

# **Enchanted place, shifting landscapes**

**An anthropological study on the tangled transformations  
within Roșia Montană's place and landscape**

**MASTER THESIS**

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## Abstract

This thesis deals with the transformations which have occurred in Roșia Montană, Romania after the late 1990s – early 2000s – when the mining company RMGC arrived at the community with a plan to start an open pit mine in the area – and how these transformations have influenced the locals' perceptions of their surroundings. Roșia Montană and its surrounding area has a thousands of years long mining history, but a project with an amplitude such as that proposed by RMGC would have been something unprecedented not only in the region, but in the whole country. The project was met by a strong country-wide opposition, since its implementation would have involved the displacement of a few thousands of people, and it also raised considerable environmental and economic concerns. Within Roșia Montană's community, the attitudes towards the company and its project were anything but homogenous or stable.

Though the project was never implemented, since the company failed to get all the approvals required for setting it in motion, Roșia Montană and the lives of its inhabitants were greatly transformed by the presence of the company. Apart from the fact that much of the population has already been relocated, the social environment in Roșia Montană was greatly changed, mostly due to the conflictual relationships between those who were against the project and those who were for it. The transformations that this thesis centers on are those concerning the locals' relationship with their place and their landscape. I have approached both people's relationship with the physical landscape as well as their relationship with the social ones, or the *scapes*, as Appadurai conceives of them, looking at the ways the locals have used in order to navigate the latter. This social landscape was an overwhelmingly intricate one, navigating it was highly confusing and demanding, required skills that the locals needed to develop almost overnight, and has strained the collective psyche. Most of the research was conducted in Roșia Montană, but part of it took place in Recea, the neighbourhood built by the company for those who accepted to relocate, but also wished to remain within the same community. Recea is around 70 km away from Roșia Montană and its landscape is completely different, both physically and socially. Thus, while the relocatees in Recea had to adapt to their new place, those who remained in Roșia Montană had to adapt to living in a place whose population was severely reduced by these relocations. But since the company has yet to accept its defeat, many of Roșia Montană's inhabitants are in a state of insecurity: they do not yet know for certain whether the mining project will ever be launched or not.



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# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

After 1990 Romania's reservoir of resources has become attractive to foreign mining companies. One of the most priced and sought after resource is gold, mainly found in the area of the Apuseni Mountains, in the western part of Romania. This area is well known for its resources, especially gold which has been exploited here since the Roman times. The place most renowned for its mining history in this region, but also for having the oldest documentary attestation in Romania is Roșia Montană. Still, the main reason why Roșia Montană is so well known nowadays is in fact the nation-wide resistance movement that has arisen against a controversial gold and silver mining project that was planned take to place there, culminating in 2013, when massive protests took over the whole country and even spread branches abroad, voicing a harsh disapproval towards the mining project and Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC or simply, "Gold", as the locals were usually addressing it), the company wishing to implement it.

This thesis deals mainly with the ways in which the inhabitants of Roșia Montană perceive and are affected by the actions of RMGC, how the relationship with their place and their landscape was influenced by these actions and the strategies they adopted in order to handle them.

### **I.1. The company and its project**

Among the reasons why the project stirred such controversy are the facts that it implied the creation of the largest open pit mine in Europe, the exploitation of all the resources found in the mine over a very short period of time (roughly 15 years) and, as is common in such projects, the use of cyanide; for this project to take place the people living in 2 of the 16 villages belonging to the commune, namely Roșia Montană and Corna villages would have to be relocated; the open pits were intended to be dug up into the 4 mountains surrounding Roșia Montană, while the tailings dam would be situated at the place where Corna village still stands until this day; obviously, if approved the project would have completely changed the landscape, it would have relocated all the people living there and changed their ways of living, particularly

their ways of subsistence. Apart from the environmental issues posed by such an massive project, those who opposed it were concerned with the possibility of losing what they referred to as “the Roșia Montană heritage.” Apart from hosting some of the oldest underground Roman galleries, Roșia Montană is also the host of numerous historical monuments from the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Ciobanu 2007: 1).

RMGC’s main shareholder and beneficial owner of the project is Gabriel Resources,<sup>1</sup> a Canadian company which owns most of the shares (80.69 %) and is listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange. The other shareholder is Minvest Roșia Montană S.A. – the mining state owned company, which owns 19.31%.<sup>2</sup>

The company made its entrance in a rather shady manner. On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1995 the state mining company, Minvest S.A., which at that time was named RAC Deva, announced in the newspaper that it was looking for a partner in order to exploit the precious metals (Documentele Confidentiale..., 2013) that ended up in the tailings ponds during the process of the previous exploitations. But it turns out that the partner had in fact been decided the day before this announcement. Thus, Gabriel Resources got the license for exploiting the tailings ponds on September 4<sup>th</sup> 1995 (*ibid.*). This partnership resulted in the company called Euro Gold Resources (*ibid.*), created in June 1997 (Plugaru, 2013); in 1998 Minvest received the exploitation license which would allow them to continue the exploitation of Cetate Massif for a minimum of 20 years (*ibid.*). In 1999 Euro Gold changes its name into Roșia Montană Gold Corporation and acquires the concession license for the exploitation of Cetate Masiff through a transfer from Minvest (*ibid.*). This Masiff, standing next to Roșia Montană had been exploited as an open cast mine since 1968, but its size is insignificant in comparison to the project proposed by the company.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.gabrielresources.com/site/Roșia\\_Montană.aspx](http://www.gabrielresources.com/site/Roșia_Montană.aspx)

<sup>2</sup><http://en.rmgc.ro/about-us/about-us.html>





*Cetate open pit mine – present day (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*



*Cetate Masiff before 1970 (from Valentin Rus's personal collection).<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Photo courtesy [http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/secretele-masivului-cetate-rosia-montana-locul-2000-ani-s-a-sfredelit-pamantul-cautarea-aurului-1\\_5565bfe7cfbe376e35a5f27d/index.html#gallery\\_currentImage](http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/secretele-masivului-cetate-rosia-montana-locul-2000-ani-s-a-sfredelit-pamantul-cautarea-aurului-1_5565bfe7cfbe376e35a5f27d/index.html#gallery_currentImage)

In 2001 RMGC proposed the creation of 3 more open pits around Roșia Montană: Cârnic, Jig-Văidoaia, Orlea (Plugaru, 2013). The whole project would imply the usage of over 200 000 tonnes cyanide over the exploitation period (*ibid.*) and the concession license with regards to the project concerns an area of nearly 2 400 hectares.<sup>4</sup>

Seven years after being leased by RMGC, in 2006, the exploitation at Cetate was shut down, laying off the hundreds of locals who were working for it, the reason mentioned being its lack of feasibility. Many of the locals refused to believe this explanation and viewed the act of closing the mine as an attempt from RMGC to impoverish them even more, to make them dependent on the company and thus compel them to accept their project and, implicitly, to accept the relocation; even more so after 2010, when documents which show that the closing of the mine was done at RMGC's request, were made public. (DOVADA! Gold..., 2011)

## **I.2. The beginning of the resistance**

People started to figure out the fact that the company's interest was not in exploiting the "leftovers" in the tailings ponds, but to actually build a colossal open pit mine, with everything such a structure implies, in 2000. That year, those who were against the project formed an organization named Alburnus Maior – after the Roman name of Roșia Montană – in order to represent their resistance efforts against the mining project. They also started the campaign "Save Roșia Montană" which has become the largest protest movement in Romania since the revolution in 1989 (Dale-Harris 2012: 43).

The opposition was rather inexperienced and timid in the beginning and it took it 2 years to become visible (Goțiu 2013: 351). As some of the members told me, what they had back then was mostly their will, rather than skills or experience. Then, in 2002 the association received help from Stephanie Danielle Roth, a French-Swiss environmental activist, a former writer for "The Ecologist" magazine, who had previous experience with organizing environmental and social grass-roots movements both in Romania and abroad. My interviewees often claimed that her help was decisive in building up the opposition. In 2005 Stephanie won "The Goldman Environmental Prize" for her work against RMGC's project.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[http://gabrielresources.com/site/Roșia\\_Montană.aspx](http://gabrielresources.com/site/Roșia_Montană.aspx)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/stephanie-roth/>

In 2004, Alburnus Maior organized the first edition of the FânFest (HayFest) festival in Roșia Montană. FânFest started as a form of protest against the company and it served as a tool for raising awareness about the company's actions, and about related environmental issues in other parts of the world as well. It also focused on promoting activities such as tourism and agriculture as alternatives to mining. FânFest has been organized almost each summer between 2004 and 2015, with two years break in 2008 and 2009, and it comprised a wide range of activities from music concerts to guided tours in the area and photography exhibitions.

### **I.3. The company and the law**

In 2013, an attempt from RMGC to change the mining law stirred the outrage of the Romanian society and led to massive protests in several Romanian cities and even abroad which lasted for several months. The bill proposed by RMGC in this context was entitled *Certain measures for the gold/silver exploitation of the Roșia Montană perimeter and for stimulating as well as fascilitating mining activities in Romania* (Harosa et al., n.d.). The reason why it stirred such uproar was the fact that it implied “unconstitutional expropriation procedures, authorities’ obligation to issue notices, derogation from the Historical Monument Law and from the EU Water Framework Directive” (Gabriel Resources quest..., 2013). In other words, if approved, the bill would have made the interests of private mining companies' a priority, at the expense of national interests, it would have severely weakened people's agency towards their properties and absolved the mining companies from many of the responsibilities they normally have towards the environment and the heritage (Harosa et al., n.d.). “These amendments (*sic*) to the mining law would have been the dissolution of the State, since the State was substituted by companies in relation to citizens” (*ibid.*). This last quote is particularly interesting within the context of what happened in Roșia Montană under RMGC's influence. The bill was in the end rejected after all the massive protests. But it seems, at least to some extent, that the company had already replaced the State in Roșia Montană long before 2013 due to its penetration into public institutions such as the town hall, the church and the school. This is only one of the aspects that helped the company gain support from many of Roșia Montană's inhabitants. The supporters were grateful for services that were provided by the company, but which should normally be easily provided by the state, such as English or French language courses. The company's supporters, often derogatorily referred to as “goldists” by its opponents, saw the

project as a development opportunity for the area, and were looking forward to the jobs that RMGC promised to offer through the project.

On 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2015 Gabriel Resources issued a request for arbitration at the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) against the Romanian State for the fact that Romania has stopped the implementation of the project "through its actions and inactions".<sup>6</sup> The dispute hasn't been solved up to this day and while some of the locals are convinced that the company has no chance in winning, others are nervously waiting for the result.

Another issue debated in the case of Roșia Montană is the fact that the area was declared a mono-industrial mining area by the local County Council in 2002, following the pressure coming from the corporation (Ivanciuc, 2013) and hence, no one can develop any activity there apart from mining and the European funds for developing activities in this area were blocked by the government. The locals, particularly those opposing the company complained that this was stopping them from starting their own business. Some of them would like to start their own businesses in tourism due to the area's attractive surroundings and its historical heritage. But the company's representatives claimed that the area had no potential for tourism or any other activity apart from mining, and they depicted the place as a heavily polluted and a hopeless one in terms of developing alternative sources of income, portraying the project as its only salvation.

The physical surroundings are a combination of wilderness and man-made elements which remind the visitor of the mining history of the place. Amongst the man-made elements one could see markers of agricultural activities, such as gardens and steep pastures, but also reminiscences of the mining activity of the past, such as mining galleries, which have transformed the mountains into a "Swiss cheese-like landscape" (Istvan 2011: 7) and natural looking artificial lakes, which were used for clearing out the gold before 1948, when this was still extracted through the traditional method. Many, both locals and tourists appreciate this mix and consider that this is what makes Roșia Montană so special and valuable as a testimony of the mining history.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://en.rmgc.ro/media/press-releases/gabriel-files-for-international-arbitration-against-romania.html>



*Cărnic Mountain with the traces of its mining past (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

#### **I.4. The acquisition of properties and the relocation process**

For the project to be implemented, everyone who owned property in the area where the exploitation was planned to take place had to agree on selling their properties to the company and relocate or resettle somewhere else. The company started buying the properties in Roșia Montană in 2002 even though it never received all the approvals which were necessary for starting the exploitation. The corporation managed to buy around 80% of the total of 800 household's real estate in Roșia Montană (Ciobanu 2007: 1) and relocated or resettled the families who agreed to do so. But since there were and there still are people who refuse to sell their properties and leave Roșia Montană, and also because the company failed to obtain all the approvals needed in order to begin, the mine was never built.

After selling their properties the locals moved to different places in the area or elsewhere in the country. Some, especially elders moved to the cities in order to live with their children or

other family members. But for those who wanted to remain within the same community, two sites were initially established – the neighborhood of Recea, in the town of Alba Iulia, where 150 families moved in, mostly during 2008-2009; and Piatra Albă, situated at the edge of Roșia Montană (Vesalon & Crețan 2012: 67). Piatra Albă was never built even though around 25 people signed up to live there. Thus, it was one of the many subjects of controversy surrounding the company and a source of disappointment for many.

The landscape of Recea is completely different from the one in Roșia Montană. It is situated at the edge of the town of Alba Iulia, 76 kilometers away from Roșia Montană. This town has a population of around 76 500 inhabitants in contrast to Roșia Montană, which had around 3000 inhabitants at the time when the process of resettlement started. The land of the resettlement site is mostly flat, while Roșia Montană is surrounded by mountains; Recea consists of quite big houses, placed very close to each other and with very small gardens, which is very different from Roșia Montană and from the usual Romanian village-scape, with small or medium sized houses and with most of the space consisting of cultivated land placed either right next to the house of its owner or just outside the village, and pastures.

Acting on the criticism that this kind of resettlement is destroying the traditional way of life, the mining company planned Piatra Albă just 5 kilometers from the center of Roșia Montană and it claims that this will be a “modern – yet traditional – village” (as quoted by Vesalon & Crețan 2012: 67).

However, there were complaints about both sites. Recea stirred many complaints, mainly regarding the quality of the houses and of the air, while Piatra Albă stirred complaints due to the fact that the only part of it that was ever built was the road, which was destroyed by landslides soon afterwards. But even without the issues related to the quality of the houses and the roads at the new sites, the way people from Roșia Montană were resettled still raises many questions, as I will show later. As mentioned already, in 2013 RMGC attempted to change the mining law in Romania to such an extent that they would be allowed to forcefully displace those who chose to remain in Roșia Montană. This attempt failed, but if we listen to the statements of many of the locals, recounting the not-so-ethical tactics (for eg. intimidation and scapegoating of those who did not want to leave) used by the company in order to push people into selling their properties, we can be tempted to doubt that those who have already resettled or relocated did it entirely on a voluntary basis. Instead, it would appear that we are talking about a merely apparent choice or a

semi-illusion of choice in the case of at least some of the people who were “voluntarily” resettled or relocated. According to Mining Watch – an NGO addressing the social and environmental issues raised by inadequate mining practices – for more than ten years, the company conducted an intensive pro-mining campaign in Roșia Montană and during this time intimidations were reported, and the complete information regarding the risks of the mining project was not provided (Vesalon & Crețan 2012: 69). Also, there is much talk about the company having turned family members against each other in cases where part of the members of one family wanted to sell the property and relocate or resettle, but the rest of the family didn’t (Daub, 2012). In addition to this, it seems that the company used something I would like to call a “visual strategy” for making Roșia Montană less appealing to those who chose to remain; strategies such as neglecting the buildings it acquired, including the patrimony buildings, which, by law, they were supposed to keep in good condition; or drilling for samples in highly visible places.

Another issue raised by the resettlement process, as Toma has remarked (in Vesalon & Crețan 2012: 70), is the fact that in the neighborhood of Recea, the residents do not have the possibility to practice land-based activities for their subsistence since they have ten times less land than they used to have and the compensation the mining company offers for this is not adequate; for example, no form of compensation is offered for the loss of access to pastures or to other sort of publicly owned land (Vesalon & Crețan 2012: 70).

## **I.5. Theories and approaches**

I am using the word “landscape” in order to refer to the physical surroundings – natural and man-made, but also in a less literal one, where I am broadly referring to the social landscape one dwells in. By using the expression “shifting landscape”, I wish to point towards the instability of both aspects of Roșia Montană’s landscape – the physical and the social one. For analyzing the social landscape I am inspired by Appadurai’s concept of *-scapes* (see Appadurai 1990). Appadurai has focused on the complexities and ruptures within the “new global cultural economy” (Appadurai 1990: 6) which characterize our modern world and he uses the concept of *-scapes* in this sense. These *-scapes* are the fluid “dimensions of cultural flow” (*ibid.*) to be identified in the present-day world and through which one can analyze today’s social landscape with its instabilities and contradictions. This concept is useful in analyzing the social landscape

of Roșia Montană due to the pronounced global aspect that – all of a sudden – made its presence in this place. Making sense of these –*scapes* and of unstable, intricate social environments in general and dealing with them is often a challenging task, as it requires one to move within a moving environment. The concept often referred to in anthropology in order to describe this practice and which I also found most useful to work with in thesis is “navigation” (Vigh 2009: 419). The word “navigation”, normally means “sailing” (Vigh 2009: 420), and thus it suggests the way one has to move in order to cut through an unstable environment, such as the sea. Hence, it is a very helpful metaphor in understanding how people deal with the changing environments characterizing the current global reality.

As for the physical landscape, RMGC’s project would imply its radical and irreversible change and though the project proper never started, the company did nevertheless heavily change the landscape of Roșia Montană by relocating most of its population despite the fact that they never got all the approvals necessary to actually begin mining. Though this fact is often left out, people themselves are also part of the physical landscape and therefore have to be taken into consideration when we operate with this concept. As for the social landscape, everyone in the community was complaining about the great extent to which the social atmosphere had changed and the difficulties they had in navigating through it, due to its waviness. These difficulties were particularly confusing and overwhelming due to its rather new dimension – the global dimension.

“Landscape” is a somewhat vague concept (Thomas 1993: 20) and it is not one which is used in the same way by everyone (*ibid.*). For my work, I find Cosgrove’s approach of what landscape is (and what it is not) to be useful. Cosgrove states that “landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience in a way that neither region nor area immediately suggests. Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of the world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world.” (Cosgrove 1998: 13). According to Angele Smith, “representations of landscape are culturally determined, dependent on who is doing the “seeing” (Smith 2003: 72). Also, it cannot be thought of through the nature/culture dichotomy or through the usual Western dichotomies in general, since it transcends them (Willow 2011: 273). Though it suggests the visual surroundings of a place, it implies a set of complex relationships between nature and society which are often not easily visible to the naked eye. Or maybe instead of “visible”, it would be more appropriate to use terms such as “perceptible” or “sensible” here, since the word “visible” may limit our attention to



the visual aspects of landscape, which would be inappropriate in studying such a complex issue. The nature of the relationship between people and places, people and landscapes, is often difficult to express through the lens of the physical senses and sometimes even difficult to express in words at all. Even if one would do his/her best to describe them, much will remain unexpressed and left at the mercy of the researcher's sense of observation or intuition. In this context, Basso's concept of *sense of place* is very useful in understanding the connection between senses and landscapes. According to Basso, anthropologists haven't paid enough attention to "one of the most basic dimensions of human experience – that close companion of heart and mind, often subdued, yet potentially overwhelming that is known as sense of place" (Basso 1996: 54). Basso talks about the connection between places and identity, between the "physical landscape" and "the landscape of the mind" (Basso 1996: 55): "When places are actively sensed, the typical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the mind may lead is anybody's guess" (*ibid.*). Next to the landscape of the mind I would like to highlight the importance of the emotional landscape, a landscape which is even more difficult to pinpoint. Landscapes and places are deeply connected to one's well-being which during this research I often found highlighted in a plain and simple manner through the expression: "Here is where I feel good."

