Economic Transnationalism and its Ambiguities: The Case of Romanian Migration to Italy

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ABSTRACT

Taking the case of migratory flows between Romania and Italy as a case study, this article investigates the ways in which spaces of economic transnationalism emerge and are reproduced over time. While the article finds that the role of the state in regulating the flow of money, people and goods across borders remains significant, it nevertheless provides evidence that state authority is systematically challenged by private actors even in the case of migration phenomena with a remarkably short history such as that of Romanians in Italy. Particularly interesting in this respect are labor recruiting networks in which informal headhunter operations, public officials and mobile manufacturing firms interact in surprising ways. While economic forms of transnationalism are the main focus of this investigation, the ways in which transnational capital and labor flows facilitated the symbolic reaffirmation of social institutions in the sending locality are also investigated.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, transnationalism has been an important focus in migration research (Portes and Walton, 1981; Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Vertovec, 1999, 2002; Itzigson, 2000; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004), although its grip on the migration scholarship is far from insulated from robust challenges (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). In this literature, migrants are seen as creating and inhabiting transnational social, economic and political spaces in ways that transcend and
reconfigure the national boundaries of both their home and host country. The creation of transnational spaces challenges orthodox definitions of sovereignty as well as established assumptions about the bounded nature of concepts like “national culture”, “national political community” or “national civil society.”

This paper analyzes the ways in which spaces of economic transnationalism created by Romanian migrants to Italy emerge and are reproduced over time. Of the forms of economic transnationalism studied in the literature, this article dwells on economic resources per se (e.g. capital, labor) and on the types of social constructions that surround the dynamics of economic resources (Vertovec, 2001, 1999, 2002). Paraphrasing Itzingson, economic transnationalism is conceived of in this article as a space of relatively recurrent and patterned material and ideational interactions between immigrants and their formal or informal organizations, on the one hand, and the capital, labor and consumption resources located in their state of origin, on the other hand (2000: 1130). Drawing on Guarnizo and Smith’s practice-based theorization of ‘locations of transnationalism,’ this article considers that as long as immigrants sustain social relations consistently across borders, they realize the necessary conditions of transnationalism (1998).

The empirical material for my investigation is drawn from the labor migration processes taking place between Romania and Italy. This is an interesting case for several reasons. First, Romanian migration is a “least likely” case for the rapid emergence of economic transnationalism: the Romanian communist regime maintained one of the most repressive emigration regimes in the Warsaw Pact and during the 1990–2002 period, Romanian citizens found it very difficult to legally travel or work in Western countries. Of the main destination countries of Romanian emigration, I chose to focus on Italy not only because Italy now hosts the largest Romanian community outside Romania and almost half of the entire Romanian migrant stock – a phenomenon which received surprisingly scant attention in scholarship so far – but also due to the fact that I saw Italy and its matrix of relations with Romania as a “most likely” case for the emergence of economic transnationalism. More specifically, Italy is a “most likely case” because of its large informal economy, its accessible language for Romanian speakers, its dense economic links with Romania, and the significant presence of Italian small business owners in many Romanian cities. For these reasons, this case selection strategy offers supportive conditions to investigate the mechanisms through which cultural and economic factors in the
destination country can be expected to create fertile ground for the emergence of migrant transnationalism and to help overcome political and legal conditions in the sending country likely to inhibit the emergence and reproduction of transnationalism over time.

**METHODOLOGY AND DATA**

The methodological approach to transnationalism adopted in this paper follows the methodology of ‘multi-sited ethnography’ as developed by George E. Marcus; its gist consists of “tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity” via methods designed around “chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (1995: 65, 105). Following this approach, the paper “tracks” the dynamics of several factors involved in the generation of transnationalism, representing “people” (i.e. migrants proper, brokers linked to migration), “the thing” (i.e. commodities, services, money), “metaphors” (i.e. social remittances, status codes), “plot, story and allegory” ensembles (i.e. narratives of everyday experience or memory), and “the conflict” (i.e. issues contested in the public space). The ethnographic method was used in particular for mapping out the social constructions in which flows of capital and people are embedded. Nevertheless, the approach adopted in this paper is not culturalist “all the way down” and responds to recent academic calls to explore the linkages between ethnocultural factors and economic, political and geographic aspects (Rath and Klosterman, 2000). Therefore, the article treats ethnocultural endowments not as a set of dematerialized artefacts, but aims to integrate them in material factors such as geographical distance, border regimes or changes in the political economy of the systems of exchange in which migrants are embedded.

I collected empirical data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and surveys. The interviewees were selected by mixing the snowball and the convenience sample. As a native of the Naşăud region, speaker of its subdialect, and member of a family with years of labour migration experience in Southern Europe, I had the opportunity to interview migrants and migration brokers between 2003 and 2006 in numerous culturally intimate settings (e.g. weddings, extended family reunions, holiday celebrations, religious events, bus trips from Romania to Italy) and to observe their lives both at home and in Italy. Primary evidence used in support of my arguments was collected in four stages of fieldwork in Romania and Italy. In June-July 2003, I conducted interviews in the
larger microregions of Năsăud (the region of Transylvania) and Borșa (the region of Crisana-Maramures), where migration rates are particularly high. Interviews were carried out in two small towns (Năsăud and Borșa) and in nine villages (Romuli, Liviu Rebreanu, Rebra, Rebrișoara, Salva, Nepos, Feldru, Cepari, Dumitra). In June, July and December 2004, I interviewed migrants from the same area as well as Romanian construction, domestic, service and agricultural workers employed in Milan, Verona and Bologna. Eleven Romanian business owners based in these three Italian cities (seven in the construction sector, two in transportation and one in headhunting) were also interviewed. In January 2005, I conducted more interviews with Romanian workers and community leaders in Rome. More than half of these informants were from the larger Năsăud area and the rest were from the North-eastern Romanian counties of Suceava and Buzău. Finally, in June 2006 I carried out in Romania a last round of interviews with migrants from the Năsăud area and three from Suceava and Iași. In total, between 2003 and 2006 I talked to 95 people, yet I retained only the answers of 54 of informants for analysis due to the high rate of vague answers in the remainder of the population sample.

