Certain categories of agents disadvantaged by the symbolic order often cannot do otherwise than recognize the legitimacy of the dominant classification, as it is their only chance of neutralizing the effects which would be most opposed to their interests.” They remain docile because “direct expression would lead to disenchantment and lay bare the ultimate...unequal balance of power on which these relationships are based” (Risseeuw, 1988, pp.177-182).

In the social field of Romania’s transition, the hierarchy of the social world is dominated at the discursive level by the orthodox EU policy, which itself is permeated by a Neoliberal doxa. In the Neoliberal project, the notion of human well-being is represented in the main vectors of power—law, policy, administration and media—by economic stability, labor market productivity, and the freedom to consume. The values and meanings of care as lived experiences and as identity, and the social relationships which care sustains tend to be externalized to the ‘cultural’ or ‘natural’ domain. A critical reading of policy discussions on rural development, pension reform, and migration throughout transition reveals that representations of rurality are dis-embedded from social experience and inflict symbolic violence on the elderly by redefining their social positions in functional terms to gain legitimacy for particular reforms.

Within the discursive field, heterodoxa represents the “the opposing opinion” (including the UNDP Human Development Report and many Romanian academics), which proposes alternatives social orders. However, the ability of heterodox opinion to dislodge the dominant discourse is limited by the fact that it “often fails to delimit the terrain of doxa (the unsaid), which forms the most powerful rule of all” (ibid., p.178). Rather than exposing domination, heterodoxa may be usurped or distorted, reinforcing the dominant vision.

## 2.2 Reorganizing the Social Field of Rurality: From Rural Spaces for Production to Social Places of Consumption

### 2.2.1 *Land and Labor as Factors of Production*

Rural sociology conceives of *the rural* as both a concrete geographic location, and a “symbolic shorthand...conveying a generally shared if implicit understanding of countryside” (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998, p. 227). In rural development policy formation throughout Romania’s transition, an idealized image of rural society has been embedded in an economic model calculating how efficient flows of finance, labor, and human resources can turn ‘idle’ factors of production into profit, for the well-being of a society at large. Under the doxa of Communism, rurality was embedded in Ceausescu’s urban-centered modernization plan, which aimed for industrial and agricultural self-sufficiency. Through forced collectivization, peasant land and labor were redefined as state-owned factors of production that would allow economies of scale and food security for the nation.

Softening the overt use of power through symbolic codification, the dominant representation of rurality created sets of “enchanted relationships” that influence the social locations of peasants today. First, the doxa of social equality and the supposedly benevolent relationship between individuals and the collective obscured the webs of reciprocity and coercion that enabled collective farm managers to obtain inputs and meet their quotas (Verdery, 2003 p. 227). During transition, the residue of these relationships would alternatively be named corruption or social capital, and obstacles or potential resources for development (Abele et al, 2001, p. 6). Second, the representation of state-run agriculture as modern and abundant obliterated the importance of smallholder farms during food shortages. As a result, peasants who had not worked on the state farms during Communism later were not rewarded with a decent pension (Vasile, 2004, p.25). Finally, idealized pieces of peasant society were supported through state-sponsored festivals and cultural houses, even as the social relationships that gave meaning to traditions were forcibly replaced by the social structure of the collective farm..

The post-Communist government’s hasty land restitution process recognized some of the symbolic meanings of property obliterated under Communism, by attempting to reconnect owners to their ancestral lands.<sup>4</sup> However, the erratic and delayed nature of Romanian reforms (Rusu 2002, p.7), the urban-industrial focus of the government, and the collapse of the resource base during the early 1990’s created the social and economic need in the social field to import the structural loans the IMF, World Bank, and European Development Bank, which required strict adherence to Neoliberal conditionalities.

Neoliberalism, in Bourdieu’s view, is an egregious example of symbolic violence, as it aims to “induce a breech between economic logic (based upon competition which brings efficiency) and social logic (subjected to the principle of justice) and then to instrumentalize the latter and subdue it to the former so that ...there will be nothing except for the power of the market or a mere interest in profit and economic efficiency” (Mitrovic, 2005, p. 41). Under this lens, structural adjustment in Romania enforced the neoclassical assumption that “government’s chief role is to ensure that potential investors meet as few barriers as possible and that problems in marketing, distribution, and production are overcome through private enterprise and investment rather than through government intervention” (Heidhues and Schreider 2000, p. 20). As a result, many social processes of reconstituting society in crisis went unsupported, while many cultural and subjective dimensions of livelihood were (mis)recognized as unvaluable.

Reassessed in market terms, “labor and soil” were dis-embedded from their cultural meanings and collective uses and treated as factors of production, which had to be rationalized to meet the declared objectives of “the *efficient* operation of land, as well as the *modernization* of the production process in order to increase agricultural *productivity* and...food safety” (Rusu et al, 2001, p.1, emphases added). Studied with neoclassical tools (in which the individual is the unit of analysis), social organizations were assigned instrumental value as potential generators of productivity and economic wealth, but also were vilified as obstructions to development, when they contributed to the “restructuring of factors

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<sup>4</sup> As Katherine Verdery points out, however, the official misrecognition of meanings of kinship contributed greatly to the disputes that followed. Kinship was recognized as a relationship disembodied from the performances and time investments that constitute “practical” kinship bonds—and hence claims to property inheritance—in the peasant society.

[land redistribution] ...by ideological than rational economic arguments" (Abele et al, 2001, p.9).

Securing private property with a Western-model property rights regime (a condition for structural adjustment loans) was an instrument for transforming land into an individual market commodity. Symbolically, individual land rights were presented as "better suiting human nature than does collective property" (Verdery, 2003, p. 3). They were thought to inspire the "entrepreneurial spirit" that would transform peasants into "individual farmers" (Balint, 2004, p.6). The structural adjustment doxa (that dismantling the state, securing private property, and liberalizing prices would automatically generate growth) obscured the powerful commercial interests behind the institutions of the IMF and World Bank. It also obscured the reality that when state support to small farmers was cut off, land "became a carrier of liabilities as people proved unable to purchase all those inputs at the prices international firms were charging" (Verdery 2003, p. 114).

A vast literature on the crisis of agricultural productivity and the persistence of subsistence farming after a decade of failed transition reveals the outcomes of shock therapy: extreme inequality, deep rural poverty, frozen land markets, and land fragmentation (Dumitru, 2002; Rusu, 2002; Vidican, 2004; Weingarten, Baum, 2005). Many, however, point not to a flawed doxa but to "improper sequencing of reforms" and underdeveloped institutions that made transactions too costly for entrepreneurship to emerge (Schrieder et al, 2000; Heidus and Schrieder, 2000; Heller 1999).

Because land had been returned to pre-Communist land owners (mainly "old people"), and 84% of the rural elderly were engaged in subsistence farming (Alexandri, 2004, p. 63), the elderly themselves and their cultural traditions were objectified as impediments to market production. The institution of equal land inheritance and peasants' "pre-capitalist" risk-spreading strategy of multi-cropping (the antithesis of market-based efficiency and rationality) were identified as "the most significant barrier to land consolidation" (Rusu 2002, p.8). Acknowledging but at the same time undervaluing their significance during transition, subsistence farmers' "[provision of] basic subsistence to rural and in part to the urban population" was (mis)characterized as a "mainly social"—and therefore chiefly not valuable—role in the development of the economy (Balint, 2004, p.3; Schreider et al, 2000).

Equally important, because "people employed in farming are, on average, old and poorly educated, they were seen to have "inadequate human capital" and limited labor mobility, which impeded the integration of rural-urban capital markets and the inflow of capital for farms (Marcours and Swinnen, 2005 p.408). Along with the declining economic base, poorly integrated rural-urban labor markets, their persistence in subsistence agriculture was seen as part of a vicious circle of rural decay: "As decaying rural areas become less attractive for investors from non-agricultural branches, and with consequently increasing economic problems and emigration of the *younger* and the *skilled*, such areas decay further" (Abele et al, 2001, p.2). The Neoliberal lens that values productivity, efficiency, and innovation, and depicts older peasants as tradition-bound, risk-averse, and irrational land users, who operated outside the market, deterred outside investors, and impeded younger people's entrepreneurship and employment.

Rather than increasing support and subsidies to small farmers (a measure antithetical to Neoliberal principles), changing the age structure of land tenure—and the peasant tradition of land inheritance—became key solutions to unfreezing land markets and stimulating market-oriented production and innovation. Though

warning against a-historical and “one-size-fits all” strategies, a Romanian scholar from the Institute of Agricultural Economics recommended enforcing cultural change through “legislation change referring to land inheritance...and forbid[ding] plot diminution below certain limits” (Rusu, 2002, p.8).

Building on such scholarship, an enchanted relationship between youth and human capital gained credibility, and land consolidation gained policy support as Romania entered the transition phase of EU accession.