But the author I have mentioned the most here in my analysis of the relationship between places and one's psyche is the philosopher Edward Casey. Casey's work, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time", delves into a few aspects of this relationship, such as perceptions, memories and knowledge, which I have focused on in this thesis.

Places and landscapes are perceived differently depending on factors such as: the memories they trigger, the type of interactions one had with it over the time or the relationship one has with its resources. This perception can be altered by, in this case a multinational company, with the use of what I would like to call different forms of enchantment such as, to mention only a few – confusion, social disunion, a discourse of nostalgia, the encouragement of certain forms of engagement with the landscape while discouraging others, the highlighting of the importance of certain resources while minimizing the importance of others, the idealization of the "latest technology", different forms of populism, promises which are often downright out-worldly or, just plainly, bribing local authorities. Thus, the idea of an "enchanted place" that the

title of this thesis refers to. However, the word “enchantment” in the title is meant to also highlight the richness of the local cosmology.

I have analyzed some of the company’s enchantment “components”, but also the ways in which people perceive and interact with their surroundings through the lens developed by Tim Ingold in his work, *The perception of the environment*. In the chapter titled “Globes and Spheres“ in this book, Ingold discusses the “local ontology of engagement” versus the “global ontology of detachment” (Ingold 2000: 216) and how privileging the latter has legitimized the “disempowerment of local people in the management of their environment” and led to technology’s triumph over cosmology (*ibid.*). According to Ingold, modern technology, in contrast to traditional cosmology, places society outside the “physical world” and emphasizes the idea of control over the latter. The expression “latest technology” is often used in the company’s discourse when it is trying to emphasize the safety of the project, but the locals who refuse to leave Roșia Montană are far from being impressed with it and are rather suspicious towards such blatant technology optimism. Instead, they insist on their willingness to live in their natal place for the rest of their lives, and on the irreplaceability of the land. One aspect worth mentioning here which concerns the local ontology is the place’s rich mythology. Landscape and the ways in which humans interact with it, of course, occupy a central place here. Denis Cosgrove has underlined the presence of landscape as a central theme in the world’s mythologies, but also how, in these mythologies, humans’ attempt to dominate the landscape through what he calls “natural magic” (*see* Cosgrove 1993) can result in disasters.

## **I.6. Ambiguous resources**

Another core issue here is resources and the locals’ attitude towards them. As R. Jenkins pointed out, “a resource in one context or for one person might be a disadvantage in another or for another” (Jenkins 2009: 5). In the case of Roșia Montană it looks like we have different types of resources in the same equation: gold, land, landscape, historical sites, which are perceived differently by the locals. Since the exploitation of gold by RMGC will come at the expense of the other resources, gold is seen as a disadvantage by those who are against the project. They even talk about the “curse of gold” in this context. The “curse of gold” is an expression which has been used in the area since immemorial times in order to express the hardships brought by the gold exploitation, by the desire for gold, and it is strongly present in the local folklore.

Jenkins also highlighted that “stuff’ becomes a resource only in the context of what is done with it” (Jenkins 2009: 4). This is obvious in Roșia Montană, where locals had very different attitudes regarding their resources and what they considered to be a valid resource in the first place. If for some, gold represented prosperity and financial safety, others saw in it a curse or simply did not have any interest in it. However, the way one perceived gold (or other precious metals for that matter) did not necessarily say much about one’s position towards the company. There were mining enthusiasts on both sides, but those who were against the company did not agree with the exploitation method and conditions proposed by the company, since this would come at the expense of all the other resources and suggested that an exploitation should be done only with a method that can ensure the protection of these other resources.

In other words, the attitude towards these other resources, such as natural surroundings, heritage, landscape or land, weighted more in determining people’s position towards the company and their project, rather than their attitude towards gold. The company, of course, had a heavy impact on people’s perceptions towards these resources. And these perceptions took on more intricate and even paradoxical articulations than one would expect, as I will show later.

## **I.7. Research methods and fieldwork**

In my research, I focused on the villages Roșia Montană and Corna because these are the places the people were supposed to relocate from and the places that were most affected by the company’s actions and on Recea, the place where some of those who chose to move were relocated. My fieldwork for this thesis started at the end of July 2015 and lasted until the beginning of January 2016. The last time I revisited Romania, in October 2016, I also paid a short visit of 5 days to Roșia Montană.

During most of the time spent in the field I have lived in Roșia Montană, but during the month of November I conducted fieldwork in Recea, the neighborhood where a part of the relocatees had resettled. I had three different hosts during my whole stay: two in Roșia Montană and one in Recea. Due to the complexity regarding the issues to be studied and regarding people’s positions towards them, I considered it useful to live with two different hosts during my stay in Roșia Montană. The fact that the two families I lived with had different experiences regarding their relationships with the company allowed me to engage with various views and network with people holding various backgrounds and narratives.

For the purpose of data collection, I have used qualitative methods, mainly participant observation, open interviews, collecting narratives, life histories and folkloric stories. Since many of the interviewees were rather reluctant to being recorded, I have mostly used notes taking. However, in Recea I had to use a more formal approach since here it was more difficult to engage in spontaneous conversations due to the fact that, unlike Roşia Montană, Recea did not have spaces where people would gather. So here, I had to take a door to door, or to be more accurate, a gate to gate approach and, together with observation, I have used an open questions interview guide in which I have included questions meant to unfold life histories and family histories of my interlocutors.

In order to ensure the safety of my respondents I have anonymized the data, particularly in the cases where sensitive information is concerned or when the respondent has a vulnerable situation due to his ethnic or financial background. The very few names I have not anonymized are those belonging to public figures. The opinions these public figures have expressed in my interviews and the positions they take are anyhow already well known to the public.

## **Chapter II**

### **A place between myths and realities**

This chapter begins with a description of Roșia Montană's surrounding – both the surface and the underground landscape. It then takes a look at how the locals perceive this landscape and how these perceptions affect their view over the mining project proposed by RMGC. Here I am also introducing the reader to the local cosmology of Roșia Montană and making a parallel between mythology (local mythology, but also “universal” mythology) and today's mining related realities, with a focus on how mining transforms people's relationship with their surroundings. In regards to this relationship I am looking at how modern mining, the technology employed and a discourse centered on extractivism are prone to disconnecting people from their surroundings.

#### **II.1. The day of arrival. First impressions**

After a whole day of traveling I finally arrived in Alba Iulia, the closest bigger town to Roșia Montană. Even though it was almost 8 pm, the air was still hot, over 35 degrees Celsius maybe, as it was in much of the country at that time. From there, in order to get to Roșia Montană I had to hitchhike. For about 20 minutes I waited for a car to stop and pick me up. Then a man with mini-van stopped. He asked me where I was going. I told him my destination. He was going home to Campeni, which was another mining town very close to Roșia Montană. My destination was on his way, so he took me with him. As the car was getting further and further from Alba Iulia, the landscape and the temperature were changing considerably. In less than an hour of travelling everything was changed. The mostly flat and boiling hot town of Alba Iulia, with its architecture largely comprised of five or more storey communist buildings was replaced by a completely different landscape. This landscape had a rather nurturing appearance, with round, cozy-looking low mountains covered in mixed forests and patches of grazing land with haymows in the middle. The temperature was dropping considerably as we drove deeper into the mountains and the air was finally breathable. On the way, I could already see marks of the resistance against RMGC, the Canadian mining company. Graffiti with inscriptions such as “Die, RMGC!” or “Save Roșia Montană” were present on the walls next to the road. After a few

good minutes of silence the driver started to ask me where I was from and what I was about to do in the area. I told him I was from Moldova (which is in the eastern part of Romania) and that I was doing some research for a school project in the area. “Moldova...hmm...” he mumbled. “And wouldn't you like to find a man from the area and settle down here?” he asked. I laughed. I said I needed to get back after a few months and that I couldn't possibly settle down there even if I wanted to. Then he told me that a lot can happen during a few months and that I would surely find someone there and settle down in the area since there were so many good men around there. I laughed again, but little did I know that this would be a question, or maybe I should rather say a suggestion that I would encounter very often during this research. I took it as a joke at the time. And perhaps it was a joke partially. But as I later came to see, humor was playing a very important part in the lives of the people in the area. And it often revealed rather serious issues. This particular one was pointing towards the eagerness of the locals to get more people to root themselves in that place and make it as lively and livable as it once used to be or at least to ameliorate the feeling of loneliness and marginalization that seemed to have taken over almost everyone in the area.

The driver then started to complain about the lack of jobs in the area. He was married, had three children and apart from his part time job, for which he had to commute to Alba Iulia, he was doing pirate taxi driving.

When I arrived at my host's place it was already dark. I met my host, Sorin, in front of his house, which was right in the old Center. Sorin has been part of the resistance from its beginnings. However, despite all the tensions existent within the community and having gone through conflicts with locals supporting the company, he has good relationships with many of the locals regardless of their position. I entered his yard through a big iron gate which made it impossible for anyone to look inside. The yard was in the back of the shop his wife owned and there was a group of volunteers who came for the marathon which was to take place the coming weekend. They were all watching a projection of the documentary “Vâlva Neagra”, which presented the conflict between the local resistance and the mining company, RMGC and some amateur videos on the same theme. I sat there and I watched the videos with them.

Afterwards, he took me to the flat where I would stay temporarily. The flat was situated in one of the very few tenement buildings in Roşia Montană, since most of the people lived in houses. He owned the flat, but it was mostly used by his son. It was the only flat in the block that

hadn't been sold to the company, he said. The water in the bathroom of the flat was heated with a boiler that worked on firewood. As he was preparing the wood for the boiler he mentioned how important it was to know how to light up a fire once one lives in Roșia Montană. “That's ok! I like to light up fires.” I said. “You do? That's good. This is one of the reasons why so many have left Roșia. They do not like to light up fires. They want to get everything solved by just pressing a button”, he replied. I came to hear the “pressing a button” reference many times from him afterwards. Though the reasons why so many people chose to leave were of course more complex than that, the expression did sum up, to some extent, the desire for comfort and the rather unrealistic consumer habits that some of the relocatees expressed in my interviews, months later.

## **II.2. The landscape and its people**

### **II.2.1. The surface landscape**

The landscape of Roșia Montană and its surrounding areas is a blend of the natural and the man-made. The most noticeable aspects are the mountains surrounding the village, which were mostly covered in forest, but also displayed visible traces of the mining past. The mountains were pierced here and there by the 2700, some even said 5000 years old mining history. The town is placed in a small mountains area, between the peaks Cetate, Cârnic, Jig-Vaidoaia and Orlea, which the company intended to turn into open pits. The old center of Roșia Montană is situated at about 700 meters above the sea level. A little bit further away one could see the highest peak in the area, Rotundu, (1187m), which was used by some for animals grazing and on top of which a weather station was placed.

One of the most significant attractions of Roșia, enjoyed by locals and tourists alike are the artificial lakes, which were created in the times before the industrialization of mining, in order to get enough water flow for the stamp mills. But it is impossible for one to tell that they are artificial, since they do not look any different from the natural ones. A blurry line between the natural and the man made is a characteristic of much of the landscape of Roșia Montană and other nearby mining areas.



*Roșia Montană, central area. Photo courtesy <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/lessons/gold-futures/rosia-montana-and-the-gold-mine/?p=4320>.*

I once sat in the car with one of my interviewees' son on the way back to Alba Iulia. As we drove out of Roșia Montană he started to talk about the surroundings. "Look at this!" he told me pointing to some hills which were rounder than the other geological formations in the area. He told me that all those were uncovered spots a few years earlier. The mining activity in the area was very intense at that time and parts of the place were dug up and turned upside down. He pointed to the fact that nature had recovered quickly and that now it doesn't even look like there used to be an intensive mining activity in the area. As we passed through Zlatna, another old mining town, about an hour's drive from Roșia Montană, he started to talk about the great number of people and jobs that were there around 20 years earlier; but that the price for all of this was the quality of the air around: "There were plenty of jobs here. And an indescribable pollution." he says almost laughing. Indeed, there were not many signs of the violent mining past in the landscape apart from the structures of the old and dying factories. Not visible from the road at least. The once disembowelled ground was covered with grazing land and bushes and I wouldn't have had any idea about how different the place used to be years before and how polluted the town of Zlatna was twenty years earlier, had I not been told about this. Then I realized that maybe this was one of the reasons why so many of the people in the area were so confident that even drastic changes in the landscape do not pose a real threat to their surroundings in the long run and why they do not feel that uncomfortable with having a huge



open mine pit in the neighbourhood; especially when the company has promised that their exploitation would be far more environmentally friendly than the previous ones.

### **II.2.2. Underground landscape**

The highly visible entrances into the mountain said nothing about the magnitude and complexity of the network inside them. The network expands underneath the town as well and some of the houses are said to hide a secret entrance to the mines. But the mines were feared by many and my desire to enter them was often met with disapproval. “The mine does not forgive you and neither does the mountain. So you must pay respect to them” one former miner said. The mines were seen as dangerous by many, since they haven't been maintained in a while. Some would warn against the possibility of stones falling from the ceiling, but not everyone agreed on the seriousness of such a danger. Some would venture in despite it being illegal. The main entrances inside the mines were sealed, but since there were holes everywhere, it was not difficult to get inside. Some trusted the solidity of the galleries like the walls of their own home. Aurel Sântimbrean, former engineer, now well in his 80's, who has spent most of his life working inside the galleries spoke rather enthusiastically about his work inside the mines and praised their level of safety, compared to that of coal mines which, as he said, “if entered, one does not know if he will ever come back”.

But almost everyone seemed to agree on the danger of dying by suffocation. Since the galleries have not been used in a while, the network was not ventilated properly. Thus one could hit a spot lacking in oxygen. The death coming in such situations was a swift one. “You won't be aware of what is going on. You won't notice the lack of oxygen. You will just lose your consciousness and then die” they explained to me. One will need to have a flame lamp, like in the old days. And if one sees that the flame starts to die out, one will have to run back as fast as possible.



*Roșia Montană's underground. Photo courtesy Ivan Rous<sup>7</sup>.*

One retired miner who has relocated to Recea claimed that when he goes back to visit Roșia Montană he sometimes enters the mine in order to remember the place where he used to work and to search for mine flowers. One would expect someone who has worked most of his adult life in an underground mine to be reluctant to entering one in his retired days, but that was not the case. And the elders were not the only ones who enjoyed taking a walk underground. Some of the younger locals discovered their passion for the underground landscape while working for the company during the preventive archaeology research project. The mines and their archaeological value were also one of the reasons why people were opposing the project, since they are believed to represent a unique heritage in the world. Among them, there were 7 kilometers of Roman galleries, but only a very small section of them was accessible for tourism. Some of the most prized mines are the ones inside the Orlea Massif. These are triangular mines and the heritage enthusiasts claim that they are unique in the world. “No one in the world has

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<sup>7</sup> [http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/imaginile-prezinta-lume-uluitoare-lacurile-pesterile-rosia-montana-marturii-vechi-secole-exploatarii-celui-mai-pretios-metal-1\\_557d4ff2cfbe376e35450680/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/imaginile-prezinta-lume-uluitoare-lacurile-pesterile-rosia-montana-marturii-vechi-secole-exploatarii-celui-mai-pretios-metal-1_557d4ff2cfbe376e35450680/index.html)

something like this. Spaniards at Medusa have around 100 km of Roman galleries, but they have a different method of exploitation. If you put on a counter the whole heritage in Roșia Montană, it is more valuable than its gold and all the other metals altogether and it has to be preserved”. But the more avid supporters of the company deny the importance of the mines, including the Roman ones. Andrei Jurca, the president of Pro Dreptatea (translation mine.: Pro Justice) – one of the NGO’s formed by the company, compared the attempt to preserve the heritage of Roșia Montană in the face of development to tripping on a stone. One former company employee, who seemed to be among its most faithful remaining supporters, claimed that all the talk about the Roman galleries is a lie, since the mines have been exploited so much over the past 2000 years and many new galleries, which have intersected with the Roman ones, have emerged, and therefore, the original gallery was rather fragmented. She added that it is not right to genuflect to what the Romans did and to how much gold they took away from Roșia Montană when the children living in Roșia these days do not have their own income and are often supported by the elderly's good pensions, pensions which have been obtained thanks to the mining jobs they once had. However, many of the people who have been inside the mines, regardless of their position towards the company, seemed to agree on their aesthetical value. Victor, one of the company's former employees likes to go inside the mine and he seems to be among those who most trust its safeness. He claimed that he found the mines to be impressive, but with no financial value for the town since it would take too much effort to make them accessible for tourism, an effort which the Romanian state most likely would not be willing to make; and therefore there would not be any point in stopping the company for their sake. The passivity of the state seemed to not only indiscriminately give way to private actors, but also to make these actors look like a solution to the state's flaws and inactions or rather, a necessary evil in such circumstances.

The underground landscape was unseen by most people and therefore it was full of mysteries and a source of controversies. The total length of the galleries was not known, but they are said to be over 100 km long. One of the controversies revolves around the minerals to be found in the underground and the concentration of these minerals. Former miners who are opposing the project claim that RMGC's main interest in Roșia Montană is not gold and silver, as it is officially stated, but other rare metals, such as wolfram, germanium or sulfur. As for the amounts of gold and silver to be exploited, it is believed that the numbers that RMGC came up with are far exaggerated and that the concentration is actually too small to really make the

exploitation profitable for the Romanian state. The interest in Roșia Montană's underground resources seems to differ even among those in the resistance. Some of them, particularly former miners, proudly state that at Roșia Montană, one can find the whole Mendeleev table and declare that the gold has to remain there for the future generations and be exploited only when one will have the necessary technology. "The gold is in the best bank, in the Earth's belly" they would say. Others do not even mention any interest in gold, but rather see mining as a thing of the past, that had to end up at some point. And they rather speak of the curse of gold or about how gold stole people's mind and made so many suffer in their search for it. One of the activists even stated that the real gold is the land with its agricultural potential and not at all the resources in the underground, but bemoaned the fact that the state's passivity discourages agriculture. People feared, respected, but also enjoyed and showed gratitude to the mines for the prosperity it has brought. "The mines offered work to many" they would say. Entering them was illegal and it was believed by some that sensors were placed inside it in order to detect any movement and those who were found there could be taken for gold thieves. The gold thieves were called *holongăr*.

Stealing gold from inside someone's mine was a centuries old activity, known to have taken place especially before 1948, when the mines were nationalized, but it was believed to have started again during the last years, since the activity inside the mine had stopped or maybe even earlier. Before 1948, many of the Roșians were mine owners. Back in those days *holongării* were skillful in finding out who had a mine that was rich in gold and thus was worth a visit in the middle of the night. Not all of those who were struck by the luck of finding plenty of gold in their mines were able to keep it to themselves. Not after a few glasses in the local pub at least. And this was exactly the reason why the gold thieves were there. Listening to the braggery of some lucky mine owner was an important part of their activity and after collecting all the needed information, the thieves would leave immediately, enter the mine and extract the gold. They knew the mine's network very well, so they were very difficult to catch. The rumors about the *holongări* having started their activity again were encouraged by the fact that some of the people who had a gallery passing under their house claimed to sometimes hear voices underneath their houses and one of my interviewees, who often enjoyed entering the mine, claimed to have met them. Also, in 2012 a young man was found dead in a mining shaft. His uncle had found him there and therefore, it was rumored that they were *holongări* and that his uncle, who used to be a miner himself years earlier, had sent him there after gold. Given the dangers of this activity,

called *holongărit*, I was wondering whether it was about more than just the exchange value of gold. It must, at least partially, have been about the excitement of finding gold and about the aesthetic value of it. After all, the older miners, when talking about their work, were also mentioning the importance of the satisfaction they felt when they found gold, even though they were not working at their own mine. The rumors about the *holongări* having started their activity again were confirmed some months after my arrival, when several individuals were arrested for stealing gold from the mine. The event made the news in the whole country and many felt sympathy for them and outrage towards the fact that such petty thieves have to face prison, while big ones, such as Gold Corporation or the Romanian state get away with murder.