In December 2004-January 2005 I carried out a survey in the wider Năsăud area with a convenience sample of 66 respondents aged 18 to 52. Roughly a fifth of respondents had eight years of schooling or less, 47 per cent were vocational school graduates and 24 per cent were high school graduates. A third of respondents had been unemployed before their departure from Romania and 25 per cent had been employed in technical professions (e.g. electricians, mechanics, masons, welders). The questionnaires were administered by the author and by four other collaborators with “insider” status in the surveyed communities. Twenty-one of the surveyed respondents accepted follow-up interviews in late January 2005. It goes without saying that the findings of this article can be generalized to the country level only with great caution. Future research will establish whether Romanian migrants in Italy coming from highly-urbanized, economically successful and low emigration areas of Romania (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Constanta, etc.) developed forms of economic transnationalism that are different from those developed by those from the Borșa and Năsăud microregions. In the view of this author, it is most likely that such factors as the weak communal links of large Romanian cities would pose significant obstacles to a sanguine push for generalization from the microregional to the national level of analysis in this case. Only the high density of underemployed skilled and semi-skilled workers concentrated in
relatively tightly-knit small town and rural communities may be said to constitute a favourable condition for transnationalism in the sending country. However, the fact that macrolevel data on Romanian migration evidences that the bulk of Romanian migrants come from areas in the Romanian provinces of Moldavia (such as the Focsani-Vrancea microregion) that share a similar profile with Năsăud and Boroșa should lend some confidence that the findings of this excursus can be generalized to significant portions of the Romanian migration phenomenon (Sandu et al., 2006).

I supplemented the empirical material with relevant statements and data found in Romanian and Italian news media, as well as government and NGO documents.5

ROMANIAN MIGRATION TO ITALY: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to the most comprehensive study involving a quantitative evaluation of Romanian migration (Sandu et al., 2006), the first wave of Romanian migration took place from 1990 to 1995 and was characterized both by the reproduction of post-communist patterns of migration, in the steady outflows of ethnic Germans and Hungarians, and by the emergence of a new pattern, due to the mass migration of ethnic Romanians to the Israeli, Turkish and German labour markets. These “new pattern” immigrants of the first wave were quintessentially transnational: they worked in the host countries for fixed periods of time, stipulated in their work contracts, and were not joined by their families. While Turkey was the destination of traders and informal service workers, Germany and especially Israel became the destination of tens of thousands of Romanian construction guest workers. Given the relatively strict enforcement of guest worker regulations in 1990s Germany and to some extent in Israel, Romanian workers did not massively settle in these two countries. The situation is similar in the case of Turkey, where economic opportunities shortly became modest for the prospective migrant once migration networks for the Italian, Spanish or Greek labour markets started to consolidate in the second half of the 1990s. The second wave of Romanian migration raised the percentage of the migrant population from five per cent of the total Romanian population in the 1990–1995 period, to six to seven per cent of the total Romanian population in the 1996–2001 period (ibid., 2006:18). It is during this period that Sandu’s study noted the consoli-
pation of Romanian migration to Italy and Spain, with roughly 31 per
cent of all Romanian migrants working in these two countries (see
Table 1), as well as the widening repertoire of alternative destination
countries. Finally, the third wave of migration, taking place from 2002
onward, has been characterized by the mass withdrawal from the
Israeli labour market and the undisputable concentration of almost 60
per cent of Romanian migration in Italy and Spain (Table 1). In a
world historical perspective, the presence of between one and one and
a half million Romanian citizens in Italy and Spain is most certainly
the largest demographic shockwave linking Southern Europe and East-
ern Europe since Roman times.

Upon its becoming an EU member state on 1 January 2007, Romania
was Europe’s biggest source of outward migration flows. Official govern-
ment estimates for late 2006 indicated that between 1.2 and 1.3 million
Romanian citizens were legally employed in EU member states.6 This
estimate does not include those Romanian citizens who work as “work
tourists”, whose number was officially estimated at about one million.7
Survey data published in 2007 revealed that a third of Romanian house-
holds had a least one member who had worked or travelled abroad after
1989 (ibid., 2006). If informal migrants are added, labour migration
approximates about half the number of the legally employed Romania
labour force (4.6 million), or a third of the active labour force. Using
2002 and 2004 survey data, scholars working on Romanian migration
flows estimated that people who live in larger communities, younger
people as well as those with medium and higher education (i.e. more

TABLE 1
THREE WAVES OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
ROMANIAN MIGRATION)

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<td>Italy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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Source: Sandu et al. (2006).
than eight years of education) were more likely to have had migration experience (Badescu, 2004).

As early as 2004, Romanian citizens had become Italy’s biggest regularized foreign population group and by 2007 the gap between Romanians and other ethnic groups in Italy was very hard to narrow (table 2).8 Due to the 2004 regularization undertaken by the Italian government, about 267,051 Romanian citizens (i.e. 11.9% of regularized foreigners in Italy) were estimated to reside legally in Italy in October 2006, with the number of women almost equal to that of men. After Romania joined the EU in 2007, Italian sources estimated the number of regularized Romanian citizens in Italy at 556,000 people (15% of the total migrant stock).9 Yet the total number of Romanian illegal immigrants in Italy cannot be easily estimated.10 In the fall of 2004, the Romanian Consulate in Milan informally suggested the figure of 500,000 to 700,000 people, a figure that was taken for granted by the Romanian government.11 The more conservative estimates of Caritas Roma and the Italian Ministry of the Interior suggested about 250,000 illegal immigrants.12

Most Romanian immigrants in Italy came from the eastern province of Moldavia and from several regions of Transylvania in North-western Romania. My fieldwork in Northern Romania revealed cases in which entire villages and small towns lose to immigration 50 to 80 per cent of their active population, with the exception of the summer and winter holidays. For instance, in the town of Borsa, out of its 30,000 inhabitants, about 15,000 lived in Milan, according to the estimates of the Borsa city council, and almost all of them would return to their hometown every year in August and December.

To assess exactly what percentage of these individuals are involved in transnational “occupations and activities”, as Portes and colleagues rec-
ommend is a daunting task (1999). The only reliable quantitative assessment can be made with regard to the level of remittances, which grew from 2 billion dollars in 2002 to over 10 billion dollars in 2006. The number of formal or informal business owners providing immigrant services or depending on “ethnic” labour pools or capital is also extremely difficult to quantify in the absence of up-to-date extensive surveys. A robust conjecture can be made vis-à-vis the transnational migrant category par excellence, namely the so-called “work tourists” who work in Italy no longer than the three month period allowed by their tourist visa. Surveys carried out in 2004 revealed that between 200,000 and 400,000 Romanian citizens worked abroad in 2004 and were in the country at the moment of the poll. This suggests that they may represent transnational workers, engaged in “work tourism” for a part of the year.

