

From Border Fetishism to Tactical Socialism

Dr Gabriela Nicolescu

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Abstract:

This article discusses the meeting point of two political systems with their distinctive value imprints on individuals' everyday lives. It focuses on two stories of labor of Romanian women before the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the first two decades after 1989. The first account comes from an expert, the head of the Union of National Cooperatives of Production (UCECOM) during socialist Romania, the main producer of *artizanat* objects for export. She tells the story of the benefits of employment in state factories for women, and how socialist products were sold for Western markets in the 1970s and 1980s. The second account is of a former Romanian factory worker who after 1989 quit her job in Romania when state socialist factories were about to collapse and became a healthcare worker in Italy, for a larger salary and for more stable employment. This second ethnographic example discusses migration for caregiver jobs in Italy as the transborder continuity of autonomy and employment practices that survived socialism. It is also a form of downward migration, where former state socialist professionals are paid as unskilled migrant workers. This article emphasizes socialism's persistence in post-1989 practices and values embodied by people's work habits not only in Eastern and Central Europe, but in unexpected places, such as southern Italy. This article applies the idea of "tactical socialism" as a strategy derived from a close analysis of work practices, with their positive accomplished effects, in contexts where jobs are distributed by the state and citizens feel protected.

Keywords: modest consumption, socialism, capitalism, women, work ethics, care, Romania.

Introduction

Alexei Yurchak's (2013) affirmation that "everything was forever until it was no more," in relation to the dissolution of socialist practices in the USSR, ultimately is neither accurate nor true. "The totalitarian theory of transition" (Burawoy and Verdery 1999: 5–8), which states that the power of the 1989 revolutions rendered the old totalitarian regimes extinct and left space for a neoliberal genesis, is to be found in volumes such as *The Black Book of Communism* (Courtois 1999) and its multiple republications and translations in various countries. This theory presents the social and political realities of the state socialist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe solely under the lethal breath of crime and repression. Such publications transmitted the inhuman face of the 1950s and 1960s and the realities of prisons on to the social and political dynamics existing in the same countries two decades later. Similar books and projects of "anticommunist" research associated communist realities only with their most negative aspects, demonized state socialism as a whole, and fiercely extolled Cold War Manichaeism.

Differently from such accounts (in both the West and East) that demonize or reify socialism, in this article I show that there are still socialist practices and representations with some positive effects lingering in state institutions and everyday behavior in many parts of the world, not least in Eastern Europe. The paper critically examines and challenges the East-West and socialist-capitalist divides, showing that areas of ideological in-betweenness predate and survive the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe. In doing so, I advance the concept of "tactical socialism" to account for the work-related values and practices that were dominant in state socialism and allowed Eastern European migrants to adapt to capitalist workplaces after 1989.

By using two case studies, the paper discusses situations in which the East-West and socialist-capitalist divides are to a certain extent blurred. The first case study is that of the director of a leading factory in socialist Romania that produced folk-themed textiles, costumes, tapestries, and carvings for domestic consumption as well as for export to Western Europe. The second case study is that of a Romanian worker in a state-owned factory who quit her job in the context of the collapse of socialist factories and migrated to Italy to become a caregiver for elderly Italians. Both cases illustrate the crisscrossing of borders by people, ideas, and

commodities during and after the end of state socialism. This counters the widespread assumptions that (1) the socialist world was culturally and socially homogeneous and impervious to Western influences; (2) the socialist values, norms, and ways of doing things have been progressively abandoned after the change in political regime; and (3) that socialist values attached to labor and technical knowledges are tied to national boundaries.

This article addresses not only the issue of the meeting point of two political regimes, but also the inherent forms of reification of the differences between them, and the aesthetic forms such representations of difference take. It is in the very use of the terms border fetishism and tactical humanism where the articulation of the new field of inquiry resides. I apply Gibson-Graham's definition of "border fetishism" as the coexistence of capitalism with communism in space but also in time (Gibson-Graham 1996: 5). Their conceptualization, used also by the social scientists William Pietz (1998) and Patricia Spyer (1998), shows how certain socialist values, forms of knowledge, and ways of realizing exist in various European contexts beyond (before, after, or in the absence of) the existence of state socialisms/communisms. Pietz says that "between recognition and disavowal, absence and (negative) presence ... the fetish more generally is never positioned in a stable here and now and thereby confounds essentializing strategies that aim for neat resolutions and clear-cut boundaries among things and between persons and objects" (1998: 3).