*Roșia Montană's underground. Courtesy photo Ivan Rous<sup>8</sup>.*

Not all underground threats were of this world though. Ghost stories were also present in the underground landscape, though much more seldom mentioned and I met hardly anyone who believed in them, apart from those who claimed to have themselves experienced them. One

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<sup>8</sup> [http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/imaginile-prezinta-lume-uluitoare-lacurile-pestere-rosia-montana-marturii-vechi-secole-exploatarii-celui-mai-pretios-metal-1\\_557d4ff2cfbe376e35450680/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/locale/alba-iulia/imaginile-prezinta-lume-uluitoare-lacurile-pestere-rosia-montana-marturii-vechi-secole-exploatarii-celui-mai-pretios-metal-1_557d4ff2cfbe376e35450680/index.html)

gallery was said by some to be haunted since the ceiling had collapsed during 1930's, killing several miners. One old man recalled the moment when, in his early youth, while he was joining his father in the mine, at some point his father walked very quickly and nervously through one of the galleries, almost covering his eyes. Later, when his son asked him for the reason why he was in such a hurry, his father replied that once, while he was passing through that particular gallery, he could clearly hear noises of people and animals screaming, though no one was there. But the most commonly mentioned supernatural being was *vâlva*. *Vâlvele* (plural, det.) are spirits associated with mining and although almost no one believed in them anymore, most people, regardless of age, are familiar with their stories. *Vâlvele* would show themselves to the miners and they can be white and benevolent or black and malevolent. They often show themselves in human form, but they can also appear as dwarfs, cats, or dogs. The stories on these spirits carry a moral message with them most of the times. If one were to see the black *vâlva*, one would have to run away as fast as possible, avoid going inside the mine and be cautious of any danger during that day. The black *vâlva* was the one bringing misfortune and leading the miner to death. The white *vâlva* would show itself to those with a kind soul and it would help them find gold. But should the miner break the promises made to the *vâlva* or become greedy and selfish, as a result of his newly achieved wealth, he would be severely punished by the *vâlva*. But sometimes *vâlvele* seemed to be disguised as persons known to those they would show themselves to. One of my interviewees, a man in his 60's recalls the horror that one of his work mates once went through one day inside the mine. He was well known for being extremely violent towards his wife and that day, before going to work inside the mine, he had beaten his wife worse than ever before. Then inside the mine, he was working alone, when, suddenly he noticed a strong light behind him. He realized that the light couldn't have been produced by the lamp, since it was far too strong. Turning around, he saw the bright figure of his wife dressed up in her wedding dress. He then ran towards the exit as fast as he could. When he came outside, he slammed his helmet and his lamp against the wall and swore to never go inside the mine again. Gender-based violence was a recurrent theme in the stories about the past of Roșia Montană. As many would say, the pay day was the day when the miners would get most drunk and the day with the highest number of battered women. Although *vâlva* is specific to the underground landscape, I have also heard one such story that relates to an element of the outside landscape, namely Despîcîta (The Split Rock). The Split Rock is one of Roșia Montană's mysteries, since its geological

composition doesn't belong to the area and most of the legends explaining its presence in Roșia Montană revolve around giants carrying it from afar, but this one story, told by someone who relocated to Recea from Corna village, is about a man who was the poorest in Roșia Montană and was the father of 12 children. One day he met with a *vâlva* who showed him where to search for gold and in exchange, the *vâlva* asked him to bring one loaf of bread every time he would come to dig out for it. Also, he had to promise that he would not tell anyone about his encounter with the *vâlva*. He brought one loaf to the place showed by the *vâlva* every day and successfully found gold. His wife started to question him every day about where all the gold was coming from. One day, he finally gave in and told his wife about his encounter with the *vâlva* and the wife said she would make a bigger bread loaf for him to take for the next time he would go after gold. The man did so and when *vâlva* saw the bigger loaf of bread, it realized that the man did not keep his promise. At that moment, the bread loaf split in two, the man split in two and so did the rock. And the rock has been named The Split Rock ever since. It is unclear to me whether the moral message of this story is about the importance of keeping one's promise or about the consequences of one's greed and ungratefulness towards what he is already being given, but the caution against being ungrateful was noticeable in the discourse of several of the interviews taken in the newly built neighborhood in Recea, Alba Iulia. The old saying “The gift is taken away from the ungrateful” or other expressions with the same message were on the lips of some of those living in Recea, when asked whether they were happy with the payment they received in exchange for their properties in Roșia Montană.

### **II.2.3. Landscape–aesthetics and livability**

The perception of the landscape's aesthetics seemed to play its part in people's attitudes towards the mining project. The project implied knocking down the four mountains surrounding Roșia Montană and its supporters would sometimes defend it by saying that those weren't real mountains –they were more like hills due to their low altitude; even more, one of them had already been partially torn-apart as result of the state-mining exploitation that started in 1968 and they were all full of holes anyway. While some, both locals and outsiders, looked at those “holes” with excitement and offered it great historical significance, others described it as a flaw in the landscape or something to be dreaded. “If you go inside Cârnic Mountain and see what's

inside there you will get scared. It is full of holes!” I was once told by one of the former company employees who was still its avid supporter.

On the opposite side there are the people whose senses seem to be indulged by the landscape. Călin is one of them. He is the vice president of Alburnus Maior and one of the most outspoken members of the resistance. He knows the area well and often organizes outdoors events such as marathons or bicycle tours out of the desire to promote it. I have taken long hikes together with him through the mountains and neighboring villages. Most of my conversations with him took place during these hikes, which also gave me a good chance to see how he related himself to the places we were going through. On one of our tours through the mountains I asked Călin what he liked most about Roșia Montană. He answered that for him it was like a paradise, that the way he felt about the place could be compared to the way Norwegians feel about their fjords and praised the fact that the mountains around were so accessible. “I saw the Alps. I didn't like them at all. Probably for the locals they mean something... but those rocky peaks, without vegetation, without forests... maybe they're beautiful in the winter because you can ski nicely for hundreds of kilometers, but they don't awaken anything in me... The mountains here are much more accessible, you can walk around, go up and down, there's a lot you can do. You can go up to Cărnic, hike around a whole day, take pictures and you don't get bored... The Alps are bare... And not to mention the heritage! We drove 200 or 300 kilometers from Grenoble to the shit ville, at France's border to see a gallery in a silver mine that didn't have a quarter as a value of what we have here. It was from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Can you compare that with the 2000 year old mines we have here? Maybe even traces from 3000 years ago? Here, wherever you dig, you will find something.”

During another hike, while we were high up in the mountains he joyfully pointed to an area far away with small mountains covered in forest. “Look how fine those mountains are! See? They are so small, so forested and so habitable to humans! That area over there is very populated, there are many villages next to each other out there.” Călin's reflections on the landscape around Roșia Montană, like those of other locals as well, transcend the nature-culture dichotomy; they go far beyond the visual aspect of landscape and praises actually dwelling inside it. The small, accessible mountains with their gentle shapes were perceived to be a friendly home for both forests and humans and the two were not seen in opposition to each other. Their



appearance, characterized by coziness rather than spectacularity makes it easier for humans to have a more intimate relationship with them.



*A common view around Roșia Montană: pasture with Cărnic Mountain in the back (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

### **II.3. Mythical and contemporary giants and their landscapes**

As mentioned before, many of the legends of Roșia Montană's visible landscape revolve around giants. According to the mythology, giants have built the mountains for their shade, carried water in their palms and created the lakes so they can use them as mirrors while the giant children have created the landscape while playing with it.

The company was pretty much perceived as a giant itself. Being an international company with so much money and power to influence at so many levels, with so many politicians supporting it, it is not surprising that it managed to create this aura of omnipotence. “We are suspected because we managed to defy a colossus”, Sorin would often say when talking

about the accusations and suspicions that people directed against the company's opponents. When telling his story at FânFest, to a crowd of young people around the fire, he went further with the metaphor, comparing the struggle between the company and the resistance with the biblical fight between David and Goliath. This shows that not only supporters, but also the opponents of the company viewed it in grandiose terms. However, a couple of times I heard him saying: "Sometimes I think that it was us who made this company so big." Of course, here he was referring to the fact that, given the loud noise made by the opponents and their efforts to make themselves visible, the company automatically came into the spotlight as well. Like in many similar cases, the resistance had to make itself visible as much as possible in order to, basically, ensure that their place will continue to exist. The company became visible before the resistance due to the spectacle it created around it. The many adverts, present on almost every TV channel, talking about the project and its necessity in Roșia Montană made the company known country wide. The company managed indeed to put on quite a spectacle in the mass-media, but the most flamboyant spectacle started after the opposition took real action against them. That's when the company realized that their campaign had to be stronger, bigger, and more dramatic in order to not only win the hearts of the Roșians and of the Romanians in general, but also in order to make themselves look bigger and stronger than the opposition in the eyes of those who invested in the project on the stock exchange. Thus, the company managed to make itself look like more of a giant than it was, in reality. A giant that was ready to irreversibly change the physical landscape of Roșia Montană.

The myth of the landscape being shaped or created by giants is widely met in various parts of the world. Among most of the natives in Australia, for example, "the physical form of the earth is believed to have come into being through the actions of ancestral beings who traveled the earth from place to place leaving evidence of their actions in the form of topographical features." (Morphy 1995: 187).

And though in Roșia Montană the belief in such beings is not a common one, rumors about bones of the giants having been discovered back in the 1970s by the miners were spread through the media. However, the legends of giants creating the landscape feed into the narrative of outside agents modifying the landscape even more.

Denis Cosgrove has nicely underlined the relationship between myths and landscape and how they shape each other. "Myths may both shape and be shaped by landscapes, not only by

those localized and specific landscapes imaginatively constituted from human experiences in the material world and represented in spoken and written words, poetry, painting, theatre or film.” (Cogrove 1995: 282). Then he continues, raising the issue regarding human interaction with their landscape and the point to which this can take place: “The critical and enduring question concerns the bounds within human life and action on the earth's surface should be defined. Our capacity imaginatively to escape the bounds of landscape yet simultaneously to master natural processes and turn them to our ends here and now has always been fraught with moral ambiguity.”

This moral ambiguity was certainly dominating the discursive landscape of Roşia Montană. This ambiguity was created mostly because the project proposed by RMGC implied the creation of an open pit. Open pit mining redefined mining and gave it a new dimension. It was more convenient in terms of productivity and it seemed to pose less risk for the workers, although from people's stories this last aspect seemed to be rather relative. Though everyone seemed to agree that working at the open pit mine which started in the 1970s at Cetate was certainly less dangerous and necessitated less caution than working underground, they wouldn't say that it spared the worker's health. “After the (open pit) exploitation started, it all got damn ugly. There was so much dust that you couldn't see from one level to another. I worked 4 years on the drill. To hell with it! I didn't feel much inside the cabin. I didn't do much effort... but I was inhaling the dust. They would use water twice every summer, I think. It was nice when they were using water since this was stopping the dust, but this (use of water) was seldom. A mockery for one's health that was...” one of my informants said. The high number of people suffering from respiratory health issues and dying at an early age was a testimony of the harsh working conditions at the mine. But it brought into the equation other issues. Surface mining interferes more strongly with ecosystems and therefore it more significantly affects nature (here, for the sake of convenience, I am using the term *nature* as it is presented through the lens of the nature/culture dichotomy), but also other human activities such as agriculture or fishing. “Large-scale open-pit mining is harmful to the environment because of the large volume of earth that is displaced, the massive volume of waste that is produced, and the potential long-term environmental toxicity of mine waste” (DaRosa and Lyon 1997 as cited in Coumans 2011). I think one could say that mining companies in the present day are giants themselves since open pit mining is a gigantesque activity itself. The machines used during this activity, due to their

size and power reminds one of the mythical giants who could carry boulders from far away, build up mountains and create lakes. In the documentary “Un destin de Sisif” (translation mine. “A Sisyphian Destiny”) which was funded by the company and presumably proposed itself to confer a neutral view over modern mining, but presents it in a rather enthusiastic light, the protagonist of the documentary shows his excitement about such giants. Happy that he happened to be there exactly in the moment when such a colossal truck was being assembled, he described it with enthusiasm: “such a monster weighs 240 tons and can carry 150 tons... the engine is a V16. It has 2300 or 2400 horse power. It consumes 140 Liters of diesel fuel every hour... It is the biggest truck to have ever been built... I am so impressed by the modern technology and the size of the exploitation that I do not realize whether I am objective or not any longer. I promised that I would only be a witness, but it is hard for the scale not to lean on one side when you see something like that.” (Chișu, 2007) But the fact that such giants would be used for the exploitation at Roșia Montană did not make the opponents happy, it made them worry about the shock that the simple circulation of such huge machines might cause to the surroundings. Also, in this context, the idea that a protected area could exist and even be inhabited, sounded even more like a fairy tale: “*There won't be a stone over another stone in Roșia Montană any longer*”, they often said, worried. The so-called protected area was the area known as the old center and the company promised to preserve this area during their project due to its historical value. But the protection of the old centre wasn't even in the company's initial plan it seems; it was added afterwards in order to cool down the opposition and because many of those who didn't want to move lived in that area.

“When they made the project, in the beginning, there was no protected area (in the plan). Because there cannot be a protected area within a project of such an extent... in the first phase they asked those living on the outskirts to sell... Afterwards they came closer to the centre. And when they arrived in the old centre they stopped because there were pockets of people out there who did not want to leave from the very beginning. And who said that they would never leave. And then they invented this thing. Although initially it was not mentioned, they made an Area Town Planning which approaches the central area of the town as a protected area. Between 4 open pits there would be a protected area which, they said, they wouldn't demolish...” Călin scoffed.

The enthusiastic discourse about the dam's safety was not received well by the company's opponents either. The discourse was, as some of the opponents mentioned, “*all too superlative!*”, talking about the biggest exploitation in Europe, the safest dam in the world and so on. This discourse was meant to give an impression of professionalism, certainty and safety by making use of bombastic numbers and technical details, as one could see in these examples from the company's website:

The RMP's tailings management facility has been designed with increased safety and capacity to store extreme precipitations. Anywhere in the world, tailings management facilities are designed to store a single probable maximum precipitation (PMP); in the current project, the dam at Corna Valley may contain two consecutive probable maximum precipitations, while the probability for this to happen is 1 in 100 million years. This unusually large additional storage capacity, in addition to other design parameters of the Corna tailings management facility, make the dam system 100 times safer than most of the tailings dams in the world.<sup>9</sup>

The safety measures provided by the mining project exceed the applicable standards. The dam in Roşia Montană will be the safest mining dam in the world, designed so far. It will be built of sandstone and andesite – hard rocks – which will ensure its stability and make it withstand earthquakes of 8 degrees, which have never occurred in the area of the Apuseni Mountains. Moreover, the tailings facility will be located in a valley lined with clay, which is an unrivalled natural sealant.<sup>10</sup>

But the news about other mining disasters all over the world, such as the collapse of the mining dam of Minas Gerais in Brasil, in November 2015, which killed at least 10 people, left at least 500 homeless and polluted the entire area, did not encourage the opponents to have faith in such structures either. And besides that, an opponent who used to work as a topographer for the state mine refutes the fact that the valley is lined with clay.

With all its grandiosity and its risks involved, open pit mining seems like a perfect example of technological hubris.

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<sup>9</sup><http://en.rmgc.ro/Roşia-montana-project/frequently-asked-questions/tailing-facility-built-Roşia-montana-100-times-safer-usual-tailing-dam.html>

<sup>10</sup><http://en.rmgc.ro/media/how-safe-will-the-dam-in-Roşia-montana-be.html>

#### II.4. Natural magic, enchantment and extractivism

Cosgrove makes use of Greek mythology when he emphasizes the relationship between humans and landscape. Thus, he underlines the issue of the technological hubris by highlighting the character of Daedalus. “Daedalus: inventor, craftsman and crafty man. Daedalus is not an agriculturalist, he works with less labile aspects of the natural world so as to exploit its potential, but always risking the danger of forcing it into *unnatural* paths by seeking to contain it or to overcome the limits it imposes. This is what Renaissance thinkers would come to describe as *natural magic*, which is dependent upon the human understanding of inherent natural powers.” (Cosgrove 1995: 289). All his inventions, though ambitious and inquisitive, take a dark turn. The best example in this case is probably his most well-known invention – wings made out of wax and feathers which could make a human fly and which brought the death of his son, Icarus. Due to the fact that Icarus ignores his father's advice to not fly too close to the sun, the wings get damaged by the Sun's heat and Icarus falls into the sea and drowns. One could argue that it is not the invention itself, namely the wings, that got Icarus killed, but rather the fact that he ignored his father's advice. Either way, one can see the role played by the hubris of the human agency in this story. “The fate of Icarus serves to remind us of the hubris which attends human invention. The indeterminacy of our place in creation imposes limits not only upon human craft but upon our capacity to behave truly as gods, and the shadow of nemesis falls even on the greatest engineer and natural magician.” (Cosgrove 1995: 290)

The company's entire discourse seemed to tell a beautiful story of “natural magic” indeed. RMGC's world was a magically fluid one. Anything could go together with anything. The fact that my question “would you feel sorry if Roșia Montană was to disappear because of a project such as the one that was planned by RMGC?” was so often and in such a natural manner met with the answer “But it won't disappear! It can't disappear!” or the fact that the company's supporters seemed to be those paradoxical people who “would want the company to destroy the mountains in order for them to have jobs and in the same time they want the mountains to stay in place”, as someone has put it, were signs that these people believed in the company's “natural magic” powers. But if the company had any magic ability, that was the ability to enchant. The discourse was by all means enchanting. It was a hope-giving discourse, promising well-paid jobs, development, family unity, infrastructure, prosperity for the whole of Romania and of course, bringing back to the Roșians everything they had when their town was at its peak. The past was

longed for by the older Roşians and the invocation of the past was a big part of the company's discourse. "Roşia Montană exists due to mining and can only exist through mining." was the sentence I heard on the lips of almost every single supporter of the company. The company promised to save Roşia Montană, which for them meant making it livable, through surface mining, a process which in fact usually damages places and makes them unlivable or difficult to live in. The intensity of faith towards such a promise showed the level of enchantment in the community and the company's high level of mastery in this art. When I expressed my confusions to some of the opponents to the generic "but it won't disappear, it cannot disappear!" answer, they always brought into discussion the manipulation that so many had to cope with. One of the former workers described that every morning at work, the company's employees had to begin the day by listening to a speech about how much progress the company was making and how certain it was that the project will be able to start soon. This, even when it was clear that the company was losing ground massively. The more they were losing ground the more emphasis they were putting on creating an optimistic image about the future of their project.

Another reason why the locals were clinging so much to the idea that "Roşia Montană won't disappear" as a result of the project might be the fact that the company stated that "the mining project is only planned on 25% of the surface of Roşia Montană commune."<sup>11</sup> What is not mentioned in this context is the fact that 25% means in fact a lot for a commune consisting of 16 villages. Also, what is seen here as "the surface of Roşia Montană" obviously refers only to the inhabited area of Roşia Montană and does not include the natural surroundings.

Portraying the present landscape as polluted was also part of the enchantment. The four mountains that were supposed to be replaced by open pits are portrayed as "devastated by underground works and significantly affected by the pollution produced by the dumps" in a RMGC brochure even though the underground works were not visible, did not seem to affect any of the life at the surface and the dumps were covered up in vegetation already; or at least they used to be before the company started their exploration works.

People were told that the risk of danger regarding the dam was equal to zero and that the amount of cyanide to be found in the dam would be among the smallest in the world, less than the maximum safety limit that was required by the E.U.