Regarding the prevalence of “work tourism”, I asked respondents in the survey I conducted to report the number of months they spend in Italy per year. Although I had only a small convenience sample, the responses obtained may be suggestive of the patterns of “work tourism” in the area where the survey was conducted. My data suggest that most respondents could be considered “work tourists”, as 64 per cent of them spent between three and nine months per year in Italy. The remainder 36 per cent spent the whole year in Italy; they came home for the winter or the summer vacation only.

**MAPPING OUT THE CONTOURS OF ECONOMIC TRANSNATIONALISM**

Having briefly described Romanian migration, I subsequently turn to analysing two mechanisms of economic transnationalism: capital and goods circulation, as defined by the formal and informal transborder economic operations linked to migration, and labour reallocation across borders. Forms of capital circulation linked to migration include the sponsorship of travel and of visa expenses by social networks related to migration (usually extended families, neighbourhood groups, local moneylenders), the businesses providing immigrant-specific services (transportation, remittance and parcel transfers), and the businesses set up by immigrants using capital available in a state other than that where the business is located. As to transnational labour reallocation, examples include the recruitment of labour across state borders. This article qualitatively investigates the emergence, transformation and recurrence of these transnational processes over time.
Moving around money and things

This section suggests that there are many ways in which informal transnational services connected to migration constitute high-intensity social fields connecting migrants to their home localities. They link migrants with families by assisting the emergence and maintenance of relationships of economic dependence or interdependence with families and communities, reduce social distance or soften the home state’s putative sovereign control over the mobility of migrants and of migrants’ economic resources across its borders. These functions intersect each other in interesting ways.

During my fieldwork, I discovered many individuals, informal groups and legal businesses that had become specialized in transferring remittances to families in Romania, in retailing Romanian ethnic merchandise, or in shipping packages from immigrants to their families and friends in the home country. The article reveals an opportunity structure that is quite specific to the residents of the Eastern borders of the EU and may not translate very easily in the context of non-European migration flows. This opportunity structure was constituted by the relatively short ground routes with few strictly enforced border controls between Northern Romania and Northern Italy, the well-developed international coach and van market stretching into Eastern Europe, by the relatively affordable illegal market for forged visas followed by the deregulation of the visa regime between EU applicant states and EU member states. In what follows, I will weave these structural characteristics into substantive arguments about the actual operation of different forms of economic transnationalism, such as financial services or parcel delivery.

Transnational financial services (border crossing financing, remittance transfer services) carried out informally are a key component of early migration processes. This category of activities is pursued either individually by migrants themselves, as informal operations of actors inhabiting the informal economy or as informal operations carried out by formal businesses unlicensed to carry out financial operations (e.g. bus companies, shipping companies). While individual remittance transfer is probably the most common, the last two other transfer instruments are more analytically interesting, as they imply the building of informal economic and cultural infrastructures that challenges state control of the flow of economic resources crossing state borders in organized ways and is conducted often with the assistance of state agents themselves.
Not only do such services deprive the state of revenue in the form of customs, corporate, personal income and consumption taxes, but they also push the state to informally share with private actors its exclusive right to de facto regulate the conditions under which cross-border flows should take place. The informalization of remittance transfer with state assistance must be understood in the context of the post-communist state weakness but also against the politics of economic incentives confronting the state in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, after it came close to default in 1998 and was consequently threatened with the imposition of a currency board, the Romanian state was forced to consolidate the national hard currency reserves and boost domestic consumption. While the state could do little to boost the use of banks and credit unions by Romanian migrants, the state’s finance and border security agencies had powerful incentives to turn a blind eye to informal remittance transfers. With FDI flowing very slowly into Romania during the late 1990s, public finance officials saw remittances as one of the few robust mechanisms to reduce the current account deficit. In 2001, a study coordinated by the chief economist of the Romanian Central Bank expressly emphasized this line of reasoning (Daianu, Voinea, and Tolici, 2001). This strategy paid off; according to the estimates of the Romanian Central Bank, in 2003 Romanian workers abroad transferred remittances worth €1.5 billion using bank and credit union services. A 2008 report of the Romanian Central Bank (Banca Nationala a Romaniei) indicated that Romanian emigrants remitted €7.1 billion (US$10.6 billion) in 2007 (see table 3).

As for the size of informal remittance transfers, good data is hard to come by. It was only in 2008 that the Romanian Central Bank estimated that of the €6.1 billion remitted in 2007, about €2.5 billion Euro (US$3.7 billion) were remitted via informal means. A study conducted in 2003 by the Italian university La Sapienza on immigrant groups in Rome, estimated that about 30 per cent of the stock of remittances was

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<td>Total inflow of remittances</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>1074</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>5091</td>
<td>10.610</td>
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*The estimates include both formal and informal remittances.
transferred informally by Romanian immigrants in the Rome area. Informal remittance transfer strategies cover a large spectrum, from taking the cash personally to Romania to handing remittances to friends or relatives. In this regard, an important role has been played by Romanian van and bus companies ferrying Romanian migrants and parcels to and from Italy. Based on my interviews and participant observation, I noted that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these services were carried out by individuals or small family firms from the same region as the addressee. In the case of the more traditional villages in the larger Năsăud and Borga areas, these “insider” operations were even based in the same comuna (cluster of villages). Registered largely as generic import-export businesses, these “white van banks” would collect monthly remittances as well as parcels from various Italian locations using annotated maps on locations of migrants in Italian villages and towns. In addition to entrepreneurship and capital, previous migration experiences and their strategic position in the social texture of the community gave the owners of these businesses a competitive edge, as one of my interviewees confirmed:

Most of my vocational school colleagues left for Italy and Spain...I worked illegally in Germany and Italy myself in ’92 and ’97. Refurbishing was not for me, though...Anyway; I knew their families and had a pretty good idea of where each one [of my colleagues] worked. So I spent all the family savings on an old van and paid a godson to quit his army job to help me bring money and parcels from Italy. I had friends working for town halls in other villages on the Somes Valley and I soon found customers outside Năsăud. But the new clients were mostly former commuters to the Năsăud factories that went down bankrupt after 1995. So my business could not grow too much; but on the other hand the small size of my business gave me no trouble with the tax collectors.20