The concept of border fetishism also allows us to think through the very idea of the need of a conceptual (spatial and temporal) border between political ideologies and regimes and in allowing socialism to be described in its minute embodied practices, derived from a certain work ethic and value attached to labor.

Based on Abu-Lughod's (2008) concept of "tactical humanism," this article employs the term "tactical socialism" in order to describe some positive aspects of the welfare state that the socialist regime promoted and the work practices and narrations associated with them. I define tactical socialism as a specific form of distribution of socialist work patterns, technical knowledge, and values attached to labor beyond social and political regimes and state boundaries. Hard work, perseverance, standardization, preference for stability (or risk-aversion), and a certain form of aesthetic and embedded modesty (of consumption) are all internalizations and embodiments of socialist work practices. As I argue elsewhere, based on Ssorin-Chaikov's (2006) analysis of "work as a gift" during socialism, being overworked, or just hard work in the socialist Romanian context had a gift-like nature, which precluded socialist workers from taking any criticism about the quality of their work (Nicolescu 2016a: 75). The article argues that these work practices and embodiments survived the collapse of the

socialist regime and still transgress geopolitical borders. These embedded repetitive practices could be seen also as a grassroots form of internationalization.

This direction of inquiry of the crisscrossing of borders by people, ideas, and commodities both during and after the end of state socialism is not singular. The reification of East and West is criticized by Eric Wolf (1997: 7). Anthropologist Frances Pine (1998), in her analysis of the demise of the communist regime in central rural Poland, underlined that when talking about transition, one needs to think at the same time of “disintegration, polarisation and fragmentation” (1998: 120). Following Pine’s argument one realizes that not only during the disintegration of the socialist state did people have various opinions, but also that these varieties existed long before the coming to power of communism and perpetuated after its fall. Such work ethics reinforced ideological polarizations. This is to say that in such contexts of internal fragmentation, the strict ideological borders between socialisms and capitalisms are tough to find. Coexistence and interdependence of different forms of socialisms and capitalisms exist today, based on previous forms of trade and coexistence. Islands of capitalism existed in socialist states in Eastern and Central Europe. People and institutions with socialist values also contributed to a more distributive society in Western Europe.

Other authors are preoccupied with hybrid places and encounters between socialism and communism. For instance, Lilleker’s work (2004) on democratic socialism describes a form of socialism impacting on the realities and political projects of the Labour Party in postwar Britain. Similarly, O’Hara (2012) discusses the politics of education following socialist precepts in postwar Britain. Last but not least, the life of ethnomusicologist A.L. Lloyd who had communist political views while working and living in the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s, and who visited several times socialist Romania during those decades, is just another example of a life-story which transgresses the West-East divide (Arthur 2012).

Out of all these authors, anthropologists Stale Knudsen and Martin Demant Frederiksen have made a key contribution to the articulation of this new field of inquiry. Their contribution, coagulated around the use of the term “grey zone” (Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015), refers to those in-between places and times where one can see innumerable crisscrossing frontiers and, according to the above mentioned authors, no clear distinction between victims and perpetrators. The term “grey zone” is evocative when we discuss the idea of slow transformation and lack of clarity following abrupt changes of political regimes. At the same time, the term, as Knudsen and Frederiksen use it, can be criticized for at least three reasons, which I am going to enumerate below.

Firstly, the authors borrow the term “grey zone” from Primo Levi and his description of Nazi concentration camps in *The Drowned and the Saved* (Levi 2017 [1989]). It is an eloquent comparison, but to start the volume with it brings in negative meanings that alter one’s understanding of state socialism in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. This association of the socialist regimes with fascist regimes was recurrent in the 1990s-era anticommunist narratives in Eastern and Central Europe. The “defeat” of the communist regimes allowed anticommunist writers to describe the regimes as “demonic,” with an equal beginning and end (for a broader discussion of such narratives see Rév 2005; Stone 2012; and Nicolescu 2016b).

Secondly, Knudsen and Frederiksen limited their research to Eastern Europe. If grey meant a zone of ambiguity that went beyond Manichean tendencies, then such analysis should expand to other non-Eastern European contexts. I argue that analyses of zones of ambiguity should include the fragmentation and “privatization” in the United Kingdom of the National Health System, or state sponsored communal housing in Hong Kong, one of the cities considered the epitome of the capitalist ethos. Socialist protectionist policies existed and still exist in many countries across the world. Their coexistence with other forms of political organization would allow for a much fairer analysis of socialist (welfare state) values in transnational perspective.