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<sup>11</sup><http://en.rmgc.ro/media/what-is-the-truth-about-the-mono-industrial-area.html>

Very often the project's supporters would straight away start complaining about the fact that the company couldn't proceed with its plans without me even asking questions about it. Often just some small talk was enough for them to start presenting arguments or even go on a rant about the lack of feasibility of the alternatives to mining that were proposed by the activists and about how non-harmful cyanide was. And the arguments were always pretty much the same. They would mention Baia de Arieș, another mining place, 35 kilometers away from Roșia Montană and the fact that cyanide had been used there in the past and now the area was so clean that you could even go fishing out there. Then they would often add that cyanide is being used in 90 % of the gold mines in the world and that it can be found in everything, including coffee. The last argument was probably the one that stirred most of the reactions from the activists, since it was even mentioned by Traian Basescu at the time when he was still the president of Romania, in an attempt to cool down what he called "the cyanide psychosis".

One of the architects involved in the restoration of Roșia Montană's heritage once said that the main issue wasn't cyanide. It doesn't make a difference whether one exploits the gold with cyanide or with butter as long as the landscape gets destroyed. But "debunking" the "myths" about cyanide mining seemed indeed to be one of the main preoccupations in the pro-company discourse anyway, while there didn't seem to be much of a concern about the fact that the landscape would be completely changed. Mountains were not really mountains and if they were, flattening them down would still not be a problem, since Romania has plenty of them.

And still, the natural surroundings of Roșia Montană were enjoyed by many of the pro-mining locals for leisure activities, among them, fishing, swimming and 4 wheels driving. The most well-known location is Tăul Brazi, due to its accessibility, being positioned right at the edge of the town and only about 25 minutes walk from the old center. During the summer and early autumn, it was frequently visited by locals and tourists from the nearby towns who would spend their time there sunbathing, swimming or making barbeques, particularly in the weekends. But what to me seemed to be a lot of tourists for a rather small lake, for the locals were more like nothing. They were mourning the old times, especially the ones before 1989, when the number of tourists was much higher and plenty of touristic cabins were put up around the lake. And the company had promised to bring those times back.





*Tăul Brazi (Brazi Lake) during summer (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

“Extractivism contains an 'utopian' aspect” (Andreucci & Kallis 2017: 100, cf. Harvey 2005: 18) and this utopian aspect was fed by the company's image of futuristic redeemer. And those who spoke for the futuristic redeemer and spread its word had a seemingly contagious optimism and enthusiasm about the utopia and an adamant self-confidence. The best example in this sense is George, a young man who used to work within the public relations for RMGC and who also, as he proudly mentioned, used to be quite involved in the local political parties. According to his statement, the payment he received when working for the company was very generous. He told me that the company had some good chances to start the project and he was convinced that given the fact that this happens, he would get his position back. He enthusiastically talked about the thousands of people that would be employed if the project begins and was firmly convinced that the anti-company protests were manipulated by the owners of the wood factories in the area, who envisaged that their employees would leave their jobs for

the better paid mining jobs that the company would create. The far too common “cyanide is not dangerous and it can be found in everything” argument couldn't of course miss out from his discourse. The same applies to the excitement regarding the “donations” offered by the company to diverse institutions and which one would normally call bribe. He “cleared out” my confusion regarding the fact that the company so confidently started out with the relocation process, investing a lot of money into it before it got all the approvals for the project with a simple “to demonstrate that they were for real.”

George's skepticism towards the real intentions of the anti-company protesters and his certainty that their intentions were of a rather cynical nature was justified, simply because he himself would never do such a thing for free. “Those women who were protesting in Bucharest, in the rain... I do not see myself doing something like that...”

Since the interview was taken in Abrud, the town nearby Roșia Montană, I had to hitchhike back to Roșia Montană afterwards. I was picked up by a resident of Abrud town. We quickly started talking about the company and he immediately expressed a feeling of relief towards the fact that the project was not allowed to start. “It would have turned Abrud into a dead town” he said.

“Still, there are many who believed in the company” I told him.

“Yes, he answered, those who worked for them, since they were paid so well.”

This was a rather common argument and such an answer would immediately lead us to the idea of the agency of money. Money was often spoken of as if it had its own agency over people's minds, over who they chose to side with. But does money in itself really have agency over what people think and believe in? Does it really have that much of an ability to enchant? In the case of Roșia Montană it looks like money was the magic wand in this process of enchantment, in opening doors for the company and in creating for itself a particular image. This was the image of a charitable entity and for some, a reliable employer who paid well and towards whom they seemed to feel they had hopes still. But this was not everyone's story. The treatment was, it seems, highly preferential and depended on one's ability or willingness to navigate or perhaps better, dance the way the company sang. “Those who were harder to convince to sell, but did sell in the end, had problems with the houses in Recea. Either with the smoke stack or with dampness in the house...” said Ion, a local who worked a few years for the company. About the referendum in 2013 he said that no one was (really) for the company. The few people who

protested on the company's side were either promised jobs or, if they already had jobs within the company, threatened to lose them. When I told him that it is not often I meet someone who used to work for the company and who expresses negative thoughts about the company he said, artlessly: “How can they do this when they still have hopes (regarding the company)? And the company is still in business. Under a different name. I don't even know what they are doing at the moment. They say they are restoring. Restoring what...? It's all for the appearances...”. He stated that the company's workers were aware of the company's game, but they got into the game and pretended it was serious. “At the very top they had the people who could be manipulated.” He complained that those who, like himself, were “loud mouths”, complaining about the company's actions and refusing to play the game seriously did not have the same preferential treatment and they were paid minimum possible; he was outraged by the big salaries of those whose main job seemed to be to give away information about others. “There were people who received 4000 lei and who just sat around snitching on others... denigrating the old people who did not want to sell!”

From many other interviews and conversations, I could see that this activity of giving away information about others had a much broader purpose than getting people to sell their properties. It was also used to keep the image of the company as clean as possible. Even if it wasn't “all about the appearances”, as Ion said, it was certainly a lot about them. People who had some sort of deals or arrangements with the company were especially vulnerable. And most of the people seemed to have had some sort of deal with it in the past, when the company was more popular and had better prospects. Either they were employed by the company, getting some sort of benefits from the company such as firewood, or they were in a trial with the company over some disagreement regarding property issues. These deals were mostly unfinished, since the company was still present, though staying somewhere in the shadows and some of the locals hoped for its return and for getting their jobs back while others waited for it to be gone for good.

## **II.5. Development or nothing**

After one month in the field I had the chance to talk to A. M. The conversation we had gave me an insight regarding the company's forms of enchantment. I was very interested in talking to him, since he used to be the president of an NGO founded by RMGC.

When I told him that I would like to speak to him about Roșia Montană, he dramatically expressed his sadness regarding the situation in the town: “It's hard for me to talk about the situation in Roșia Montană at the moment because certain hopes that I had are not there anymore. The hope that this place would keep the profession it used to have for 2000 years is now withered. We have reached a moment where this place has no perspective. People here are confused. They do not have jobs, they do not have an income, the possibility to live here is very limited and then they go abroad.” A.M. often displays a rather conspicuous philanthropic attitude and portrays the company as a charitable entity. Not only once did he mention his worries towards the people of Roșia Montană, and the importance of helping those in need in a rather pitiful manner. He blamed the opponents for the fact that the NGO couldn't continue with its aid activities, which involved chopping wood for the elderly during the winter, clearing out the snow, bringing medicines to the elderly, since its sponsor, RMGC (Roșia Montană Gold Corporation), did not get the exploitation license. The idea of dependency of the company, so deeply ingrained among the people in Roșia Montană, was strongly present in his discourse and he portrayed the community as helpless without RMGC. “In my opinion, the fact that we didn't have the opportunity to keep working with these people (RMGC) was a very difficult thing because usually we were helped by this great... by Gold Corporation. And look! The people have now lost even this possibility to be helped.”

Mining culture was one of A. M.'s favorite subjects and he insisted that the mining project proposed by RMGC would have ensured its preservation. The fact that the type of mining that the company would have started was radically different from the type of mining that used to be practiced in the area regarding the methods, technology and scale didn't seem to bother him at all. “This is a place that for 2,000 years has created a culture – this culture, called the mining culture has to be continued. We cannot forget everything that used to be here and to cover over this culture. Many ethnic groups came to Roșia Montană. Apart from Romanians and Hungarians there were Germans, Czechs, French, Poles, Italians and all of these have contributed to this culture – the mining culture. It is more important to maintain this culture than to maintain a house or a street. The house gets damaged as the time passes by, but the culture remains. I have always been against the pollution of the mining culture. This pollution was done by the foreigners, by Stephanie Roth, the ‘great’ activist, the ‘great’ ecologist.” The shift of focus from the physical landscape to an intangible entity, such as what he calls “the mining” culture

obviously gives anyone permission to transform the physical landscape as one pleases to, as long as mining remains the main activity in the area. Also, panic regarding local culture, perceiving it as vulnerable contributes to the production of “the populist politics of fear” (Kalb 2013: 12), as well as “imagined enemies and excessive narcissism” (*ibid.*).

Indeed the discourse voiced by A.M. and by the other supporters of the project too, was one strongly marked by place-related narcissism. People would often talk about the Western European influences brought in Roșia Montană by the different ethnic groups, particularly the Austrians, over the centuries. These influences were considered a mark of elegance, class and high status. It is this status of the place that seems to be what many Roșians, including the A. M., were clinging on to, rather than the physical place in itself and its natural surroundings. Had the mine started, it would have been the biggest open cast mine in Europe and implicitly bring a lot of prestige and status to the place. The status of the place was often a recurrent theme, particularly when the locals would discuss neighboring villages and what makes Roșia Montană so special in comparison to them, and of course, this theme was used by the company to create an enchanting discourse of nostalgia around their project. The main activity of the people from the surrounding villages is agriculture and given that an exploitation of such proportions would begin, their activity would be affected, though the company's supporters deny this fact. But this has stirred dissatisfaction among some of the villagers from the surrounding areas. Eugen David, the president of Alburnus Maior, who has become an important part of the resistance's image, is from one of these villages, but has established himself in Roșia Montană, where he practices agriculture together with his wife, who owns land in this area. The fact that he is not originally from Roșia Montană, but has a say in the whole issue was heavily criticized by the company's supporters, even though his village was just nearby. One of the most insistent messages promoted by the company, country wide, was the fact that the locals should be the ones to decide their own fate. And they were certainly sticking to a very strict definition of localism. The fact that this localism was in the service of a multinational company is only one of the contradictions surrounding the case of Roșia Montană. A.M. complained about the activists who came from poorer parts of the country to “give lessons” to the Roșians. “They have no consideration, they dare come here from Moldova, from some place where they barely have anything to eat”. When I asked him what he liked the most about Roșia Montană, he said that he didn't like the situation anymore, bemoaning the fact that it was not the special place that it used to be in the old days –

an urban place of great significance regarding mining and due to mining. Expressing his nostalgia for Roșia Montană's old days: “From these elite places along the Arieș Valley, Roșia Montană has become a destroyed one.” A. M. pretty much summed up a lot of what I was going to encounter in conversations with locals from Roșia Montană: the nostalgia for a past that made Roșia Montană a special place, a place with a status above the ones surrounding it – “an island in the Apuseni Mountains”, as A. M. puts it, a hunger for development, the issue of the dependency on the company and the bemoaning of the fact that the landscape changed to the point where it just wasn't urban any longer. It was very hard for me to imagine the urban, crowded Roșia Montană that everyone was talking about, but for many of the Roșians, that was the real Roșia Montană, the one they were missing. And the present one, depopulated and lacking in employment opportunities was insignificant to them and not worth saving. People would sometimes make condescending and ironic remarks about the slogan “Save Roșia Montană”, created by those in the resistance by saying “They want to save what?” or they would sometimes angrily ask the outsider activists why they didn't come years earlier in order to stop the state mine from closing down. Roșia Montană HAD to be special, it HAD to be better than all the places around it, it HAD to be an emblem of development and work provider in order to be worthy of existence. The main theme seemed to be “Development or nothing!” When I asked A. M. if there is a particular place in Roșia Montană that he feels most connected to, he endearingly started to talk about the house he inherited from his grandparents, which he described as a refuge, a place where he created his own world. It was not uncommon to hear supporters of the mining project declare their attachment to Roșia Montană, but hearing them declare the attachment to the parental homes, which they had to sell to the company, sounded even more like a paradox. But A. M.'s house was situated in the so called “protected area”.

Among the company's supporters, one could find people with all sorts of degrees of attachment to Roșia Montană. From the “I don't care what happens to it! Fuck it!” type, to those who, like A. M. declared a deep attachment towards it and wanted to “save” it with the help of the company. Rationalizing one's own contradictory choices was doable. The company offered enough space for them to navigate.

A.M. spoke in long phrases which often ended up in a completely different place from where it started and I would often start wondering how in the world he managed to get there. I'm not sure whether he was trying too hard to integrate us in his reality or whether he just had the

tendency to get lost in his own words. For example, he once started talking about nationalism and how important being a nationalist was. For him, nationalism meant caring about the place where one was born, the places one loved as a child... and then one could draw a line and conclude whether one was happy or not in this world, whether it was worth anything that one was born or whether one was born only by chance. “Because not all of those who were born were wanted. Some were born just because it happened. I like to believe that I wasn't born only by chance. I like to believe that I was born out of a special relationship between a Romanian and an Austrian mother and I like to say to everybody that I embrace the Germanic culture.” How he managed to get from a discussion on nationalism to a long monologue on one's worthiness or unworthiness of existence and then finishing by declaring his pride for his German roots is rather perplexing. But the whole train of thought, again reflected a lot about the entire community, if not region or even country. One's worthiness was not something to be taken for granted. Ceaușescu's regime, with its emphasis on work and production has left behind not only an ecological mess in some parts of the region, such as the Roșia Poieni copper mine and the decapitation of the mountain Cetate, but also a mentality led by the “production” mantra and an idea of worthiness or deserving based on whether one produces (or at least appears to produce) or not. Just like the people, landscapes had to prove their worthiness and their productiveness. Productive people in a productive landscape! This seemed to be the rule. As for the Germanic origins pride, the Germanic/Austrian influences were in general considered to be an advantage for Transilvania in general and the reason why this region had a better economy in comparison to the other regions in the country, which had to deal with the “misfortune” of “less beneficial” cultural influences such as Turkish or Slavic.

In other words, places have their share of authority depending on how “developed” they are. And people's degree of authority depended on the places they were associated with. This place-related authority which was given much importance among the people in Roșia Montană was development centered and status centered – Roșia Montană, with its successful and eccentric past, wouldn't want to lower the bar in these regards after all; but it was also prone to double standards. Stephanie Roth, for example, was harshly criticized for meddling in the local problems and the fact that she was originally from a more “developed” country did not stop the company's supporters from questioning her credibility, but on the contrary, they concluded that, due to her origins, she did not have the ability to properly put herself in the shoes of the locals.

## **Chapter III**

### **Dwelling in a changing place**

In this chapter I am looking into how the locals interact directly with their changing surroundings. I am paying particular attention to the ways in which the place and the landscape of Roșia Montană has been transformed ever since the company arrived and how the locals' relationship with their surroundings has changed as a result of these transformations. One central aspect here is how the locals of Roșia Montană perceive these changes and try to adapt or cope with them, but also how those who relocated to Recea relate to their new surroundings. Since it seems like the whole case concerning Roșia Montană is characterized by duality to such an extent that I think we could even say it is a place of junction for several dualities, I am analyzing some of the aspects in this chapter through the lens of what I found to be, some of the most relevant dualities here: place/space, works/products, in the world/over the world and rural vs urban.

#### **III.1. From place back to space**

##### **III.1.1. The almost emptied place**

The common view is that space precedes place, the latter being the result of the first one (Casey 1996: 14). Space is often described in literature as “neutral, pre-given medium, *tabula rasa* onto which the particularities of culture and history came to be inscribed». This process of inscribing is perceived as the mechanism that gives birth to what we would usually call *place* (*ibid.*). In James F. Weiner's view, space is initially a “sheer physical terrain” that through human intervention becomes a place (Wiener 1991: 32). There are many disagreements regarding this distinction between place and space. However, for my approach over the space-place relationship in the context here, I find it more useful to relate to the distinction between the two as it is presented by Casey. But is the reverse possible? Is it possible for the place to (re)become a space? If so, then this seems to be the process that has started to unfold in Roșia Montană or at least in big parts of its territories under the actions of the company. After the relocation of most of its inhabitants, a big part of Roșia Montană was perceived more as a space rather than a place. Though I would argue against the rather anthropocentric idea that the lack of



inhabitants would turn a place into “sheer physical terrain”, this was an idea that many of the Roşians shared. When I asked one my informants, who relocated to Recea whether Roşia Montană had a value in itself, without the people, he answered: “No, people give value to a place. Places mean nothing without people. What would they mean without people? It is bad without people. What could (such a place) be then? A national monument where you go for pilgrimage only?”

Some of the locals in Roşia Montană seemed to perceive their town as important only in the context in which it could be inhabited and/or provide jobs and to view its landscape as valuable only as long as it could be seen by people, preferably tourists who could also contribute to the local economy. Also, much of the opposition’s discourse was focused on the idea that the landscape and heritage of Roşia Montană can be a source of income for the locals due to its touristic value.

This anthropocentric kind of discourse is rather common among the company's supporters, but the company's opponents as well, bemoan the fact that the town's human population had shrunk considerably over the last 10 years. When I asked the same informant to describe how Roşia Montană was during his childhood he, like many other locals, first of all, recalled enthusiastically how much more populated the town used to be: “It was a very different place; there were many people, many children, many families, families had many members and everything was crowded.” He is among the last people who decided to sell their properties and leave Roşia Montană. When I asked him why he took the decision to leave, he said: “It's because the place was so deserted at the time. You've seen how Roşia is now. It's deserted. All the friends, all the relatives had left. We were among the last to leave.”

Socializing was crucial for the Roşians. One of the most common places where people could spontaneously meet up in Roşia Montană was the local shop. In a small place such as Roşia Montană, chances would be high that upon entering the shop one would meet someone familiar and if not, one could have a chat with the shop assistant, usually about the local news or the old days. And if one was new to the place, a couple of visits to the shop would get not only the regular groceries, but very likely some new acquaintances as well. During the warmer season people would also sit for a chat and drink outside, on the benches in front of the shop or just by the side of the road. These encounters were often a medium for people to gather and discuss about just anything from other people's lives to politics and they were a good setting for

entertainment in the form of jokes, usually made at each other's expense. Banter and humor in general were a fun and cathartic way of keeping relations between people at a decent level.

Often, people would address serious, even painful issues in a humorous manner, which would turn the whole situation in a comedy show rather than an argument. The moment when an old woman made fun of the counselor for his ability to navigate through the deals and opportunities created by the coming of the company while accusing him of not having taught her to do the same is a good example of this. The old woman was having a chat with the neighbors at their regular chatting place, by the road, when the counselor appeared and stopped by. The lady moves her walking stick in the air and points it towards his new shiny car: "Look at this! You really knew how to make use of the situation! Why didn't you teach me how to do the same, how to take advantage of the company so I can get rich as well?" Her tone was half bickering, half jestful and the whole scene triggered the laughter of everyone present, including the counselor. Such spectacles were telling a lot about the conflicts and discontents existent in the community, but also about people's efforts to deal with them and save what was left of their relationships. The tragic and the funny were easily intertwined and humor was, at least to some extent, blurring the boundaries between people, opinions, choices and ameliorating the split between them.

### **III.1.2. Erasing a place's memories**

Turning a place into a space takes more than removing the people. People are not the only occupants of a space. However, the saying "Man sanctifies the place", so commonly used in Romania was sometimes on the lips of the people when I would ask them whether Roșia had a value even if depopulated. A place was less of a place without its people. This anthropocentric approach seemingly had a big influence in people's attitude towards the project. However, it would be unfair to entirely accuse the Roșians of being anthropocentric for their displeasure with the uninhabited Roșia Montană, but rather we should see that as a result of the fact that, as I mentioned in the beginning, this no longer looked like the place they knew. Most of the places that people had left behind no longer even looked like they had once been inhabited. Many of the houses had been levelled down and vegetation had taken over the spaces where their gardens used to be. People bemoaned this change and many claimed that the company turned it this way in order to make the place look like a wild, uninhabited terrain not belonging to anyone which can therefore be transformed in any manner: a space just waiting to be taken over.