### ***2.2.2 EU Accession: Human Capital Development, Livelihood Diversification, and Quality of Life***

Realigning Romania’s rural spaces and the people within them to the objectives of the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) entailed a notable shift in the symbolic meanings of rurality itself. The theoretical underpinnings and symbolic meanings of the CAP model must be understood as the outcome of a market-driven reshuffling of the social field of rurality in Western Europe as a general trend. Reflecting global patterns of flexibilization and niche marketing, the CAP policy was revisited beginning in the early 1980’s to address Western European social demands for environmental protection and locally grown food, and economic concerns about subsidized overproduction, and rural depopulation (Van der Ploeg et al, p.1). The economic vision was for “rural space [to] become a location for consumption rather than for agricultural production.” while the idealized notion of rurality became a social place of participatory democracies, diversified economic activity, and sustainable environments (Gray, 2001, p.41). Focusing on rural place rather than exclusively on production created the policy space to incorporate elements of heterodox human development frameworks into policy. Non-economic measures of gender equality, environmental sustainability, community participation, and “quality of life” were linked to economic growth, and the concept of “social inclusion” was added to income poverty as a measure of well-being (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; Mikos, 2001; Stockdale, 2004).

Deeply rooted in the Neoliberal doxa, however, the CAP model prioritized “a greater orientation towards the market needs” and situated human capital as an instrument, rather than human beings as subjects, of development. Although the CAP 2000 agenda touts a flexible, multi-sectoral, multi-actor rural development model (Mikos, 2001, p.), funding allocations make it clear that social development is subordinate<sup>5</sup> to the goal of maintaining a competitive agricultural sector.<sup>6</sup> As a CAP pamphlet explains, “EU agriculture aims to be a versatile, sustainable, and competitive economic sector...it maintains the countryside, conserves nature, and makes a key contribution to the vitality of rural areas...In addition, the CAP...[has] helped the EU to become a world player in agriculture and food terms” (EC, 2004, p. 13).

Set against the underlying economic agenda of EU competitiveness and the Western European idealized representation of rurality laid out in the CAP model,

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<sup>5</sup> In the 2000-2006 budget, second pillar measures received only 10% of the CAP budget; the 2007-2013 program suggested increasing the rural development funds to 25% by 2013, but this proposal was much disputed by some member states (Bendz, 2004, p.1).

Romanian rurality was characterized as backwards, burdensome, and in need of rapid modernization. In a study funded by the EC, rural areas throughout the CEEC region were characterized as problematic due to their typified low GDP, unfavorable age structure (“due to out-migration of skilled, young people”), high dependence on agriculture, low education level, and low human capital (Weingarten and Baum, 2005, p.139). Adopting almost identical language, Romania’s pre-accession policy analyses of the agriculture sector cited national weaknesses as “rural population demographic aging,” “the high share of population employed on its own holdings,” and “the low number of persons employed in non-agricultural activities” (Manoleli et al, 2004, pp. 57-69).

Adopting CAP guidelines, Romania’s 2000 National Agricultural Agenda and the national strategy for 2000-2006 (supported by transitional SAPARD funding) focused fundamentally on deepening the Neoliberal structural adjustment reforms: privatizing rural companies, and developing ‘optimal sized, efficient farms’ were the linchpin of the first pillar. The second, “social” pillar focused on meeting EU product quality standards; consolidate land and modernize farms; encourage non-farm livelihoods; and only lastly to “develop social infrastructure” (Dumitru 2002, p. 35-6). In Romania’s pre-accession agricultural report, “investing in human resources” was laid out as a key mechanism for stimulating rural development and meeting the needs of “individuals and groups *other than farmers* who are active” in rural areas (Manoleli et al, 2004, p. 8). But as human capital was depicted as a youthful attribute, investing in human resources meant “supporting young farmers, stimulating early retirement and vocational training...[and supporting] farm transfer from one generation to another” (*ibid.*, p.17).

While it deliberately sidelined the elderly, the EC’s stated claim of encompassing regional diversity and “preserving rural area specificity” still left open a potential place for cultural valorization and for the elderly as agents in rural development, in the area of agro-tourism. Viewing tourism as a potential source of alternative incomes, particularly for economically disadvantaged mountain areas, the national strategy selectively represented features of cultural capital identified as potential marketable assets: beekeeping, aquaculture, mushroom processing, traditional handicrafts, and agrotourism (NARDP, 2005, pp. 312-315). However, the conditions for obtaining funding for agrotourism under the transitional SAPARD program were notoriously unwieldy and bureaucratic, administered at the national and county level. The beneficiary had to obtain multiple certifications, submit a sophisticated business plan and market strategy, have a minimum of 4 rooms and adequate rural infrastructure, and prove “the ability to operate without public support” (NARDP 2005, p. 313). Given the marginalized social location of older smallholders, their geographical distance from the regional centers, and their generally lower education level, the mechanism of funding itself discouraged older smallholder farmers from taking advantage of funding—effectively enforcing the policy bias toward younger, business-oriented, and less rural individuals.

In sum, while improving the “quality of life” and preserving specificity of the rural areas is the stated goal of the Romania’s rural development agenda, elderly farmers were symbolically discarded as outmoded actors and demographic representations of the development gap between Romania and the EU. The focus on human capital as an instrument for developing non-farm employment reinforced a middle-aged- and youth-oriented model, designed deliberately to speed up generation transfer and land consolidation. Dis-embedded from values upheld by rural people, cultural heritage acquired an instrumental dimension, (mis)represented as a configuration of commercial activities that “will contribute to

a better marketing presentation, a better valorisation of local resources and market orientation addressed to domestic consumers" (NARDP, 2005, p.309).

## 2.3 Redefining Care and Ageing

In the related social fields of ageing and care during transition, policy discourses reflect the androcentric and middle-aged biases of Neoliberal logic, in which economic man is the expression and focus of production-oriented reasoning. Prioritizing productive-oriented activities (in the formal market), the support of dependents and the elderly was constructed as an economic cost, and caring activities—including (re)generating and maintaining human life, and reproducing culture and identity—were unvalued and passed on to the (unpaid) domain of the extended family (Peterson, 2002, p. 9). As Beneria, Elson and other feminist economists have shown in the developing world, women's unpaid care work helped subsidize the social welfare cuts of structural adjustment programs (Razavi, 2007, Misra and Merz, 2004). In the shift toward the EU discourse of self-care and community responsibility for care, the embedded biases constructed a negative image of dependency that legitimated minimal or instrumental forms of public care for the elderly. Overlooked throughout the transition were the subjective dimensions of care which are assigned no market value (including the relationship between caregivers and receivers), the strains of transition on extended families, and the lived experiences of dependency and ageing (Himmelweit 1999, p.3).

### 2.3.1 *Dismantling Communism: Misrecognizing Social Protection as Economic Liability*

Under the doxa of socialism (which represented the notion of the “good” as collective welfare and equality), age, dependency and infirmity were not categorized as shameful, but constituted valid claims to state support, in the form of welfare transfers for childcare givers, mothers, orphans, invalids, and elderly (Radutiu, 2004; Fox 2003). The state recognized and supported the reproductive economy to ensure the productivity, docility, and well-being of the labor force (Fajth, 1999, p.418). Under structural adjustment, however, the Neoliberal lens viewed “cradle-to-grave” social protections as thwarting individual initiative. State firms and farms that had rewarded work with social benefits were reassessed in market terms that (mis)recognized those social provisions as liabilities. They were “sold for the equivalent of an expensive house, leaving their employees astonished and dazed” (Verdery 2003, p. 23). The sudden erosion of welfare protections and work opportunities after 1989 created unheard-of inequality and poverty, making the extended family farm and community the principle social safety net. As elsewhere in the CEEC region, the social instability also brought an initial drop in the birth rate and an increase in male mortality,<sup>7</sup> creating a demographic shift that

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<sup>7</sup> By 2005, Romania's -0.20 natural rate of increase ranked 10th in the world in terms of negative population growth (Vasile, 2004).

became the subject of concern in labor market, pension, and migration discussions (Shrestha, 2000, SAR, 2003).

In the initial years of transition, the Romanian government tried to stave off social unrest by offering early retirement to workers and protecting the pension system against inflation (Radutiu, 2004; Fox, 2003). With the decline of the fiscal base and the move of many workers into the informal sector, however, the “pay as you go” pension system was seen as fiscally unsustainable. The elderly therefore became the objects of a “demographic crisis” discourse that legitimated decreased pension spending throughout the 1990’s and paved the way for restructuring the social welfare system along Neoliberal lines (Preda et al, 2004, p. 24). A series of reforms raised the age of retirement, redefined categories of beneficiaries to restrict access and limit abuse of the system, folded the special fund for farmer pensions into the state social security budget, and made steps toward partially privatizing the pension system (Alexandri 2004, Pop and Calugaru, 2004; Vasile and Zaman, 2005, Preda et al, 2004).

As Romania entered the EU integration process, pressure to regain macroeconomic growth and restrain spending turned population ageing into a “demographic time bomb” in some literature (SAR, 2003). Romanian scholars—wary of the population control tactics of the Communist regime—clarified that population decline *per se* was not at issue (SAR 2003, p. 34), but the focus on dependency ratios cemented a synonymous symbolic relationship between ageing, (un)productivity, and the economic burden of pensions and other welfare protections. Because labor potential was seen as “a pillar of sustainable development,” and both productivity and skill were seen as youthful attributes, the “age group structures [were] incompatible with the objectives of the economic restructuring and effective integration into the EU labor market” (Vasile, 2004, p. 13). Migration intensified the demographic crisis discussion, as younger workers—again, discursively endowed with human capital and labor market productivity—were seen to be draining the country of skill as well as contributions to the pension system (Vasile, 2004, Preda et al, 2004).