Lastly, grey is problematic because it makes use of a symbol—a color. As many anthropologists wrote already, people across the world interpret, make use, and even visually perceive colors in very different ways (Turner 1967; Taussig 2009 and Young 2011). Grey is the composite of black and white. But for Europeans, these colors have moral connotations: black is associated with negative meanings such as death, and white with positive ones. One might wonder which of the two colors did Knudsen and Frederiksen associate with victims and which with perpetrators (and why they made use of such a dichotomic presentation of the past regime)—and which was socialism and the one that next? Grey, other than being associated with the idea of nuance and in-betweenness, is also associated with dullness and the absence of change. For the Romanian context, grey also refers to restrained consumption and scarcity of state investments in the comfort (including aesthetical) of its citizens. Ultimately socialism meant distribution, which is difficult to represent in sparkling forms and colorful narratives.

For the above-mentioned three reasons, this article acknowledges the use of the term “grey,” but prefers to employ the concept of tactical socialism to discuss the coexistence of socialist practices and modes of doing and being with capitalist ones, in subsequent political regimes and transborder contexts.

Methodology

This article combines material from two different instances of field research: one on memories of work in state museums in socialist Romania, conducted between 2010 and 2011, and the second one on live-in care for the elderly performed by Romanian migrants in Italy, conducted between 2013 and 2014. In both cases I received ethical clearance from the Department of Anthropology at Goldsmiths. The researches consisted of combining methods specific to the intersection of three fields: history, anthropology, and political economy. I used life-history interviews, I consulted personal photographic archives, and I conducted classical anthropological participant-observation over several years. The two cases presented in the article were selected from a very large number of samples in each of the two sites of research. In both sites, my research among women prompted the theme of employment and values attached to labor during socialism. The two cases examine the nature of women's specialization and the accountability of such specialization at micro- and macro-levels of different groups across Europe. The sampling strategy was to choose extreme cases in order to maximize variability but also to allow the theorization of tactical socialism as a concept deployed in reference to both time and space.

The museum employer who quits her job to become the head of a state-owned factory and a factory worker who leaves employment to become a domestic worker abroad seem to share few social characteristics, apart from gender and the fact that both of them quit their jobs to find work somewhere else. On the surface, their social worlds seem different. In reality, despite a twenty-four-year age gap, the two women shared a vision about labor as a source of autonomy and independence. They had in common the positive evaluation of socialist education as well as life experiences that went beyond a Romanian context.

I encountered the director of the state socialist factory in 2010, when she was 77. She had lived under socialism for her entire youth. I conducted four interviews with her: the first one, in a crafts fair in Bucharest, while she was still managing different branches of the National Union of Cooperatives of Production (hereafter UCECOM). I made the second and the third interviews at her home. And the last time I spoke to her was over the telephone in 2011, before her annual half-year trip to Canada, where her child lived. All the interviews lasted between one and two hours.

During my research in 2013 and 2014 in a city of 20,000 inhabitants in southeast Italy, I conducted research with 34 migrant caregivers, out of whom 28 were of Romanian origin. Camelia was the first Romanian caregiver I was introduced to. The family that employed her was very proud of her modesty and “devotion” to their elder relative. They encouraged us to get in contact. In 2013, Camelia was 56 years old. With Camelia, I conducted five interviews. Three of them, of around two hours, took place in the house where she worked taking care of an elder patient 24/7. The interviews presupposed a very good knowledge of her work environment and familiarity with her life conditions in Italy. Other telephone conversations followed after I left Italy in 2014. She returned to Romania for good in 2016 after she completed ten years of work as a live-in caregiver for the elderly, out of which only eight were registered as such.

Out of the two case studies, only one was anonymous. The director of UCECOM agreed to make her name public.

First Case Study: The National Union of Cooperatives of Production

In 1968, after ten years of work at the Museum of Folk Art in Bucharest, Olga Horșia, one of the most enthusiastic curators in that museum, quit her job and started working in a state enterprise that produced *artizanat* objects: the National Union of Cooperatives of Production. Starting as a simple worker, as she confessed, in a few years she became the director of this enterprise, an achievement based on very hard work and ambition to reach the decision-making echelon of the institution. Under her directorship UCECOM became a state enterprise with many branches across the entire country. These were factories in small towns where thousands of employers were working to make tapestries, carvings, textiles, costumes, and pottery. As she stated in an interview, in Breaza alone, a small town 80 kilometers away from Bucharest, 4,000 women were sewing and hand embroidering clothes for export. “Upon retirement, these women received more money than their one-time head teachers,” Horșia very proudly declared (Interview with Horșia, February 2011).