The massive appeal of informal remittance transfer was facilitated by several factors. As in the case of Latin American migrants, the use of informal remittance avenues is encountered mostly among Romanian migrants who come from rural communities with no accessible banking services or from families with little exposure to (or trust in) formal banking institutions (Iglesias, 2001). Yet, I found that even for migrants with some experience of using bank services, the post-communist context was hardly conducive to trusting banks, as the soft regulation of banking during the 1990s led to chain bankruptcies throughout the sector. For many of the users of informal remittance transfers interviewed, banking institutions had a similar reputation with the Ponzi schemes
that depleted the savings of people and provided negative representations of modern finance for millions of Romanians during the 1990s (Verdery, 1995). While the urban migrants from Năsăud claimed to use formal remittance transfer services more often than migrants from the more remote villages of Rebra or Romuli, they nevertheless confessed that it took them between two to four years since their arrival in Italy to make use of formal remittance transfer instruments. My interviewees also confirmed findings reported elsewhere in the literature; that the regularization of migrants’ status in the destination country was a crucial factor in the decision to use formal means of remittance transfer (Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 2005). But even after regularization, the process of remittance formalization seems to have stretched on, with informal and formal strategies of remittance transfer being used simultaneously by most of my interviewees.

Among my interviewees, a more concrete source of anxiety vis-à-vis the use of formal remittance transfer instruments was generated by the institutionalization of a transnational form of authority for the Romanian state after 2001. This process was spurred by an opening in the international opportunity structure: considering the prospect of EU membership for Romania, the EU states signalled a relaxation of the visa regime vis-à-vis Romanian citizens. The German Ministry of the Interior was however sceptical that such a relaxation should occur given Romania’s poor control of its borders. In order to persuade Germany to drop its opposition to the granting of Schengen visa waiver rights to Romanian citizens, the Romanian government adopted an emergency decree (OUG 112/2001) that set harsh prison terms for Romanian citizens who crossed state borders illegally. This degree was subsequently ratified into law by the Parliament. It exposed all Romanian citizens residing illegally in Italy to the threat of expulsion from Italy and to a quick criminal trial in Romania. Even though the Italian state was not particularly diligent at expelling illegal aliens with Romanian citizenship and even though in practice the Romanian state itself did little to give substance to this self-proclaimed extension of its judicial authority across national borders, the memories of communist-era state repression and of the Kafkaesque post-communist judicial system enhanced suspicions among illegal Romanian immigrants, who represented the bulk of Romanian migration at that time, that the Romanian state could use the banks to track them down.

Finally, some of the urban migrants interviewed, who had stayed out of official money transfers, defended their scepticism by telling stories heard from North African work colleagues that depicted banks as an
extended surveillance arm of an Italian state whose surveillance power was perceived as dramatically boosted by the 11 September 2001 attacks:

“After they rammed those planes in[to] New York skyscrapers and Bush went to war with the Arabs and the Italians lost soldiers in Iraq, I heard a lot of stories about the Italian secret services tracking your money by calling their men in the Western Union and the banks. I heard this from two Moroccan colleagues [...] At first I said to myself ‘They are Arabs and should worry; after all Iliescu and Basescu [Romanian presidents] sent Romanian soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan, so why would they spy on their allies?’ But then I heard Poles and Ukrainians telling the same stories. One day our foreman, a man from Bologna, said that in times of war everybody spies on everybody. Some say the stories come from the bosses, who wanted to keep paying us in cash so that they pay less tax...I would not take any chance in these times...We Romanians know that in the communist times the CEC [a state-owned savings bank] had secret service agents...Italy may be a democracy but you never now...”21

The fact that these suspicions were not isolated was also confirmed by several other Romanian migrants interviewed. Among them was one of the prominent leaders of the Romanian community in Rome.22

The case of coach companies is most telling in relation to money transfer services pursued by the informal operations of formal businesses. The biggest actor on this market has been the Romanian-German coach operator Atlassib, a holding from Sibiu in Transylvania, Northern Romania. This company boasts of shuttling half a million passengers a year across the Romanian borders. By 2007 it was in the process of developing a successful low-cost airline targeted at Romanian immigrants in Italy. In the early 2000s, Atlassib established itself as a rival of the giant Eurolines, a European consortium of coach operators, and established coach stations in over eight major Italian cities. In exchange for a competitive fee, bus security would take cash from Romanian immigrants in Italy and hand it to designated recipients in Romania upon arrival at their destinations. The operation was carried out largely off the record, under the guise of “parcel and envelopes delivery”. Unlike in other cases of economic transnationalism (e.g. the flow of remittances across the US-Mexican border), transaction costs for remittance transfers practiced by informal businesses were lower than those of banks and credit unions. Thus, in the early 2000s, the Atlassib fee,
applicable to money transfers, beat official money transfer rates by as much as ten per cent. Atlassib’s niche market has been that of illegal immigrants and visa overstayers who did not feel comfortable enough with formal and established money transfer services or simply did not know how to use them.23

The capital associated with the migration phenomenon often flows both ways through the migration network. All my interviewees and 91 per cent of survey respondents acknowledged having received money from the extended family to finance their first departure. When cash-strapped migrants go unemployed in Italy or have medical or legal problems, relatives back home extend them “reverse remittances”. Likewise, many of the immigrant offspring who aspire to go to university in Romania manage to get a place in the university or jobs by tapping into the connections of their relatives at home. In this way, the migrants’ financial capital is exchanged for their relatives’ social capital. Also, many migrants who fear state abuse choose the spreading of assets in both Romania and Italy as a customary economic strategy. Given the underdevelopment of affordable property management services in Romania, it is families in the home country that are entrusted to administer emigrant assets.