The conflation of ageing with economic burden allowed for blunt statements of the policy objective: “the number of pensioners included in the PAYG system is too big” (Pop and Calugaru, 2004). Despite the fact that GDP growth rose steadily since 2000 (UNDP, 2007, p. 12), the ongoing discourse of aging crisis—and the engagement of many elderly in “survival” farming—legitimated the payment of virtually symbolic pensions to categories of elderly, including some 1.4 million smallholder famers who received “ridiculous pension amounts like: less than 10 EUR/month” (Pop and Calugaru, 2004, Alexandri, 2004; Vasile and Zaman, 2005). Another three-fourths of the 0.83 million persons issued invalid or disability pensions were said to be cheating the system, because “even if some of them could still work part-time, most of those persons are working on the black labor market and they cash their pension every month, too” (Pop and Calugaru, 2004). Depicting many beneficiaries as abusing the system disguised the reality of persistent low wages, rising costs of living, and the erosion of the real value of pensions and benefits over the years (Alexandri, 2004).

Converging with the discourse of the ageing crisis was the enticement of the symbolic capital to be gained through EU membership, a conditionality of which was to complete pension reform by partially privatizing the system and reducing categories of beneficiaries. In the language of a pre-accession report, “the reforms of pension systems are an essential element of the European strategy on modernizing social protection....It is obvious, especially since the World Bank...proposed its multipilar [sic] strategy...that candidate countries need to

*modernize* their social systems too” (Preda et al, 2004, p. 40). Cloaked in this language, the inflexible conditionalities of EU accession—as well as the commercial interests of Western European banks involved in the privatization of the Romanian pension system—were misrecognized by the aspiring EU member as guidance toward a state of modernity (Gallagher, 2006). Under the veil of the enchanted Romanian-EU relationship, the well-being of the elderly and other dependents was subordinated to the needs of the labor market.

### ***2.3.2 EU Social Welfare: From Social Insurance to Social Inclusion, Community Care, and Autonomy***

The EU-guided reform of Romania’s social structures—and the subsequent redefinition of ageing, care, and dependency—must be seen as part of a broader European trend of welfare state downsizing since the 1980’s, initiated by the Neoliberal stance that “a welfare society must reflect only the interplay of social and political structures forged out of self-responsibility and consumerism.” In the European discourse, heavily influenced by Giddens’ “Third Way” model, the voluntary sector (families and communities) was constructed as a core feature of social policy, and states were urged to invest in “positive welfare based on *autonomy*, active health, lifelong education, well-being, and initiative” (Powell and Edwards, 2002, p.1). “Social inclusion” replaced equality as the benchmark for well-being. With this symbolic representation of active aging and community responsibility, the discourse relinquished the state of some of its responsibilities for care and discouraged the “moral hazard” of dependency (*ibid*, p.3). In so doing, it inflicted symbolic violence on caregivers, by disguising the power relation that delegated “unimportant” work to (women’s) altruism. It also inflicted symbolic violence on care receivers, by misrepresenting the experiences of disability, infirmity, and dependence.

The outcomes of Romania’s austerity programs and failed transition matched the goals of the European social policy model: By doing little to preserve social protections, care demands and social needs considered unaffordable to the state (including livable pensions) were passed on to the institutions of the extended family and the subsistence farm. In the process of EU accession, the language of Romanian social policy began to adopt the European discourse of “autonomy” and “social inclusion” as synonyms for well-being. Analyzing an EU-guided Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) “as a mechanism to promote social inclusion,” Ilie and Radutiu (2004) explicitly position Romania’s social restructuring within the Third Wave discourse, calling for “the protection of the vulnerable, as well as no rights without responsibilities.” The means-tested MIG benefit (in accordance with EU regulations and “based on social solidarity”) was intended to reach the most vulnerable 10% of the population, including “old people living alone.” In the aim of “enforcing individual responsibility for well-being,” recipients were required to perform 72 hours of community service, in jobs determined by the local councils. As the authors illustrate, however, because the benefit is means-tested, ownership of land made many rural elderly ineligible for the credit. Moreover, for psychological and social reasons—“stigma, selfishness, self-esteem”—potential beneficiaries might exercise their agency by “self-excluding” from the social programs intended to “include” them (*ibid*, pp. 6-10). Even as the authors point out the social oversights in the design of the program and argue for increased social spending, they situate their argument within the doxic notion that “welfare state

reforms impose the need to redefine concepts [through] re-commodification, cost containment and recalibration" (ibid, p. 2).

As the case above suggests, representing autonomy, productivity, and individual responsibility as well-being in social policy obscures an underlying meaning: that care is a (state) burden and dependency itself (an inevitable lifecycle stage) is a social and moral failure. The bottom-line objective of reducing welfare costs assigns instrumental values and monetary costs to many of the psychological, physical and social dimensions of elderly well-being, even in papers calling for greater social spending.<sup>8</sup> For older Romanians who grew up under the doxa of social equality, the changing construction of dependency implied a loss of dignity and recognition for those seeking social assistance. Discarded by the state with virtually symbolic pension payments, they faced morally charged and stigmatizing conditionalities for proving their need. With cuts and new conditionalities for welfare services, the institution of the extended family continued to provide not only the caring activities that the elderly need, but also the subjective dimensions of dignity and interrelation that the state's definition of care does not recognize.

### ***2.3.3 The Feminization of Migration and the Nacent Care Drain***

Linking and rapidly transforming the social fields of ageing, care, and rurality, the phenomenon of migration placed an unacknowledged strain on the institution of the extended family and generated a new enchanted relationship (between remittances and development) in the social policy discourse. Migration flows have been an important and ever-shifting feature of Romania's market transition, and since 1989, 2.5 million Romanian households have had some migration experience—direct or through a family member (Sandu et al, 2006, p. 13).<sup>9</sup> The process of EU integration, however, opened the floodgates for semi-regular and illegal circular migration, particularly from the rural areas. Since visa restrictions to the Schengen Zone were lifted in 2002, circular migration became an accessible livelihood diversification option for young adults eager to bypass the faltering economic transition at home (El Cherkeh et al, 2004, p.76).

In the dominant discourse on migration, the principle trade-offs were seen to be the loss of human capital ("brain drain" and skill drain), productivity, and depletion of social policy funds as younger workers exited the formal labor market (UNDP, 2007; Alexandri, 2004; Constantin et al, 2004). Other issues raised were the potential for social unrest as Romania might begin to import its own migrant labor to make up for its labor loss, the reputation of Romanian migrants abroad, and the acceleration of population aging (UNDP 2007, p. 97). Romania's Pre-Accession Report on migration highlighted several vulnerable social groups—unaccompanied minors, Roma, victims of trafficking, and students—but made no

<sup>8</sup> For example, in arguing for social activities for the elderly, an EU report on elderly well-being notes that "social integration" reduces depression, which "is one of the factors leading to a situation of dependency. Therefore, increasing depression rates among the elderly contributes to increasing care demands" (Mette 2005, p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Early streams of migration were pioneered by political émigrés or ethnic minorities. Later these were replaced with economic migration streams, which were facilitated by family and community networks, and influenced by labor demand and immigration restrictions in the expanding EU (Gorny, 2006, p.4).

mention of the care needs of elderly or children, or of the strains of migration on transnational families (Constantin et al, 2004, p.45-65).

Moreover, material remittances were, undisputedly, identified as a valuable resource for stimulating domestic demand and temporarily solving Romania's overt and hidden unemployment problem.<sup>10</sup> Citing an IOM opinion, Romania's Pre-Accession Report concluded that, with "proper management, the national migration policy can become a major catalyst, able to enhance a new economic prosperity in Romania" (Constantin et al, p. 24). The Human Development report, Romanian scholars, and Prime Minister Nastase also saw migration as a source of cultural capital: By working abroad, Romanians would learn the ("Western") values of hard work, democratic behavior, and responsible citizenship (Bleahu, 2004; Badescu, 2005; UNDP, 2007).

From the side of the EU, Romanian integration and migration coincided with a continent-wide trend of population ageing and welfare state downsizing. These intersecting trends created the demand for cheap, migrant labor (provided mainly by women) to fill the welfare and labor gap (Ehrenreich and Hoschild, 2003), particularly in Southern Europe, where the "family care model" strongly prefers in-home care (Da Roit, 2007). Capitalizing on this demand (and the demand for agricultural and construction laborers), Romania signed bilateral agreements with Southern European countries that helped regularize and manage the already strong informal migration flows. By 2005, around 175,000 Romanian workers had legal residence in Spain, and 249,000 had residence permits in Italy (Baldwin-Edwards 2005, p. 3).

As a result, more Romanian women (both married and single) have engaged in the strategy of migration.<sup>11</sup> The Romanian Labor Force Migration Office estimated that 52.6% of migrants in 2005 were women. Unacknowledged by the state, however, Romanian migrant women form a link in what feminists have labeled "global care chains," in which women who migrate to provide care for others transfer some of their own caregiving responsibilities to relatives at home—including older parents (Escriva, 2005; Misra and Merz, 2004; Ehrenreich and Hoschild, 2003). This places unseen strains on the extended family institution to which the state has delegated many of its social policy responsibilities (as illustrated above).

The strain of migration on families does feature prominently in the Romanian media, but the focus is often on divorce rates and the psychological problems of "abandoned" children (quite often placing the blame on the moral deficiency of migrant mothers). International institutions such as the Soros Foundation and UNICEF have developed programs for migrants' children, and the government has responded by instituting measures to institutionalize abandoned children and assign legal guardians to children of migrant parents (Piperno 2007, p. 3). The focus on the care needs of the young, however, ignores the elderly, whose needs are assumed to be covered by their pensions, subsistence farms, and remittances.