The industry she managed produced great transformations in the entire country: not only were people employed, but they accomplished their jobs utilizing skills learned in schools and at home. Products of this work were often sold for export in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Such exports were highly valued by state socialist officials. This trade was a source of foreign currency for the country. It also played a role in Romania’s repayment of its foreign debt during the 1980s (Roper 2000). To exemplify the achievements of UCECOM state company, during my two visits to Olga Horșia’s home, she showed me

catalogues with pictures of UCECOM products advertised by Western models in newspapers such as *ELLE*, *Vogue*, *Für Sie*, and *Jasmin*.

Figure 1. Image from the cover of a western newspaper representing two women dressed in an *artizanat* blouse produced by UCECOM in socialist Romania (personal archive Olga Horşia).

As Horşia explained, she collected these images from covers of British, French, and German fashion magazines as proof of the international recognition of socialist products. In the 1970s, UCECOM products were exported abroad and many hippies across Western Europe wore or used these items produced in Romania (Interview with Horşia, February 2011).

The images from the 1970s and 1980s are striking for their use of color, which usually is not associated with the way state socialism was remembered in Romania during the 1990s and 2000s. More than that, these images show how these *artizanat* products of folkloric inspiration, produced in socialist Romania, dressed liberated bodies in Western Europe and alluded to freedom of expression almost leading to decadence.

As I discuss elsewhere (Nicolescu 2016b), *artizanat* is a loaded term in contemporary Romania, mainly because of its use during the communist regime. It could be defined as popular art crafted for the former peasants who became newly urbanized people employed in factories during state socialism. *Artizanat* objects bore the burden of the socialist modernization process and of its rush. They were expressive of the mechanization of agriculture, industrialization, and the mass consumption of that age. What is striking in the images collected by Horşia is that one does not see much of the socialist values of those times, such as work ethic, modest consumption, conformity, or standardization. In the models' sexy poses one can notice a neoliberal glamour and abandon when dressed in clothes produced in communist Romania. In fact, once conceived and sent to western markets, those products escaped the realm of socialism, morphing into capitalist consumption goods.

Because of the very nature of the *artizanat* objects, the covers made by Western editors and photographers also displayed a fascination with color, diversity, orientalism—hippies—with no connection to modernization or lack of authenticity. The association of state socialist produced artifacts with color stands against the narrative of the meeting point between capitalism and communism in terms of grey-infused space. One could look at this encounter of bodies and clothes as a paradox. It was an instance of “border fetishism” as Gibson-Graham

called the coexistence of capitalism and non-capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996: 5). Western bodies, icons for sexual freedom and the desire to experiment, confront us appealingly dressed in socialist clothes produced by the careful devotion, discipline, and self-restraint of socialist women workers. As I show elsewhere (Nicolescu 2016), work during socialism was a gift in itself and restrained consumption had multiple aesthetic consequences. According to socialist logic, freedom of expression, instead of leading to decadence and thoughtless use of resources, was supposed to lead to more restrained consumption in society. In their turn, individuals would show more modesty, focusing on the way society will look in the near future. The general motif behind the representation of socialist women was the reproduction of society through motherhood. It was not limited to giving birth. It included the rights and facilities for women who wanted to work, so that they would go beyond an assigned role of “housewife.”

Are these examples forms of dissipated socialism, or just of socialist products engulfed by capitalist markets? The tactical, in this case, derives from tactility—the physical vicinity between people and things. Those products, sewed by socialist workers, mostly women, became products that dressed western liberated bodies. In this very paradox and vicinity, or coexistence, one decides if s/he wants to observe difference, or rather similitude. The fact that these products were produced in socialist factories and consumed by capitalist markets indicates transmission of both technical knowledge and form beyond the Iron Curtain.