As in the case of the parcel deliveries analysed bellow, the circulation of remittances reduces the social distance between immigrants and their families, enables them to reproduce perceptions of “home” that are usable in both Romania and in Italy or maintain basic interactions with the institutions of the home community. Thus, remittances make possible the reproduction of the structures of the extended family that are quite common in the Năsăud and Borșa regions. Significant amounts are directed not only towards the expenses of their parents or offspring, but also towards investment plans or health care needs of uncles, cousins, et cetera. Many of the Romanian immigrants in Rome whom I interviewed in Rome in January 2005 and who were financing the construction of a new house for their family in Romania liked to show photographs of the progress of the construction to newcomers, to co-workers and to their Italian neighbours. This symbolic compensation practice seemed to have become quasi-ritualistic during Sunday afternoon immigrant community gatherings around metro stations in Roman suburbs and seemed particularly strong among regularized migrants. Finally, many immigrants diverted a share of their remittances towards the institutions of the home community. In my survey, I found that 69 per cent of respondents donated to churches and monasteries. By
contrast, only six per cent donated to the local school, three per cent donated money for communal reparations in their village, and nobody donated to the local hospital. Given the high prestige of the church in rural and semi-rural Northern Transylvanian communities and the symbolic association of schools and hospitals with state funding, these figures are hardly surprising.

The informal parcel delivery sector also succeeded in opening transnational market niches. Its importance for generating spaces of transnationalism is paramount because, at least during the early years of migration, Romanian immigrants tended to invest the sending of parcels home, which they viewed as social distance reducing method. Thus, during my fieldwork, immigrants and parcel delivery truck drivers often stated that most parcels contained basic staples (e.g. household chemicals, foodstuffs, clothing and footwear) that are neither necessarily better nor cheaper than staples that can be found in stores in Romania. In many cases, the merchandise is even produced in Romania and exported to the Italian market. Yet, as I found out from my informants in Borșa and Năsăud, for rural immigrants and their largely traditionalist kin, parcel sending is more semantically than economically significant: the immigrant’s family perceives it as affirming the intactness of the immigrant’s social responsibility towards them:

“My wife and I still send parcels to our parents. We send sunflower oil, soft drinks, sweets, detergent. They can find all this in Romania but for them it all feels like we still live in Bistrita [industrial town in Northern Romania, author’s note] and not in Rome. They are old and miss us a lot, but when they receive the monthly parcel with our letter in it they feel they can quench their longing for us a little bit...And, of course, they almost never use what we send them...When we travel home in the winter or in August we find all this stuff neatly arranged in the pantry.”

This is an interesting case of ambiguous de-commodification occurring in a transnationalized context, concerning the linkages between “home”, “destination” and material tokens of gratitude and of reasserted commitment to the extended family. This phenomenon of reproduction of home locality subjectivities in a transnationalized context deserves in-depth investigation in future research.

While the case of remittance transfer and parcel delivery services brought out into relief the importance of transnational private actors and strategies, the case of informal border clearance brokered by pri-
vate actors provides an opportunity to investigate a case in which power is jointly exercised by public state actors (e.g. customs and border police officers) and by private non-state actors (e.g. coach carriers and traders). In a nutshell, as my research reveals, private actors used bribery to institutionalize patronage networks centred around customs and border police officers in order to avoid custom taxes and restrictive regulations on the cross-border movement of the people and goods they carried. More specifically, in exchange for an informally-paid fee, bus drivers or bus security made sure that coach passengers who overstayed their visas, which is the case with most “work tourists”, were able to cross the border by supplying border officials with informal payments. Often the coach drivers attempted to cross border checkpoints only when their border police connections were on duty. The same strategy was used by traders of immigrant merchandise, such as Romanian food staples and alcohol brands. These traders often boasted of saving costs by shipping the merchandise from Romania to Italy in the baggage compartments of the respective coaches. Over time, these practices generated vast patronage networks at several of Romania’s Western border crossing points despite frequent personnel reappointments and lay-offs ordered by the Romanian Ministry of the Interior following EU pressures.

Another border clearance funding strategy consisted of financing prospective migrants who experienced cash flow problems. For example, in a move meant to circumvent a Romanian government measure (i.e. emergency decree 144/2001) meant to allay EU fears of massive Romanian migration westwards after 2002, many coach companies “lent” each traveller the money he/she was required to possess by law (i.e. 100 euro per day) to show to the border police in order to be allowed free passage. The money would be “returned” to the coach company after the crossing of the border, and, in some cases, an informal interest rate was levied. This practice and the difficulties Romanian border police encountered in cracking down on it were widely reported in the Romanian media. Although border-crossing financing has become less extensive more recently, once increasing remittances injected more capital into the sending migration networks, it can be argued that border-crossing financing had a considerable impact on cutting the costs of labour migration, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the January 2002 visa waiver. This informal financial service also weakened the dependence of the generally indigent prospective Romanian migrant and especially of the unemployed youth on his/her family and community networks.
Labour reallocations

The reallocation of labour from the Romanian to the Italian labour markets is far from being the sole prerogative of the Romanian and Italian states or of formal private recruiting agencies. Labour recruiting networks linking small Italian businesses in Romania, small Romanian immigrant businesses in Italy and a variety of private and public actors in both countries make up a complex governance structure of labour flows between Romania and Italy.

The Romanian state established a specialized agency for labour recruitment (The Office for Work Abroad), yet since its establishment in 2001, this understaffed government agency mediated the recruitment of only several thousands of Romanian workers for the Italian labour market. In the national sample analysed by Sandu et al., only 11 per cent of the respondents who had a migration experience after 2001 said they had been recruited by state agencies (2006). Likewise, formal and privately-run employment recruitment agencies were even less successful, especially after the government established its own monopoly over labour recruiting in 2002. By contrast, informal labour recruiters accounted much more for the large fluxes of labour mobility from Romania to Italy. These informal actors operated in the interstices of national Italian and Romanian regulations. They managed to build networks of collaboration that “carved out” labour niches in the Italian labour market and set up networks of labour supply that informally involved public actors in Romania. Three categories of transnational actors stand out as the most socially consequential in this respect: individuals hired or self-employed as labour recruiters for various quasi-formal Italian economic sectors, Romanian immigrant businesses in Italy, and Italian businesses in Romania. I will describe each in turn, analytically locating them in the wider transnational governance of labour reallocation.