Remittances may offer some material comforts to the rural elderly, however, they are a poor substitute for the social networks, physical care, and

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<sup>10</sup> The National Bank of Romania estimated that in 2005, migrants' remittances were close to 4.5% of the GDP (HDR 2007, p. 99).

caring relationships that are essential to well-being in older age (Brown and Kulcsar, 1999). Moreover, some Romanian scholars have noted that remittances tend to diminish as the cost of living in the new country increases. Once the nuclear family is united abroad, remittances may stop altogether, as migrants are unable to meet obligations to those who remain behind (Bleahu, 2004). In addition, cultural remittances—lifestyle changes and symbols of success—can create intergenerational tensions and widen the generation gap in rural villages, creating difficulties for elderly surrogate parents (Piperno, 2007, p.7).

The phenomenon of migration (supported by the state) thus places the elderly in a social position of in/visibility: In both migration and rural development discourses, the “graying” of villages is a metaphor for negative social change or economic decline. Yet the elderly themselves are not subjects of concern. Under the weight of the discursive distortions in the intersecting social fields, the rural elderly are marginalized to the point that they are pushed out of the policy frame of transition.

## 2.4 Limited Discursive Space for Heterodox Opposition

As illustrated above, the dominant institutions and social forces realigning the framing of rurality, care, and aging in the social field of transition have tended to characterize the elderly in instrumental ways that distort the stated EU goals of human development and social inclusion. Throughout the policy shifts, heterodox voices from Romania and other institutions operating in the social field have attempted to draw attention to the non-material concerns and lived realities of social groups, including the rural elderly. While most of the Romanian academic texts analyzed supported the EU agenda, they urged the government to proceed with caution, contextualization, and public participation in policy formation. In rural development, for instance, the Romanian Academic Society urged the government not to downplay “the complexity of the process to transform peasant households into commercial farms, and the deep historical entrenchment of the former in the Romanian society” (SAR 2005, p. 19). Alexandri’s review of the EU proposed early retirement policy considered it a positive solution—but warned that it would only be successful if pensions were livable, and peasants’ *love for their land* were taken into account (Alexandri, 2004, p. 68). The urgency of meeting EU benchmarks, and the Romanian history of treating the “peasant problem” in a top-down manner, however, made these voices of caution and nuance easy to dismiss.

The more authoritative voice of heterodox opinion in the social field—the UNDP’s Human Development Report (HDR)—seems to have been usurped by the Neoliberal doxa of development, according to which the benefits of the market will eventually outweigh the “short-term” social costs of transition. Romania’s 2007 HDR <sup>12</sup> distinctly instrumentalizes the concept of “human development,” making it synonymous with economic growth. Throughout the report, macroeconomic stability and sustained GDP growth rates are depicted as the foundation of social

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<sup>12</sup> In principle, the HD paradigm makes human beings subjects of their own aspirations rather than objects of social engineering. It aims to shape social organization to stimulate the spirituality and creativity of human beings, as well as their labor productivity (Truong 1997, p. 351).

well-being. In fact, “hitting rock bottom served the country well, at least from a certain point of view,” because it “denied Government lush funds during a period when they would have had anyway to maintain strictness.” Similarly, the crisis-mode return to small family farms was said to have “reliev[ed] the budget from what would have been otherwise a formidable pressure...and greatly contribut[ing] to falling inflation rates” (HDR 2007, p. 24). While the report calls for greater equity in Romania’s transition, its bottom line is that economic instability is responsible for the depletion of social protection systems, which in turn has the effect of “pushing [people] into the shadow economy and further alienating them” (UNDP 2007, p. 27). Throughout the report, the model clearly tries to mold people to the market rather than enhance their qualitative freedoms, by narrowly defining “social inclusion” as participation in formal labor-market activity.

The instrumental construction of human well-being in the HDR testifies to the deep penetration of the Neoliberal doxa in the policy field of transition. After a decade of failed transition, EU accession was seized upon by the Romanian government, and Romanian academics, as the stern hand that would assure political stability and economic prosperity (Gray, 2004). Given Romania’s limited cultural and economic capital within the EU, the pressure on candidate countries “to translate the Union’s...objectives into their national policies” (Preda et al, 2004, p. 40) left Romania limited space to develop an indigenous vision for development. In practice, adopting the EU policy framework meant accepting its symbolic (mis)representations of ageing, dependency, and rurality.

## 2.5 The Habitus of Ageing Peasants and the Limits of Resistance

Given the weight of the social forces and policy discourses acting upon them, what space is there in the social field for peasants to resist policy, enact social change, or even make their voices heard? Completing the metaphor of the social field, Bourdieu’s concept of agency—the habitus—encompasses the limits and intimate ways of negotiating social change. In Bourdieu’s terms, agents create the social world by works of representation, as they constantly perform acts to impose their view of the social world and their own identity within it (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 727). At the same time, perception of the social world is structured by the existing symbolic meanings assigned to objects in previous social struggles (*ibid*, p. 727). These meanings are internalized and reproduced through the habitus—the embodied, instinctive “feel for the game” by which people memorize and accept their social position (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 20). For Bourdieu, “the body is a full-fledged component of social action....[it] is never *only* a body in action...embodied action concerns sedimented or accumulated—but usually forgotten history.” Interpreting the social world by and with the body is a way of (re)creating the present, through reenacting the past (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004, p. 14).

Many have criticized Bourdieu’s concept as being too deterministic and leaving too little room for human agency and social change (McNay, 2004; Gartman, 1991). However, McNay’s operationalization of the habitus (of gender) as a lived social relation illustrates that while the power of symbolic domination extends deeply to one’s instinctive habits, neither identity nor social position are imposed from outside. Reproducing the habitus requires an unseen process of active negotiation and acquiescence. Hegemonic doxa “has continually to be

renewed, recreated defended, and...also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged" (McNay, 2004, p. 184-185).

Treating rurality, like gender, as a lived social relation, shows how actors within the village of Spermezeu renegotiate, contest, or resign their individual habitus through everyday interactions with and representations of the social world. Mediated through the bodily knowledge of imminent dependency on others, the experiences, including emotions, of the elderly, can be examined not as ends in themselves, but also as the bearers of invisible power relations (McNay 2004, p.186).

Outside the discursive sphere of transition (in the village of Spermezeu), villagers embodying the "rules of the game" of an ancestral rurality contend with a game that is rapidly changing. Bourdieu's own characterization of the peasant world—in which power relations are enacted through direct, face-to-face relationships—reduces the relational, "ancient economy" to a game of economic sleight-of-hand, a set of cost-benefit analyses in which inputs of time and face-to-face contact soften the violence of economic appropriation (Risseeuw, p. 179). In this way, he (mis)recognizes intrinsic and spiritual values embedded in the rural livelihood. Using the tools of habitus shows how the elderly of Spermezeu interpret the symbolic and material codes of modernity, and how they strive to retain the meaningful spiritual and subjective meanings of their livelihood and community. The concept of habitus—both generative and embedded in history—captures acts of resistance, as well as the painful embodiment of symbolic violence.

## CHAPTER 3 RURALITY AND AGEING AS LIVED REALITIES: AN ECO-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

This chapter situates the experience of aging in the context of the village of Spermezeu in Bistrita-Nassaud county. Following Vincent (2005), the experiences of aging and shared collective consciousness are embedded in a specific historical and political economy context. The narratives that follow reflect the structural exclusions that derive from the age-, gender-, and rural-based biases embedded in the realignment of the social field of transition. However, within the group of elderly (ranging from 51 to 96 years old) interviewed, there are also distinct “generations,” defined in social constructivist discourses as sharing a “common habitus and lifestyle” or “collective rituals and memories” (Vincent, 2005). The speakers are identified in the following passages by age, profession, and land ownership or marital status, which reflects to a degree on their social position and indicates whether their experience of rurality was shaped mainly during the Communist period, or also before. Those identified as “farmers” or “housewives” had been smallholders throughout communism, while those identified by a former profession received a pension. Widows as a group had limited pension income, while landless villagers self-identified as both materially and socially poorer. The diversity of their personal biographies, objective/subjective resources, and shared experiences of course influences their social position, their construction of the changing social world, and their own identity within it. The narratives that follow reveal how—from an eco-centered habitus—material, symbolic, and cultural assets gain or lose their value through the quality of relationships invested in them.

### 3.1 Situating Spermezeu

Spermezeu fits the profile of a “transnational village” as defined by Sandu (2005B): It is highly populated (about 2200 people);<sup>13</sup> situated along the highway 100 kms away from Cluj, the main city of Transylvania,<sup>14</sup> thus well integrated into transnational spaces. It also has a sizeable religious minority (about 25 Pentacostal families), which is an important source of social capital in migration networks. The village also feels the “push factor” of urban-rural return migration, after the closing of the factories in the nearby industrial cities of Dej, Beclean, Bistrita (Sandu, 2005, p. 566).