Sitting in Horșia’s living room, on antique style sofas and chairs, listening to classical music, having tea and biscuits in delicate ceramic cups, we were discussing the importance of women’s work during socialist times. This setting was itself another encounter of socialism and capitalism. During my research, Horșia was still an important person in the UCECOM industry. In the few months she spent every year in Bucharest, she visited or organized UCECOM fairs. Her successes during communist times and her activity after the fall of the regime made her voice one of the few openly critical of the dominant anticommunist discourse at the time of my research. Yet, the cause of her open anti-anticommunist discourse might not be necessarily related only to her position during the previous regime, but also to her position in the present. As yet another form of border fetishism, after 1989 Horșia left for Canada to spend most of her time there.

Besides the catalogue with covers of Western magazines, during our second interview in March 2011, Horșia also showed me pictures from a second album, black and white. These images portrayed her accompanying Elena Ceaușescu, the president’s wife, at an exhibition of *artizanat* products from around forty years ago. Looking at those black and white pictures, I saw both Horșia and Elena Ceușescu elegantly dressed, with a similar length skirts, above the

knees, similar haircuts and smiles. Horșia was confident. Poised on heels of medium height, she was showing Elena Ceaușescu some recent UCECOM objects. She looked professional and happy with what she was doing at that time. Other people, mostly women, stood around them. The entire scene was filled by the grandeur of the moment. UCECOM products were so important for increasing exports, employing people, and representing Romania abroad. This successful past still imbued my interlocutor during our conversations. It was one of the first ideas communicated to me upon initially meeting Horșia. UCECOM not only represented Romania abroad, but it also gave work to many women. The stability offered by those jobs and the pensions derived from them had to be acknowledged and appreciated.

In the following section, I discuss the prolongation of socialist work ethics beyond borders and beyond the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989, not all the state companies ceased their activities immediately. Many though, UCECOM among them, drastically reduced their output, ceased their exports, and were split into multiple branches. In certain regions of the country where heavy industry was in place, the demise of the regime led to the disintegration of the respective factories. Twenty years after the fall of the communist regime and the closing down of many factories and collective farms, Romania reverted to being a country with one of the biggest rural populations in Europe (Murgescu 2010; Mihăilescu 2013: 68). During the 1990s and 2000s, 46 percent of the population lived in rural areas (Sandu 2011 and Raport INS 2011). Many people lost their jobs, and among them, many more women. Other than withdrawing to work in agriculture or in temporary semi-legal jobs, most of these women decided to leave the country and work as healthcare personnel for the elderly in Italy, especially after Romania joined the EU in 2007.

The Second Case Study: From the Factory to Migrant Domestic Care Work

In a report of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2,350,000 Romanians lived abroad in 2012 (INS Raport 2014). The report also mentioned that, out of this total, 46 percent of them lived in Italy and that women between 25 and 60 years of age represented more than half of the total. This allows us to extrapolate that around 600,000 Romanian women lived in Italy in 2012. Out of them, at least 500,000 were employed, at least for few months, as caregivers. In support of this information, other researchers point to the fact that the total numbers of immigrants of Romanian origin in Italy are higher than the official data, taking into consideration the short time (few months a year) of circular migration typical for many Eastern European workers (Vianello 2012). Since early 2000s, Romanians represented the largest

community of immigrants in Italy and the most numerous migrant workers in the field of care in Italy (Ban 2012). Migrant women who work as caregivers (*badante*) in Italy explained their urge to leave Romania as a way to earn money for their families back home. Their remittances were invested into building or consolidating their houses, paying for the daily bills of the households, and last but not least providing their children with education. In the last decade, the total volume of remittances sent by Romanians working in Italy varied between two and four percent of the national GDP. In the years following the economic crisis that started in 2008, this represented more than the total of foreign investments in the country.

Out of the total 28 women of Romanian origin with whom I conducted research over a year in Italy, 25 were employed in state factories during the socialist regime. Out of them, Camelia's employment in Italy and Romania supported the application of the concept of tactical socialism because the significant duration of her presence in the second country, a result of her desire that the time spent in Italy would allow her to receive retirement benefits from the Italian authorities.

Camelia came from a family of rather wealthy peasants with five children living near the city of Iași—in eastern Romania. Her parents paid not only for her two brothers' education, in the city nearby, but also for herself and her other two sisters. The costs comprised accommodation and food expenses. The high school was free because education was generally state-owned and subsidized. They enrolled her into a theoretical high school, but Camelia had different plans. Without letting anybody know, she withdrew from this secondary education institution and started a career in sports, attending the specialized high school in the same city. Work schedule under socialism was very strict and demanding: mandatory six-day work week and many Sundays assigned to “patriotic activities” (free work for the state). In her free time Camelia enrolled in the Parachuting Club and, without telling her parents, practiced this sport for several months successively before her father found out. Despite support from her coach and other members of the club who believed in her abilities, her father compelled her to give up education plans and work in a factory as a secretary, under an uncle's close supervision.