My field interviews confirmed the prevalent view that migrants see family and friendship recruiting networks as providing most of the employment opportunities they found in Italy. While the scholarly treatment of these kinds of networks remains a mainstay of the literature on migration, the role of informal private headhunters in the large scale informalization and de-territorialization of labour force recruitment continues to be understudied. In my own survey, 50 per cent of respondents indicated that they had found work in Italy helped by relatives, 31 per cent by “friends”, while only eight per cent had found work via Romanian and Italian employers. As “friends” is a notoriously polysemantic
word in Romanian, I asked respondents to define this word in the context of their departure; five out of 21 respondents who accepted follow-up interviews defined “friends” as informal recruiters with whom they remained in contact subsequent to their departure for Italy.

It is difficult to describe accurately the background of these informal recruiters, yet the perception of the five respondents and of several more Năsăud and Borșa migrants I interviewed in 2003 and 2004 was that at least some of the Romanian headhunters arrived in Italy before the boom of the Romanian migration in 1996–2002. What made their activities transnational is the fact that the high competition for niches in the Italian construction and refurbishing market created an incentive to tap into steady flows of skilled and semi-skilled construction workers not only in the Romanian migrant communities in Italy, but also in the home country. Over time, person-to-person recruitment evolved into more complex structures linking employers in Italy, workers in Romania, officials and community leaders in Romania and Italian companies in Romania. This informal labour recruitment boom seems to have been especially spectacular during Silvio Berlusconi’s second term in office, when illegal constructions were tolerated and eventually showered with a comprehensive amnesty. Secondly, as these labour brokers were known to recruit for the informal Italian labour market, they were also responsible for obtaining either forged visas or visas “purchased” from consular services of Schengen area states. Three of the Năsăud immigrants interviewed who admitted having been recruited in this way claimed that their recruiters had taken their passports to Budapest to have them stamped with Italian visas. The fact that Budapest was an East European centre for visa forgery and an outpost of post-Soviet visa mob networks was well-known throughout the Năsăud area. Many locals obtained Schengen visas in this way in exchange for sums that ranged between US$ 1000 to 2000.

If indeed most Romanian headhunters looked for cheap unskilled labour – hence the pressure to recruit straight from Romania – the most lucrative headhunting business was in the recruiting of skilled and semi-skilled construction workers (such as master masons, concrete structures engineers, or licensed truck mechanics and drivers) because in the Italian construction sector the skilled and especially the semi-skilled were in high demand. Several of my informants claimed that the dwindling supply of these workers in Romania pushed Romanian headhunters to start recruiting from the tens of thousands of Romanian construction workers in Israel, where work conditions and pay remained below the Italian
levels. My 2004 interview with a Romanian headhunter from Verona, who had been in the business of searching for skilled construction workers for three and a half years, revealed that Romanian-style transnational headhunting involved at least two people for each hire; an agent of the headhunter (or the headhunter himself) and a skilled Romanian or Italian construction worker with work experience in Italy. The latter was typically hired as an informal “consultant” for the testing of the work skills of the potential new hire. In many instances, a native Italian, either a resident in Italy or an Italian entrepreneur residing in Romania, made regular trips to Romania to enhance the prestige of the recruiting enterprise. For example, during my 2004 interviews in the Năsăud area, I found two individuals hired by Romanian headhunters from Milan to assist in the recruitment process; one of these individuals was a Romanian cement specialist from Feldru, a village near Năsăud, and the other an Italian concrete mixer truck driver laid off from a Rome construction site. While most of my interviewees who confessed of being recruited in this way were generally content with their jobs, two of them claimed they had been victims of highly exploitative labour practices. One of these respondents said he was forced to work and live alongside nine other men of various nationalities in a remote farm “around Naples” in what qualifies as a form of forced labour. Under the threat that their passports would be destroyed and they would be turned in to the police, the workers were forced to work with no wages for five months refurbishing the farm and its stables. Those who protested were severely beaten and then kept in solitary confinement in a cellar for ten days. The respondent claimed to have had been “freed” for “good behaviour”.

Sometimes, the Italian end of the headhunting network was an Italian individual or company with Romanian residence who use their embeddedness into the local Romanian society and economy to obtain information about eligible workers. The spectacular increase in Romanian-Italian capital flows that occurred in the 1990s has been an opportunity structure to this end. This phenomenon poses a challenge to the boundaries drawn by Guarnizo and Smith between the “transnationalism from above” of corporations and states and the “transnationalism from below” of international migrants (1998). As Stocchiero observed, through the 1990s, about 13,000 Italian small and medium businesses relocated or were re-created in Romania (2001). The prospect of Romania’s membership in the EU in 2007 seems to have also led to sedentarization of their owners and/or staff in Romania, with “Little Italy” becoming a commonly-encountered urban phenomenon in cities like Timisoara and Arad. Not only did this massive corporate delocaliza-
tion lead to the creation of those demonstration effects that constitute a pull factor in migration (e.g. the display of Western consumption patterns by the new Italian residents), but also made possible the linking of a number of these businesses to informal labour recruiting networks. During my fieldwork in the Năsăud and Borșa areas, I heard several job recruitment stories in which small Italian firms incorporated in Romania were involved. In most of these stories, recruiting was described as done through the links of these companies with key local individuals and institutions (e.g. small clergy, small business bosses and supervisory personnel, municipality clerks) invested with formal and informal authority, with highly customized local knowledge and willing (or paid) to provide information contacts. Italian government sources confirm that this is far from a random phenomenon. A 2003 report on immigration by the Turin municipality noted that the fact that a quarter of Romanian workers in Turin were originally from the Romanian county of Bacau, a region that is noteworthy for the high density of Italian small and medium enterprises. The report also explicitly stressed that the presence of Italian companies in this region “has undoubtedly represented a pull factor for Romanian labour force there”.

More research needs to be conducted on this type of headhunting networks regarding the employment of Romanian workers in the Italian manufacturing sector. A potential premise for further research is the fact that – despite the leading role of Italian investors in Foreign Direct Investments to Romania – of the 13,000 Italian enterprises incorporated in Romania in 2004, only about 2,500 were operational. In any event, Northern Italian municipalities and law enforcement authorities seemed quite aware of the role of Italian investors in recruiting processes. Before the 2002 visa waiver, when the risks of expulsion were particularly high, this mode of recruiting supplied the labour needs of extremely exploitative Italian enterprises. Such was the case of approximately 100 Romanian truck drivers recruited by an Italian company based in Northern Romania for a haulage company based in Italy. It also needs to be pointed out that capital accumulation in these activities and the relatively high level of business sophistication of Romanian headhunters may offer prospects of formalization, with headhunters buying shares in formal recruiting companies in Romania or using internet job search engines to place the selected labour. There are clear indications however that the continuing supply of construction workers from Romania is reaching its limits. The Bucharest Labour Authority, a government agency, estimated in late 2006 that the labour force deficit in construction ranged between 52 and 55 per cent, despite the narrowing difference in salaries in this sector between

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Romania and Western Europe. As a result of the dramatization of this labour shortage by the Romanian media and employer organizations in 2007, Romanian construction and manufacturing firms began recruiting Romanian workers straight from the Italian labour market via job fairs and other arrangements.