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<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.primariaonline.ro/primarii/Bistrita-Nasaud/index.php?sub=8>

<sup>14</sup> Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2002 Census, <http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/core/search/search.en.do;jsessionid=0a02458c30d58ba22aba538a42e6920ce200b4e000d4.e38QbxeSahyTbi0TaO0>

Located in the mountains, Spermezeu was never collectivized during Communism, although Ceaușescu had planned to depopulate the mountain villages and resettle the peasants more centrally.<sup>15</sup> Because farmers were allowed to retain their land<sup>16</sup> and animals (though not to sell them), the village retained many of the traditions and meanings of the eco-centered peasant habitus. While many (especially the women) remained on their own farms, others combined seasonal agricultural work with state jobs at the nearby collective farm, the factories, and apartment block construction sites. Higher-paying jobs in the mines might take men farther away from home, for months at a time. For this reason, “migration” as livelihood diversification option is not a new phenomenon, although the distances and periods of migration are far greater at present.

In 2002, the rate of migration from Spermezeu was about 74.86 per 1000 residents (OSI, Sandu). Villagers attested that almost every household had at least one member abroad. The primary destination is Spain, and a private bus company, Spermatrans, runs twice-weekly routes to Madrid. Of the interviewees’ immediate relatives who had migrated, 38 had been in Spain; 7 in Italy; 2 in France; 4 in Cyprus; and 3 in Ireland.<sup>17</sup> The influx of remittances was brightly visible: Construction and renovation generated significant employment (mainly informal) within the village. The village boasted new buildings, brightly re-painted houses, new cars, two new stores and a recreation center. Renovations had been made to both the Pentecostal and Orthodox churches and the school. Many of the children and adolescents center appeared slightly overweight, were outfitted with “city” clothes, and had cell phones, motor scooters, and other gadgets representing a new form of symbolic capital.

### 3.2 Livelihood as a Visible, Reciprocal Economy: Situated Meanings of Land, Property, and Work

#### 3.2.1 *Embodied Land*

In contrast to policy discourses on the return to subsistence farming—a failure of transition, a crisis fallback position, an inefficient use of land and labor—for many of the older villagers, it was a welcome choice. Working the land reconnected villagers with a local identity (even if they themselves had been separated from it

<sup>15</sup> Ceaușescu’s project prompted the formation of L’Operation Villages Roumains, an initiative active in the 1990’s that created partnerships between French, Belgian and Swiss villages and specific villages in Romania. Halmasau retains a partnership with a Swiss organization, while Spermezeu had a partnership with Belgium.

<sup>16</sup> About six peasants in the village were named *chiabur*, or rich peasants, with 40 or more hectares, 100 or more sheep, or a mill. Some of their forest land was seized and some were sent to labor camps for several years.

<sup>17</sup> Ireland had become a popular destination for Spermezeu migrants because it is possible to obtain citizenship through children born on Irish soil.

throughout Communism) and restored an inherited symbolic codification and organization of the social world. Though Spermezeu had not been collectivized, Katherine Verdery's observations about land recovery found echoes in the community:

Recovering land meant reasserting those ways of being-in-world for [villagers]....This is not simply a return to traditional values, but rather the use of a familiar idiom for making new present identities" (Verdery 2003, p. 173).

The embeddedness of land in family and community relationships extend the symbolic value of land to a constellation of social meanings that help explain why the lack of credit markets alone do not account for the failure of land consolidation. In the habitus of the older peasants, owning—but more important, working—the land constitutes the skeleton of the social order, the embodied asset that shapes villagers' identities, aspirations, investments, and places within the world. In contrast to values such as productivity, enterprise, and efficiency, the local terms that represent good land use are being a 'master' (*gospodar*) of the land, 'hard working' (*harnic*), and 'satisfied' (*multimit*) with what the land gives. In this view, comfortably 'subsisting' was not seen as survival, but bounty. Responding to questions about material assets, villagers who had no cash income but lived entirely off of their farms described themselves as "rich."

The cultural capital endowed by land mastery is displayed to the village through what Katherine Verdery calls the "visible economy," where what is produced on the farm is a conspicuous proof of ones hard work, family cohesion, and moral standing (Verdery 2003, p. 181). According to this ordering principle, older peasants' time, labor, and capital investments can seem deeply symbolic, and outputs of produce are measured in distinctly non-material terms. Proudly showing off his *gospodarie*, a 96-year-old farmer responded with baffled impatience to questions about quantities of oil produced on his farm:

Farmer: How much, how much? As much as the sunflowers give!

Q: And how much does your family need in a year?

Farmer: We need just as much as we need! When we don't have, we buy! When we don't have money to buy it, we don't eat it!

Gesturing to his huge pigs, full woodshed, working beehives, fruit trees, corn fields, and mountain of sunflower heads, he indicated that what valuable to him was that he had *enough* of everything, that everything on his table came from his farm, and that he and his family were visibly at work to improve the land. "Do you see?" he said, "It's possible to have a real *gospodarie* here in Romania. If everyone were to do as I've done, we wouldn't have these problems in the country!"

Embedded in this value system, land that was not being worked was assigned a negative value: it was a public shame, tantamount to a sin, to leave land "empty." As a 78-year-old retired logger explained, he hired a worker to help keep up his

land—not because he needed the produce, but because otherwise, “my neighbors will laugh at me that I don’t want to work.” The luxury of his pension (111 euros per month) enabled him to make this symbolic investment, essential to his self-respect and social well-being.

Due to the centrality of land mastery in their habitus of rurality older villagers expressed dismay at the collapse of market prices for land, something that tangibly misrecognized its social value as well as diminished the landowners’ potential financial capital. Asked if they would be willing to sell their land, some retorted, “Who’s buying? You can’t sell if you want to!” However, in follow-up, they quickly retracted, stating that land was an important security against harder times. A 67-year-old whose husband was ill and children abroad did not have the labor to work her own land, but selling it was still out of the question:

Nobody’s working the land, it’s not worth anything anymore. The young people have all left, nobody wants to buy it. But we don’t want to sell it, anyway, because who knows what kind of times there will be in the future? You may need it.

Given the low land prices, extreme interest rates (15% at the rural credit institute), and recent experiences of hyperinflation, it is not surprising that land offers a more solid sense of security than money in the bank. But the peasants’ eco-centered relationship to the embodied land also reflects a link of trust and reciprocity that they felt formal and informal employment did not provide. Elderly parents felt that they were better off and more independent than their children, because they had small “projects” whose output—meat, cheese, milk—was reliable in times of hardship; their children, in contrast, were at the mercy of unsteady jobs and untrustworthy employers. Some, whose children were employed in Spain, took advantage of low prices to accumulate more land—again, just in case.

This trust in the land also manifests the ability to self-sustain—a capacity that is distinctly undermined by the subsidy regime geared toward land consolidation. A 66-year-old widow was baffled by the “crazy” EU logic that allocated subsidies:

The EU gives money for people who use the land, but they have to have plots adjacent. So I have two plots, one with potatoes, one with corn, but I didn’t receive money from the EU, because in between them, I have a gap. It has to be at least 1 hectare [to receive the subsidy]. I have more than 1 hectare, but it’s not the same crop. Why not have potatoes next to corn?

While many farmers acknowledged that having a variety of crops and a few animals is not the way farming is done in the West, they saw this as a difference, not a deficiency. Having a diversity of crops, as they explained, protected against seasonal vulnerabilities, such as the two early frosts that spring, the devastating flood of 2006, and the drought of this summer.

### *3.2.1 Subjectified Property*

In a mountain village like Spermezeu, where land is more suitable for grazing than for crops, livestock represents a principle form of material and symbolic capital. In

the eco-centered habitus, though, animals do not just provide income and sustenance; they also become subjectified by their owners through the relationship of rearing and caring for them. Pigs and hens seemed to have limited symbolic importance<sup>18</sup> beyond food security and Christmas bounty, but cows, buffalo, horses, and sheep were represented as close companions and recipients of care, and provided metaphors for understanding human behavior and social change. Because selling animals had been forbidden under Communism, many retired workers returned to raising and selling animals as an exercise of freedom and a source of income, but also to regain quality of life. As a comfortably retired construction worker explained, he returned to sheep herding not because he needed to have the animals around him:

You know, some people keep animals to get rich. But if you take a dog into your house, are you bringing him in to make money off of him? It's the same way for me with my animals. I keep them because I love them (Retired construction worker, 70).

As predicted in pre-EU accession reports (Manoleli et al, 2004, p. 54), however, the market value of certain animal products (milk, pork, beef)<sup>19</sup> has plummeted in the past few years. Most elderly farmers were ineligible for new subsidies, which privilege market-oriented farmers with three or more cows. Those who relied heavily on the income from their animal products felt increasingly vulnerable and dependent. As a 60-year-old farmer noted, “We have to sell milk and things,<sup>20</sup> because with a pension like this [47 euros a month], it's not enough to live on. We could ask the kids [for help], but we don't like to because it's expensive there in Spain.”<sup>21</sup> She sold milk and eggs regularly to neighbors, rather than the official distribution points, because through that direct relationship she received a more generous price. Others had given up trying to sell milk, keeping it for their own use or to feed the pigs.

For younger farmers, migration offers an opportunity to supplement their livelihood, but their relationship to their animals makes this a painful trade-off. One middle-aged shepherd tried several times to earn income from seasonal migration to support his traditional sheep cheese production, but he was unable to bear being away from his flock:

It would be much easier to make money abroad...but being away from here is just too hard. Last time I left, two winters ago, I had three month contract, but I couldn't finish it. I was too worried about the sheep. I had to come back and make sure they were okay (Shepherd, 44-years-old).

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<sup>18</sup> Asked if they “kept animals,” most would respond in the negative, even if they only had a number of pigs and chickens.