In this factory she started work at the age of sixteen and a half. After a few years she enrolled herself in evening classes and completed a high-school degree, and married and got divorced after having two children with her husband. She raised their two children on her own, making the best of free state nurseries and education. She received no help from her parents or relatives. She had a job as secretary and started to learn bookkeeping and work as an accountant in the same factory. In her leisure time she continued practicing parachuting, going to theatres and operas, and enrolled in evening classes to complete high school and to become a chef. She

had no passion for cooking, she only had passion for sport; it was just that the socialist state required for employees in certain positions to continue education and acquire diplomas. Many years after the change of the regime, when both her daughter and her son left to work in different cities in Romania (her daughter also started a career in gymnastics), she decided to quit the state job, feeling that the factory might close its gates soon. She also needed more money to pay for the monthly bills. After 32 years of employment in Romania, at the age of 49 she left the factory in order to find work in Italy as a caregiver of the elderly.

When she told her boss that she was going to leave for Italy to care for the elderly, he started to laugh and told everybody in the room, that she, a very tough woman, cannot do such a job. He liked her and advised her not to sign her resignation in case she would like to return. She listened to his advice, but at the same time she was too proud to come back when she realized how difficult the job of caregiver was. Two years later the factory closed down. Her decision to leave proved fortuitous.

Her first job was terrible. As she once told me: “to take care of an old person is something, but to take care of the elderly and his entire nut family is unbearable!” She literally escaped the house with the help of another Romanian who told her that in Italy there are also welcoming families. The next job she had was truly fulfilling, she said.

The family where she worked was very educated and well-traveled, but she had no contract with them. Even so, she decided to stay there because she felt she could learn a lot from them. She had interesting conversations, she read volumes from their bookshelves, listened to classical music. She was asked to eat with them even if her contribution to the table conversations were limited since her Italian was far from perfect. During the summer, other Italian people from north would come as guests.

At one such table conversation with other people, the couple who were invited for lunch asked her where she is from in Romania. She said Iași. She was very happy when they said they visited Iași for an entire month and felt sorry to leave. “It’s a lovely city, they said, with theatre, shows, restaurants, botanical garden, the old city.” “Here in Grano what can she see? Why would she go out of the house?” “Have you taken her to the Old Church [Chiesa Madre] in the city and to the two main squares?” “‘Yes,’ came the reply from one of the members of the family she worked for.” They turned to her and said “Then, that’s all that you can see!” As she told me the story, she explained that their tone was appreciative for the modernity that she left behind. They added: “Probably she feels bored here in Grano. Iași is bigger than Lecce [the capital of the Salento Region n.a.]” (Interview with Camelia, February 2014).

Very often in the conversations I had with Camelia she kept saying that very few Italians are as educated as the family she had the chance to work for during a year and a half (Interview with Camelia, July 2014). As many other caregivers (*badante*) stated about their experience in southern Italy, they did not feel inferior to the Italians. They felt that they were more educated and better prepared to deal with difficult situations than their employers. This has to do not only with “downwards migration” (Vianello 2012) but also with the fact that the socialist regime invested a lot in the education of its citizens, and the benefits of this were encountered in unexpected places such as caregiver jobs in Italy.

Camelia’s work schedule was as follows: every day she would wake up at six in the morning, said her prayers, and then prepared the “colazione” (breakfast) for the elderly person she worked for. She would give the medication, clean the house every two days, lift the elderly, bathe and talk to her, prepare lunch, and later dinner. This was her routine for several uninterrupted years. She would watch a lot of Romanian television and rarely go out of the house. This habit is connected to a local unwritten norm according to which migrant caregivers should only have limited free time—usually no more than two times a week for two hours (Interview with Camelia, January 2014).

Many Romanian caregivers would approach their job with more or less criticism, but with similar devotion and a combination of self-restraint and desire for more rights and freedoms. I consider that it was not necessarily the ethics of religious devotion that helped them accept the difficult conditions. Their behavior also reflected the work ethics extolled during state socialism which were centered on positive values associated with work and monthly wages. Other than this, when *badante* take care of the elderly in the latter’s own houses, away from close and permanent supervision of the person’s relatives, *badante* experience a degree of freedom and autonomy which is qualitatively different from what they are accustomed to in their home countries. The capacity of migrant workers to feel autonomous, needed, and respected in their job by one or more employers (or other Italian kin), allows them to continue uninterrupted employment for many years.