A related case of transnational labour reallocation is the formation and maintenance of Romanian labour and entrepreneurial niches in Italy by Romanian immigrant construction businesses. In Rome, a joint study of Caritas Roma and of the local Chamber of Commerce found that Romanian firms amounted to 67.7 per cent of immigrant enterprises in the construction sector, as opposed to only 16 per cent in services, a very popular sector of immigrant entrepreneurial activity. In September 2002, the distribution of the 983 Romanian immigrant businesses in Rome was the following: 710 in industry (72.2% of the sector), of which 667 firms were registered in construction (67.7% of sector), 166 in services (16.9% of the sector), 36 in agriculture, and 71 as “others.” Similar figures were recorded in other Italian cities of high Romanian immigration. My own survey found that 33 per cent of all respondents worked in the construction and renovation sector, but only six per cent owned a business or worked in supervisory positions in this sector. Yet, national studies argue that migration experiences significantly increase the entrepreneurial potential (Sandu et al., 2006: 59–46). In my study as well, despite the low number of respondents who were entrepreneurs at that time, 34 per cent of them would have preferred to be business owners rather than employees, even if owning their own business would not have resulted in a higher monthly income.

What made these businesses transnational are their labour recruiting patterns and the cultural “side effects” caused by the social construction of the acquisition of middle class social status. Many of these businesses seemed to depend on transnational recruiting for their jumpstart. Typically, the company owner hires workers who have no experience in working abroad straight from Romania or from the pool of typically indigent and mostly first time “work tourists”. In the case of both these categories of migrants, wage expectations are low, so that the company could afford surviving the first months of capital accumulation and market insertion quite easily. Thus, during my January 2005 interviews I noted that sixty percent of the construction workers hired by Romanian construction businesses in Rome indicated that this practice led to quite severe forms of exploitation of workers who did not belong either to extended families or other forms of face-to-face groups. In addition to
quartering their workers in substandard and overpriced tenements, many Romanian employers had a bad reputation among my interviewees for failing to pay the due wages, for unilaterally extending the terms of trial periods, and for keeping workers cut-off from the information networks of Romanian immigrant communities in Italy.

The cultural “spillover” effects of these businesses for both the home and host communities brought forth into relief new intersubjective fields that crisscross the home and the host communities. At the macro level, the emergence of this “transnational capitalist class” from among the ranks of formerly economically marginal Romanian citizens feeds an emerging media discourse in Romania about the miraculous building of capitalism from below as well as from abroad, while obscuring the socially unjust ways in which this process of class differentiation via capital accumulation often takes place (Sklair, 2001). Many of these entrepreneurs seek social recognition of their status both in their home and host communities. My interviews revealed a widely-shared perception that owning a construction business in Italy, however small, was significant and positive in terms of the status hierarchy of both the home and migrant communities. Yet this perception did not conform to the Western (neo)liberal valuing of entrepreneurship as intrinsically superior to employment and seemed more like a complex hybrid of rural-traditional, state socialist and liberal capitalist subjectivities. Thus, merely owning a business abroad does not bring social status for my interviewees. Only owning a business that conveys a sense of professional skill and social-managerial capacity in sectors associated with “industry” and “technology” does. Owning a business in wholesale, retail restaurant and other sectors associated with “services” was much less appreciated and almost scorned as exclusively capital speculative. The higher social worth my respondents attached to owning one’s business in the construction sector is rooted in the privileging of “productive activities” over “speculative” (i.e. service) activities during the formative experiences of most migrants in late communism and the early post-communist transition. The difficulty of construction work was also invested with attributes of masculinity that were highly valued in the cultural narratives made popular by the agricultural-military traditions of the Năsăud and Borșa sub-regions. At the same, an important cultural recoding was operating on the Italian side of the transnational continuum. Thus, while sending communities in Borșa and Năsăud reproduced and enforced status privileges for construction entrepreneurs by conjuring up the aforementioned contrast between “production”/”labour supervision” and “speculation”, Northern Transylvanian immigrants
in Rome, Verona or Milan typically interpreted being a construction entrepreneur in a liberal sense, as a sign of status ascension to the ranks of the local middle class. This “Italian” symbolic social code is made readable mostly via specific forms of consumption. Indeed, as my interviews suggest, while well-paid workers signalled their status with brand name clothing and cars, successful construction entrepreneurs did so by renting better quality housing in Italy or investing in real estate in Romania. As far as the construction entrepreneurs themselves are concerned, they struggled to manage these symbolic disjunctures by playing different roles in different contexts: that of the “production/labour supervision” while in Romania and that of the “small business owner” while in Italy. From a larger perspective, this dual symbolic game constitutes an important caveat to rushed arguments that view entrepreneurship as an automatic avenue to integration in the host society and that depict immigrant entrepreneurs as unchanging subjects.

CONCLUSIONS

This article analysed the ways in which forms of economic transnationalism emerge and are reproduced over time in the context of early Romanian migration to Italy in the 1990s to the early 2000s. My contributions to the literature on this topic can be summarized along three main findings. First, my research confirms the transnationalist argument that state control over the flow of money, people and goods across its borders is significantly, effectively and regularly punctured by networks of private actors who compete to open informal markets of remittance transfer, border clearance and parcel delivery. The convergence between the worsening macroeconomic situation in Romania in the 1990s and the de facto semi-privatization of border controls gave the central authorities of the Romanian state strong incentives to largely withdraw from (re)imposing their control over these challenges to the state’s claims of sovereignty.