<sup>19</sup> “The accession...will generally lead to farmer incomes increase in most countries...Only Romania, where the livestock sector is not competitive, will experience a diminution of farmers' incomes if direct payments are not applied.” (Manolele et al, p. 54).

<sup>20</sup> She earned about 1.40 euros per day from milk sales.

<sup>21</sup> The price at the distribution points was about 50-60 bani per liter (17 eurocents).

For older or frazier farmers, however, the emigration of the youth means losing the substantial labor input required to provide hay. Tending animals becomes a luxury that only the healthier, better-pensioned, and socially supported elderly can afford. As interpreted by the village nurse, this loss can have a significant impact on the health of the elderly, as the exercise, emotional bond, and sense of responsibility involved in caring for animals have intrinsic physical and emotional benefits:

Absolutely! There's no question in my mind. It's much, much better for them to have fieldwork and animals...It gives them something to take care of and to feel useful.

Especially for those whose children and grandchildren were abroad, selling off animals was described as a painful loss. A spry 59-year-old whose husband fell ill was forced to sell her cow after 40 years of working with animals. "Eh! It's hard to live without her," she said, "I miss the cow as much as I miss my own kids when they leave."

For a few elders, however, the caring relationships of migrant children enable them to sustain unprofitable "enterprises" in the face of market devaluation and labor loss. One 66-year-old, a widow for 15 years, beamed with pride when talking about her small farm of 13 sheep, two pigs, rabbits, and favourite horse, who was "like a child to me." With the remittances of an indulgent youngest son (who will inherit her house), she was able to pay 9 euros (the equivalent of her inheritance pension) per sheep to pasture her small flock:

My son says, 'Mother, you're crazy! I'm working in Spain just for you to have some sheep and a horse to look at.' If you put it altogether—a little sheep cheese—it's no use even raising them.

Surrounded by modern appliances that she chose not to use, her farming was not a hobby but a basic need, essential to her identity, as well as a symbolic protest against the extinction of her livelihood: "After I die, I don't care what [my son] does with the animals," she said, "But as long as I'm alive, the farm will stay together."

### **3.3 Lived Experiences of Ageing and (Inter)dependency: Forms of Reciprocity and Community Support**

#### ***3.3.1 Dignified Labor and (Inter)dependence***

In the rural habitus derived from subsistence farming, the values of hard work, interdependence, and reciprocity—not autonomy—are essential to the functioning of the family farm and to the well-being of the community in times of vulnerability. As labor is a family asset, the ability to work hard reflects moral value, self-worth, and worth to others. Intimately linked to the symbolic codes of working the land, "hard-working" (*gospodar*, derived

from the word 'landlord') was the highest term of respect for a villager; through labor for others, poorer villagers were able to work their way into land ownership. Rooted in this code, distinctly non-market oriented forms of labor are essential to well-being and dignity into older age.

Within the extended family farm, the cultural values placed on work and interdependence (and the respect for past labor) allowed elderly to provide what work their bodies permitted to the running of the household, and to have both their present and past contributions valorized by family members. Working hard was constructed as a source of pride and autonomy and a way of life. As a 59-year old woman said, "We were raised to work! If we aren't doing anything with our hands, we get terribly bored."

For elders with little land or property, labor remains a principle livelihood asset, the currency of exchange in the reciprocal economy. Unseen in policy discourses, though, the loss of the youth due to migration places a physical and social strain on those whose ability to exchange work services is mediated through an ageing body. If their adult children were around, the older villagers would be able to contribute family labor into the pool even as they themselves grow physically weaker. When adult children migrate, older people who were weak or who lived with incapacitated spouses were ashamed to ask for help that they could not return in kind. As a 70-year old widow complained:

My parents-in-law brought me the cheese for the *placinta*. The neighbors are okay, but you know, there are disputes because I can't work for them anymore....What can I do? I can't take the heat anymore [to go to the fields].... They'll stop by and chat, or bring me some milk sometimes, but if I can't work, I'm good for nothing.

Several widows, whose children were abroad, were left in an uncomfortable position of resignation and dependency, waiting for a child or relative to send what they could, when they could, to meet basic needs. Being unable to reciprocate is shameful to individuals, unbalances social relationships among villagers, and creates a sense of being a burden on family in older age.

### **3.3.2 State and Community Supports**

In contrast, receiving state support was not viewed as dependency but as a form of reciprocity for citizenship—as well as a crucial supplement to their livelihood assets. From this perspective, new requirements to perform public community service in exchange for livelihood supports were construed as shameful, an added burden of labor, and a misrecognition of need. The bureaucratic hoops villagers had to jump through to receive existing public supports were identified as a form of symbolic violence. This was particularly emphasized among the oldest generation,

who had generally remained on their land during Communism and were offended at what they saw as a failure of reciprocity in the pension scheme:<sup>22</sup>

Look, during Communism, peasants would have to give a quota to the State. If we paid this to the State back then, why don't we get something back now? We didn't pay taxes, but we gave our share. (Retired farmer, 80)

Appealing directly to the Mayor for a welfare benefit for her unpensioned father-in-law, one 57-year old farmer was told that to receive the credit, the father-in-law would have to be registered (on paper) as living alone. As long as he was living with family, he would be considered cared for, and "not the concern of the City Hall." Viewing this as a violation of his dignity, the family refused the arrangement and the credit.

An elder who had served in the army under Hungarian occupation and Romanian control, repeatedly appealed to both governments for at least a token veteran's pension, but neither had a record of his service. It was the affliction of his older age to have suffered and survived, only to have his experience symbolically obliterated by a missing paper:

I served for the Hungarians, I was in Russia, they don't *recognize* me. What do they mean, I wasn't in the army? If I don't have documents, they don't believe anything. Without documents, you're nobody.

Given the lack and indignity of public supports, community interdependence continues to offer an essential social insurance system in times of emergency. However, villagers' social locations influence the degree to which they can count on the system, and the effect of migration seems to connect villagers to family members abroad, while weakening the intracommunity response. For those with wider social networks, the dispersion of the community abroad has expansively widened the emergency safety net. For example, when a rapidly progressing eye disease struck the grandson of a 51-year-old farmer, she was able within three days to raise money for the hugely expensive operation (about 1200 euros), by calling on her children abroad, the church and school, and relatives of a neighbor who lived in the US.

For those at the bottom of the social order, however, the failures and conditionalities of reciprocity—from the state and the community—are made more painful by the influx of remittance wealth, which exaggerates existing inequalities within the community. Following the massive flood of 2006, a female head of household (79)—among the poorest in the commune—applied to the local council for reconstruction materials. But because her shingled shack (futilely patched with bottles and cans) was on a hill, and the floodwater had not penetrated from below, she was deemed technically ineligible for public assistance. When volunteers from

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<sup>22</sup> Women, who had primarily worked on the farms during Communism, were ineligible for a pension. The average pension was 43 euros per month for men; 18 euros for women. However, 5 of the 6 women's pensions were widow's pensions. In 12 of 29 households, neither spouse had a pension.

the Pentacostal church gave her limited financial support, she was shamed by the priest of her own Orthodox church and effectively excommunicated from the one social place offering inclusion and comfort. Her neighbors below her, whose outhouse frequently flooded her yard, offered monetary support—provided she would sign over her property to them. Surrounded by the construction of new houses and new cars, she asked:

I just don't understand why people won't help us. There are quite a few rich people around here. They could just give us a little, each of them.

Discarded by the community and state, she was nonetheless unwilling to leave the village to move in with a distant brother, as the house, embodied with her lifelong effort to care for her son, represented the only valuable property she could pass on to him.

### 3.4 Multiple Dimensions of Care

#### 3.4.1 *Intergenerational Care as a Reciprocal Relationship*

In a rural livelihood in which reproduction is integrated into economic activity, the eco-centered habitus recognizes the need to receive and to provide holistic care as intrinsic to individual, family, and community well-being. Before and throughout communism, intergenerational care played an important functional and social role, freeing up younger women to work in the fields and providing a respectful “retirement” for the elderly. Constructed as reciprocal relationship (a debt paid forward and backward), care is performed in a way that respects the care receiver and disguises the burden it may entail. As a woman caring for a paralyzed husband and sick mother-in-law explained:

This is my duty. If I'm here who else should take care of them? If God ordered this to me to take care of my husband, then I have to do it. I can't just leave. My mother-in-law is old and she took care of my kids back ago. Now it's my turn. (Housewife, 51).

Women who dedicated long years of their lives to caring for children, parents-in-law, and parents described good care provision as making the recipient feel independent, useful, and welcome—literally, “to make human” (*a omeni*)—even if the care responsibility was unexpected:

After my mother-in-law died, the father-in-law moved in and stayed with us for 26 years! He was supposed to go with his youngest son, that's the way the rule should go, but [...] he felt better here, so of course I took care of him...Having grown up without a mother, I knew what it was like to need help...Whoever needed help, I had to take him in, make him feel welcome [*a omeni*] (Farmer, 60)

From the perspective of the care receiver, well-being in older age meant being autonomous but *cared about* through daily interactions. An 83-year-old widower who proudly “managed on his own” was gratified by the daily attention he received from his daughters-in-law and rich social network:

So much food they bring, that I have to feed it to the pigs. They wash my clothes...because they have one of those mechanical washing machines now. I’m very happy with what I have here, very satisfied with what they do for me. Everyone in the village stops by. I was godfather to fifteen kids...I have a brother over here, a cousin over there...I have relatives all around.