By erasing the buildings, memories associated with them would eventually fade away. Memory is one of the important constituents of place. Casey talks about the place's tremendous power to gather both physical and non-physical elements, such as memories. "Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts. Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange, and much more besides. What else is capable of this massively diversified holding action? Certainly, not individual human subjects construed as sources of 'projection' or 'reproduction' – not even these subjects as they draw upon their bodily and perceptual powers. The power belongs to place itself, and it is a power of gathering" (Casey 1996: 25). But is this power still there after the place has been emptied out? Roșia Montană has over time attracted, like many gold mining towns, people from far away, from all over Romania, and from other European countries, bringing with them their culture and their memories. This gathering of diversity is what so many Roșians took pride in and missed the most. But the power that places exercise over people does not stop at simply bringing them together as a group. In fact, this aspect is not what Casey refers to when he talks about the places' ability to gather: "By gathering I do not mean merely amassing. To gather place wise is to have a particular hold on what is presented (as well as represented) in a given place... it is a holding together in a particular configuration, hence our sense of an ordered arrangement of things in a place even when those things are radically disparate and quite conflictual" (*ibid.*). The locals would often talk about such a hold when referring to Roșia Montană, as something of the past and something deeply longed for. "Roșia has held many over the time" was the sentence I would often hear when they talked about the town's history of gathering. And the fact that it managed to hold so many different elements and mix them together was proudly mentioned by the locals. According to Casey the hold of a place "retains the occupants of a place within its boundaries: if they were utterly to vanish and the place to be utterly empty, it would be no place at all but a void" (*ibid.*). And this void is exactly one of the things the locals feared the most, alongside joblessness and family separation. Indeed, after most of the population had left and many of the buildings were levelled down, Roșia Montană was pretty much perceived as a void by many of the Roșians. Many of those who moved seemed to have run away from this perceived void, which, as even many of the company's supporters agreed, was created by the company itself. Roșia Montană and Corna villages still had around 800 inhabitants, but this was very little comparing to the

population that used to live there just 15 years earlier. Hence, the place was perceived as a void when looked at in comparison to its past. Besides, the long distances between the remaining people and the almost complete lack of public transportation made it much harder for them to connect with each other on a spontaneous basis, apart from the small pockets of people living close to each other. Some of the buildings with most of the collective memories attached to them, such as the Cultural House in Corna, the Miner's Club and one of the main gathering places, called *Casina*, were left in ruins. So were most of the undemolished buildings that were bought by the company, though many of them were categorized as historical monuments. When people were talking about the miner's club or Corna culture house they would recall the parties that used to take place there; the dances, the music and the people they were meeting there. These were places where people would celebrate happy events such as weddings, school balls, Christmas parties or simply have youth gatherings in the weekends. Places where people would connect with each other and relations were made.



*Casina. Photo courtesy Alexandra Dodu<sup>12</sup>.*

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<sup>12</sup> <http://rosia-montana-cultural-foundation.com/heritage/>

Fun and solidarity seemed to be what characterized the relationships that everyone talked about in this context and what they missed the most. But once the hosts of such lively events, these places were now rather ghosts of what they used to be. Their ghostly appearance seemed to confirm the death of everything they once used to be. It was as if they could say it out loud: “Look! It's over! There's nothing left here.” All the degradation of these places represented the death of a central part of the Roşian's social lives and the degradation of the recipients of so many memories. The physical recipients of a place's memories are bridges between the past and the present and it strengthens one's connection to a place's history. As these recipients degrade, one's connection to the place's history and implicitly with the place in itself is weakened.

Some of the buildings in the old town centre, now owned by the company were restored and many pointed out that this was done just “for the sake of the facade, to show that they care”, especially since still, most of the heritage buildings were left to rot. The company blamed the lack of funds for neglecting these buildings and claimed that they can only be rehabilitated with the money resulting from the exploitation, even though the law states that owners of heritage buildings must preserve them.<sup>13</sup> Also, the opponents found the idea that such buildings could remain standing when having a huge mining operation in the vicinity to be laughable.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.htm?act\\_text?idt=28852](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm?act_text?idt=28852)



*One of Roșia Montană's neglected heritage buildings (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre). On most of the buildings now owned by RMGC, one can see the RMGC plate, with their logo and the message “Dezvoltare durabilă” (translation mine.: “Durable development”).*

Removing the inhabitants and levelling down the buildings were not the only things that the company did in their attempt to bring the village to the status of a void. Hiding significant archaeological material and focusing on, as some of the former archaeology workers said, “not finding anything of value” during their preventive archaeological research seemed to be part of the strategy of making the place ready to become a void. The recognition of archaeological sites and objects serve not only as pretexts for keeping place-intruding activities away, but also to preserve the places' memories. These thoughts and memories are often contained within physical objects, which serve as a medium between past and present.



*Another heritage house with the RMGC plate offering a short description of the house and stating: “The mining project also means the beginning of the rehabilitation programme for this historical monument house.” (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre, translation mine.).*

Houses in Roșia Montană, like many of the houses in Romania's rural area, are an embodiment of relationships and collective work. They embodied the family's history, the local history and even the country's history. In the past people would incorporate in the walls of their houses the roman votive artifacts they discovered while digging the ground, as a mark of prestige and connection with the place's ancient history.

These stones were though collected from the houses' castings and gathered in the “Mining museum” in Roșia Montană, which was opened in 1981. But incorporated inside the wall facing the Central Market of Sorin's family's house one could see a copy of such an artifact. The copy was embedded in the same place where the original used to be, in a highly visible spot, right next to the shop and just above the benches where people would often sit and drink

their beer during the warm season. It was a part of the landscape and it was a remembrance of the historical significance of the place.

### **III.2. Knowing and place transformation**

Philosopher Edward Casey highlights the importance of knowledge in one's relationship to the place one inhabits:

There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it. Knowledge of place is not, then, subsequent to perception – as Kant dogmatically assumed – but is ingredient in perception itself (...). Local knowledge is at one with lived experience if it is indeed true that this knowledge is of the localities in which the knowing subject lives. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.  
*(Casey 1996: 18).*

Knowing was indeed one of the themes found in the conversations with the locals of Roșia Montană. “Why and where would I live? Here I know every street, every stone and every leaf” was often the answer when they were asked how come they had not left yet. The knowing of the place often seemed to be the reason for not leaving. And contrary to what one's expectations might be, this was invoked by elderly and youngsters alike. Knowledge of the history of the town played an important role in the way the town was perceived and lived. What to the outsiders looked like houses in ruins were to the locals, particularly those who were enthusiastic about the local history and to the architects involved in restoring the local heritage, testimonies to Roșia's historical significance. Many of these houses had a story that the most knowledgeable would enthusiastically tell within the framework of the free tours they were guiding, during the Fan Fest period. But since much, if not the most significant part of the heritage was underground, in other words, invisible, the relationship to knowledge here was a bit more intricate. The lack of visibility and accessibility of this part of the heritage turned it into a shifting ground. Its degree of significance and the number of underground kilometres considered to have historical value were not agreed upon by those who were for and those who were against the company. It seems like the project's needs were deciding which part of the underground heritage was worth saving and which wasn't. “Surprisingly”, the galleries whose destruction was unavoidable for the project were insignificant.

Some of the most spectacular stretches of the galleries were only accessible with the use of special equipment and for some, exactly this lack of accessibility, in other words the



impossibility for the regular people to really be in these places and therefore really know them, was what made these places not worth saving. The mountain was looked upon as more worthy of existence if it (or 'he') more easily lets humans know its/his insights.

Roşia Montană's landscape had changed so much, especially for those leaving at the outskirts of the village, where most of the people had been "removed", that it was not the place they knew any longer. Or, not much of what they knew was left. Living locally meant something different from what it used to mean some while before. It now meant knowing new things. It meant living among far fewer people than one was used to, and in a much more rural landscape. The lack of people brought not only the knowing of loneliness, but also the knowing of new emotional landscapes such as that of fear, and the empty spaces, which once used to be inhabited, often spawned fear. Fear of the unknown, especially at night time, when the lack of light made the shift to the space status in some of the town areas look even more obvious. My respondents would often be worried about my safety when I was leaving their houses late in the evening and had to pass through such an area in order to get home. The lack of inhabitants made these areas be perceived as less safe and unpredictable and more inclined to host criminal incidents. I would think that the reason why this perception was so strong was in great part due to the fact that it contrasted so much to what these places looked like previously.

Changes were made into the physical landscape, both the human and the natural one. The natural landscape was affected by the drilling regardless of place or time. The company drilled for probes in rather unsuitable places and at unsuitable times. My interviewees were particularly bothered by the fact that this drilling often took place at random times – in the night, at 02:00 o'clock, on Sundays right through the church service and during the holidays. They saw this as an aggressive act on behalf of the company of taking over the place, making it their own; an ostensive attempt at marking their territory and invitation for inhabitants to evacuate. This was affecting the place both visually and auditorily. One of my interviewees talked about how domineering he perceived the atmosphere created by the company to be and about how much he had to argue with them in order to make them stop drilling near his dying father's house. "There were plenty of drills; there was activity all over the place. They were more numerous than us. They were dominating us. There were only RMGC jeeps. ... The drill was only 40 meters away from my father's house. He was sick and dying. I argued with them for 2 weeks until I made them quit drilling and then they went drilling in a neighbour's yard."

The most visible slope from the Cărnic Mountain that could be clearly seen from the centre of the town was one of the points where the state company had done its exploration surveys after it came under RMGC. This process has created sterile looking batters on the middle of the slope.

According to Călin this exploration was also done without having the approvals required in such a process. Needless to say, the ostentatious visibility of this procedure had made the company look like it gained more ground than it actually did. Also, by changing the place, both in its physical and its social aspects, the company was, among many other things, an initiator. It initiated the people by teaching something new to them, it changed their emotional landscape by transforming the physical and social one.

Many, including even the company's supporters, declared that the company had stirred a lot of hatred among people. Some of the opponents even told me that they never felt hatred before the arrival of the company. Călin talked about the fears they were acquainted with after the company's arrival: "they cultivated some fears in us: the fear of ridicule, the fear that you might involuntarily harm someone, the fear of an inevitable death... I never felt them before." It only makes sense to ask ourselves to what extent this initiation has affected the ways in which the inhabitants came to perceive their place. Perceptions are affected by institutions and social practices (Casey 1996: 19). But Roşians were affected both from the direction of the perceived/sensed and the perceiver. Both the outer and the inner world of the Roşians were challenged and transformed by the social practices of the company. Constantin, a young man, who in his wish to get away from the big city life moved from Bucharest to Roşia Montană said: "Do you know what is the miracle here? People here were forced to ask themselves 1000 times more questions (in comparison to others). Simple people, with an anonymous life trajectory all of sudden started asking themselves ... what is life? Who wants this gold? A corporation? What is a corporation? Lots of questions appear... A dynamite of questions was thrown here. So many questions were raised here. And if they didn't voice these questions themselves others would come and ask them to answer instead. People became educated overnight. The devil came and educated them."

People became educated in dealing with a new dimension in their place, namely the global dimension and exactly this dimension, with its gigantesqueness is what the locals were feeling most intimidated and confused by. Extreme confusion impedes action, clutters one's mind

and it can be disconnecting. People were confused by both this global dimension and by their now almost empty place, which seemed to be shrinking under the influence of the former. In other words, they were feeling more and more out of place, while hanging in an abstract space. This space has stirred many fears among the people. Some of them well grounded in reality, others rather far off from it. But this latter aspect might be the most relevant one in unfolding the extent to which the people were taken by surprised by the space of neoliberal globalization. It is not commonly agreed on what globalization means. (Cooper 2001: 193). Globalization is often mistaken for being a homogenizing force. A much more accurate statement is that “globalisation reconfigures the local” (*ibid.*). And when the local is reconfigured, the locals are put in the situation of having to learn new things about the place they dwell and are exposed to new ways of relating to it.

### **III.3. Ways of interacting with the surroundings: “In the world” vs. “Over the world”**

The term “globalisation” sends our thoughts to the global perspective that modern thinking holds regarding the world. Ingold criticizes this perspective and puts it in opposition to the local perspective, where the world is seen more as a sphere, rather than a globe. By viewing the world as a sphere, one places human being inside it, inside the world; in other words, human being lives in the world, acts in the world and it is part of it, instead of living on the world and acting over it, as it is implied in the global perspective. “The life world, imagined from an experiential centre, is spherical in form, whereas a world divorced from life, that is yet complete in itself, is imagined in the form of a globe. Thus, the movement from spherical to global imagery is also one in which 'the world', as we are thought it exists, is drawn even further from the matrix of our lived experiences” (Ingold 2000: 211). This global perspective sees the world more as a commodity for humans to use and live on. It shows us a unidimensional relationship, portraying the world as a passive surface, and the humans as being active, exercising agency over it. This agency is seen as the human's implicit right.

Though Ingold posits the “local perspective” in opposition to this, I consider that we should be careful when we talk about “local” perspective in general terms, since this “local” comprises an overwhelming diversity. But I will use this expression in the present context since we can all agree that across the world we find plenty of examples that show how the local perspective is closer to the idea of the world as a sphere rather than a world as a globe. In these

local perspectives, the surroundings that human being lives in are not just passive, inert surfaces under the actions of man, but in fact, they, themselves have agency and are often attributed human-like properties. For example, in the Andes, surroundings are considered to have agency and feelings just like humans do. Out there, “...landscape is not simply understood as constructed by human agents and as passively acted upon; people in the Andes see themselves as influenced by their surroundings.” (Ødegaard 2011: 340).

In Roșia Montană this non-human agency was attributed mostly to gold and, back in the time when people still believed in them, to the *valve* (plural) – the spirits associated with it. But some even attributed the fact that Roșia Montană couldn't be exploited by RMGC to the place in itself, which could be seen in expressions such as “Roșia Montană doesn't allow itself to be conquered so easily.” One very old miner even attributed the fall of the communist dictatorship to the fact that they destroyed the cross standing over what Roșians called “The Sphinx” or “Calut” – a stone formation standing at the top of the Cârnic Mountain, looking somewhat like a human's profile and visible from the centre of the town. “There was a cross on the Calut and the superstition was that he who would destroy it shall perish. The cross was destroyed by the communists and the communists have perished. Now there is another cross there. And he who will destroy it shall perish.” Some even called the Sphinx the guardian of the Cârnic Mountain and claimed that no one will be able to tear down the mountain as long as the Sphinx is still in place.



*The “Sphinx” and the cross on the top of Cârnic Mountain. Photo courtesy <http://casapetrirosiamontana.ro/ro/trails/carnic>*

In the local cosmology of Roșia Montană gold triggered a rather wide range of feelings – joy and hope for prosperity, but also respect and fear. It was like an ambiguous entity. It was either beneficial or negative towards the humans, depending on circumstances, mostly on one's inner place. Thus, the inner place and the outer place were tied closely together in the local cosmology. They were both just as real and active towards each other. We can say that the man was IN the world and the world was IN the man. But these local perspectives were losing ground and the inner place was missing from the global perspective. Now the gold was nothing more than a resource that could be valued only if taken out of the ground and whose exploitation would bring prosperity regardless of the circumstances.

The local perspective idea of gold having agency didn't completely vanish though. But now, gold's agency was suddenly not so ambiguous any longer. Instead, it seemed to have remained solely in its negative aspect. Its positive aspects had long vanished. People would often talk about the curse of the gold and about its ability to take away the minds of the people when

trying to explain the frenzy of the company's supporters and the risks that the gold thieves took inside the unsafe galleries in order to find the precious metal. The “curse of the resource” is a rather common concept, found in many parts of the world where communities are confronted with the complex difficulties stirred by the extraction industry (see Sachs and Warner 2001).

One of the works dealing with this concept and which describes a case that has many similarities with the situation in Roșia Montană is “Unearthing conflict”, by Fabiana Li – an anthropological work concerned with the struggles caused by gold extraction in Peru. Fabiana Li underlines the existence of the discourse of the “resource curse” and the one of the “beggar sitting on a bench of gold” (Li 2015: 13). Many similarities to the case in Peru, concerning the discourse, were found in the case of Roșia Montană. For example, the mining opponents would often mention the “curse of gold”, while the pro-mining discourse would often contain the well-known old saying: “Our mountains bear gold, we beg from door to door.” Just like in the case of Peru, this discourse of the begging resource rich country have been used in the past in the context of the foreign oppression which resulted in the alienation of many of the country's resources, but nowadays, in the mining context, it was mostly used in order to scapegoat those who stood in the way of the exploitation, making them responsible for the fact that so many Romanians had to leave the country and “beg” for jobs or plainly beg for money on the streets in the Western European countries while the gold remained in the ground instead of being capitalized on.

These “in the world” vs. “over the world” views are also reflected in the types of mining that were practiced in Roșia Montană. Underground mining can be seen as an analogy to living in the world as in the sphere approach, while open pit mining can be seen as an analogy to the act of living on the world, as seen in the global perspective. Open pit mining was more dependant on technology. Technology is usually seen as a means to “rationally” exercise domination over nature (Pfaffenberger 1988: 237). Though one could argue regarding the extent to which this affirmation can be generalized, it is without a doubt, relevant in the case of surface mining. The technology used in open pit mining has such an effect over the surroundings that we can say nothing is left undominated. Here I would like to highlight the statement made by Ellul (1962), who asserts that “modern technology becomes an autonomous force” (Pfaffenberger 1988: 239) because its demands for “efficacy and profitability” comes at the expense of other regulations, such as work safety, worker’s health, aesthetics and environmental protection (Pfaffenberger 1988: 239). But in order to avoid the trap of fetishizing technology (See Pfaffenberger 1988:

242), I would like to add one correction: modern technology becomes an autonomous force because OUR demands for “efficacy and profitability”, which take an ideological form, come at the expense of other values, which are often seen as just standing in the way.

In contrast, the underground workers were literally working inside the world and relying more on their own brains rather than on technology. This work was damaging the landscape to a far less extent in comparison to surface mining. The relationship one had with his surroundings when working in such conditions was a much more intimate one. Inside the Earth's belly one did not behave in the same manner as one did when working at the surface.

Though the miners were not religious when outside the mine, once they arrived at the entrance of the mine the situation was different. Up until 1948, miners would recite the Lord's Prayer before entering the mine. The excitement about finding native gold was great also for its aesthetical qualities. Native gold could be found in different shapes, from what the elders would say, usually as a leaf, a lizard or a snake. This excitement about finding gold is not much present in industrial mining. Here most of the work is done by machines, which makes the relationship between workers and gold a much more impersonal one. The underground work was of a more intimate nature. Man worked with the Earth's elements without the mediation of a lot of technology, right from inside the Earth's belly.

#### **III.4. Recea – place making within “repetitious spaces”**

The streets in Recea, the relocation place, were empty almost all the time, as were the yards and gardens around the houses – apart from in the evenings. It was late autumn when I did my fieldwork there, so the people were meticulously cleaning up their gardens and burning the dead leaves. Close to my neighborhood's entrance there was a house whose garden was more spacious than most of the other ones. It had several small fruit trees and a few hens were running around all the time. The owner, a man in his mid-sixties, was often standing in the garden just watching the chicken. He seemed always cheerful and up for some small talk. Later, when I came back to Roșia Montană I realized that people talked about him as someone who is very well informed about everything that moves in Recea. “He knows everything that happens there. He knows who comes into Recea and who leaves it” they would say laughing. Most of the gardens were well looked after and they were surrounded by iron fences with remote controlled gates. When I realized this, the talk about the button that Sorin brought into discussion in the first

day I arrived in Roșia Montană came into my mind, especially since having a remote controlled gate is not a common thing in Romania. In the middle of the neighborhood there was a green space where the company had promised to build a playground for children. The playground was never built up and in the middle of the green space there was a grass mower similar to those that were so common in the landscape around Roșia Montană, but certainly not something you normally see in a residential area just outside a town of 60 000 people.