One could wonder, based on the case study presented above, where there is more welfare for the individual. In a socialist state where jobs were mandatory for six working days (some Saturdays were dedicated to “patriotic jobs” like agricultural work, cleaning the parks or the streets of the cities, collecting glass, paper and other things for state factories), or in the Italian capitalist society of the south where migrant caregivers are paid 600 euros a month to work 24/7 with a “semi-legal” contract of only four paid hours a day?

Camelia together with seven other workers of the case study were part of a minority who worked under semi-legal contracts. The remainder of the 20 Romanian workers had no contracts whatsoever, mostly because they did not think that they would stay in Italy for as long as ten years. The Italian law states that one can get a pension after working for minimum of ten years in Italy. As one might imagine, the work for the elderly is quite uncertain and changing jobs does not always mean the continuation of the previous contract. Such reality limits even more the caregivers' chance of receiving a decent pension from the Italian state. Still, some of them learned about their rights and requested that their employers respect them. In the case of Camelia, after twelve years of work in Italy, out of which only eight were semi-legally (even though she worked 24/7, she was paid for only four hours a day), she was ready to apply for retirement benefits from the Italian state (Interview with Camelia, June 2018).

Socialist know-how morphed into survival tactics in capitalism. The discussion of pensions folds back to the first case study presented in this article: socialist regimes offered all individuals jobs, subsequently providing pensions and social security. In contrast with how the socialist state assured provisions, the newly capitalist system in Romania does not offer free housing, and offers less free education and healthcare—the social-economic rights typical of the pre-1989 regime.

What is Tactical about Socialism?

As the stories of Olga Horșia and Camelia presented above show, this article focused on work practices and values attached to labor, particularly female work, during socialism and after the fall of the state socialism in Eastern Europe. I consider tactical socialism a strategy for future research and writing on the micro-scale of dispersions of social habits deriving from state sponsored education, health, and housing impacting people's lives. This strategy borrows from Abu-Lughod (2008) the interest in presenting the small, micro-scale of social realities. It argues that by way of the details of every day practices one can point to invaluable social practices such as perseverance, modesty, hard work, and bureaucratization.

The discussion about the positive aspects of the socialist welfare state held after the fall of these regimes in Central and Eastern Europe reminds one of similar political and social debates held in the 1950s. The “Kitchen Debate,” to be discussed further, has contemporary significance not only with a view to the aesthetics and the functionality of things, but also as symbolic landmark for what different political regimes instill in their citizens: skills, values,

expectations, and the effects these values have on social stability, ecology, or the fate of future generations.

In 1954 domestic products from the United States were simultaneously exhibited with objects showcasing Soviet Union's own modernity. The exhibition was accompanied by a famous debate between Vice President Nixon and Soviet Premier Khrushchev about the superiority of each ideology's accomplishments: capitalism versus communism, not measuring it in nuclear weapons, political influence, or control of territories. The focus was solely on technological innovations presented in aesthetic terms. In the Kitchen Debate, the functionality and aesthetics of things were discussed also in relation to the philosophy of work: things manufactured to make "the life of housewives" "easier," in Nixon's words, whereas Khrushchev commented: "Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism" (Transcript, The Kitchen Debate: 1). Easiness and access were attitudes promoted by capitalism; work, free education, and free housing were values promoted by the communist system. If capitalism had housewives, communism provided education for all and employment for women in factories.

An important percentage of the foreign caregivers who perform domestic jobs in Italy are college educated. Their degrees have been obtained during the socialist regime, and are results of the latter's investment in free education. According to data coming from International Domestic Workers Federation, six out of ten domestic workers in Italy come from Eastern Europe; the others migrate from North Africa, South America, and Asia (IDWFED, 2013). The case of Filipina domestic workers is most telling. Research by some social scientists proves that at least 50 percent of Filipina women who migrate for caregiver jobs are college educated (Briones 2009; Chang and Ling 2010). This article acknowledges that it is not only the socialist work ethos that pushes women to migrate to foreign countries. Competing explanations vary from recognizing the desire of women to travel and understand the world, challenge, and improve their selves, but also the lack of jobs in their countries or difficult familial situations, from which women very often try to escape. They are thus pushed into situations of exploitation rather than social equality. But the intersection of economics, gender, and class (worldwide) shows the limitations, or better said, the adaptation of socialist values and tactics to world economies. In a similar way, the concept of tactical socialism indicates that East European women, because of their pre-1989 simultaneous roles as workers (with varying degrees of skill) and mothers, acquired a work ethos that allowed them further specialization beyond national borders after socialism's fall. In this vein, Camelia's case is telling: her experiences from before