With the intensification and feminization of migration, however, the elderly’s local social networks are thinning out, necessitating forms of long-distance care—principally carried out through phone calls, gifts, and remittances—that do not meet their need for interrelation. While cell phones (paid for with remittances) made it relatively easy to stay in touch with migrant children, they did little to ease the loneliness of being left behind by their children:

Well, [my daughter] comes when she can, but she’s working and she has two daughters there. Whenever I miss her, I call. Of course, I miss them all the time. [Begins to cry.] But what can I do? I miss them so much, I want to go with them. (Housewife, 67.)

In some households, the tradition of intergenerational parenting allowed younger elderly women to remain integrated into their children’s lives by traveling abroad to provide care for grandchildren. However, this arrangement was impossible for many women to accept, as it meant neglecting care responsibilities for parents, land, and animals that remained behind:

I’d go visiting if I could but I can’t be gone even two, three days. I need to keep an eye on the household, on my husband not to fall and break something, or my mother-in-law that can pass away any minute, she’s 90. (Housewife, 53)

Because men’s caring services are usually offered in the form of providing hay, wood, and other farm labor, rather than childcare, it was less common and more difficult for them to temporarily join family members abroad. To feel interrelated and useful to the family meant trying to find work in the labor market, an option that was difficult for older workers. One man traveled to Cyprus with his wife, who was invited to care for the grandchildren. Unable to find regular work in construction, however, he chose to return to the village, where he could keep busy providing services for his mother-in-law. But he expressed what he saw as his abandonment as an “ugly” tradeoff:

It was horrible to sit there doing nothing...But I’m not okay here, I’m not calm at all. I’m afraid of myself. I can’t sleep any more than three hours a night...It’s ugly to be alone. If I just had a grandson to keep me company...I could get out of this horrible situation. (Former truck driver, 69.)

From the perspective of the elderly, then, the ideal long-distance care arrangement was not to be cared for through token gifts and material remittances, but to provide caring services for others, especially by taking the grandchildren into their home. As they saw it, this arrangement allowed them to pass on rural values to the grandchildren—such as love for the animals and land, as well as to preserve the integrity of the family. Especially in the early stage of migration, when children were looking for work abroad, some saw taking care of the grandchildren as a way of protecting the fragile bond of their children's marriage in a precarious social world:

My son wanted to go by himself first, and see [...] what he could find for work. But we persuaded him to take his wife, too, because you never know what can happen. So we said, 'You better go together, and we will take care of the kids for you.' (Male farmer, 75.)

Intergenerational parenting was not just a meaningful activity in its own right, but it also meant more frequent phone calls and visits home from their children and represented a reciprocal claim to the caring attention—and eventual return—of their own children. Caring for grandchildren was such an undisguised need and source of joy for many that it could create painful tensions with the transnational family:

Oh, I was so happy, so happy [to have care of the grandkids]. We've been taking care of them since they were born. Last summer, my son wanted to take the children to France with them. [Starts crying.] I was so upset, and the older granddaughter didn't want to leave, either. We discussed it over and over again, but I said to my daughter-in-law, "Leave them here. If you take them, that means that you won't be coming back. We'll just be two old people, what will we do all by ourselves? (Female farmer, 64).

Although they specified that the money they received went directly to the grandchildren, not themselves, those who cared for grandchildren also benefited more from remittances, as observed by the household appliances, thermopane windows, and indoor bathrooms that went into their houses. While most of the elderly interviewed could count on their children to send money when they needed it or to personally return to care for them during illnesses and injuries, for meeting their daily material needs, however, the benefit of remittances seemed limited. Many were ashamed to ask for help that they could not return, or had to ask in an indirect way that disguised their dependency. As one retired truck driver said, "I would rather die than ask them for money." Particularly for those in marginalized social positions, asking children for help was seen as a painful reflection of their inadequate monthly pensions and an unfair drain on their children's chances of success. Despite their unmet needs, several could only protect their dignity and definition of good parenthood by making do or doing without:

I don't like to ask them for anything. If they send me money, it's good, if they don't it's okay. There's a lot of things that I need, but if there's no money, what can I do? I just take a step back and wait. If I don't have money, I just don't eat for a day (Widow, 51)

### ***3.4.2 Intergenerational Land Transfer: Linking Land, Care, and Reciprocity***

More worrisome than meeting their immediate needs was the impending (and often unasked) question of which of the children would come back to take care of the parents—and the parental house—when they became unable to manage on their own. In Spermezeu, the youngest son would traditionally inherit the birthplace, a slightly larger piece of land, and the responsibility for the care of the parents in their old age. As migration stays become more permanent, however, that unwritten contract is being broken, renegotiated, or transferred to other family members—even years after a verbal arrangement has been made. Having practiced and embodied the meanings of reciprocal care, the elderly feel symbolically discarded by their children's indecision, even if they cognitively understood that one or another will provide for them materially. Women, in particular, identified this painful uncertainty as an injustice and a deteriorating ethic of care:

I know so many people whose children left abroad, and they are just getting sick, paralyzed with worry. The young people don't care anymore about taking care of us. Maybe they won't even come to our funerals! When we were young, we *knew* we had this responsibility (Female farmer, 60).

The uncertainty of knowing when and if a child will assume the role of caregiver intersects painfully with the loss of livelihood and the symbolic and market devaluation of land. Land, nurtured and embodied through family care, is so central to identity that to find that it has no practical value or emotional hold over their children reflects on the elders' self-worth and parental accomplishments. One middle-income couple for instance, had worked their way up from just half a hectare of land to a 6-hectare property, only to find that their five sons (seemingly) had no intention of returning:

I kept buying land and buying land to be able give something to them when they get married. But now they come back only to go away again. They tell me, "Just go ahead and sell it, we don't care about it."...We chose this [youngest] son to be the one to take care of us and get a bigger piece of the property, because he was such a hard worker....Even worse, he wanted to sell his piece to one of his brothers!...After all that effort, all for the sake of the kids, and now they don't even care about the land (Retired construction worker, 69).

Still, to sell land or give up caring for it would sever family ties and publicly symbolize a failure of interrelation. Only two older men asserted that they might be willing to sell their land if the price were reasonable—both citing deteriorated relationships with their children as the reason. In practice, however, they continued to invest daily care into their land and houses, maintaining what they saw as a fraying link between themselves and far-flung family members. For one of these men, a son's regular inquiries about the houses sustained a thinning hope that at least one family member would one day come back to the village:

What can I do? For 20 years they've been saying they'll come back, but maybe by the time they get here, I'll be nothing but clay for pots (Retired truck driver, 69).

Individuals or couples without land felt they had the most tenuous claims to their children's care. Having been unable to set their children up with a decent livelihood and social position in the village, they face the unhappy probability of having to leave the home and community they care about in order to receive care in their old age.

Of course, my daughter calls me and says, "Come on, mama, come stay with me." But I don't want to go there. How can I tell you? It's not good to leave your own house as long as you can still manage...I'm just consuming myself, I can't eat, because I think and think...about what's going to happen (Widow, 70).

As the pattern of long-distance caring becomes more common in the village, being left in limbo by their children is becoming a shared generational experience and less of a public shame. Out of necessity, new forms of commercialized care—including paid caregivers and nursing homes—are entering their worried conversations, though as yet, these unorthodox arrangements are not being practiced. One woman's sister, a magistrate in a nearby city, promised to provide a paid caregiver if neither of her sons assumed care:

Who knows what's going to happen to us? We trust our son, but you never know anymore. So we're thinking about having someone come take care of us, because the worst possible thing in the world would be to go to a nursing home (Female farmer, 60).

In the case of an 88-year-old widow, socially unheard-of autonomy and self-care was preferable to leaving the hilltop home in which she had lived out the Hungarian, German, and Russian occupations and the Communist regime. With her children working in nearby cities, the care responsibility fell to a 70-year-old in-law, who came running up during the interview to demonstrate that her relative had not been abandoned. Laying out food, she scolded: "Oh, this old thing doesn't know what she's talking about. Look what you've done to this house, all this smoke inside! You're not right in the head, that's why it's such a mess in here!" The widow shrugged off the abuse, saying her caregiver was "like a sister to me":

If you have no one around, what can you do? Even you will get old one day...My husband took me here to this house, and only the Priest will take me away from here now.

To her neighbors, isolation was antithetical to the rural habitus of interrelation, and they both blamed the widow's children as undutiful, and misrepresented the woman as crazy and deaf. But for the widow, who was articulate, though physically weak, choosing where and how to die was an exercise of agency and resistance, a defence of the life and memories embodied in her home.

### 3.5 Interpreting New Symbolic Codes Through the Rural Habitus: Accelerated Intergenerational Transfer in Practice

Integral to the rural livelihood, the changing practices of land inheritance and care arrangements leave many feeling abandoned and uncared about—by the state, the EU, and by their own families. However, the shame of being abandoned, and the internalized values of being resigned to what they are given and working hard into older age may lead them to conceal their subjective vulnerabilities, and help others to misrecognize some of the needs and concerns of the elderly. In addition, the outcome of migration has been to “accelerate intergenerational change” (a stated goal of rural development policy), which creates an exaggerated communication gap between the elderly and the younger adults who have begun to adopt a more market-oriented value system. Most of the younger adults interviewed believed that remittances were an adequate expression of care and seemed oblivious to the distress and insecurity of the elderly:

They live a life without stress! *Apart from the fact that the kids are gone*, materially speaking, they are doing very well. The kids come back and build indoor bathrooms, warmer houses...if there's anything they need, they can ask their kids. So financially speaking, they have no way to be depressed. And young people still respect the elders, at least in this region. (Village nurse, 53, emphasis added).