*Recea (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

The spaces where people would normally gather for the main purpose of socializing, such as pubs, cafes or shops were absent in the neighborhood. People said that there used to be a shop there, but the owner had to close it down because everyone would go to the big supermarkets in the city instead. The availability of these spaces out in the city and their unavailability in the neighborhood has, it seems, led to a dispersion of the social space. So now the only place that seemed to serve the purpose of socialization in Recea was a bench placed in front of one of the



houses that was right on the first street of the neighborhood, where men would sometimes meet in the evening for chatting. “Only men gather out there. I do not go there. I would feel embarrassed to be there alone, among men only. They probably discuss politics and they surely gossip about everybody in the neighborhood as well,” said one of the women I interviewed in the neighborhood. People were often going out in the town center and during my walk through town I would sometimes see them wearing hats with the company's logo – “GOLD”, similar to the hats that the company's employees from Roșia Montană were wearing, thus making the company's name present in Alba Iulia's landscape.

There wasn't much excitement among the Receans regarding their new place. Many of the people who moved there claimed that their financial situation was the same or worse than it was when they lived in Roșia Montană, but what they considered to be of significant importance was the fact that they had more comfort, easier access to the hospital, having more shops to choose from and the fact that they could move more freely, using public transport. One of my respondents even said that infrastructure is like blood in the veins.

In opposition to the houses in Roșia Montană, those in Recea were more products rather than works. I find the contribution of the philosopher Lefebvre to be particularly useful in making the distinction between “works” and “products” in this context: “...whereas *work* has something irreplaceable and unique about it, a product can be reproduced exactly and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures.” (Lefebvre 1994: 70). *Repetitive* is an appropriate word to use when referring to Recea, particularly when one tries to compare it to Roșia Montană. The neighborhood has around 125 houses and the relocatees could choose between 8 standard house projects. Standard houses, all having pretty much the same color – all of them were orange, apart from the very few newest ones, which were gray. The residence looked pretty much like any other of the newly built suburban areas built in Romania after 1990. The houses were made by construction companies and not by the people who inhabited them. And it seems like at least some of the inhabitants were not allowed to see the houses during their construction, which has not only given the people less of a say regarding the way their houses would be built, but also increased the level of disconnection between the inhabitants and their inhabited place, thus making the relationship between the two even less intimate. Recea had the qualities of what Lefebvre calls a “repetitious space”. “Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures, (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to

duplicate: machines, bulldozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills and so on” (Lefebvre 1991: 75). Lefebvre calls such spaces “a product *stricto sensu*” (*ibid*).



*Recea (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

When we think of something that is “purely” a product, we usually think of a strictly economical thing, very impersonal, usually made passionlessly, sacrificing many of the aspects one would usually take into account in the process of creation, for the sake of “time-efficiency” or “cost-efficiency” – two of the imperatives of the mass-producing society. And too often, due to these sacrifices, quantity prevails over quality and the products fail the test of time much easier. These sacrificed aspects were underlined by Augustin, one of the people still living in Roşia Montană, but who had relatives living in Recea. He blamed the low quality of the houses built out there and the low quality of many other houses being built in the present day as well, on the fact that people ignored certain rules regarding nature's cycles. “Before, they would cut down

the trees for construction wood in the winter, on full moon.”

“In December! The wood is more enduring at that time. And they sacrificed the pigs in December too, when the moon was on the wane. But now they cut everything when it suits them,” added his mother, who was next to us.

“They would cut down the wood and they would leave it to dry from one year to another. They wouldn't use it right away. Now they just cut it down and use it straight away. That's why constructions don't last. They mould, they rot and that's it!” said Daniel. He blames it all on greed, money and speed.

People were complaining that the houses were poorly built, made out of cheap materials and that this was the reason why they were not allowed to be there during their construction. Whether this last aspect is true or not, it shows how upset people were by the fact that they did not have much agency regarding building their own house and how little they trusted the company. This lack of agency over building one's own house also minimizes the intimacy one has with the house one inhabits – “When we build our houses, our tools, our edifices, we condense all of our world movements into a microcosm.” (Weiner 1991: 182). But this was only one of the aspects we can mention regarding the loss of intimacy that the Receans may experience. Leaving their initial house was experienced by at least some as an act of loss and disconnection. The experience of disconnection from one's original home was nicely highlighted by Bachelard “...houses that were lost forever continue to live in us; (that) they insist in us in order to live again, as though they expected us to give them a supplement of living. How much better we should live in the old house today!” (Bachelard 1994: 56). Another aspect highlighted by Bachelard concerning one's relationship with his home is the loss of intimacy that comes once one moves to a big city: “...a house in a big city lacks cosmicity. For here, where the houses are no longer set in natural surroundings, the relationship between house and space becomes an artificial one. Everything about it is mechanical and, on every side, intimate living flees” (Bachelard 27: 1994). Alba Iulia is not a big city, and Recea was situated at its periphery, away from the city noise, but still the difference between it and Roşia Montană in regards to the richness of the natural surroundings was striking.

But what made a real difference in Recea and gave it an aesthetical value were the gardens. They were obviously not products, but works. Most people invested time in them and took care of every bit of space they had. Though Recea was, often ironically, referred to as some

sort of “American style” neighborhood, by which they more particularly meant a typical middle class American neighborhood, there was hardly any bare grass lawn to be seen in the neighborhood. The gardens had both a practical and an aesthetic purpose though they were certainly not limited to that. Receans planted trees, vegetables, grape vines, flowers, rose bushes and they were happy when their gardens came to fruition. But beyond that, the gardens seemed to give Receans the opportunity to exercise some agency over their surroundings. Appadurai places the activity of working with gardens among the “techniques for the *spatial* production of locality” (Appadurai 1995: 205). Drawing on several anthropological works (Lewis 1986; Munn 1986; Schieffelin 1985), Appadurai shows us that “space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action” (Appadurai 1995: 206). Gardening seemed to be the main action that socialized and localized Recea, at least at the time when I lived there. But I would like to add that it wasn’t just the space itself that was localized, socialized and thus transformed in a place through gardening. The people themselves were socialized and localized through this activity. As Christopher Tilley has put it, “Ostensibly, gardening is all about cultivating plants. At a much deeper level, I want to suggest, it is actually about cultivating the soul through cultivating the earth. Through the expressive medium of the human body itself, through utilizing and exploring its entire range of sensory and perceptive capacities, gardening as a craft and as a productive activity, is a primary way of redressing the existential alienation inevitably produced in a culture of mass production and mass consumption.” (Tilley 2006: 313). Tilley here highlights the tight relationship between gardening and the senses. He shows how gardening helps one experience human intimacy, bolstering one's wellbeing and helping one cope with the impersonality of the day to day lives of so many (Tilley 2006: 329). I would even say that gardening can help (re)humanizing people.

Receans seemed to be confronting themselves with the realities of a rather impersonal life and often people there would complain about the lack of connection between people. Though they all chose to move to the same place, the wounds caused by the conflicts stirred by the company were still there, affecting the present relationships between people. Apart from helping people experience intimacy, gardening also connects one to one's environment since it is a way of being in the environment, of creating an active relationship to it.

But for some, especially elders from the Corna village, the space provided by these gardens was far too small. Corna was a place where the focus on agriculture, but even much

more, livestock activities, was stronger than in Roșia Montană and the gardens in Recea were far too small in comparison to the vast space they used to have and they were certainly not suitable for cattle rearing or other big animals either. Elders who were used to having this as their main activity in their lives and enjoyed it were not happy about the situation, but tried to make the most out of the little gardens they had.

### **III.5. Agriculture and livestock practices in Roșia Montană**

Asking a lady in her 50's, still residing in Corna about the reason why she did not sell the property and moved to the city like most of her neighbors did, she answered that she was not happy with the money she was offered in return. “The offers they came with were not that impressive really. And it all depended on how each person negotiated”. At a first glance one could easily be misled into thinking that her motivation for not having sold her property to RMGC was purely financial, but later she added: “One can go insane from something like that. Where else will you find the freedom you have here and so much space to raise the animals? There were people living in flats who died because of diabetes. Man has to be active. Here you can be active with the animals. They do not have a fixed schedule.” After taking several aspects into consideration, she did not find the amount she was offered to be worth selling her property and leaving Corna. She talked about how much she liked to work with animals, regardless of the weather and the fact that they ensure one's food supply. But she complained that few people nowadays are willing to work with animals and she claimed that those who moved to Recea were those who didn't really like to work much. Livestock activities and agriculture in general was now part of some of the Roșians' lives. As part of the discussions on agriculture, people talked about the climate change and environmental issues in the area. The instability of the weather brought about by the climate change during the last few years was interfering with those practicing agriculture. The year when I did my fieldwork fruits were abundant in Roșia Montană. The fruit trees in the abandoned gardens, most of them consisting of apple trees and plum trees were pretty much full. But the locals were complaining that that particular year was an exception. When I visited the field site briefly the following autumn, in 2016, the locals complained about the fact that they got hardly any fruits that year. One of the main factors affecting the fruit productions was, as the locals put it, the fluctuations in the weather. “It is warm in March and April, but then the cold comes again in June and the flowers freeze. in the

past, summer was summer and winter was winter. Now we do not know what (season) there is anymore... sometimes it's so warm in the winter that you can go out dressed up in a T-shirt only", said one of my interviewees. Several people were telling me with surprise about how unusually hot February was the year of 2015. So warm that one could, indeed, walk around dressed only in a T-shirt. "The summer now comes immediately after winter" some said.

People were not concerned with the instability of the seasons only, but also with the big temperature differences between day and night during the summer time. "Now in the summer it's too hot during the day and too cold during the night. It's like in a desert..." People were complaining about the weather being too hot that summer, though the temperature would seldom reach 30 degrees C. Coming from a low hills area, where the temperatures were easily reaching 40 degrees, I was more than happy to spend the summer in Roșia Montană, where, by comparison, the weather was cool and pleasant. But for the Roșians, 30 degrees was more than what they were used to.

The weather was not the only factor influencing how many fruits the Roșians would have. Many have observed that immediately after the Roșia Poieni copper mine exploitation, situated only about 5 km away, has started in the 70s, gardens were affected, since many of the plants and trees stopped bearing fruits or they would simply dry up. But as the mine's activity decreased over the time, the vegetation slowly went back to normal.

The fruits were mainly used for making *vinars* or *palinka*, a very strong and popular drink, which they would often sell afterwards on the black market. The fruit trees, left behind by the relocatees of Roșia Montană were sometimes also object of dispute. Since they did not belong to any of the actual residents, people would sometimes quarrel over their fruits. Not only the trees, but also the land on which they stood was reason for dispute at times.

One issue concerning livestock was the fact that cattle were often grazing the properties that used to belong to those who left and that were now in the custody of RMGC. Some were complaining about the cattle ruining their fences and getting into their gardens, others would reproach those who were against the company about the fact that they grazed their cattle on the properties that now belonged to the company itself. Normally the place destined for the purpose of cattle grazing is an open area, called Islaz, situated uphill from Roșia Montană, close to the Rotundu mountain top. However, many preferred the lands that once belonged to their now relocated neighbors for grazing, since they were closer to their homes, richer in vegetation and

Islaz hasn't been maintained in a while by the passive authorities. The cows were most of the times left loose and they would make their way back home in the evening. They could often be seen even grazing the grass in the town center, to the exasperation of those who did not want the place to turn completely rural.



*Islaz area (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

Another issue raised by the activity of keeping livestock was the fact that, as many locals say, Roşians were not used to do this sort of work as a main activity. At least not those from the central area. *Laturenii*, as those living at the outskirts were called, usually owned more space and were traditionally more used to taking care of livestock and keeping gardens, while those living in the center were historically more focused on mining. But both people who appreciated agriculture and those who didn't, acknowledged the hardships of this activity and blamed the state for making it so. One interviewee even said: "The hardest life is the life of the Romanian peasant, not that of the Romanian miner". People were not pleased with the system of

subventions given by the state and the European Union; they complained about the conditions they had to obey and the bureaucracy they had to put up with.

But the main difficulty when it came to living off livestock was probably the middlemen – *the speculators*, as people called them – bringing the cattle price down at the animal fairs, so people preferred to sell the meat per kilo instead, inside the community. Similar problems were encountered by those who tried to sell milk to dairies processors. Many of them have been cheated by dairies processors and have completely lost their trust in them (*see Pascaru 2007*). One of my hosts, who also owned cattle, even claimed: “the animals are now holding Roşia together”, by which she meant the great extent to which cattle are being relied on economically, but she was complaining that the middlemen have worsened the situation quite a lot lately: “They're all hand in hand to keep the price down”, she said.

### **III.6. Air and water**

Recea is mainly flat and the Mureş river is only about one kilometer away. The river was seemingly responsible for the thick fog, which sometimes turned into smog, covering the neighborhood and, depending on the wind directions, Receans would often get the smell coming from the nearby chicken farm as well. Hence air was one of the main factors of complaint for the Receans; alongside with water. “Air and water” was often the answer given when one would ask the inhabitants of Recea to mention what they missed the most about their native place, namely Roşia Montană. People found it difficult to get used to the tap water and paying for bottled water was an expense they were not used to. But more so, they were not used to paying for water they were not using. The fact that they had to pay monthly for the pluvial water was an outrage for them.

Many had water from springs or fountains during their stay in Roşia Montană, so they did not have to pay for it. And those who were connected to the water network had to pay little due to the fact that Roşia Montană, like many other former mining areas in the country, had the status of under-privileged area. Moving from an under-privileged area to a residential area of a city came with a price. Even more, some of its inhabitants complained that the neighborhood did not really fulfil the requirements of a residential area.

I once witnessed a conversation on these issues between Zaharia, a youngster relocated to Recea and his friend, seemingly a resident of Alba Iulia. In the beginning of the conversation,



Zaharia, slightly hesitantly claimed to be pleased with the payment that he and his parents got for their property in Roșia Montană. He expressed his gratitude towards the fact that, thanks to the deal he had made with the company, he now had his own house where he could live with his family, without having to pay a mortgage for the next several years, like most of the people his age had to. But later in the conversation, irritated by his friend, who pointed out how lucky Receans were for the chance they had to sell their properties and move to a newly built neighborhood such as Recea, Zaharia erupted, expressing how fed up he was with the fact that Receans were constantly being reminded of this “privilege”: «What are we so damn privileged about, if I may ask? Out there (in Roșia Montană) I was drinking water springing from underneath the fir's root! That water, alone was worth 50 billion of lei, not one billion! Drink this water, from this tap! Do you even drink this water? “

People still residing in Roșia Montană were also appreciating the drinking water there. Ironically though, water pollution in the region was one of the arguments used by the company in order to portray Roșia Montană as a place in decay and to emphasize the necessity of starting the mining project, which, according to the company, will include cleaning up the waters in the region. The reddish waters of the gill going through Roșia Montană and flowing along the main road, were a visible element in Roșia Montană's landscape. Roșia Montană had plenty of springs and lakes with clean water. But the “red” gill which none of the locals made use of (apart from ditching their trash in its layer once in a while) gained most of the focus from the company's side and was portrayed in their pro-mining campaign as an ecological bomb for the area. The company's explanation for the river's color was the long years of mining history, they talked about historical pollution when addressing the issue and they claimed that their project would clean up this pollution right from the first year, promising to bring the life back into the river. “In Roșia Montană, gold has been mined ever since the Roman Empire. Modern mining requires the rehabilitation of the environment affected by past mining operations, which have left behind a strongly degraded environment”<sup>14</sup>, it is stated on the company's website. Horea Avram, the company's vice president for environmental problems, in an interview to Informația de Alba newspaper, in an article called “Roșia Montană has the right to clean environment and clean water” (translation mine) criticized those who proposed tourism as an alternative to mining in the area stating: “you cannot do tourism when you have acidic waters.” He also affirmed that the

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<sup>14</sup><http://en.rmhc.ro/Roșia-montana-project/environment/water.html>

environmental clean-up that would be effectuated by the company, would, in turn, make tourism in the area possible. Also, during a conversation with the company's former Social Responsibility Manager, herself an anthropologist, she asked me in a guilt tripping attempt: “Do you think the tourists want to see that red water when they come here?”

Adriana Golgot, one of the geology engineers who used to work for Roşia Min, the state company during its last 10 years of activity, states on her blog in response to the campaign that “the so-called historical pollution has been around since the erosion has brought the deposit to the surface”<sup>15</sup> (translation mine), and though it has indeed been accentuated by the mining exploitation, the red color caused by the iron hydroxides in the soil would have existed even if there hadn't have been any mining activity in the region. “Interestingly, ever since the company arrived, all of a sudden, we are the most polluted people on the planet,”<sup>16</sup> (translation mine), she continued. She also warned against the danger that lurks, given that the project starts, for the cyanide to react with the sulfurs inside the deposit and create hydrocyanic acid, an extremely poisonous gas, “which will be carried into the atmosphere at great distances and poison would infiltrate the underground water as well. There will be pollution in the air, as well as in the soil and in the underground water. No one will want to come in this area. There is no discussion about developing tourism or other businesses because everyone will stay away from this area. One cannot compare the cyanide pollution to the historical pollution”<sup>17</sup> (translation mine).

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<sup>15</sup> <https://geologrosiamontana.wordpress.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://geologrosiamontana.wordpress.com/2013/09/29/poluarea-asa-zis-istorica-de-la-rosia-montana/>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Chapter IV**

### **Navigating through time and –scapes**

This chapter's aim is to look at the social landscapes affecting the people from Roșia Montană and how these people navigate them. The ways in which people navigated was closely linked to the time dimension, as history usually plays a decisive role in determining which way one would chose to navigate. Not only the past, but also the future affect these decisions, as people are trying to make predictions, often about the future and establish navigation strategies around them. Thus, we can say that people navigate not only through landscapes, but also through time.

The social landscape of Roșia Montană is only one of the many instances incorporating the intricacies to be found in today's global economy. Appadurai asserts that we can cast a light on these intricacies by looking at particular fractures between economy, culture and politics (Appadurai 1990: 6). Appadurai points to 5 types of landscapes for the analysis of these fractures: ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. I would like to focus here on the ethnoscapas and financescapas concerning the case of Roșia Montană, since these were the “scapes” I found to be most relevant for this study.

#### **IV.1. The Split**

Roșia Montană, at the time when I did my fieldwork, was full of contradictions. One contradiction concerns the attachment that the company's supporters have towards Roșia Montană and its surroundings and it reflects the fact that there are dualities to be found even inside the psyche of so many of the individuals whose lives were touched by the company. One of my interviewees pointed out: “the goldists are a paradox because they care about things that would be destroyed; they would want the company to destroy the mountains in order for them to have jobs and at the same time they want the mountains to stay in place. And when I point out to them (that such a thing is not possible) their answer is: What can we do? We have to live as well”. Again, we see that many of the supporters perceive the project as a necessary evil, although this is not always obvious from the start. The fact that there was an inner split between the wish for the project to start and the attachment towards Roșia Montană and its surroundings

was often covered up by the enthusiasm towards the grandiosity of a project that seemed to promise almost everything.