Second, the article makes the case that headhunters or labour brokers specialized in recruiting skilled and semi-skilled workers for specific labour niches on the Italian market are an overlooked category of agents of economic transnationalism. My research shows how their activities generated dense transnational labour markets across the borders of Romania and Italy and across the Mediterranean area, into Israel, often by connecting state/municipality agents, local community and business in enduring social networks. Similarly, the transnational recruiting practices of Romanian immigrant businesses in Italy revealed interesting ways in which the
fields of (transnational) social class-making and social status symbolic contention are formed and maintained. Finally, my analysis of the role that Italian manufacturing firms with operations in Romania have in the recruitment of labour for the Italian economy may be seen as challenging the distinction operated by some scholars between the “transnationalism from above” of corporations and states and the “transnationalism from below” of international migrants.

Third, these capital and labour flows affected not only the distribution of economic conditions in the home community or the limits of state sovereignty, but also facilitated the symbolic reaffirmation of social institutions ranging from the extended family to social status norms inter-subjectively shared across entire sub-regional communities.

NOTES

1. This theoretical view dissents from the classic perspective from Massey et al (1994) in that it does not take the condition of long-term displacement as the prerequisite for the realization of transnationalism. Migration and markets are by hypothesis transnational.

2. Before 1989 the Romanian communist regime generally allowed for the emigration of Jewish, German and Hungarian minorities, often in exchange for “education expenses” paid by Israel and Germany.

3. Although Italy is clearly the most important destination of Romanian migrants, to my knowledge there are few studies focused on Romanian immigration to Italy (e.g. Stochierro 2002; Weber 2003; Piperno 2006). For the most comprehensive and updated overview of Romanian migration flows, see the book edited by Diminescu (2003). For a comparative study of some of the destinations of Romanian migrants, see the report drafted by Diminescu, Ohlinger and Rey (2001).

4. Romanian is a Romance language. Compared with the major Romance languages, Romanian is closest to Italian. At present, the lexical similarity with Italian is estimated by Ethnologue at 77%.

5. For Romanian newspapers, see Cotidianul, Ziua, Capital, Jurnalul National, Cronica Romana, Evenimentul zilei, Adevarul.

6. “Guvernantii harbar n-au cati romani sunt in Romania/Government has no idea how many Romanians are there in Romania”, Cotidianul, October 11, 2006.


8. While the Romanian government estimated in late 2003 the total Romanian migration population to represent between 700,000 and 2 million people (Press release of the Department for Work Abroad, 28 Sept. 2004, Ziua, 29
Sep. 2004), the International Organization for Migration spoke of about 1.7 million people (“Adevaratele efecte ale muncii in straiatate/The real effects of labor migration”, Capital, 30 Sept. 2004). Also, a CURS poll conducted in late 2003 showed that almost eight percent of Romania’s population worked abroad (http://www.curs.ro). Public opinion polls conducted in late 2004 showed that more than half of Romania’s youth planed to work abroad temporarily (Metro Media, Transylvania Poll. Oct. 2004. See also, “Mirajul Occidentului ramane la cote ridicate/Lure of the West is still highly popular”, Cotidianul, Oct. 4, 2004).


10. In the case of Romanian migrants, the status of work tourist and illegal immigrant often overlap, as ignorance of legal requirements on registration turns many work tourists into illegal immigrants. Interview with the Romanian consul in Milan, Jurnalul National, 23 Sept. 2004.


14. The survey carried out by Open Society Bucharest’s Public Opinion Barometer in October 2004 put the figure at around 200,000. However, a December 2004 joint survey coordinated by political scientist Gabriel Badescu and conducted in December 2004 by the Department of Political Science of the Babes-Bolyai University and the Centre for Community Development (Cluj, Romania) estimated the number of Romanians engaged in work tourism at 400,000 people.


19. Ibid.


22. Interview with Eugen Terteleac, 40 years old, business owner and founder of the Association of Romanians in Italy, January 12, 2005.


26. In a national survey (Sandu, 2006), the importance of recruiting networks of family and friends was significantly reduced to 23 percent of respondents, most likely because the urban population, which my survey did not cover, was more likely to benefit from the formal recruitment networks of state agencies.
29. The major concentration of Italian residents is in the city of Timisoara (southwestern Romania), where 10,000 Italians have their second residence. The fact that the Italian residents bought entire blocks of real estate in the city’s historic center and had them restored lent Timisoara the nickname of “the second capital of Veneto” (http://www.italiainromania.com/). For an analysis of the distribution of Italian businesses in Romania and Timisoara in 2004, see the studies of the Veneto Chamber of Commerce and Trade in *Indagine sulla presenza imprenditoriale veneta in Romania/ Report on Veneto entrepreneurs relocated to Romania*, (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/8/31798570.pdf).
35. A mason’s monthly wage in Romania could amount to 800 Euro a month (pre-tax) in high season in 2006, while in Italy the same mason would earn between 1,500 and 2,000 Euro a month before tax. A mason’s wage in late 1990s Romania was less than 300 Euro. This narrowing effect is compounded by the fact that the net wage for a mason in the two countries is affected by lower income tax rates in Romania relative to Italy: Romania has 16% income tax (as of January 2005) whereas an Italian taxpayer earning less than 26,000 euros (and most legally employed Romanian masons would earn less than that) would owe 23% tax. Finally, it is important to note that the job fair organized by the Romanian government in Italy in 2008 offered 700 Euro per month (after tax) jobs in Romania. The targeted audience was the 55 percent of Romanian citizens in Italy who earned less than 1000 Euro a month (ASG 2007).

37. The high visibility of Romanians in the construction sector is hardly surprising. Wasteful allocations and quality problems aside, communist Romania had developed a fairly large and sophisticated construction sector and construction-related activities (which included truck transportation and repair), as well as the vocational education system that this development effort required. The system was complete with a university and vocational education system that mixed pre-communist, postwar French and East German educational and technical templates. Not only did the construction sector see a national boom, but it also developed a certain international reputation for the skills and low labor costs of its construction companies. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Romanian construction companies were very active in industrial construction projects in Libya, Iraq, Morocco and the former Soviet Union. With state investments reduced to nil and private capital slow to fill in state investments, the sector saw a dramatic collapse during the 1990s, with the number of workers in the construction sector dropping from 515,000 in 1994 to 309,000 in 1999. (Institutul National de Statistica, *Anuarul Statistic 2000*).


40. The literal Romanian phrase for “labor supervision” is symbolically powerful: “to have people under your hand” (“a avea oameni sub mâna”).

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