By virtue of their material capital, transnational mobility, and indulgent long-distance parents, the youth who remain in the village seem to have assumed symbolic authority, and meaningful social spaces and practices of older farmers are rapidly being transformed into youth-oriented spaces of consumption. The slaughterhouse that had supported peasant incomes, for instance, was transformed to a discoteque to meet a more urgent community need—providing a (supervised) entertainment place for the adolescents. The symbolic capital of the younger generation, which only has currency within the confines of the village, updates for the age of migration the codes of the “visible economy.” Instead of the well-stocked barn and haystacks, the symbols of family status and success are the shiny car, brightly painted house, satellite dish, indoor bathroom, washing machine, and cell phone. Interpreted through the habitus of the elderly, the beautified village and new houses represented an investment in the community. Because building a house of ones own traditionally established a young couple’s independence and reflected parental success, short-term migration was considered beneficial, in many cases. On the other hand, because building a house previously took place over years, during which intergenerational families would live together, they interpreted the quick capital accumulation of the youth as depreciating the values of interrelation, meaningful labor, and the ability to self-sustain:

When we lived in this house together with my brother, we put all our property, all our animals together. In those days, we didn’t think of everyone building a big, fancy house and having all these *things*. We had enough to live on today, and give something to the kids tomorrow, and that

was enough. Now everyone wants to accumulate as much as possible (Retired Meat Acquisitioner, 81).

This deterioration of interrelation was also reflected, in the eyes of one widow, in the weddings, which she said were once were a community affair but had become invitation-only events. Referring to the parade of new cars that now concludes the ceremony, she said:

Now, you can't tell the difference between a wedding and a funeral! At a wedding, everyone would be out in the streets, singing, drinking, dancing. But now, you just go to a restaurant, you eat, pay, and go. (Widow, 66.)

The accelerated transformation of rural practices and symbolic codes deprives the elderly of the respect and authority that traditionally came with older age, leaving them with limited social space to contest change, and making them ashamed of aspects of their habitus, such as wearing the traditional dress, or singing while working. With outmoded cultural capital and limited material capital, some feel they have no choice but to self-exclude from intergenerational relationships:

You know, we old people don't mix with [the youth]...The young people know different things, we can't communicate the same way.... They all have their own families, we just don't want to interfere with them. We can just try to respect their ways and their opinions. (Female farmer, 67).

While not passive actors in the rural transformation process, their ability to negotiate the transformation is restricted by their negative depiction in policy—which diminishes their social location—as well as by their concern for their children's well-being. Having been acted upon by powerful social forces throughout most of their adult lives, the elderly blamed the state and dishonest employers in Romania for destroying local livelihoods and leaving the youth with no other option than to migrate. With few exceptions, they believed that migration was good for the young people—just not good for the elderly. The eco-centered habitus of accepting what they are given in life, and their care for the well-being of children and grandchildren allows them to construct a violent social transformation as an inevitable stage of the lifecycle.

As for the younger farmers—in whom the rural development discourse invests the future of the rural areas—the ability to fulfill inscribed values of their rurality is restricted by the logic of the imported model. Frustrated by the “dance” of EU subsidy paperwork and quality controls; by the high cost of inputs and taxes; and the absence of social support for farmers, the relatively easy income of migration loomed as an inevitable alternative to the more meaningful livelihood of working the land. As one 47-year-old farmer said, turning over the calloused hands of her 18-year-old son, “Look at his hands, how it looks for so much work with the animals and land. We wanted to do agriculture...but if it's not worth it, with broken heart, we'll sell all the animals and we'll all go to Spain.”

Understanding the non-economic uses of land and labor, the spiritual values of property, and the centrality of care and interdependence to the rural habitus exposes the symbolic violence of equating income with livelihood, and of offering a policy of early retirement to older farmers for whom livelihood is an identity and a way of knowing the world. The economic outcomes of EU

integration place the elderly in the demoralizing position of being materially vulnerable and dependent on others in a social environment where dignity is derived through the ability to self-sustain and reciprocate. The disintegration of the extended family deprives the elderly of a dignified experience of ageing, which allowed them to remain productive within the limits of their bodily capacities, and to remain socially interrelated to family and community. The struggles of the young farmers as well as the displacement of the elderly reveal the symbolic violence of imposing a hegemonic model of rurality that forces out people and practices embodying a meaningful cultural heritage.

## CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION: CARING ABOUT ECO-CENTERED KNOWLEDGE

This paper has shown that in the social field of transition-dominated by Neoliberal norms reflecting middle-aged and market-oriented biases—the elderly have been constructed in key transition policies as dependent, tradition-bound, and less important human beings, rather than as actors struggling to maintain the particular meanings they assign to their universe of rurality. The new model of rural development, which seeks to transform smallholder agriculture into an EU business model, treats Romanian rurality as a distinctive opposite from the modern EU model. Rendered invisible and obsolete by this classification are indigenous ways of knowing, caring about, and valuing the world. The unsuccessful struggles of the elderly to protect their livelihood illustrate that Romania's experience of EU integration on unequal terms mirrors what Bourdieu calls Neo-colonialism, or 'social facism,' a process characterized by the consolidation of economic power in a handful of states, and structures of unequal power between parties in a civil contract such that, "the weaker party, rendered vulnerable for having no alternative, accepts the conditions imposed by the stronger party" (Mitrovic, 2005). This paper shows how local values of rurality are being discarded by the imposition of a hegemonic cultural model and by the economic and spatial transformation of the village of Spermezeu.

With nothing visible to defend, the elderly bear internal and invisible costs of this symbolic violence, able only to regretfully relinquish cherished meanings or to enact seemingly futile gestures of resistance. Exposing the distortions created by the dominant definitions of rurality and well-being illustrates the significance of politicizing symbolic meanings in processes of social change, rather than passively accepting Neoliberal norms and a pre-defined terrain of rurality. Understanding the elderly's struggle over social meanings brings new light on an "eco-centered" understanding of the world that is oriented around reciprocity, interdependence, and relationships of care between people, the environment, and their livelihood.

The dominant construction of smallholder land and livestock as inefficiently used factors of production distorts the centrality of embodied land to individual and family identity, as well as its embeddedness in relationships of care. Migration and the transformation of the rural livelihood are having the effect of finally destroying the equal inheritance tradition—effectively leaving space for land marketization and consolidation—but at the expense of dis-embedding land from its subjective meanings, and at the cost of the care security and well-being of the elderly. With the transformation of the livelihood and emigration of the youth, some elderly are forced to work beyond their physical capacities, while others are deprived of the ability to provide caring labor (for grandchildren, animals, land) that is central to their well-being.

Exploring the multiple meanings and struggles for care in transnational families unveils new forms of care that must be subject to further analysis. Essential to the rural livelihood but invisible in rural development policy, care is a critical human capital that is being stretched thin by migration. The dominant construction of financial remittances as substitutes for care distorts the reality of

dependence and the multiple caring activities that are integral to the fabric of rural life. The transnationalization of families links the well-being of the elderly to the aspirations of distant others, creating long-distance and makeshift arrangements for *taking care of* the elderly. These arrangements reveal the inability on the part of younger adults to meet the emotional investment and interactive attention that are the hallmarks of good care—being *cared about*—as well as the integral need of the elderly to *care for* others (Himmelweit, 1999).

The construction of the elderly in policy as burdensome welfare costs disregards their material needs and social worth, offering public services in a manner that can violate their dignity and be a poor substitute for the human needs of the beneficiary. The strains on community reciprocity within the changing village expose the distortion in the dominant construction that “the principle of social solidarity” is a valid replacement for more substantive public supports (Ilie and Raditiu, 2004). This notion disguises the reality that local services are mediated through relationships of social inequality, which are being magnified by the process of migration. For the rural elderly in Romania, the absence of caring relationships may be one reason (along with income poverty) that some avoid existing support services and choose self-reliance and self-exclusion instead.

Given the centrality of interrelation to the rural elderly, this choice of self-exclusion signifies more than the need for greater attention to the social in transition planning. It demands a shift of cognitive style away from what de Sousas Santos calls the abyssal thinking of modernism, in which modern science is granted hegemonic monopoly, rendering invisible other ways of knowing—including popular, lay, and peasant knowledges (Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 2). Bringing the indigenous knowledge of the elderly to the social field of transition would help unveil the myth of the market as “separated from morality, politics and culture,” and would validate human interactions that are unquantifiable, reciprocal or redistributional (Escobar 1993, pp. 132-5). It would bring to the field transition an ethical dimension of care, as something that is fundamental to social life, and as “a moral orientation...that can guide human agency in a variety of social fields” (Kofman 2005, Truong, 1996, Razavi, 2007). This paper exposes that the right to give and receive meaningful care in the social field of transition is mediated by power relations from the global restructuring of welfare states, down to the struggles within transnational households. An ethic of care, as Fiona Williams argues, would recognize caring—both for the self and others—as meaningful activities in their own right, something involving us all, men and women, old and young. We are all, after all, at some level, the givers and receivers of care from others. It's an activity that binds us all” (Williams 2003, p.12).

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