The company's presentation of the project often made the whole process of the exploitation, including the redressing and maintenance of the environment look like a piece of cake. In the documentary “The gold war in Transylvania”, one can see a lady asking the representatives of the company about their intentions regarding those who refuse to move and receiving the answer “For those who do not want to move, we can build around them”. Also, the collocation “latest technology”, often used in their discourse sounded encouraging to the company's supporters who started using it themselves. The wish to remain in Roșia Montană was often invoked as the main reason for supporting the company's plans, contradictory as it might sound. But this was only one of the many contradictions. I witnessed one such contradictory and confusing moment one day, when together with the new locals, I started walking around in Corna village in search for a house. The new locals were a small group of youngsters in their 30's who, in their wish to escape the turmoil of the lives they had in Bucharest, decided to move in the area in order to try to live off the land. They were living in Corna, in a house that they agreed to look after in return for being allowed to live in it. The person owning the house inherited it from her grandmother and refused to sell it, but couldn't live in it since she was established with her family in Alba Iulia. The new locals often talked about how sorry they felt that cities were getting larger and larger while so many villages were deserted and they dreamt to see those villages repopulated again. As they had several friends who shared their dream to move to the rural area, they needed to find a house for them as well. We asked around everyone we met in our way and everyone seemed skeptic towards their intentions to settle down in a village that was almost deserted and where one could not find jobs. At some point, we arrived somewhere at what seemed to be the outskirts of the village, on the top of a hill, next to a forest. There we met two women who seemed to be in their 60's and who were living in that place. When asked whether they knew anyone who would like to rent out their uninhabited house, they immediately stormed off. “No, we do not need this. We are for the company! Not against it! ” This answer came pretty much out of the blue to us, since none of us had mentioned anything about the company at all. Then, one of them accused the opposition for having chased the company away. “How can I be against Gold when my children used to work for Gold?”, said the other one. She then complained that the place where they live is deserted and asked us why we

did not come there from the beginning, before Gold depopulated the area. Dazzled by the contradiction between her loyalty for the company and her anger towards the fact that the place got depopulated by the activities of the company and trying to make more sense of this contradiction, I asked her whether she was upset about the fact that people left or whether she was upset with the company. She replied that she was upset because the people left, but also because the company left. Because there are no jobs left for their children, as a result. “We cannot live out of nuts. You should come here yourselves from Bucharest and dig potatoes out of the ground! ” It was not something new to hear the company's supporters reproaching the activists coming from outside Roșia Montană or those perceived as activists, failing to arrive earlier, to stop the company's actions right from the beginning.

Why would someone supporting a company want its opponents to have come to stop it right from its beginnings? The answer may lie in the fact that the period when I conducted my fieldwork seemed to be one of transition. The company, after having lost more and more ground, had to fire most of its employees and its presence in the community was now barely noticed. The very few left employed were not even locals of Roșia Montană, which stirred up the discontent of many. This aspect, together with many others such as, for example, the rift in the community, which the company's supporters themselves agreed was caused by the company, the dissatisfaction of some towards the payment received for their properties, the poor quality of the houses in Recea, to name a few, made the company less and less popular over the last years. But still, the loyalty towards the company would not just vanish overnight. Not after so many years of coexistence, during which the company has pretty much replaced the role of the state in the community and has been perceived as all- powerful. And not after it promised to bring back the affluence that used to characterize Roșia Montană in its older days.

Also, years after the state mine had been shut down and the town had been largely depopulated the remaining locals were relying mainly on RMGC for their jobs and often for other benefits, such as the payment of the electricity bill or the supply of fire wood. After the last mass layoffs, when most of the employees lost their jobs, many people were left without what was believed to be the last hope to have an income while remaining in the area, or at least in the country.

The loyalty towards the company was still present in many, but too often it seemed to take an incomplete shape and be accompanied by some kind of remorse, regret or fear and

insecurity, leaving one's psyche split, like the body of the miner who was punished by *vâlva* for breaking his promise. This loyalty was often anchored in an altered sense of reciprocity, hence the encounter of reactions such as “How can I speak badly of Gold when my children worked for Gold? ”.

The split seems to be present among some of those who are against and hate the company to the core as well. One lady complained about the amount of work she has put in for building a house for her children. It was a big house that she placed in front of her own so that she can have her children nearby and help out with her grandchildren or whatever they needed. She was afraid that the work she has put in for building the house might have been in vain, since her children might not be able to live there due to the lack of jobs in the area. She had not been willing to move and her children never asked her to sell her property to Gold corporation, but now she was wondering whether they would have been happier if she sold the properties to Gold, so that they can buy themselves other homes wherever they wanted to “...or maybe they would have spent all the money on cars or just pointlessly wasted them, like many did. People who never had anything were wasting their money on gold jewels...” she then added. The split is what seems to have taken the life of her sister. Her sister had sold the property to the company for the sake of her husband. Her husband was employed by the company and he was afraid of losing his job if they did not sell it. So she accepted to sell the property, fearing that otherwise her husband would reproach her for not having done so for the rest of their lives. Soon after that, she started regretting her decision and after a while she died from a stroke.

The company came up with several deals. Those who perceived these deals as opportunities tried their best to navigate through them while those who were not interested in them were often pressured by others to do so.

#### **IV.2. “They closed a door and opened another one”**

C. is one of those who are happy about the deals they made with the company. He was pleased with the money he made from selling them one of his properties. He said that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and felt sorry for those who did not take advantage of it. But he is not keen on the company itself. He worked several years in underground mining for the state company and he would have preferred to continue to do so until retirement. “Had the state

company continued I would have been retired now already. RMGC and the Romanian state made sure to close it down. They closed a door and opened another one...”

He, like many others, felt compelled to take the newly opened door, though he would have preferred the old door to stay open. In a shifting landscape, one is forced to navigate, one way or another. The concept of navigation is used in anthropology in order to describe the way people deal with “situations of social volatility and opacity. It enters into our analytical vocabulary through descriptions of practice in unstable places and contexts of insecurity and/or rapid social change” (Vigh 2009: 419). And indeed, it looks like this is the term that would best describe the manner in which the Roșians dealt or tried to deal with the company. “Volatility and opacity” were probably the words best describing the social and political landscape in Roșia Montană. Hence, insecurity was the predominant feeling in the community. The opacity and the confusion cluttering around the company and the institutions did nothing but to contribute to this insecurity. And whether they liked it or not, almost everyone was forced to navigate. One way or another. Some navigated by learning how to fight against a corporation, others by learning how to make deals with the corporation, others by keeping themselves in the middle and pendulating between the two positions. One of my interviewees stated:

“I do not have a bad opinion about Gold, but had they started the project, I wouldn't have been happy to the extremes either. I would have taken the things as they were. You shouldn't have an attitude that is too much against or too much in favor (of the company); you have to be somewhere in the middle, to have a balance, to have a relationship to each and everything, you must not force things out. I understand the ecologists too, I understand their point of view, but they just embraced the “NO” and refused any dialogue; and now the place is deserted and I don't think they'll be happy out there.” This kind of middle ground seems to be the space that many of the locals from Roșia Montană preferred to find themselves in. To what extent this was determined by the belief, rather common in Romania, according to which “Truth is always in the middle”, it is hard to say, but it could be seen that a desire and need for balance was present among many of the Roșians, balance that they hoped to find by not identifying themselves too much with any of the sides. But this balance often seemed rather artificial. Also, it is obvious that this middle ground would easily allow one to navigate more easily from one side to the other depending on which situation seems more favorable at a particular moment and to keep in somewhat good relations with most of the people in the community. And having good relations

with those around was of crucial importance for Roşians. At the same time, this middle ground rhetoric can threaten to relativize everything and to pressure the activists to soften up their discourse.

Many came up with new and often enthusiastic future plans, which revolved around the company, but which became fulfilled or not in big part depending on the knowledge, relations or more simply put, one's negotiation skills and possibilities. When it comes to evaluating the amount of money they got for their properties, the statement ranges from “I got so much money that I can live happily for the rest of my life” to “I wasn't happy with the price at all”.

“People invest a great deal of time in making sense of and predicting the movement of their social environment, in clarifying how they are able to adapt to move in relation to oncoming change,” (Vigh 2009: 420). Indeed, much time was spent by the Roşians on trying to predict the “movement of their social environment”. Some of them so much that they seemed to be stuck somewhere in the future.

### **IV.3. Ethnoscapes vs. Hereness – fluid locality and the populism of “I want to live here”**

Appadurai uses the term ethnoscapes in order to refer to “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (Appadurai 1990: 7), suggesting the spatial fluidity which characterizes so many of the nowadays societies.

Ethnoscape circumstances were not something new to the Roşians; historically, like many of the inhabitants of booming mining towns, they were used to be on the other side of the spectrum in this situation, namely the one in which they would witness other people settling down into their town, becoming an integral part of their communities and, not least, completing their families. But now they had to watch their family members separate, as it often occurs within the ethnoscape circumstances. It may seem paradoxical, but much of the ground that RMGC gained was due to this fear of separation. Thus, as youngsters were migrating into the cities for study or job opportunities, many of the elders sold their properties in order to live with their children in the cities. Others chose to support the company for the jobs they promised to create. The promise of jobs was not just a promise of financial security, but more importantly, it was the promise of salvation from the forces of separation inherent in today's global economy and hence, the promise to save the family cohesion.



Thus, “here” is a word often heard in the pro-mining discourse and “I want to live and work here” is often the main argument that the company's supporters would invoke in order to justify their position. *“Having here, by the sill of the house, the investment, the salary, the future, it would be a pity to miss it out. Here are my friends, here is my family and here I want to work”* – this is a quote found on the company's website, under the heading *“A miner from Roșia Montană”*. Just that what “here” meant was often very confusing. This discourse of “here” was obviously a distorted echo of the opponents’ discourse, who voiced their desire to remain on their properties in Roșia Montană. It was an attempt to infuse the pro-company discourse with a flavor of localism and to empower the company’s supporters as locals who have the right to decide for themselves what happens in their area. In any case, for the company's supporters it meant something completely different from what it meant for its opponents. It had a more flexible meaning, which one could easily play with and fit into one’s own plans as one pleased. “Here”, obviously, could not mean the villages Roșia Montană and Corna as they still are today. For some it meant simply living in the area. For others, it simply meant living in the county, in a stable place while having a stable job, instead of going abroad or have a job that would involve a lot of traveling around, such as the job of truck driver, which many of the Roșians, former employees of the company now had. Though the truck drivers from Roșia Montană had a consistent pay, even better than the one they used to get from the company, they were often complaining about the fact that they did not get the chance to be home with their families much. Family is a central value among the Roșians and in Romania in general. But with so many Romanians emigrating abroad, the idea of holding a family together was becoming more and more of a challenge. But this reality has come to Roșia Montană later than in other parts of the country due to the state mine, which was active until 2006 and ensured that at least part of the population had well paid jobs. Once the state mine closed, the fear of having to go abroad, leaving the family behind or not being able to start one has consumed everyone. As a gold mining place, Roșia Montană was not the kind of place that people would move from, but rather the kind of place that people would move to. Along the centuries, it has attracted people from different areas of the country and from other countries as well. And especially after 1948, everyone was ensured a job. Mining jobs were well paid during the communist era in comparison to other occupations and thus ensured an affluent life for many of those living in Roșia. I would argue that this affluence was rather artificial though, considering the harsh working conditions

one had to endure, the alcoholism and the health problems that shortened the lives of so many, but this, together with the reasons why these old times were perceived in such a positive light could make the subject for a whole other thesis, that would require focusing on the history of the place much more than I am able to do here. However, this “affluence”, but even more, the feeling of certainty that there would always be well paid jobs in the area, has not encouraged people to leave, but on the contrary, it has got the people used to planning their lives and their children's lives around the mining going on in the area. Some people would even build houses for their children nearby their own in order to have them close. These houses were of no use in the new reality, in which their children had to move elsewhere for work.

The company has promised enough jobs to bring back the youngsters left abroad or in the cities for work. The mayor, well-known for his support towards the company firmly declared in an interview:

“We HAVE resources. We HAVE to exploit them in Romania's interest and to give people jobs. Only this way will we succeed, as all the politicians say, to bring the Romanians back home to work. We bring them (back)! Many from our area are gone and want to come (back), but they have nothing to come back to. The biggest wealth, even bigger than Roşia Montană's heritage are the inhabitants of the place. If there are no inhabitants here, then it's in vain for people to come and chant: ‘Heritage! Heritage!’ No one talks about the people. No one thinks about them! Yes! We have stones! We have heritage! (sarcastic)”.

The “let's bring the Romanians back!” or “let us keep our children here” kind of populism was certainly of great success and its message was on the lips of many of the company's former employees. This was so engrained in people's minds that many of the locals would often start this discussion suddenly, without me mentioning anything about the issue. Many sorts of populisms were used by the company in their process of enchantment, but this one seemed to be the most appealing. Considering the state of confusion and insecurity that the locals of Roşia Montană have been living in for such a long time, the appeal for populist ideas should not surprise us. “...populism refers to the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised as they face the disjunctures between everyday lives that seem to become increasingly chaotic and uncontrollable and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement.” (Kalb 2013: 14). Chaotic and uncontrollable – this is how the lives of the Roşians seemed to them after the changes that took place over the last 10

years, especially after losing the jobs they had at the state-owned mining company in 2007. As for “the wider public power projects...”, it looks like pretty much everyone going against the project was perceived as being a part of them: the company’s opponents, the Romanian state for not giving the approval to the company in starting the mining project, Hungary for supposedly wanting to exploit the mine for themselves and the rest of Romania for protesting against the company. According to Edward Shils, one of the main characteristics of populism is a focus on the sovereignty of “the will of the people” over the will of other social categories while identifying “the will of the people with justice and morality” (as cited by Worsley 1969: 244). Who “the people” are, is of course not independent from the power relationships involved. In our case, “the will of the people” meant the will of the company and its supporters. The pro-company discourse was supporting the idea that Roşians (the Roşians from the opposition were not included here though...) should have the right to decide on their own what would happen in their own yard and not the rest of Romania, as if a project of such enormity was not a concern at a national level. During a conversation with me, the company’s former Social Responsibility Manager, who is also an anthropologist, even expressed her concern over the fact that the opponents, despite representing a minority of Roşia Montană’s population, were winning over the company and its supporters and suggested this to be a lack of legitimate democracy.

This ethno-localistic sort of populism contributed even more to the state of disconnection that the Roşians were dealing with. This time the disconnection was between the Roşians and the rest of the country.

What was often presented as the main reason against the exploitation was the fact that the area was populated and what was often presented as the main reason for the exploitation was the fact that the area will, very likely, become completely depopulated due to a lack of jobs. A former mine worker once complained about the “Save Roşia Montană” movement: “When I hear those who want to save Roşia Montană I just want to kick their asses. Save what? Don't they see that there aren't any jobs here? The young are leaving and only the elderly remain here.” And then he added that the project will also develop tourism, since tourists would be more interested in seeing the dam the company was planning to build due to its impressive size than to see the natural surroundings. One of his relatives asked: “what's the point that the landscape is beautiful if there will be no people here to see it?” The natural surroundings seemed to have a much less significant importance, maybe because what used to be the characteristic of Roşia Montană in its

golden days was the vibrant and extravagant social life sustained by the gold money and that now was longed for by so many, even more so after years of being exposed to the company's discourse of nostalgia.

#### **IV.4. "It's ALL about the self-interests" – navigation and mistrust**

To a great extent people's attitude towards the company or its project was determined by their attitude toward the opponents and the level of trust they had towards them. One of the locals asked me what anthropology was when he first met me. When he understood that anthropology is concerned widely with human relationships he asked me: "And how are the human relationships? They're all a matter of expediency, right? ...All the so-called patriots woke up now. It's all a matter of expediency here! None of them is a patriot. Everyone claims to be a patriot, but everyone is leaving the country!" Rumours about how much money the activists were making or about who was paying them was only strengthening the "it's all a matter of expediency" or "everyone has a self-interest" kind of discourse. The rumours went to the point where some of the locals claimed that the environmental activists and people associated with them were considered to push a Hungarian agenda. According to some of these rumours, which I have heard from some of the pro company locals, Hungary intended to take over the territory of Transylvania and then exploit the gold for themselves.

During my stay in Recea I interviewed one relocatee who had worked for the company until 2014 and was still its avid supporter at the time of the interview, at least. When I asked him about his opinion on the company and its project, he replied "It wasn't a bad project, but there was too much publicity and too many self-interests". When I asked what kind of self-interest he was talking about, he laughed sarcastically and looked at me as if I should have known better. "What kind of self-interest?? Do you want me to openly tell you? You know that Transylvania was under Austro-Hungarian occupation, right?" "Yes", I replied. "And then? Do you want another explanation?" Within this context, he then mentioned the issue of the Hungarian ethnics from Romania who were asking for autonomy. Later he mentioned the flag of the campaign that went on against the company. "If you look at it better it is something else – the colors red white and green... and putting it on Avram Iancu's statue... this is offensive! Haven't you seen it?" After few seconds of confusion, I realized that he was referring to the fact that the Hungarian flag has the same colors. Since I found the analogy to be forceful I told him that apart from the colors there

were no similarities between the two flags. The flag, depicting a bleeding leaf on a white background was often found in the version with a black background after all. But he insisted on his point and emphasized how hurtful it was to see that flag next to the Romanian flag and placed on Avram Iancu's statue. Within the same context, he mentioned the new locals who had established themselves in Corna, which happened to be his home village. "Haven't you seen that even in Corna someone brought some people from I don't know where to do I don't know what..." Trying to figure out what he meant by "I don't know what", I insisted on asking more details about this issue. He kept avoiding giving a clear answer and instead he kept making sarcastic remarks about the issue, the people involved in it and simply repeated that they were brought there in order to live there. Intrigued by the fact that he portrayed the newcomers as having been "brought" there I continued with more probing questions on the issue. When I asked him to tell me what they were "brought" there for, he answered "Well, they want to expand, to have control over everything." Since it was rather unclear to me who "they" were, I insisted with more probing questions: "Whose control? Over what?" He answered by complaining about the fact that those who contested the project have done nothing for Roșia Montană. "This is where you clearly see the self-interests" he then added. The dread of the ethnoscape wasn't limited to the fear of "losing" people over it. Though less visible, the fear of some kind of external invasion was present as well. This may sound contradictory to what I have mentioned in the beginning of the thesis<sup>18</sup> as regards the locals' desire to get more people to root themselves in the area, but as we have already seen, contradictions were not something unusual in this case. Also, since the person who allowed the new locals to live in her house was, herself, opposed to the project, these new locals were looked at with skepticism by the company's faithful supporters.

It seems also that, especially when the company's propaganda was at its highest peak, the long forgotten inter-ethnic dissents between Romanians and Hungarians in the area were awakened.

The revival of old forgotten conflicts is a strategy often (successfully) utilized as a means for gaining power. As Gingrich and Banks (2005) and Appadurai (2006) have stated, a social environment dominated by anger, insecurity and fear is usually more prone to fall prey to "populist ideologies of ethnic or religious neo-nationalism" (Kalb 7: 2013). Roșia Montană was indeed, characterized by an environment of anger, insecurity and fear.

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<sup>18</sup> See page 14

Just that in Roşia Montană, this ethnic populism took a rather self-contradictory turn. Sorin, himself partially a Hungarian ethnic, described one of the company's protests going on in front of his house, in the old town centre. According to his description, the protesters used Romanian patriotic music such as a famous folk song called “We Are Romanians” and chased away a bus with Hungarian tourists that had just arrived in town. My host seemed to be just as confused as I was about the fact that a song with lyrics going: “We are Romanians, we are forever rulers here...” were used in the protest supporting a multinational corporation, but it might point towards the fact that the company managed to “earn” its acceptance as local and gain the trust of many, at least during its “good days”, when it was present in all aspects of the public sphere in the area and its image of charitable, futuristic redeemer was still strong. Also, when expressing their choice to support the company, people would often highlight their lack of trust in the state and in the opposition. Here we already have two of the ingredients of a thriving environment for the rise of working class populism: “enforced particularization of trust and the narrowing of the public sphere” (Kalb 2013: 14).