1989 provided the basis for adaptation to caregiver work for the elderly in Italy, despite neither having medical training nor an excellent knowledge of Italian.

The research upon which the present article is based reveals that political systems impact not only knowledge-elite communities, but at a micro-scale too. The specificities of a polity leave an imprint on individuals and their preferences, practices, or habituses. The micro-level unveils these systemic influences in situations which are not so visible. Care, an important value in socialism, is nourished by people who believe in distribution of goods within society. In the first story—it was care for objects and people’s work contracts; in the second example—care for the elderly in Italy. Based on Frazer’s (2016) observation that the logic of capitalist accumulation is at odds with the logic of care, we could also state that professionals in socialism were experts of care. If capitalist values are related to visibility and allure, communist ones are based on the invisible face of the world—in this case, the care for the bodies and minds of the elderly, as performed by employed workers. But the border and the divide between the two ideologies melted down, and in the present we see various forms of coexistence that defy established geographies or frontiers.

Conclusion

This paper is based mainly on the life histories of two employees, both women, who lived and worked during state socialism and after its collapse in 1989 in Romania and respectively Romania and Italy. One of them represents an example of socialist ethics empowering women with a view to appropriate employment and upward social mobility. It also indicates the amount of work these women carry out and how their pensions—as depositories of pride and proofs of work accomplishments—reflect it. These mechanisms are not limited to socialist practices and sensibilities. The contact between East and West, in the first case study, is one of trade and imagination, knowing that relatively few people were allowed to travel abroad in Romania before 1989. However, *artizanat* objects produced in socialism were exported for western consumption. The second story shows how the work ethics and the autonomy given by state socialist employment accustomed Romanian citizens with diligent work and often with the view that work represents the sure path to respectability. When state factories collapsed, women searched for a similar sense of autonomy and stability elsewhere. They have found it in Italy.

In these two stories, socialism encounters capitalism in a subtle, often invisible way. In one story, socialist products dress western bodies. In the second story, socialist values such as secure employment do not stop when state socialist factories are about to collapse, for it carries

on outside national borders. The tale of Romanian women taking care of the elderly in Italy after 1989 shows that the transfusion of knowledge from the socialist to capitalist markets continued in popular ways well after the Cold War ended. Post-socialism therefore also implies an important spatial component that is often overlooked outside Eastern and Central Europe.

For example, the *artizanat* products sold in capitalist magazines in the 1970s and the 1980s were packaged glamorously by capitalist designers and marketed in relation to fashionable western trends, such as the hippy movement. This phenomenon which included two very different imaginaries could be seen as a form of border fetishism for the profit of both socialist and capitalist national economies. Such fetishism and combination of markets and values gave rise to intermediary spaces where socialist products were sold as positive products on capitalist markets. The key of this combination of values and markets is folkloric production in mechanized forms. In Herzfeld's (2004: 21–23) terms, selling of folkloric items represents a form of self-subordination to western markets.

A similar process of contemporary self-subordination is represented by women in Central and Eastern Europe who strive to preserve employment in domestic care work in western countries by constantly downgrading their specialization. Migrant domestic workers balance out their sense of self-subordination with pride of their education and prospects for future financial autonomy due to the relatively stable pension schemes in the western countries. Migrant domestic workers express solidarity with everyone who appreciate the same values, no matter their nationality.

In this context, “grey zone” should be broadened to places and times where socialist experiences and practices coexist within capitalist regimes. Such an interpretation sees the experiences of work in socialist states not only in terms of oppression or obligation, but also as manifestations able to diffuse and be efficient in contemporary capitalist societies. This way to distribute some aspects of the socialist welfare state into other forms of political and social organization could be seen as “tactical socialism.” It represents a continuing process that integrates aspects of social redistribution and repetitive work into the dominant logic of capital accumulation and economic efficiency.

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