However, many of the company's supporters that I have talked to seemed to have been dealing with some sort of cognitive dissonance towards foreign companies. Once, I was talking with one of the company's supporters, who used to work for Roşia Poieni, the copper mine nearby, and who lost his job as a result of the restructurings that took place during the last few years. After having criticized the company's opponents for the fact that some of them have themselves worked in the mining industry in the past, he started complaining about the state and the fact that it has sold so much of the country's industry to foreign companies. “I do not understand this government. How come nothing works in this country? Mining doesn't work, this doesn't work, that doesn't work, but it does work for foreigners! It works to give it all away to the foreigners!” Then I asked him how come he supported RMGC. Was not it also a foreign company like the ones he had just described? “Yes! But let them come if Romanians are too stupid to do the exploitation themselves!” he answered assertively.

The “It's ALL about the self-interests” or “It's ALL a matter of expediency” kind of discourse is common Romania in general and it seems to express a mix between criticism towards this sort of attitude and the feeling of hopelessness in the face of it. This discourse is, unfortunately, counterproductive since it threatens to discourage social activism and therefore keep the civil society in a state of inertia. Since everybody's only pursuing their own agenda, it

means they cannot be trusted. If they cannot be trusted, then we cannot accomplish anything together as a society, so the only option I am left with is to pursue my own agenda. This is the train of thought that seems to transpire from the discourse on expediency, be it in Roșia Montană or other parts of Romania. This shouldn't come as a surprise considering the huge amount of corruption to be found at all levels and pretty much all institutions. Such a situation will easily create an atmosphere where mistrust (which in Roșia Montană was almost palpable), hopelessness and insecurities are “perfectly” mixed together and where cynicism seems to be the answer to every question. And this is a thriving environment for disconnection. The local activists complained that the company had used a divide-and-conquer strategy within the community in order to get what they wanted. Many of the conversations I had, particularly those about the split families point in that direction. And the fact that a cynical discourse was already in place has only laid the ground for the “divide-and-conquer” strategy, making it easier for it to achieve its purpose.

#### **IV.5. Financescapes and the steer of money**

But probably the most misty landscape here and in other cases as well, is the financescape “since the disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid and difficult landscape to follow than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move mega-mones through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units” (Appadurai 1990: 8). Specialists didn't quite agree with each other when it came to the amount of resources that were to be found in the deposit and that could be exploited, but a widespread belief was that the real value of the deposit was much lower than the one stipulated by the company's estimations, even insignificant, and that the company inflated the numbers in order to earn popularity on the stock market. Investigative journalist Mihai Goțiu states that the real intention was not for the exploitation to take place, but for the company to attain all the permits and then sell the project further, this move being far too common in the mining world (Goțiu 2013:328). Locals from the opposition came to the same conclusion after they had watched the company just dragging it out for more than 10 years. “This must be the last method one can use in order to exploit a deposit, especially if it is empty – the stock market”, Călin said a few times. Aurel Sântimbreaan, former director of Roșia Min stated: “They (RMGC) have earned more on the

stock market than they would have earned had they been allowed to open the mine. They obtained the license to exploit for 20 years and what have they done in 20 years? Just opened that gallery where they said they would make a museum? That they drilled and took some samples from the surface... they did this just to look more convincing”. And RMGC looked convincing indeed. Not only to the stock investors, but also to locals, by doing the drilling in highly visible places, by managing to relocate so much of the population, and by being such a visibly integrated part of the community. Financing important local events such as “The Miner's Day” or religious holiday events, as well as the advertising spots one could see on every television when the company had its peak and which, even some of its supporters agreed that were far too frequent, certainly put them in the spotlight. Such a performance is not something new at the intersection between mining and the financescape. Anna Tsing gives a very good idea about what such a performance entails, in her work, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* – a study focusing on the changes that took place in Borneo during the 80's and 90' under the pressures of capitalist interests. Here she discusses what she calls “the economy of appearances”, when describing the massive performance that junior mining companies have to put in order to get investors. “Start-up companies must dramatize their dreams in order to attract the capital they need in order to operate and expand. Junior prospecting companies must exaggerate the possibilities of their mineral finds in order to attract investors so that they might, at some point find something. This is the requirement of investment-oriented entrepreneurship, and it takes the limelight in those historical moments when capital seeks creativity rather than stable reproduction”. (Tsing 2005: 57) RMGC has indeed put a lot of creativity into the PR and advertising sector. *Goțiu* highlighted the fact that there were no mining engineers among the leading employees of Gabriel Resources or RMGC, only economists, lawyers and PR specialists (*Goțiu* 2013: 328). The local activists highlighted the presence of psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists among the company employees and often refer to the atmosphere created by the company's actions as one of exquisite psychological warfare.

Many of my interlocutors concluded that the company's plan was to relocate as many people as possible in order to earn popularity on the stock market. “In order for all of us to leave it was necessary to make a most of us leave because then the few remaining people would effortlessly give in. And the majority was attracted with the help of the mayor and sweet promises”. Especially if we think of the possibility of Roșia Montană's deposit to be



insignificant, it seems like the stock market business and not the resources was the trigger behind everything that happened there ever since the company arrived. The fact that fictitious value alone determined such real changes at so many levels makes everything sound like the script of an absurd tragicomedy; it reveals the pervasive nature of the financescapes and the sway it holds over the other *-scapes*. Financescapes are shady, but tempting entities. Financescapes are global entities, but they can ripple into the local, creating branches made of the same essence and replicating the same behavior as the big tree. The fever of speculating seems to have taken over some of the regular locals as well. Locals who refused to sell because they speculated that they would be offered a bigger price later were also let down in their predictions. “There are many who feel sorry they haven't left. Probably they made all sorts of calculations, all sorts of analysis, but meanwhile everything stopped” said Sorin. These people were often perceived as greedy and always unhappy with whatever price they were offered by the company. However, I think this would be too bluntly put. To me it looks like at least some of them were aware of the hassle that might arise from selling their properties, not only the financial hassle, but also the emotional one and the amount of money they were offered did not seem to pay off for that hassle. As one old lady said, “they didn't pay for the moral damage, for the fact that one must leave the house that one’s ancestors have lived in, but how can you pay for that?”

Navigating financescapes in general requires plenty of calculations, it is risky and involves a lot of emotional turmoil. But to go back to the “bigger” sides involved in the business, the stock market investors were not the only ones who fell for the show that RMGC put on and risked their money by betting on the company. Big enthusiastic investors that have bet their luck on the company and ended up disappointed could be found at local, or rather, regional level as well. At the outskirts of Roșia Montană there was a piece of land with around 30 newly-built rudimentary cabins placed closely next to each other. They were very basic and unequipped with any sort of utilities, since they were built up with the sole purpose of being sold to RMGC in exchange of a good amount of money. People who have heard of the huge prices that RMGC have paid for some of the properties they bought in Roșia Montană speculated that this would be a good way to hit the jackpot. Thus they were referred to as “the speculators”. Being in contact with the network of people swirling around the company and getting encouraged by their optimism in regards to the future plans of the company, they threw themselves into this shady business. Their disappointment was not small when the company lost ground, and therefore the

cabins couldn't be sold any longer. Also, the locals were displeased with the presence of these buildings, since they were spoiling the landscape. Sorin was sarcastically calling this place “Recea 2” because of the small space between the houses. These speculators were it seems also the middlemen that everyone selling animals were complaining about for forcing them to accept ever-lower prices, thus discouraging them from continuing with livestock related activities. Whenever such a situation occurred, when someone was losing big amounts of dishonestly or immorally earned money, people were not surprised. I have heard people saying “The devil takes its share even from honestly earned money, let alone from dirty money” or other similar expressions on various occasions and sometimes those who said it, resignedly referred to themselves and their own losses.

Money and financescapes acted as if they had their own agency and they often slipped through people's fingers, though sometimes out of an apparent negligence. The stories of those who have wasted the large amounts of money they got from the company, be it wages or the money they got in return for their properties, on fast cars which they would soon afterwards crash on, new furniture or striptease clubs were not few. Part of this was due to what many of those who moved into the city perceived as the “demands” of their new place. “New house – new everything” seemed to be the idea that they were being led by. Many were complaining about the high investments they “had to” make in acquiring new furniture because the old one “did not fit in” with their new house and the sums they invoked to have paid for commodities such as curtains or laptops often seemed to be rather above their financial possibilities. Others blamed this wastefulness on the people's need to overcompensate for the poverty they lived in before or on the lack of value one places on easily earned money. It was as if such money were not perceived as having real value and considering the blurry circumstances in which they were made, this perception is understandable. The money coming from the company seemed to carry a rather negative connotation. The idea that not all money is the same and that it differs or is perceived differently depending on where they come from and how they are made has been discussed in anthropology before. Zelizer (1989) has highlighted how money are differentiated by the connotations or purposes attached to them (Li 2015: 25). Taussig has shown how interest-producing money, in other words money that creates more money has often been perceived as unnatural, even anti-natural in different cultures and times from antiquity up until nowadays (see. Taussig 1977). I found some strong similarities with regards to how people in Roșia Montană

treat the money they got from mining activities in J. Jacka's book on mining in Porgera, *Alchemy in the rainforest*. Here he discusses how the money that locals earned from mining activities had a negative connotation and that it was even considered "money nothing", meaning that it was worthless (Jacka 2015: 200). He even recalls how easily one of his interviewees got over the fact that he had ruined his fourteen-seat Toyota simply because it was bought with such money, which meant nothing anyway (*ibid.*). This inevitably makes me think about the stories of the expensive cars ruined by the Roşians soon after having bought them. It seems as if people are subconsciously or even semi-consciously more neglectful about money that have a negative connotation attached to them or commodities acquired with such money. Another aspect that draws me towards making an analogy with the Roşians is the purpose that the Huli who worked in the mining at Mt. Kare give to the money they have earned through mining, which was consumption only (Clark, as cited in Jacka 2015: 200). Too often have I heard the narrative of the miner who after a whole day of hard work would spend all his money in pubs, restaurants, brothels and then come home empty-handed. "Roşians just wanted to eat well, drink well and live well and that's how they wasted all their money. They did not invest in their houses at all, which is why they were falling apart. They couldn't even fix their own fences" I often heard Roşians themselves say. Those living in the villages just outside Roşia Montană, such as Corna, Bucium or Vârtop and even the Roşians living at the outskirts, *laturenii*, as they were called, were pursuing more agricultural and livestock activities; their incomes didn't entirely consist of money coming from mining, they were known for having a different attitude towards money and for investing more in their households.

The motif of the miner who is doomed to work, but to whom money never "sticks" is illustrated in a legend about St. Peter's visit in Roşia Montană. The legend says that St. Peter, during his travels came to Roşia Montană long ago, when he was still on Earth. Here he entered a bar and the locals tried to offer him to drink *vinars*, the strong local plum spirit. St. Peter refused, since he did not quite drink alcohol. Feeling insulted by the fact that they have been refused by an old man, the Roşians beat him up badly. As a result of this, St. Peter cursed the Roşians to be forever poor regardless of how much gold they find and to end up spending in the bar everything they earn (Soit).

Like most people, Roşians associated money with power and influence; they often claimed that money was the decisive factor in the whole issue created by the company; "money

decided here” are the words I would often hear in this context; but they also associate money with volatility, instability, something that was not meant to last or whose value was uncertain and unpredictable. The fact that the seemingly large amounts of money that many of those who sold their houses did not mean much in the following years due to the financial fluctuations occurring at that time, thus making the relocatees end up in a financially delicate situation while living in a place that was new and unknown to them and without a social network, just fed into this narrative. “Money is like a pig. You eat from it today, tomorrow... but then it's gone” said one of the ladies who refused to sell. This unreliability in regards to the value of money seems to slowly drive some to focus on other types of goods, whose value is more tangible. I met one young man who returned from Italy, where he had spent some years working. He told me that there was no point in working there any longer since the money value has decreased so much. Therefore he decided to come back to his property in Roşia, start working with livestock and produce his own food, like he used to do with his parents back in the past. Eugen David, the president of Alburnus Maior – has put this issue in the most plain manner “No one can play with my cow at the stock exchange” (as quoted in *Goşiu* 2013: 330).

#### **IV.6. The burden of choice and history**

Higher authorities such as international companies or the state were often perceived as almost invincible entities. This perception, of course, must have had a great influence on how people viewed choice and how they chose to navigate. Here, I believe history has played its part. Sometimes, when discussing the issue of the relocations and whether the price for the properties was right or not, people, particularly the elders, would mention the fact that had the Romanian state been the actor behind all of it instead of RMGC, the prices would have been much lower and even worse, had this happened under Ceauşescu's rule, no one would have had any say or choice; neither about whether they agreed to leave or not, nor about the price they would get for the property. Not without a severe punishment anyway. “It did not matter whether you wanted something or not back in those days. All you had to do is say “no” and you'd be sent to the canal”. The Danube-Black Sea canal was too often mentioned in the conversations about the times before '89, as the place where the disobedient ones were forcefully sent to work. Also, the story of Geamana village, which was almost entirely evacuated in 1977 and then turned into a tailings lake for Roşia Poieni copper mine was still fresh in the people's minds. And how could it

not be, when the copper mine was only 5 km away? Hardly anything was left out of Geamăna village as the tailings lake was still expanding and raising environmental concerns.<sup>19</sup> The tailings lake, with its high levels of toxicity has an eerie appearance and its images are often used by the opposition as a warning against RMGC's project and dangerous mining practices in general.



*Geamăna tailings lake, which in 1977 replaced Geamăna village. In the middle of the lake there can be seen the top of the church, which hasn't yet been covered by the tailings (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

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<sup>19</sup> In April 2017, following an accident, a large amount of toxic tailings was spilled from Geamana Lake into Aries River.



*Geamăna tailings lake (Photographs by Larisa Sevastre)*



*Graffiti near Geamana lake: "Don't forget Geamana. Save Roșia Montană!" (Photograph by Larisa Sevastre).*

The same is the case with some of the historical buildings in Roșia Montană, which were demolished in the 1970s in order to make space to blocks of flats and which many of the Roșians, regardless of their opinion towards Ceaușescu's regime, were still mourning. The elders, when recalling the times when nationalization took place, in 1948, would also talk about the tortures that many of the locals had to go through when they refused to give to the state all the gold they owned or when suspected to have hidden gold in their houses.

For a long time Roșians did not have much of a say in regards to their work, property or landscape. And after decades of not having the chance to make their own choices, they were all of a sudden slammed in the face by a completely different reality; a reality in which they were confronted with a heavy burden of choice. For some it was a burden, for some it was a great opportunity and for others a curse. Even to those who saw this as an opportunity, there still remained the burden of navigating through the deals. Some were happy with the deals they made. But others complained that the prices that were paid for the properties had been given "for one's pretty eyes". This is an expression which is commonly used in Romania, which describes the act of being unfair and favoring one party, often at the expense of someone else during a transaction or assessment of any kind. Others accused the company of having taken advantage of

the lack of unity in their families due to the partition related conflicts and thus having paid them less.

But it looks like the “agency” of the resource, through the job opportunities it gave, also played a strong role in people's lives, leaving very little choice for themselves. When I asked whether they enjoyed their work as miners, although many said they did, there were also those who answered: “What was I supposed to do? Where was I supposed to leave when there were damn plenty of jobs here?”

This burden of choice has certainly put a strain on the psyche of the community in both Roşia Montană and Recea. Regret was one of the common discussion themes, since many, from both camps, seemed to be unhappy with their decisions.



## Conclusion

As I have mentioned several times already, Roşia Montană is a place of paradoxes. Over the last approximately 15 years, Roşia has been severely changed, both physically and socially by a project that was never implemented and that, as many believe, was probably never meant to be implemented. As people's relationship with their environment has changed, so did their relationship with their community.

The whole case is characterized by rifts – within society and families – even at the level of the individual psyche. However, these fractures began to somewhat ameliorate as the company started to lose credibility and power.

Most of the locals are grieving for the social atmosphere they had in the community before the company's arrival and feel the need for social balance. Though they make visible efforts in that sense, trying to socialize and preserve good relationships with their peers regardless of their position towards the project, what often still manages to stop this balance from becoming fulfilled is the still persistent mistrust between community members.

At the moment, people in Roşia Montană seem to be in a transition period. Andreea, one of the locals I used to talk to regularly, was curious about my project and often asked more details about the aspects I was looking into. When I explained to her that one of these aspects was the process of adaptation of the community members to new kinds of work activities, she said: “But there is nothing to see on that score! Because we haven't adapted yet! We are still messed up in the head! We do not know what we want! We would have liked for the mining activity to continue and didn't know whether we should start doing something else or not.” When I told her that this confusion is normal since Roşia Montană is still in a transition period, she complained that this transition was taking too long.

The transition was and is still being prolonged by the fact that the company, though at the moment very weakly represented within the community, is still, as I write these lines present and hasn't yet fully accepted the defeat. As Sorin said, some of the “goldists” were still waiting for the company to receive the right to start the exploitation. This glimpse of hope is apparently what keeps them from getting involved in any of the activities which are organized by people who are part of the resistance or by people perceived as being so. “They hope that the company would

start their activity again and that they would be rewarded for their ‘good behavior’ when they do so.”

But not everyone waiting in a limbo was a supporter of the company. Among those who sold their properties or who did not get to sell them, but would like to do so once they again got the chance to, there were some who firmly believed that an exploitation like the one proposed by the company will, inevitably take place sooner or later. “If they (the company) don't get to do the exploitation, others will for sure. Or they will come back with another name and another plan,” I heard many say. “The gold will not stay in the ground,” they would add. In this context is it is easy to see why so many saw the offers coming from the company as a great opportunity. One cannot know whether the next time a company wants to relocated them, the offers won't be worse. Even time seemed to be volatile in Roșia as many were living in the future. A future that seemed uncertain for all sides.

On the part of the resistance, some claimed that uncertainty has been a part of their lives for the last 15 years. While some asserted that they never believed that the project would start and that it was nothing more than a stock exchange business, others began their new lives as opponents of a multinational corporation without having any certainty about what would happen in the future, how long the fight would last or about what their odds against the company were. They even claimed to have had more will than they had knowledge or hope.

There were those who claimed to be convinced that they “got rid of Gold”, who were optimistic that they have defeated the company and convinced that no other such company would ever dare to do the same thing again because the noise created by the opposition was too loud. And there were those who worried that the company might come back under a different name, with a different strategy and who even at my second visit, in the autumn of 2016 were still en garde, ready to continue navigating in their fight against the company.

During this last visit in Roșia Montană, I asked Sorin whether it was all over with the company and its plans for exploitation, since Roșia Montană was proposed for the UNESCO World Heritage list.<sup>20</sup> He answered that he didn't think that it was all over: “We are waiting for the results of the trial... you don't know what else they can come up with. The battle is won, but the war is not over yet.”

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<sup>20</sup> Roșia Montană was listed as UNESCO World Heritage candidate in February 2016.

Also, the fact that TTIP and CETA had been brought into discussion in Europe, was not exactly a release either. “Anything is possible” some would say when I asked them about what they expect to happen in the future. Also during the last visit, one of my interviewees, who sold his property, even mentioned that there was a discussion between the company's leaders about “helping” those who insist to remain in Roșia Montană die out within the next 5 years with the help of chemical weapons. “You really think that such a company would stop because of a handful of people who refuse to leave?” he asked me. Though his affirmation looks more than just a little removed from reality, it does suggest us how real is the people's fear in front of a big corporate power or of an authority of global proportions in general and how small is often the belief in the agency of civil society and “ordinary people”.

Roșia Montană's story has many similarities with the stories of other gold mining places in the world. In this sense, it is not just a story about Roșia Montană per se, but also a story about the mechanisms of enchantment employed by mining companies in their “quest for gold”, regardless if we talk about gold figuratively or in the real sense. It is also a story about how the global can invade the local almost overnight and about how people, also overnight, learn to navigate the landscapes produced by this invasion.

It is a story about fluidity and blurred boundaries – fluidity of landscapes, people and ideas. About disconnection, but also about interconnectedness. As old ties were severed, new ones came into being. It is a story about unmaking and remaking, but also about the struggles to preserve and protect what is still in place.

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